A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages

european-language writing in sub-saharan africa

vol. 2

Akadémiai Kiadó
Budapest

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AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ · BUDAPEST

EUROPEAN-LANGUAGE WRITING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

VI/2

A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF LITERATURES
IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES
SPONSORED BY THE
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CHAPTER IX

ENGLISH: NIGERIA

The written art must have first come to the territories that now constitute the Republic of Nigeria, in the course of the eighteenth century, to the northern areas that were known as the Hausa emirates, and in the Arabic language, as part of the general Islamic revival that was then spreading under the influence of Fulani *mallams*. The military victory of the Fulani and the foundation of the Sokoto empire in northern Nigeria in the early years of the nineteenth century paradoxically fostered the emergence of an *ajami* literature in the Hausa language.[1] With typical Islamic resilience, the Hausa, who are the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, managed to resist the encroachments of Western cultural imperialism: although from the 1930s some of the newly educated turned to the Roman script and Western-type prose fiction, *ajami* writing and the traditional genres have remained alive to this day. Significantly, the Hausa contribution to modern Nigerian literature in English is negligible.

Christianity and the Roman script were first brought to the southern part of the country in the course of the nineteenth century by European and African missionaries based in Sierra Leone. Some of them, like Bishop Samuel Johnson, were liberated Yoruba slaves; they reduced the language to writing, thus creating the conditions for the emergence of a written art[2] which, by the mid-twentieth century had produced a notable author, D. O. Fagunwa (1903–1963). Fagunwa owed his fame, which was inevitably local, to his skilful use of traditional oral lore and of traditional narrative techniques in the five "novels" that he produced from 1938 to 1961.[3] And it was this tradition that first caught the eye of the Western world in 1952, when a Yoruba writer, Amos Tutuola, (b. 1920) had his first "novel" published in London. Intriguingly entitled *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town*, it was a quest story set in the jungle forests which are supposed to be the abode of the dead and of a number of incredibly weird creatures; the medium was the distorted but recognizable version of English which is the lingua franca of many semi-educated Africans.

[1] *Ajami* means "foreign" and refers to writing in the Arabic script but in a non-Arabic language. On Hausa literature, see notably Mervyn Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1975).

[2] For a brief account, see Adeboye Babalola and Albert Gérard, "A Brief Survey of Creative Writing in Yoruba," *Review of National Literatures* 2, 2 (1971), 188–205.

[3] See Ayo Bamgbose, *The Novels of D. O. Fagunwa* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1974). One of Fagunwa's works was translated by Wole Soyinka under the title, *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (London: Nelson, 1968).

Two years later, another London firm published the first West African novel (in the accepted sense of the word) in English to achieve international recognition: *People of the City* by Cyprian Ekwensi (b. 1921). This, too, was part of a larger indigenous trend, to be found among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria; it was a form of popular, sub-literary writing which had emerged in the late forties largely as a result of the educational drive in the army during the war. It soon became known locally as "market literature" because its printing centre was the lively market town of Onitsha. This was a typically urban growth, catering for the semi-literate tastes of a city audience of schoolboys, junior clerks, traders and pulp journalists who had lost touch with ancestral custom and had become polluted by the more sensational aspects of Western culture as reflected in American-style tabloids; sex and violence were the main ingredients of those popular chapbooks often written in a peculiar form of sub-standard English interspersed with slick journalistic clichés and ponderous officialese. Ekwensi's novel signalled both the ascension of this low-brow trend towards the loftier sphere of legitimate literature, and the development of imaginative writing among the Igbo, who, for a variety of reasons, had hardly produced any written art in their own language.

As independence was drawing near, a third trend appeared when Heinemann published *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the first novel of a younger writer, Chinua Achebe (b. 1930). This was of extreme importance, for Achebe's novel was the first literary fruit of the intense imaginative ebullience that had gathered momentum since the foundation of a University College at Ibadan in 1947. In the late fifties and the early sixties, this uncommonly vivid intellectual activity crystallized around three poles: *The Horn*, a literary magazine set up in the English Department, *Black Orpheus*, a literary review founded at Ibadan in order to make English-speaking West African readers aware of black francophone writing and in the hope of fostering emulation among would-be writers of English, and the Mbari Club, an informal association founded soon after independence as a meeting place for poets and novelists, dramatists, musicians and artists.

The early sixties, which witnessed a temporary decline in the evolution of French writing in Black Africa and the all but total interruption of African publication in Portuguese, were years of feverish activity and breathless growth in Nigerian literature. Becoming a grand old man at an uncommonly early age, Chinua Achebe was soon joined by a host of Nigerian novelists, most of them of Igbo origin. The independence celebrations revealed the dramatic talent of Wole Soyinka (b. 1934); other playwrights, mostly of Yoruba origin, sometimes writing in their own language, and making full use of Yoruba lore, myth and history, followed suit. And as early as 1962, the Mbari Club, venturing into the publishing business, issued *Heavensgate*, a slender collection of poetry by Christopher Okigbo (1932–1967), who was hailed immediately as a worthy rival with Senghor for the leadership of modern African poetry in European languages.

After a mere half-decade of this meteoric rise, Nigeria appeared as a model for the development of a mature African literature unhampered by foreign control or even influences. The Nigerian example was a source of inspiration for literary activity in English not only in other West African countries, but even in East Africa, where

encouragement and advice from Nigerian (and South African) writers played a significant role in the early growth of creative writing at Makerere College.

While tribal disturbances and military coups had been frequent throughout Black Africa ever since the Congo tragedy, the Nigerian civil war, which occupied the second half of the sixties, was the first major conflict of its kind, and it could not but have considerable influence on the literary development of the country. But although it led to the untimely death of Christopher Okigbo, an irreparable loss, it also provided new subject-matter, new topics and approaches to imaginative contemplation of Africa's problems, and it also enabled a new generation of writers to feel free to react against the authority of their elders and to embark on further experiments in narrative fiction, drama and lyrical poetry.

BERNTH LINDFORS

1. AMOS TUTUOLA: LITERARY SYNCRETISM AND THE YORUBA FOLK TRADITION

Amos Tutuola is one of the great eccentrics in African literature. Born in Abeokuta, Western Nigeria (now Ogun State) in 1920, educated no more than six years in missionary primary schools, trained as a coppersmith during World War II, and employed as a messenger and storeroom clerk throughout most of his adult life, he appears to be the kind of man least likely to win an international reputation as an author. Indeed, considering his cultural background, minimal education and lack of literary sophistication, it is surprising that he began writing at all and even more astonishing that he chose to write in English rather than in Yoruba, his mother tongue. His works are crudely constructed, severely restricted in narrative range, and marred by gauche grammatical blunders; yet, aided by a remarkably vigorous imagination, he has been able to turn some of these liabilities into great assets, thereby accidentally transcending his own natural limitations as an inexperienced man of letters. Like the heroes in his stories, Tutuola seems amply blessed with both genius and good luck.

He began his literary career almost by accident. In fact, if post-war demobilization in Nigeria had not thrown him out of work as a coppersmith in the R.A.F. and if his own subsequent efforts to establish a smithy had not failed, he probably never would have turned to writing. It was only after he had taken a job as a messenger in the Labour Department in Lagos in 1948, a job that left him with plenty of free time on his hands, that he began to write down on pieces of scrap-paper English versions of the stories he claims to have heard old people tell in Yoruba. He did not originally intend to publish these jottings; he was merely trying to relieve his boredom by occupying his time in a profitable manner.

But after he had been engaged in this pastime a while, something must have urged him to put the stories into a longer narrative sequence and to seek publication abroad. In the late 1940s he wrote to Focal Press, an English publisher of photography books, asking if they would care to consider a manuscript about spirits in the Nigerian bush illustrated by photographs of the spirits! The director of the press, amused by the offer, replied that he would indeed be interested in looking at such a manuscript. Several months later Tutuola's first long narrative, "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts", arrived in London wrapped in brown paper, rolled up like a magazine, and bound with twine. The sixteen photographic negatives accompanying the seventy-six page hand-written manuscript turned out to be snapshots of hand-drawn sketches of spirits

featured in the story. A reputable publisher of technical books on photography obviously could not print such a tale, but the director of Focal Press, impressed by the amount of labour that had gone into writing out the story in longhand, felt the author deserved some compensation for his efforts and therefore bought the manuscript for a nominal sum. He had absolutely no intention of publishing it and believed no other publisher in London would seriously consider bringing out such a book. He himself was interested in it only as a curiosity and conversation piece.[4]

Reading this manuscript today, one wonders whether Tutuola's unusual literary career would have been quite the same if "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" had been his first published book. In most respects it closely resembles his later books but it also contains a few idiosyncracies that make it unique. Like the others, it is an episodic adventure story told in the first person by a hero who has been forced to undertake a long, hazardous journey in a spirit-infested wilderness. As he wanders from one "town" to another in this ghostly forest seeking a way home, he encounters strange creatures and experiences extreme deprivations, tortures and other "punishments" that test his mettle and ingenuity. Fortunately, a generous legacy of protective medicine (in this case, the "juju" of his father, a famous hunter and magician) enables him to survive any ordeals he fails to avoid through cunning or chance. After decades of such exploits, which include visits to both heaven and hell, the Wild Hunter finally returns to the human world and offers his people the benefits of his knowledge of other realms.

The story is divided very neatly into seven parts, the opening chapter being the narrator's recollection of his father's life story as told to him the night before the old man died. His father had also been transported to the bush of ghosts many years earlier when he had been swallowed by a one-legged ghost while hunting big game, but he had suffered only six months of colourful horrors before managing to escape. The narrator begins his own autobiography in the next chapter, which opens with a brief account of his father's death followed by a detailed description of how he himself was drawn ineluctably into the "First Town of the Ghosts in the Bush of the Ghosts". After a succession of misadventures involving tree-ghosts, dead-smelling ghosts, and pyrocephalic equestrian ghosts, he succeeds in slipping out of town only to be captured again early in the next chapter by a short, stout, taper-headed, hungry ghost who conveys him to the subterranean "Second Town of the Ghosts". So it goes, chapter by chapter, town by town, with the narrator facing in each episode two or three major threats on his life and numerous petty harassments until he reaches the Fourth Town, where he is sheltered in a Salvation Army church run by a saintly South African named Victoria Juliana. This woman died prematurely at the age of twelve, more than twenty years earlier than predestined, so she was biding her time before ascension into heaven by performing good works. She had even started a school for illiterate young ghosts, a school she persuades the Wild Hunter to attend. He does so well in his studies that eventually he is appointed Headmaster, a position he surrenders after her ascension, when the pupils begin to act unruly.

[4] I am grateful to Mr. A. Kraszna-Krausz, Director of Focal Press, for this information and for allowing me to examine the manuscript of "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" (hereafter cited as *WHBG* M.S.). Dr. Lindfors' edition of the work has since been published by Three Continents Press, Washington, D.C. (Ed.).

From there he moves on to the Fifth Town, the abode of the Devil, which is pictured as a well-organized mini-state with a huge standing army, an efficient Engineering Department that controls the fuel supply for all four subdivisions of Hell, a Correspondence Section in the Devil's Office that employs 18,000 clerks, and an Employment Exchange Office that keeps extensive records on all sinners, human and ghostly. Tutuola's vision of Hell as a vast bureaucracy is one of the most entertaining conceptions in the whole story—something no doubt inspired by the government offices in Lagos with which his job brought him into regular contact. In this comically Kafkaesque underworld there is even a Labour Headquarters run by a Commissioner of Labour named "Death" who is "the Devil's Cousin." It is not clear whether his appointment to this post was the result of infernal nepotism.

The final stop for the Wild Hunter is Heaven which, despite its "Glorious Technicolors" and busy orchestras, is a mild let-down for the reader after the hilarious vibrancy of Hell. Though the Wild Hunter is still a living human being, he gains admission to Heaven through the intervention of his old friend and mentor Victoria Juliana who gives him a grand tour of the facilities before arranging his split-second return trip to earth. Then, just before bringing his story to an appropriate moral conclusion, the Wild Hunter pauses briefly for a commercial: he announces that he will transmit written messages via Victoria Juliana to any dead person in heaven the reader may wish to contact, if the reader will be careful to print the name of the person or persons clearly in capital letters on the back of an envelope containing the message and enclose this envelope in another along with a five shilling postal order or money order to cover expenses. The second envelope should be addressed to:

THE "WILD-HUNTER"
c/o AMOS TUTUOLA
35, VAUGHAN STREET
EBUTE-METTA (LAGOS) NIGERIA

The Wild Hunter had made a similar offer just after leaving Hell. Any reader who wanted to find out if his or her name was included in the Devil's Records Office (thereby indicating that the person was classified a sinner and would ultimately wind up in Hell) could follow the same procedure, addressing the inserted envelope to

His Majesty's the King of the Hell,
17896, Woe Lane,
5th Town of Ghosts,
Bush of Ghosts,
Hell

and mailing the entire packet and five shilling fee to the same address in Ebute-Metta.

Anyone familiar with Tutuola's other works will recognize in this synopsis a number of features that place "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" in the same distinctive narrative tradition. First there is the monomythic cyclical structure of the story, involving a Departure, an Initiation and a Return.[5] Then there is the loosely

[5] For a discussion of this kind of structure, see Gerald Moore, "Amos Tutuola: A Nigerian Visionary," *Black Orpheus*, 1 (1957), 27–35.

coordinated internal structure which is the result of a concatenation of discrete fictive units strung together on the lifeline of a fabulous hero in an almost random order. The hero himself is a composite of the most popular folktale protagonists—hunter, magician, trickster, superman, culture hero—and some of the adventures he relates closely resemble episodes in well-known Yoruba yarns (e.g., a half-bodied ghost, similar to the half-bodied child found not only in folktales but also in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* torments the Wild Hunter before he gets to the Fifth Town of Ghosts).[6] Moreover, certain motifs such as the facile shifting of bodily shapes, the contests between rival magicians, and the encounters with monsters, mutants and multiform ghosts clearly derive from oral tradition. The story is a collage of borrowed materials put together in an eclectic manner by a resourceful raconteur working well within the conventions governing oral storytelling.

Yet there are signs of literary influence too. The narrative frame—a hunter's memoirs prefaced by a brief biography of the hunter's father—appears to have been inspired by D. O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju ode ninu igbo irunmale,*[7] which uses the same device. Indeed, the very title of Tutuola's story "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" is extremely close to Fagunwa's "The Brave Hunter in the Forest of Four Hundred Spirits" (a literal translation of *Ogboju ode...*), suggesting a strong kindred relationship between the texts possibly bordering on plagiarism. In any case, no one could deny that they belong to the same family of letters.

Certainly there are striking similarities in some of the events recounted. For instance, in the course of fighting with a fierce ghost in the First Town of Ghosts, Tutuola's Wild Hunter breaks his cutlass on his adversary's body and the ghost calmly repairs it and returns it to him so they can resume their battle; Fagunwa's Akara-Ogun is offered the same strange courtesy in his duel with Agbako, a monster he meets in his first sojourn to Irunmale.[8] Next, the Wild Hunter is victimized by a ghost who mounts and rides him as a horse; so is Akara-Ogun.[9] Both books tell of encounters with one-legged ghosts, four-headed ghosts, ghosts who want to learn how to cook, ghosts with major social and psychological problems. Furthermore, there are suggestive resemblances between parts of Tutuola's story and parts of Fagunwa's second novel *Igbo Olodumare,*[10] which was published in 1948, apparently the year Tutuola began writing. Such a plethora of parallel

[6] *WHBG,* p. 44: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952, hereafter cited as *PWD),* pp. 31–38; Phebean Itayemi and P. Gurrey, *Folk Tales and Fables* (London: Penguin, 1953), pp. 46–50. Tutuola also uses this character in a short story, "Ajantala, the Noxious Guest," in *An African Treasury,* ed. Langston Hughes (New York: Crown, 1960), pp. 131–137.

[7] (London: Nelson, 1938). The earliest edition of this book listed in Janheinz Jahn and Claus Peter Dressler's *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* (Nendeln, Lichtenstein: Kraus–Thomson, 1971) is the 1950 reprint, but A. Olubummo cites the first edition in "D. O. Fagunwa: A Yoruba Novelist," *Odu,* 9 (September 1963), 26, as does Ayo Bamgbose, *The Novels of D. O. Fagunwa* (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corp., 1974), p. 131.

[8] *WHBG* M.S., p. 13; *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons,* transl. Wole Soyinka (London: Nelson, 1968), pp. 23–24 hereafter cited as *FTD*).

[9] *WHBG* M.S., pp. 13–14; *FTD,* pp. 38–42.

[10] I base this remark on the summary of *Igbo Olodumare* in Bamgbose, pp. 35–37, which reveals that the hero is joined by other hunters and acquaintances on his journey, as is Tutuola's Wild Hunter. Jahn and Dressler, as well as Bamgbose, give 1949 as the date of publication for *Igbo Olodumare,* but Olubummo, p. 26, gives 1948. In a letter to me dated 18 September 1975, Tutuola states that he wrote *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1948. It is likely that *WHBG* was written in the same year.

motifs, added to the structural similarities already noted, establishes beyond doubt that Fagunwa had an important formative influence on Tutuola's mode of writing. It is true that both writers made extensive use of the techniques and materials of indigenous oral lore, but Tutuola appears to have learned from Fagunwa how to transmute this oral art into written art.

And Fagunwa was not his only teacher. Tutuola had also read *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Arabian Nights*,[11] classic adventure stories fabricated out of a chain of old tales loosely linked together. Events in Bunyan's narrative such as Christian's fight with the monster Apollyon, his scalings of the Hill Difficulty and the Delectable Mountains, and his visits to Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, the Palace Beautiful, and the Celestial City may have served as distant models for some of the Wild Hunter's peripatetic adventures. Certainly there is the same element of restless questing, with the pilgrim either struggling against fearsome adversaries or learning the ways of God, Devil and Man through discussions with helpful advisers. At one point even the Wild Hunter himself turns evangelist when he meets a ghost named Woe who had been expelled from Heaven for bad behaviour and punished in Hell for sixty-five years before being rusticated to the Third Town of Ghosts to live for eternity among the "wild beasts, poisonous snakes and scorpions."

> After the ghost related his story like that, I was very sorry for him, and I advised him that if he could change his bad character, the God Almighty may take you away from these punishments, but he said immediately, that he could not change his bad character atal [sic], and he said he was waiting for more punishments from God. (*WHBG* ms., p. 26)

When the Wild Hunter offers this ghost a drink of water to slake his sixty-five years of thirst, the ghost consumes no more than drops before being transformed into a little hill near the way to Heaven. The Wild Hunter decides to write the ghost's name on the hill "for the rest bad ghosts to see whenever they would pass, and as a remembrance."

This vignette illustrates one point of difference between "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" and the six books that followed it: missionary Christianity was a major theme in Tutuola's earliest writing. Although this theme was to resurface in some of his later works—e.g., the famous episode in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* in which the narrator meets his dead cousin who has established in the 10th Town of Ghosts a very successful Methodist Church with more than a thousand provincial branches over which he presides as bishop at annual Synod meetings[12]—Ulli Beier was certainly right to note that Tutuola was not the Christian moralist that Fagunwa was.[13] Nevertheless, it is now clear from this new corpus of evidence that he started off from a position much

[11] In a letter to me dated 16 May 1968, Tutuola states that he read these books in 1948.

[12] *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 144–153 (hereafter cited as *MLBG*).

[13] Ulli Beier, "Fagunwa, a Yoruba Novelist," *Black Orpheus*, 17 (June 1965), 54. A fuller study of the religious orientation of Fagunwa's fiction can be found in Afolabi Olabimtan, "Religion as a Theme in Fagunwa's Novels," *Odù*, 11 (1975), 101–114. Also, Bamgbose, op. cit., has a chapter in his book on "The Didactic Element" in Fagunwa's fiction.

closer to Fagunwa spiritually than has hitherto been recognized. They both began as didactic writers combining Christian theology with traditional Yoruba moral wisdom, but Tutuola, after initially following Fagunwa's example in Africanizing Bunyan, returned to more indigenous sources of artistic inspiration and wrote less homiletic secular sagas.

Another exceptional feature of "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" is what might be termed its autobiographical content. Tutuola had attended a Salvation Army school, had served briefly in a branch of the military service, and was working in a government office in Lagos while writing this story. It is not surprising, then, to find him inserting in his narrative fairly elaborate descriptions of Victoria Juliana's school, the Devil's army, or the crowded offices of Hell. He was obviously using his own first-hand experience of such places as the basis for his fantasies. The story may thus be said to have a greater fidelity to actual circumstances and scenes in terrestrial life than is usually the case in Tutuola's fiction. We are still in an imaginary garden but it appears to have some freakishly real toads in it.

Yet it must be admitted that "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts" is neither Tutuola's most interesting narrative nor his most accomplished. Indeed, crudities abound, and there are moments when spectacularly outlandish happenings are robbed of imaginative intensity by colourless narration. The tale is obviously the work of a novice writer, in this case an apprentice craftsman with no formal training whatsoever. Had it been published thirty years ago, it would not have generated the same excitement among readers overseas as did his next narrative, a bizarre yarn with the improbable title *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town.*

Tutuola was very lucky to get this second story published and luckier still that it happened to turn into a commercial success. Tutuola had originally submitted the manuscript to Lutterworth Press, a missionary publisher for the United Society for Christian Literature, in response to an advertisement in a Nigerian magazine listing books they had published by African authors. Two of the editors at Lutterworth Press were intrigued by the story and passed it on first to an educational publisher, Thomas Nelson and Sons, who rejected it outright, and then to Faber and Faber, who had the courage to publish it in May 1952.[14] The book might have sunk rapidly into obscurity had it not been enthusiastically reviewed a few weeks later by Dylan Thomas in *The Observer*. Within a year Grove Press brought out an American edition which won similar acclaim, and neither edition has ever gone out of print. By 1978 more than ninety thousand copies of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* had been sold.[15]

In Nigeria, however, Tutuola's writing did not get such a friendly reception. Educated Nigerians were shocked to learn that a book written in substandard English by a lowly Lagos messenger was being lionized abroad, and they were contemptuous of Tutuola's efforts when they saw that he had borrowed heavily from both oral tradition and the works of Fagunwa. Some Yoruba readers went so far as to say he had

[14] I am grateful to Jocelyn Oliver and M. Mary Senior, formerly editors at Lutterworth Press, for this information.

[15] I am grateful to Faber and Faber and Grove Press for providing this information.

plagiarized these sources, creating nothing startlingly new or original in the process and often mangling the best of the material he forged. To them he was not a naive native genius endowed with a protean imagination but rather a bungling literary burglar with no imagination at all.[16]

The book that sparked such controversy was summarized by Dylan Thomas as a

> brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching story, or series of stories... about the journey of an expert and devoted palm-wine drinkard through a nightmare of indescribable adventures, all simply and carefully described, in the spirit-bristling bush. From the age of ten he drank 225 kegs a day, and wished to do nothing else; he knew what was good for him, it was just what the witch-doctor ordered. But when his tapster fell from a tree and died, and as, naturally, he himself "did not satisfy with water as with palm-wine", he set out to search for the tapster in Deads' Town.
>
> This was the devil—or, rather, the many devils—of a way off, and among those creatures, dubiously alive, whom he encountered, were an image with two long breasts with deep eyes; a female cream image; a quarter-of-a-mile total stranger with no head, feet or hands, but one large eye on his topmost; an unsoothing something with flood-light eyes, big as a hippopotamus but walking upright; animals cold as ice and hairy as sandpaper, who breathed very hot steam and sounded like church bells, and a "beautiful complete gentleman" who, as he went through the forest, returned the hired parts of his body to their owners, at the same time paying rentage, and soon became a full-bodied gentleman reduced to skull.
>
> Luckily, the drinkard found a fine wife on his travels, and she bore him a child from her thumb; but the child turned out to be abnormal, a pyromaniac, a smasher to death of domestic animals, and a bigger drinkard than its father, who was forced to burn it to ashes. And out of the ashes appeared a half-bodied child, talking with a "lower voice like a telephone".... There is, later, one harmonious interlude in the Father-Mother's house, or magical, techni-colour night-club, in a tree that takes photographs; and one beautiful moment of rejoicing, when Drum, Song, and Dance, three tree fellows, perform upon themselves, and the dead arise, and the animals, snakes, and spirits of the bush dance together. But mostly it's hard and haunted going until the drinkard and his wife reach Dead's Town, meet the tapster, and, clutching his gift of a miraculous, all-providing Egg, are hounded out of the town by dead babies.[17]

As can be inferred from this incomplete summary, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is pure fantasy, a voyage of the imagination into a never-never land of magic, marvels and monsters. But the beings and doings in this fantasy world are not entirely unfamiliar. The journey to the land of the dead, the abnormal conception, the monstrous child, the enormous drinking capacity, the all-providing magical object, the tree-spirits, the personifications, the fabulous monsters—these are standard materials of oral tradition, the stuff folk tales are made of all over the world.

The palm-wine drinkard himself appears at first to be an unpromising hero. He has, after all, done nothing but drink palm-wine all his life. But once he starts on his journey to Deads' Town his extraordinary cleverness and unusual powers of endurance enable

[16] Their views are reprinted in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975), pp. 31–32, 41.

[17] *The Observer*, (6 July 1952), 7.

him to circumvent or survive numerous misadventures. He carries with him a substantial supply of juju so he can transform himself at will whenever he gets into a tight corner. However, even though he is part-trickster, part-magician, part-superman, he cannot overcome every adversary or extricate himself from every difficult situation; supernatural helpers have to come to his assistance from time to time. Eventually he finds his tapster in Deads' Town but cannot persuade him to re-enter the world of the "alives." The palm-wine drinkard and his wife leave Deads' Town and, several adventures later, arrive home only to discover that their people are starving. Heaven and Land have had a bitter quarrel and Heaven has refused to send rain to Land. The ensuing drought and famine have killed millions. The palm-wine drinkard springs into action and in a short time manages to feed the remaining multitudes, settle the cosmic dispute, end the drought and famine, and restore the world to normal functioning order. The unpromising hero who had set out on his quest with limited powers and purely selfish ambitions becomes in the end a miracle worker, the saviour and benefactor of all mankind. He changes, in other words, from a typical folk-tale hero into a typical epic hero. Such a change does not take him outside the stream of oral tradition.

It is not difficult to prove that many of the folk tales Tutuola uses in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* exist in Yoruba oral tradition. Any sizable collection of Yoruba tales will yield a number of parallels, and some of Tutuola's most striking episodes can be found in more than one collection. For example, the celebrated passage in which a "beautiful complete gentleman" lures a lady deep into the forest and then dismembers himself, returning the hired parts of his body to their owners and paying rentage until he is reduced to a humming skull, appears in at least seven different versions in Yoruba folk-tale collections.[18] There are almost as many texts of the incident of the all-providing magical object which produces first an abundance of food and later an abundance of whips.[19] Many other tales and motifs in this book—the quarrel between heaven and earth, the carrying of a sacrifice to heaven, the tiny creature that makes newly-cleared field sprout weeds, the *enfant terrible*, the magical transformations—can be documented as traditional among the Yoruba.[20] For those that cannot be so documented we have the word of Adeboye Babalola, a prominent Yoruba scholar, that

> the Yoruba are lovers of the marvellous, the awe-inspiring, the weird, the eerie. It is a small minority of [Yoruba] folk-tales that concern human beings only. The great majority of the tales feature human beings, animals behaving like humans, and often also superhuman beings: demons, ogres, deities.[21]

Further confirmation of Tutuola's debt to Yoruba oral tradition comes from his Yoruba critics who insist that his stories are well known.

They are known not only in Yorubaland but throughout West Africa. The distinguished anthropologist Melville Herskovits remarked in the introduction to a collection

[18] For such documentation, see Bernth Lindfors, "Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets," *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 10 (1970), 316–318, 322, 329.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] A. Babalola, "Yoruba Folktales," *West African Review* (July 1962), 49.

of Fon tales from Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) that "it will be instructive for one who reads the narratives in this volume to go to Tutuola's books with the motifs and orientations of the tales given here in mind. He will find them all."[22] Though this is certainly an overstatement, it serves to emphasize the fact that folk tales known to the Yoruba are known to other West African peoples as well. Tutuola's tale of the self-dismembering "complete gentleman", for instance, has been found not only among the Fon but also among the Ibo and Ibibio of Nigeria and the Krio of Sierra Leone.[23] According to Jack Berry, the tale of the magical food-and-whips producer is very widely distributed in West Africa, as are tales of ogres and other supernatural beings.[24] Alice Werner in her study of African mythology reports that stories of people who have penetrated into the world of ghosts and returned "are not uncommon" and that shape-shifting transformations are not only present in many folk tales but also "are believed in as actual occurrences at the present day."[25] Thus *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* a lineal descendant of Yoruba oral tradition, hails from a large extended family of West African oral narratives.

What has been said about *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* also applies to Tutuola's other books, for his method and content have not changed much over the years. The quest pattern basic to his fiction has already been described: a hero or heroine sets out on a journey in search of something important and passes through a number of concatenated folktale adventures before, and sometimes after, finding what he seeks. Though Tutuola varies this pattern from book to book, he never abandons it entirely. He never chooses a totally different pattern. One suspects that his roots in oral tradition run so deep that he knows of no other way to compose book-length fiction.

Nevertheless, minor changes in Tutuola's writing are worth noting, for they reveal that though Tutuola has not moved any great distance from where he was in 1948 when he began writing *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* he has not been standing still all these years. His most radical departure from the quest pattern came in his second book, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), which opens with its narrator-hero, a boy of seven, being maltreated and abandoned by his stepmothers, separated from his older brother, and left to wander in the bush during a tribal war. Frightened by the sounds of gunfire and unable to distinguish between bad and good, he enters the Bush of Ghosts and spends the next twenty-four years wandering in an African spirit world replete with towns, kings, civic ceremonies, festivals, law courts, and even his cousin's Methodist church. He has experiences both harrowing and happy and at one point considers taking up permanent residence in the "10th Town of Ghosts" with his dead cousin, but he cannot bring himself to do it because he keeps longing to return to his earthly home. In this respect he more nearly resembles the protagonist of Tutuola's earliest story, "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts". And like the *deus ex machina* that appears at the

[22] Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1958), p. 13.

[23] See source cited in footnote 18.

[24] Jack Berry, *Spoken Art in Africa* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1961), p. 9.

[25] Alice Werner, "African Mythology," in *The Mythology of All Races,* ed. John Arnott MacCulloch (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), pp. 118, 121.

end of that story, eventually a "Television-handed ghostess" turns up and helps him to escape so that he is reunited with his mother and brother and begins to lead a more normal life.

As can be seen from this brief summary, the hero's journey cannot really be termed a quest. Harold Collins describes it as a "West African Odyssey,"[26] and Gerald Moore sees it as "a kind of extended Initiation or 'rite of passage'... or Purgatory [in which the] initiation of the boy-hero is not sought, but is imposed upon him as the price of his development into full understanding."[27] Both of these interpretations are apt, but they presuppose a degree of premeditation, of careful organization and methodical development, which cannot be found in the story. Again the plot consists of a string of loosely connected episodes set down in a random sequence. There is a distinct beginning and a distinct end but the middle is a muddle. When Geoffrey Parrinder asked Tutuola "the reason for the apparently haphazard order of the towns of the ghosts" in this book, Tutuola replied: "That is the order in which I came to them."[28] Here is confirmation of the improvisatory nature of Tutuola's art. He moves from one tale to another not by calculation but by chance. And when he gets to the end of the chain, when all conflicts are resolved and his hero returns to a state of equilibrium, as most folktale heroes do, Tutuola rounds off the narrative with a moral: "This is what hatred did." The moral reminds the reader that the hero's sufferings and misfortunes can be blamed on his stepmothers who rejected him twenty-four years before. Tutuola thus ends his story in typical folktale fashion by using it to teach a lesson about human behaviour.

In his third book, *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), Tutuola returned to the quest pattern. Beautiful Simbi, an only child who has never known poverty and punishment, desires to set out on a journey "to know and experience their difficulties". Her mother and others warn her not to, but she feels she must. One hundred and twenty pages later she is fed up with poverty and punishment. She has been kidnapped, sold into slavery, beaten, starved, almost beheaded, set afloat on a river in a sealed coffin, carried off by an eagle, imprisoned in a tree trunk, half-swallowed by a boa constrictor, attacked by a satyr, shrunk and put in a bottle, bombarded by a stone-carrying phoenix, and petrified to a rock. Fortunately, she is a talented girl who can sing well enough to wake the dead and she gets plenty of assistance from girl-friends, gods and a friendly gnome, so that in the end she manages to return home to her mother. Then, "having rested for some days, she was going from house to house she was warning all the children that it was a great mistake to a girl who did not obey her parents." Simbi, too, has a lesson to teach.

Although it resembles Tutuola's other books in matter and manner, *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* marks a new stage in Tutuola's development as a writer, for it displays definite signs of formal literary influence. It was the first of his published

[26] Harold Collins, "The Novel in Nigeria," in *Writers on the Other Side of the Horizon: A Guide to Developing Literatures of the World*, ed. Priscilla Tyler (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1964), pp. 51–52; and again in *Amos Tutuola* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 46. V. S. Pritchett also terms this book an Odyssey in a review in *New Statesman and Nation*, (6 March 1954), p. 291.

[27] Gerald Moore, *Seven African Writers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 49–51.

[28] Foreword to *MLBG*.

works to be divided into numbered chapters, each encompassing a major adventure, and the only one to be written in the third person. Gerald Moore has pointed out that it contains far more dialogue and more frequent adverbial "stage directions" than the earlier books.[29] Furthermore, there are creatures such as goblins, imps, a gnome, myrmidon, phoenix, nymph, and satyr whose names, at least, derive from European mythology. And there is one passage which so closely resembles an episode in a Yoruba novel by D. O. Fagunwa that it is difficult to believe that they could have been created independently of one another.[30] It is clear that Tutuola must have been doing some reading between July 22, 1952, and November 26, 1954, the dates *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* were submitted for publication.[31] When Eric Larrabee interviewed him in 1953, Tutuola owned no books and did not think of himself as an author,[32] but after his second book was published, another interviewer found that he had "decided to attend evening classes to 'improve' himself, so that he [might] develop into what he describes as 'a real writer'".[33] Reading was no doubt a part of Tutuola's program for self-improvement. When Larrabee offered to send him books, Tutuola requested *A Survey of Economic Education* published by the Brookings Institution, Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun,* and "some other books which contain stories like that of the P.W.D. *[The Palm-Wine Drinkard]* which are written by either West Africans, White men or Negroes, etc."[34] Larrabee recalls that of the other books sent, "the two he seemed most to enjoy were Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson* and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology,* which he said contained stories similar to those he had heard as a child."[35] It is not surprising then to find traces of literary influence in *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle.* Between 1952 and 1954 Tutuola was becoming conscious of himself as an author, was reading more widely, and was trying hard to "improve" his writing. He could still tell only one kind of story, but should the traditional wellspring ever fail to provide him with sufficient material, he could now turn to a number of other sources for fresh inspiration.

Tutuola did succeed in improving the structure of his narratives considerably. His last three books do not differ markedly from his first three in content or narrative pattern, but they tend, like *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle,* to be organized into rather more neatly demarcated chapters. In *The Brave African Huntress* (1958) and *Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty* (1967), he adopted the practice of citing one or more proverbs at the head of a chapter and then using the action in that chapter to illustrate the proverbs. In *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), his most stylized work, he created an Arabian Nights structure by having a 76-year-old chief entertain villagers every night for ten nights with accounts of his past adventures. Both of these narrative techniques must have entered literature from oral tradition. If Tutuola picked them up from his reading, as appears likely, he is to be commended for selecting those that suited his

[29] Moore, *Seven African Writers,* p. 54.
[30] These passages will be discussed later.
[31] I am grateful to Sarah Lloyd and Rosemary Goad of Faber and Faber for this information.
[32] Eric Larrabee, "Palm-Wine Drinkard Searches for a Tapster," *Reporter,* (12 May 1953), 38.
[33] *West Africa,* (1 May 1954), 389.
[34] Eric Larrabee, "Amos Tutuola: A Problem in Translation," *Chicago Review,* 10 (Spring 1956), 40–41.
[35] Ibid.

material perfectly. Using such techniques he could remain a raconteur and at the same time could link and unify his concatenated tales more effectively.

The tales were still woven into the familiar quest pattern. Adebisi, the heroine in *The Brave African Huntress*, ventures into the dangerous Jungle of the Pigmies to rescue her four brothers. The chief in *Feather Woman of the Jungle* sets out on a series of hazardous journeys in quest of treasure and adventure. Ajaiyi in *Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty* simply wants to get out of debt and is willing to go to the Creator, the God of Iron, the Devil, and assorted witches, witchdoctors and wizards to ask for help. Each of these adventures, after a succession of ups and downs, achieves his objective.

As for the tales themselves, Tutuola appears to have continued to rely more heavily on traditional Yoruba material than on non-Yoruba material. In *The Brave African Huntress* there are references to "elves, genii, goblins, demons, imps, gnomes" and a "cyclops-like creature,"[36] but the actual monsters encountered and the adventures undergone are not unlike those in Tutuola's earlier books. The episode in which Adebisi the huntress cuts the hair of the king of Ibembe Town and discovers he has horns has been cited by critics as a possible example of European or Indian influence because it resembles the story of King Midas and the Ass's Ears,[37] but Tutuola, in a letter to Harold Collins, has stated: "The Ring who has horns is in the traditional story of my town."[38] In published Yoruba folktale collections it is not difficult to find parallels to other tales and motifs such as Adebisi's palace adventure in Bachelors' Town in *The Brave African Huntress*; the three dogs that rescue their master from woodchoppers, the journey to the underwater kingdom, and the town where people eat only water in *Feather Woman of the Jungle*; and the dead rats that come alive, the person who hides in the pupil of a blacksmith's eye, and the quarrel between lenders in *Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty*.[39] Moreover, these later books are packed with Yoruba deities, towns, customs, superstitions, and proverbs. Tutuola, despite his reading and increased sophistication, apparently chose to remain a teller of Yoruba tales.

A few critics, seeking to demonstrate how Tutuola improves upon the material he borrows, have contrasted passages in his books with analogous folk tales.[40] This type of argument, no matter how well-documented, is not very persuasive because the critic cannot prove that the particular folk-tale text chosen for comparison is the version of the tale that Tutuola knew. Perhaps Tutuola had heard a different version, perhaps even a better version than he himself was able to tell. Eldred Jones makes the mistake of assuming that the Yoruba traditional tale on which Tutuola based his account of the self-dismembering "complete gentleman" in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is very similar to

[36] *The Brave African Huntress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), pp. 9 and 25.

[37] Ben Obumselu, "The Background of Modern African Literature," *Ibadan*, 22 (1966), 57; J. A. Ramsaran, "African Twilight: Folktale and Myth in Nigerian Literature," *Ibadan*, 15 (1963), 17–19. This tale is number 782 in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1964). Literary redactions appear in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bk. XI) and Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" (*Canterbury Tales*, III, 951 ff.).

[38] Harold R. Collins, "Founding a New National Literature: The Ghost Novels of Amos Tutuola," *Critique*, 4, 1 (1960–1961), 17–28.

[39] For such references, see the source cited in footnote 18.

[40] Eldred Jones, "Amos Tutuola—*The Palm-Wine Drinkard:* Fourteen Years On," *Bulletin of the Association for African Literature in English*, 4 (1966), 24–30; Collins, *Amos Tutuola*, pp. 53–68.

the Krio version of this tale.[41] Jones therefore credits Tutuola with the invention of several striking details which, though absent from the Krio version, are quite common in published Yoruba texts of the tale. Even a critic familiar with all the published Yoruba versions would not be able to draw a firm line between borrowed and invented details in Tutuola's redaction. Without knowing exactly what Tutuola borrowed, it is impossible to know how much he contributed to the stories he tells.

Critics who search for literary influences on Tutuola's writing are on safer ground insofar as texts are concerned. Bunyan is again a case in point. The episode in which Death shows the palm-wine drinkard the bones of his former victims appears to be modelled on a scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress* in which Christian meets the Giant Despair in Doubting Castle. A number of towns the drinkard and other Tutuolan heroes visit bear a distinct resemblance to Vanity Fair. And the monsters often seem to belong to the same sub-species as Bunyan's Apollyon who was "clothed with scales, like a fish, ... had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion."[42] However, unlike *The Pilgrim's Progress,* Tutuola's narratives are not religious allegories. They have been influenced far more by Yoruba oral tradition than by the Bible. Bunyan may have been instructive in teaching Tutuola how to put an extended quest tale together but he did not convert him to Christianity. In substance and spirit Tutuola was still a thoroughly African story teller. Only in "The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts" does Bunyan appear to have left a religious imprint on Tutuola's narrative strategy.

It is D.O. Fagunwa who remains the crucial literary influence on Tutuola. Between 1948 and 1951, the years Tutuola started writing, Fagunwa published at least nine books, including a new edition of his first work of fiction, *Ogboju ode ninu igbo irunmale,* which had originally appeared in 1938.[43] Tutuola, who had read this book at school, must have been aware of Fagunwa's extraordinary outburst of literary activity in these post-war years. Indeed, it is conceivable that he got both the idea of writing stories and the idea of submitting them for publication from seeing Fagunwa's works in print. As noted earlier, the title of Tutuola's first narrative is virtually a literal translation of the title of Fagunwa's first published tale. And there is abundant evidence in critical studies[44] and English translations of excerpts from Fagunwa's fiction[45] that Fagunwa's influence extends well beyond titles.

[41] Jones, pp. 24–27.

[42] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress,* ed. Alexander M. Witherspoon (New York: Pocket Books, 1957), p. 113.

[43] Besides three fictional works he published two travel books—*Irinajo Apa Kini* and *Irinajo Apa Keji* —and four "Taiwo and Kehinde" school readers during this period. See *Books for Africa,* 21 (April 1952), 34.

[44] In addition to Beier, Olubummo, and Bamgbose cited earlier, there is a very perceptive comparative essay by Abiola Irele entitled "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer: D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka," *Odù,* 11 (1975), 75–100. But Oladele Taiwo, in *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 79–81, believes that "Tutuola's debt of Fagunwa may be much less than many critics have suggested."

[45] "The Bold Hunter in the Forest of Zombis," trans. A. Akikiwo, *Odù,* 9 (September 1963), 35–37; "The Beginning of Olowo Aiye," trans. Bakare Gbadamosi and Ulli Beier, *Odù,* 9 (September 1963), 31–34; "The Forest of the Lord," trans. E. C. Rowlands in *A Selection of African Prose (2. Written Prose),* ed. Wilfred Whiteley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 69–84; "Igbako," trans. Wole Soyinka, *Black Orpheus,* 15 (August 1964), 5–7; "Kako", trans. Wole Soyinka, *Black Orpheus,* 19 (March 1966), 17–21; and Wole Soyinka's translation of the whole of *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* cited earlier.

A good example can be found in the episode in *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* in which Simbi first encounters the satyr, a confrontation that bears a striking resemblance to a passage in *Igbo Olodumare,* Fagunwa's second novel, in which an adventurer named Olowo-Aiye meets Esu Kekere Ode ("Little Devil of the Ways").[46] The monsters themselves are very much alike. Here is Fagunwa's Esu Kekere Ode:

> He wore no coat and he wore no trousers; he had no hat on his head and tied no cloth round his loins, for it was with leaves that the wretch covered his nakedness. He had only one eye and that was wide and round like a great moon. He had no nose at all because his eye was so much bigger than the ordinary bounds of an eye. His mouth was a wide as a man's palm and his teeth were like those of a lion, and these teeth were red as when a lion has just finished eating a meal of raw meat. The sprite's body was covered with hair like a garment and resembled that of a European dog. A long tuft of hair grew on the top of his head. From his shoulder there hung a scourge and from his neck a great bag which filled one with fear. This bag was smeared all over with blood and on this blood was stuck the down of birds, while various medicines were attached to its sides. (pp. 73–74)

Here is Tutuola's satyr:

> He did not wear neither coat nor trousers but he wore only an apron which was soaked with blood. Plenty of the soft feathers were stuck onto this apron. More than one thousand heads of birds were stuck to all over it. He was about ten feet tall and very strong, bold and vigorous. His head was full of dirty long hairs and the hairs were full up with refuses and dried leaves. The mouth was so large and wide that it almost covered the nose. The eyes were so fearful that a person could not be able to look at them for two times, especially the powerful illumination they were bringing out always. He wore plenty of juju-beads round his neck. (pp. 73–74)

Some of the descriptive details are different but a great many are the same. Moreover, the action that follows is almost identical. Fagunwa's monster first interrogates the presumptuous earthling that has trespassed on his domain and then boasts of past conquests:

> "Who are you? What are you? What do you amount to? What do you rank as? What are you looking for? What do you want? What are you looking at? What do you see? What are you considering? What affects you? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? Where do you live? Where do you roam? Answer me! Human being, answer me in a word! One thing is certain—you have got into trouble today, you have climbed a tree beyond its topmost leaves, you have fallen from a height into a well, you have eaten an unexpected poison, you have found a farmplot full of weeds and planted ground-nuts in it .... You saw me and I saw you, you were approaching and I was approaching, and yet you did not take to your heels .... Have you never heard of me? Has no one told you about me? The skulls of greater

[46] The quotations that follow are taken from *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955) and the Rowlands translation of an extract from *Igbo Olodumare* in Whiteley.

men than you are in my cooking pot and their backbones are in the corner of my room, while my seat is made from the breastbones of those who are thoughtless." (pp. 74–75)

Tutuola's less eloquent satyr says the same:

> "Who are you? What are you? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? or don't you know where you are? Answer me! I say answer me now! .... Certainly, you have put yourselves into the mouth of 'death'! You have climbed the tree above its leaves! You see me coming and you too are coming to me instead to run away for your lives!
>
> By the way, have you not been told of my terrible deeds? And that I have killed and eaten so many persons, etc. who were even bold more than you do?" (p. 75)

Both Fagunwa's hero and Tutuola's heroine respond by standing their ground and hurling back boasts of their own. In the strenuous wrestling match that ensues the monster is subdued.

It is encouraging to note that Tutuola and Fagunwa differ considerably in their description of this epic struggle and its aftermath. Such differences indicate that Tutuola is not merely translating Fagunwa and that he is sensitive to the demands of his own narrative. They also suggest that even when he follows Fagunwa most faithfully he does so from memory rather than from a printed text, that instead of actually plagiarizing he vividly recreates what he best remembers from Fagunwa's books, knitting the spirit if not the substance of the most suitable material into the loose fibers of his yarn.

Because Fagunwa occasionally makes use of material from Yoruba oral tradition, it is not always easy to tell when Tutuola is borrowing from Fagunwa and when from folk tales. For example, both writers use motifs such as the "juju-compass" which helps travellers to find their way, the hall of singing birds which turns out to be a trap, the fierce gatekeeper who must be overcome in combat, and the deer-woman who marries a hunter.[47] Tutuola's handling of these motifs may owe more to Yoruba oral tradition than to Fagunwa. Indeed, it is conceivable that Tutuola seems closest to Fagunwa when Fagunwa is closest to oral tradition. Without folktale texts suitable for comparative study it is impossible to assess Tutuola's debts accurately. But it can be assumed that Fagunwa's books were among those which taught Tutuola how to weave a number of old stories into a flexible narrative pattern that could be stretched into a book. Fagunwa's influence on Tutuola should perhaps be measured more in terms of overall structure and descriptive technique than in terms of content. Tutuola followed Fagunwa's lead and travelled in the same direction but he did not always walk in Fagunwa's tracks.

Tutuola has never pretended that his stories were original creations. Indeed, he has admitted in interviews and letters that he borrowed extensively from Yoruba oral tradition and always enjoyed reading works of Fagunwa, Bunyan and other writers who made imaginative use of folk tales and stories of fabulous adventure.[48] Any storyteller

[47] References can be found in the source cited in footnote 18.

[48] See, e.g., the interviews with Larrabee and the biographical "Portrait: A Life in the Bush of Ghosts," *West Africa* (1 May 1954), 389–390.

building up his repertoire of tales probably would have done the same. In oral art what matters most is not uniqueness of invention but adroitness of performance. A story-teller is judged not by his capacity for fabricating new stories but by his ability to tell old, well-known tales in an entertaining manner. This may explain why Tutuola looted the treasury of ready-made fiction he found around him. He was creatively exploiting his cultural heritage, not robbing word banks.

Yet some of his early critics maintained that this was an unprincipled act of piracy, especially since Tutuola was writing in English for a foreign audience rather than in Yoruba for his own people. What made it all the worse, they said, was that he was an inept craftsman who could not match Fagunwa as a storyteller and could not write in proper English. Tutuola's barbarous verbal behaviour was giving readers overseas a poor opinion of Africans!

One can understand the virulence of this reaction if one remembers that Tutuola's first books appeared at a time when Africans were trying to prove to the outside world that they were ready to manage their own politial affairs. The colonial era was coming to an end, and educated Africans, in their eagerness for national independence, were becoming acutely conscious of their image abroad. They wanted to give an appearance of modernity, maturity, competence and sophistication, but the naive fantasies of the Lagos messenger projected just the opposite image. Gerald Moore has suggested that Tutuola aroused the antipathy of some of his countrymen by reminding them of a world from which they wanted to escape.[49] To such readers Tutuola was a disgrace, a setback, a national calamity.

But to readers in Europe and America Tutuola was an exotic delight. Reviewers hailed *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as "a fantastic primitive,"[50] a book "possessed of an imagination that ... seems to be progressively eradicated as 'civilization' advances."[51] The *New Yorker* went so far as to say: "One catches a glimpse of the very beginning of literature, that moment when writing at last seizes and pins down the myths and legends of an analphabetic culture."[52] In a similar vein, V. S. Pritchett claimed that *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* "discernibly expresses the unconscious of a race and even moments of the nightmare element of our own unconsciousness .... Tutuola's voice is like the beginning of man on earth."[53] The image-conscious Nigerians apparently had good reason to worry.

What fascinated many non-African readers of Tutuola was his style. V. S. Pritchett characterized it as "a loose, talking prose,"[54] Dylan Thomas as "young English,"[55] another as "naive poetry."[56] One critic even spoke with enthusiasm of the emergence of a "new 'mad' African writing" written by those who "don't learn English; they don't

[49] Moore, *Seven African Writers*, p. 56.
[50] Lee Rogow, *Saturday Review* (17 October 1953), 30.
[51] John Henry Raleigh, *New Republic* (14 December 1953), 21.
[52] Anthony West, *New Yorker* (5 December 1953), 222.
[53] *New Statesman and Nation* (6 March 1954), 291.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *The Observer*, (6 July 1952) 7.
[56] Selden Rodman, *New York Times Book Review* (20 September 1953), 29.

study the rules or grammar; they just tear right into it and let the splinters fly."[57] To native speakers of English Tutuola's splintered style was an amusing novelty; to educated Nigerians who had spent years honing and polishing their English it was a schoolboy's abomination.

Tutuola's later books were not as enthusiastically received in England and America as his first two. Reviewers complained that "Tutuola's idiom has lost its charm and spontaneity,"[58] that "his effects are a good deal more calculated than they used to be,"[59] that "there is none of the nightmare fascination of the earlier books,"[60] that "one's attention flags here and there."[61] Tutuola's writing now seemed repetitive and "deliberately childish" rather than "pleasingly child-like".[62] Since Faber and Faber no longer took pains to cleanse his manuscripts of their grossest linguistic impurities,[63] he appeared more inarticulate, more splintery, at times almost unintelligible. The *Times Literary Supplement,* in a review of *Feather Woman of the Jungle,* recalled the "literary sensation" Tutuola's first two books had caused:

> There had been nothing quite like them before, and the strangeness of the African subject matter, the primary colours, the mixture of sophistication, superstition, and primitivism, and above all the incantatory juggling with the English language combined to dazzle and intoxicate. Novelty-seekers, propagandists for the coloured races, professional rooters for the avant-garde—any avant-garde, anywhere and at any time—were alike delighted, and none more vociferously than the thinning ranks of the Apocalypse.

But now, with the publication of his fifth book, which "very much is the mixture as before ..., increasingly one's reaction is irritation, a desire to say 'So what?' in quite the rudest way, and to protest against what is dangerously near a cult of the *faux-naïf.*"[64] Clearly, Tutuola's novelty had worn off, and the pendulum of critical opinion had begun to reverse its direction. Later it was to swing back to a more neutral position.

In Nigeria, on the other hand, the pendulum had started to swing in a decidedly more positive direction shortly after independence. In the early 1960s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was adapted for presentation on the stage as a Yoruba opera, and performances in Nigeria and at a number of drama festivals abroad were extremely well received.[65] In the late 1960s and early 1970s a few Nigerian critics began serious

[57] Tom Hopkinson, review of *An African Treasury,* ed. Langston Hughes, in *The Observer* (17 September 1961), 28.

[58] Simon Raven, *Spectator* (4 May 1962), 597.

[59] Neal Ascherson, *New Statesman* (11 May 1962), 683.

[60] V. S. Naipaul, *New Statesman* (5 April 1958), 444.

[61] Gene Baro, *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* (25 January 1959), 6

[62] Raven p. 597.

[63] *PWD,* p. 24, contains a "page from the author's MS., showing the publisher's 'corrections'." Sarah Lloyd of Faber and Faber told me in a letter dated 1 May 1968 that "Rather less correction was needed for Tutuola's later books as the author has become more practised in writing." After *MLBG* Tutuola's books contain many more errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. For a discussion of Tutuola's errors, see Collins, *Amos Tutuola,* pp. 96–110, and "A Theory of Creative Mistakes and the Mistaking Style of Amos Tutuola," *World Literature Written in English* (13 1974), 155–171.

[64] *Times Literary Supplement* (25 May 1962), 369.

[65] For an account of this, see Wole Soyinka, "Amos Tutuola on Stage," *Ibadan* (16 1963), 23–24.

reassessments of his works, studying them with great care.[66] In more recent years there has been a tendency, particularly among established Nigerian writers, towards a greater acceptance of Tutuola, warts and all.[67] More is being written about him and his works today than at any time in the past, the consensus of opinion being that though he is not a typical author, he is far too important a phenomenon to be overlooked.[68]

His importance lies not only in his eccentricities but also in his affinities with two established traditions of creative expression. His works unite oral and written art, bridging folk narratives on the one hand with precursors of the novel (such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*) on the other. Without too much exaggeration Tutuola could be called the missing link between preliterate and literate man, for his creativity is firmly rooted in the cultural heritage of both. One sees quite clearly in his works how two disparate systems of expressive conventions can be joined in a productive synthesis. Tutuola's writing will no doubt continue to interest readers for some time to come because they are a fascinating amalgam of old and new, indigenous and foreign, oral and written. Tutuola, despite obvious limitations, is one of the most remarkably successful syncretists in African literature.

[66] See, e.g., Emmanuel Obiechina, "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition," *Présence Africaine*, 65 (1968), 85–106; Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, "*The Palm-Wine Drinkard:* A Reassessment of Amos Tutuola," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), 48–56, and reprinted in *Présence Africaine*, 71 (1969), 99–108, and *Ibadan*, 28 (1970), 22–26; Sunday O. Anozie, "Amos Tutuola: Littérature et folklore ou le problème de la synthèse", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 10 (1970), 335–351, a briefer version of which appears in English in *Conch*, 2 (1979), ii, 80–88.

[67] See e.g., Chinua Achebe's remarks in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 15–16, 61.

[68] A fairly comprehensive bibliography of criticism on Tutuola can be found in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, op. cit., pp. 309–318 and in *Black African Literature in English: A Guide to Information Sources* (Detroit: Gale, 1979). To these can now be added one new book—Karl-Heinz Böttcher, *Tradition und Modernität bei Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe: Grundzüge der westafrikanischen Erzählliteratur englischer Sprache* (Bonn: Herbert Grundmann, 1974)—a doctoral dissertation—Ebele Ofoma Eko, "The Critical Reception of Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, in England and America, 1952–1974," University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1974—and the following chapters and articles: Abiola Irele, "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer: D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka," *Odù*, 11 (1975), 75–100; John Agetua, "Interview with Amos Tutuola," in *Interviews with Six Nigerian Writers*, ed. John Agetua (Benin City: n.p., 1976), pp. 5–8; Anon. "Pacesetters," *Newbreed* (Lagos) (July 1976), 10; Oladele Taiwo, "Amos Tutuola" in his *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 74–110: Salim Jay, "La Magie verbale d'Amos Tutuola," *L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique*, 44 (1977), 46–48; Ebele Eko, "The Problem of Cross-Cultural Reception: Three Nigerian Writers in England and America," *Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association*, 1 (1977), 11–15; Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, "Ten Years of Tutuola Studies: 1966–1976," *African Perspectives* (Leiden), 1 (1977), 67–76; Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "The Africanness of *The Conjure Woman* and *Feather Woman of the Jungle*," *Ariel* (Calgary), 8, 2 (1977), 17–30; Eustace Palmer, "Twenty-Five Years of Amos Tutuola," *International Fiction Review*, 5, 1 (1978), 15–24; Chinua Achebe, "Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," *Okike*, 14 (1978), 25–33; David S. West, "*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and African Philosophy," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 19, 2 (1978), 83–96; Eckhard Breitinger, "Amos Tutuola: Von der Oralliteratur zur Nationalliteratur" in *Black Literature: Zur afrikanischen und afroamerikanischen Literatur*, ed. E. Breitinger (Munich: Fink, 1979), pp. 156–192; and Mineke Schipper, "Oralité écrite et recherche d'identité dans l'œuvre d'Amos Tutuola," *Research in African Literatures*, 10 (1979), 40–58.

JULIET OKONKWO

2. POPULAR URBAN FICTION AND CYPRIAN EKWENSI

The "modern" novel had made an early appearance in French Africa between the two world wars with Couchoro's *L'Esclave* and Socé's *Karim*. It is noticeable, however, that local publication did not begin until the forties, with Couchoro's second novel, *Amour de fétichеuse* (1941), which was issued and sold in Ouidah, Dahomey; in Ghana, J. Benibengor Blay's first "novelette", *Emelia's Promise and Fulfilment* (1944), was likewise printed locally, and the writer was later to set up his own publishing firm, the Benibengor Book Agency. In Nigeria, it was chiefly among the Ibo of the East that this popular type of lowbrow literature grew to impressive proportions. It seems to have been started by Cyprian Ekwensi (b. 1921), a young graduate of the Chelsea School of Pharmacy, whose *When Love Whispers* was, as one critic put it, "in the tradition of English twopenny novelettes avidly read by romantic-minded girls", except for the African setting and names. This 43-page story was first printed in Yaba near Lagos, but when it was reissued at Onitsha in the mid-fifties, this lively Ibo market town on the river Niger was growing into an important publication centre, for the accelerated changes brought on by the war were becoming manifest in the social, physical, economic and cultural life of the people. The growth of this art form was stimulated not only to give expression to the changes but also to direct them. Foremost among these changes were those introduced by the spread of literacy through expansion in education, the drift of young people from the villages to the towns, causing a population explosion in the urban centres, the accessibility of printing presses and "the diversion to commercial, industrial and technological development of much of the energy and money previously devoted to the war."[69]

Education produced a new class of Africans—the newly literate, residents of urban centres employed in wage-earning occupations, exposed to new ideas and new life styles, with a considerable amount of leisure time—who were eager to read. For most of them, especially those whose education stopped after the elementary or secondary school levels, the novels of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens or George Eliot (usually prescribed

[69] E. N. Obiechina, *Onitsha Market Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 3. Professor Obiechina is the best authority on Onitsha writing. See his *Literature for the Masses* (Enugu: Nkwankwo-Ifekija, 1971), an expanded version of which appeared later as *An African Popular Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973). See also D. I. Nwoga, "Onitsha Market Literature," *Transition*, 4, 2 (1965), 26–33; Nancy Schmidt, "Nigeria: Fiction for the Average Man," *Africa Report*, August 1965, 39–41; and S. Okechukwu Mezu, "The Cradles of Modern African Writing," *The Conch*, 2, 1 (1970), 3–11.

as school texts) were too long, sophisticated, remote and expensive for leisure reading. The Bible, newspapers, cheap foreign magazines or the pulp fiction of crime and detection, romance, lust or urban violence by such writers as Marie Corelli, Bertha Clay, Agatha Christie, Edgar Wallace or Rider Haggard, constituted most of the average man's reading material. It was soon discovered that readers responded more enthusiastically to fiction which came as close as possible to their own lives, describing characters like themselves with interests and problems similar to their own. The introduction of young people to city life with its novelty and its exacting demands intensified the search, through the written word, for new habits and new values.

Of paramount importance in the rise of popular fiction was the availability of local printing presses and publishing houses. But while the printing shop of Madame d'Almeida, which printed two Couchoro novels, contributed as little to the growth of the francophone novel as did the Dakar firm which issued some of Abdoulaye Sadji's fiction, and whereas the Benibengor Book Agency remained an exception in Ghana until Bediako Asare founded the Anawuo Educational Publications soon after the fall of Nkrumah in 1966, the need for local production of this type of pop fiction was felt most intensely in Nigeria, the most densely populated of the English-speaking countries of Africa.[70]

Throughout British Africa, it had been the policy of the missionaries, and later of the literature bureaux supported by the colonial administration to promote the writing and publication of popular, edifying "novelettes" in the local vernaculars. In Nigeria, official sponsorship encouraged the printing of such works in English. In 1953, for instance, the Western Region Literature Committee issued A. O. Osula's *The Great Magician*, Edmund Odili's *The Mystery of the Missing Sandals*, and a volume of poetry by Gabriel Ibitoye Ojo, *The God of Vengeance*. Meanwhile, it had become possible for enterprising Nigerians to acquire obsolescent printing equipment discarded by government agencies and large newspapers when the end of the war enabled these to buy more modern presses. The result was that similar popular works, designed for an audience of high school students and junior clerks were published by small, privately owned printing houses. Representative samples of the fifties are the stories of Olorundayomi Akinsuroju, issued in Lagos, or those of Samuel Akinadewo, issued in Ibadan. But the vast majority of these popular pamphlets or chapbooks was printed in the Igbo market town of Onitsha.

Besides the existence of a potential readership and of local printing facilities, a third element in this development was the existence of local talent capable of exploiting the favourable conditions for creative endeavour. Education, which created the reading public, also produced the writers. Although a tradition of oral story-telling had existed in Africa, it was to the new written literature of the developed world that these writers turned for inspiration and models. With the exception of Onitsha writers (most of whom were barely literate) such popular writers as Blay, Bediako, Amarteifio, or Ansah in Ghana, and Ekwensi in Nigeria received a good education, often up to university level.

[70] Don Dodson, "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature," in *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1976), pp. 195–213.

They travelled widely and often had careers with the mass communication media of newspaper, radio and television. Encouragement came from teachers, librarians, and individuals, especially employees of the British Council. The newspapers also played a part in the development of the habit of writing. Like Addison's periodical, *The Spectator*, in eighteenth-century England, they provided 'Public Opinion' pages and would publish fiction in their Sunday editions.

Because it is rooted in the life of the urban population, and therefore familiar, popular fiction has thrived; besides it is cheap and makes very few if any demands on the intelligence of the reader. It is mostly narrative, deliberately written in simple, direct style. The writers exploit the interest of the urban masses in crime, corruption, adventure and intrigue, sex, love, romance, conflicts of cultures, linguistic innovations and idiosyncracies.

This, together with the swift increase in the study and knowledge of the English language, accounts for the tremendous growth of popular writing in such parts of Africa as Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. But the Onitsha chapbooks belong to a class of their own in African urban literature. They differ in their mode of production, their authorship, their scope and their style.

In the whole process of the production of the Onitsha chapbooks, the barely literate and semi-literate, whose greatest assets were their enthusiasm and their energetic adventurous spirit, predominated. The result is that, quite apart from the genre's positive qualities, a marked crudity is its distinguishing feature. From its covers with glamorized pictures of film stars or crude drawings, to its type setting, its spelling and its grammar, it reveals the amateurishness and limited expertise of its promoters. The chapbooks were written by amateurs of such varying professions as school teachers, local printing press owners, booksellers, journalists, railwaymen, clerks, traders, artisans, farmers and, occasionally, grammar school boys. Not very conversant with the procedures of book publishing, they were careless about dating their works; and often the pamphlets would bear the name of the publisher rather than the writer. Although some of the books are written in the vernacular, the majority are in English; and because of the authors' limited education, their English is often sub-standard, although it sometimes bristles with startlingly vigorous figurative innovations.[71] Their readership is generally confined to the new, barely literate masses of primary school teachers, traders, mechanics, taxi drivers, low-income public servants, elementary and grammar school boys and girls.

In scope, the chapbooks cover a wide range and cater for a variety of tastes and interests. Although the most widely circulated are fiction, some are in drama form, and a considerable number are factual, intended to guide the reader through many aspects of living. Like the chapbooks of Elizabethan England, or of Defoe and his contemporaries, some are designed to aid honest tradesmen in their business; to warn new arrivals in the city about the many dangers of city life, especially the hazards posed by pickpockets, confidence tricksters or prostitutes; or to advise them how to make money in the city. Such interests are reflected in titles like *How to Write Good English Composition*,

[71] Harold R. Collins, *The New English of the Onitsha Chapbooks* (Athens, Ohio: Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 1968).

How to Write Business Letters and Applications, How to Succeed in Life, Money is Hard to Get but Easy to Spend, Beware of Harlots and Many Friends, The Nigerian Bachelor's Guide, Beware of Women, Sundry Advice about Life. Political events in Africa, especially in as far as they relate to popular or important personalities receive considerable attention as in *Dr. Nkrumah in the Struggle for Freedom, The Ghost of Lumumba, Dr. Zik in the Battle of Freedom, Sylvanus Olympio, Tshombe of Katanga, The Life Story and Death of John Kennedy.*[72] There are collections of folk tales, proverbs, anecdotes and accounts of local histories and customs: *How to Know Proverbs and Many Things, Sayings of the Wise, Ntigha Burial Custom.*

Marriage is a popular subject. Its attraction derives from a social problem of the period, created by the clash between the Western individualistic and the traditional communalistic life styles. Almost invariably, the plot is woven around a young man and a girl who wish to marry because they have established affectionate bonds with each other, based on shared moral values. They are opposed by autocratic fathers who insist on exercising their traditional prerogatives of choosing husbands for their daughters by criteria that are calculated to be of benefit to themselves (usually money or friendship with the suitor) rather than to the young girl. It is indicative of the mood of the youthful city population that invariably the young lovers triumph over the father as in Ogali's *Veronica, My Daughter,* Okenwa Olisah's *About Husband and Wife Who Hate Themselves,* R. Okonkwo's *The Game of Love.*

By far the most popular subject of the chapbooks is love, seen in all its aspects —fulfilled, tragic, comic and deceitful. Books are written (much in the same spirit as Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*) to introduce people to the art of love, by teaching how to write love letters, how to make the first approaches towards the object of love or how to choose a suitable love partner, as the following titles show: *How to Write Loves Letters, Our Modern Love Letters, How to Make Friends with Girls, The Art of Love in Real Sense, The School of Love and How to Attend it, A Journey into Love, How to Play Love.*[73] The chapbooks are firmly rooted in contemporary urban society and reflect the interests and conflicts of its transitional nature as a meeting point between new Western values and old traditional concepts. The mass media, particularly the cinema, have been very influential in introducing and propagating Western ideas, being almost wholly responsible for the overwhelming emphasis on romantic love and the individualistic stances of most characters projected in the pamphlets. English literature texts which are studied in school, like the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot, or the poems of Wordsworth, Keats and Tennyson, exerted considerable influence on the style of the books. The Bible, the newspapers, the radio and traditional

[72] On this point, see for example Ken W. J. Post, "Nigerian Pamphleteers and the Congo," *Journal of Modern African Studies,* 2 (1964), 405–418; Charles R. Larson, "The Kennedy Myth in Nigeria." *Colorado Quarterly,* 16 (1967), 39–45; and Bernth Lindfors, "Heroes and Hero-worship in Nigerian Chapbooks," *Journal of Popular Culture,* 1 (1967), 1–22.

[73] The importance of these topics in Onitsha pamphlets was first pointed out in Ulli Beier, "Public Opinion on Lovers," *Black Orpheus,* No. 14 (Feb. 1964), 4–16, reprinted in *Nigerian Writing: Nigeria as Seen by Her Own Writers as well as by German Authors,* ed. G. S. Momodu and Ulla Schild (Tübingen: Erdmann, 1976), pp. 267–289. See also Bernth Lindfors, "Nigerian Chapbooks Heroines," *Journal of Popular Culture,* 2 (1968), 441–450.

folk tales are among other factors that went into their shaping. Such influences may be traced in the development of the plot as in Thomas Orlando Iguh's *Alice in the Romance of Love* (1960), which borrows heavily from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet;* at other times they are manifest in the use of allusions, quotations, in a turn of the phrase (as in the use of stereotyped expressions) or in the choice of subjects. The newspapers and their news coverage provide many of the political subjects.

West African folk tales are responsible for the overall moralistic tone of the chapbooks. In fiction and drama dwelling on the experiences of young men and women, especially in situations of love, the unwary, the wayward, the antisocial always come to a bad end. A heavy didacticism overlays the chapbooks, and this also is derived from the folktale tradition.

Whatever their educational value, social usefulness or entertainment power, most of the Onitsha chapbooks are of slight literary quality.[74] But, as Mezu observed, market literature can be regarded, at any rate potentially, as "the laboratory for more serious writing". Indeed, these humble activities proved to be a favourable training ground for the first Igbo writer to reach international fame, side by side with his Yoruba contemporary Amos Tutuola. This was Cyprian Ekwensi, a pharmacist by profession, whose flair for story-telling gradually drew him into the orbit of the communication arts until he effected a transformation by training in London as a broadcaster. He has held the posts of Head of Features, Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, and Director of Information, Federal Ministry of Information. Ekwensi began his writing career early, and is remarkable for his incessant activity in nearly all forms of creative prose. His first writings were done purely to gratify a personal urge; since then he has written for the radio, for films; he has collected folk tales; he was among the initiators of Onitsha pamphlet writing; he has written books for children, tales of crime and adventure, and, finally, full-length novels.

Ekwensi's early attempts at writing resulted in stories like "Banana Peel", "The Tinted Scarf" and "Land of Sani," which he published together with a collection of Igbo folk tales under the title, *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Igbo Tales,* (1947), which was later reissued as *The Great Elephant Bird* (1965). When the British Council organized the "Scribblers' Club" as the first literary club of its kind in Nigeria, Ekwensi became one of its members, and contributed five stories to *African New Writing* (1947) which was edited by Cullen T. Young, and, as the first anthology of modern African prose fiction in English, attracted both local and international attention. Next came *When Love Whispers* (1948), his first contribution to the so-called Onitsha fiction. But in the early fifties Ekwensi graduated from cheap lowbrow production: beginning with *The Leopard's Claw* (1950), most of his works have henceforth been published in the United Kingdom. Although it was through his full-length novels that he reached fame, his total output includes a considerable amount of shorter prose fiction.

[74] For information about the fate of Onitsha writing after the civil war, see notably Joseph C. Anafulu, "Onitsha Market Literature: Dead or Alive?," *Research in African Literatures* 4 (1973), 165–171, and Bernth Lindfors, "Postwar Popular Literature in Nigeria," *Okike* 9 (1975), 52–64.

It is characteristic that Ekwensi's early interest was in juvenile literature.[75] Throughout his career he has given free rein to his desire to create reading material with local flavour for Nigerian children. In these stories, Ekwensi focuses attention on the world of the Nigerian child from various viewpoints—the deprived child, the isolated non-conformist child, the neglected child, the handicapped child or the ambitious child. Some of the tales concern children in educational institutions of varying levels; others are adventure stories imitating *Treasure Island*. They are usually short tales, simply told, and sometimes illustrated with drawings. The first of these, *Drummer Boy* and *The Passport of Mallam Ilia*, were published in 1960. Others which have followed since then are *Yaba Roundabout Murder* (1962), *African Nights Entertainment* (1962), *Trouble in Form Six* (1966), *Juju Rock* (1966), *Samankwe in The Strange Forest* (1975) and *Samankwe and The High Way Robbers* (1975). Nor is Ekwensi's shorter prose fiction confined to juvenile writing: other collections are *The Rain Maker and Other Stories* (1965), *The Boa Suitor* (1966), *Lokotown and Other Stories* (1966), *Restless City and Christmas Gold* (1975). Special interest attaches to many of these short stories because they contain the germs from which the longer novels have developed: *People of the City*, for instance, was based on the first series of short stories which Ekwensi had written for the radio.

In spite of the vast amount of short fiction that he has produced, however, Cyprian Ekwensi, with six novels to his credit, is usually regarded as the urban novelist par excellence.[76] With the exception of *Burning Grass* (1962), and *Survive the Peace* (1976) all his novels are set in the city of Lagos. He revels in the excitement of city life and loves to expose its many faces of modernity. He writes about the cultural centres, department stores, beaches, lagoons, political organizations and campaigns; its criminals, prostitutes, band-leaders; ministers of state, businessmen, civil servants, professionals; policemen on duty, thugs, thieves, and many other types that are found in the city. Unlike Achebe and others of the African—culture school who are interested in the pre-colonial African past, Ekwensi focuses his attention on the contemporary scene. Employing a naturalistic narrative technique reminiscent of Emile Zola, Ekwensi has been able to capture both the restless excitement and the frustrations of life in the city. Many of the incidents in his novels are taken from the everyday life around him, in his country, because he believes that the function of a novelist is to reflect the social scene as faithfully as possible. Ekwensi's novels therefore follow the history of Nigeria in chronological sequence. *People of the City* (1954) is set in the last days of the colonial era; *Jagua Nana* (1961) covers the period of the election campaigns which ushered in the first independent government; *Beautiful Feathers* (1963) reflects the first optimistic years of independence with its concern for Panafricanism; *Iska* (1966) exposes the fissures in the fabric of the nation as manifested in the tribal and factional divisions and animosities that finally

[75] On this point, see Pol N. Ndu, "Urban Modality in Ekwensi's Juvenile Literature," *Conch Review of Books*, 3, 2/4 (1975), 83–86.

[76] See John McClusky, "The City as a Force: Three Novels by Cyprian Ekwensi," *Journal of Black Studies* 7 (1976), 211–224, and Juliet I. Okonkwo, "Ekwensi and Modern Nigerian Culture," *Ariel* 7, 2 (1976), 32–45.

erupted in the Nigerian Civil War; *Survive the Peace* starts with the tail-end of the war and deals with the immediate problems of security and rehabilitation.

The first novel, *People of the City*,[77] is a picaresque novel which focuses on one central character, Amusa Sango, through whose progress the reader is initiated into the various kinds of life that exist in the city. Ekwensi's declared intention in this novel is to show "How the city attracts all types and how the unwary must suffer from ignorance of its ways". In order to gain this objective, the author makes Amusa Sango a crime reporter for a Lagos newspaper, and a band-leader in one of the night clubs. From these vantage positions, the protagonist is able to observe many sordid aspects of life in the city, and the author thus piles up scene after scene of urban life in all its ramifications. Readers learn about the materialistic outlook of city people, about the bribery and corruption, the squalor of the slums, the predatory secret societies; they are told of extortionist landlords and business racketeers, and, more particularly, of the utter sexual laxity which is characteristic of the new urban society. Amusa has come to the city from the Eastern Greens in order to take advantage of the opportunities it offers for material and social self-improvement, but he is drawn into the dissipating pleasures of women and the fast life. Artistically, *People of the City* is not a successful novel. Its many narrative elements have not been fused into one artistic whole. Ekwensi's handling of language is still unsure, his characterization superficial and sometimes contradictory, his exploration of the motivation of actions and their import on the deeper levels of life is shallow.

In his second novel, *Jagua Nana*,[78] Ekwensi remains faithful to the picaresque technique. Jagua (called after the prestigious British car) has escaped from conventional married life in the Eastern Greens to the city where she has been active as a prostitute. Now, at forty, she grows anxious about her looks, which are very essential in her trade; more than this, she hankers after a life of respectability through marriage and motherhood. She has attached herself to a young teacher, Freddie, with whom she is in love, and for whom she sacrifices a great deal in order to retain his interest in her. Through Jagua, her career, her pursuits and her fluctuating fortunes, Ekwensi reveals the common wickedness, squalor, materialism and immorality of the city, together with its crimes and violence. But he also delves into the complex nature of his heroine, so that Jagua is presented in greater depth than Sango and we see her in her roles of prostitute, woman and mother. Ekwensi's greater success in *Jagua Nana* is also due to his better control of language; particularly impressive is his ability to handle various levels of English expression, allotting the appropriate level to each character. Jagua, for instance, because she is illiterate, talks pidgin English; but her pidgin is different from that of her mother, who never left the village at all. When this is set against the standard English of the narrative, and the diversified speech levels of other characters, a semblance of reality is achieved.

In *Burning Grass*, Ekwensi retreats from the city to the grassy plains of northern

[77] Bernard Nganga, "Tradition et modernisme dans *People of the City*," *Annales de l'Université de Brazzaville*, 9 (1973), 49–54.

[78] See Donald Cosentino, "Jagua Nana: Culture Heroine," *Ba Shiru*, 8, 1 (1977), 11–17, and Russell J. Linnemann, "Structural Weakness in Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*," *English in Africa*, 4, 1 (1977), 32–39.

Nigeria in which he sets his story about the adventures of a Fulani cattleman, Mai Sunsayi and of his family. Mai Sunsayi has been struck with the *Sokugo,* a wandering disease which separates him from his family, who, for their part, try to follow his trail in order to recover him. Like the earlier two novels, this is a picaresque story; and Ekwensi's main achievement lies in the recreation of the life patterns of the Fulani. A short novel with a limited objective, *Burning Grass* might better be described as a tale. There is no attempt at in-depth presentations of characters and their motives, or any complexity in the action. The language is unexciting, though controlled.

With *Beautiful Feathers,* Ekwensi came back to Lagos. Its chief character, Wilson Iyari, a pharmacist by profession, has political ambitions and is leader of a pan-africanist political party. The theme and the title of the novel come from an Igbo proverb which says: "However famous a man is outside, if he is not respected inside his own house, he is like a bird with beautiful feathers; wonderful outside but ordinary within." Iyari has great difficulty in reconciling his responsibilities as a pharmacist and politician with those of a husband and a father in his house. The conflicts generated by this situation threaten the peace of his home and lead to a minor tragedy. In this novel, Ekwensi discards the picaresque technique and attempts to share out actions and interest among different characters. He makes a greater effort to inter-relate the various facets of his narration and bring them to bear on a central theme. There is greater in-depth exploration of character, and a probing of the cause-and-effect relations of events that is lacking in the preceding novels: Ekwensi achieves some degree of maturity in the handling of the central techniques of the novel, such as character delineation, plot construction, effective dialogue and economy that leaves nothing wasted and superfluous.

Because of the technical improvement evident in the progress from *People of the City* to *Beautiful Feathers,* a number of critics assumed that Ekwensi was gradually solving his problems of form, character and language in the art of fiction writing. Unfortunately, that optimism has not been borne out by his later novels. In his two latest novels, he has reverted to the picaresque mode with its loose episodic plots, unconvincing characterization and melodramatic excesses. *Iska* focuses on the fortunes of a young Igbo girl, Filia Enu, who was born and educated in Northern Nigeria, and who falls in love with and marries a young Hausa, Dan Kaybi. From that moment, her life becomes a series of tragedies. Having lost her husband in a pub brawl, she moves over to Lagos where she tries to give meaning to her life through education and respectable employment. As Filia is driven from one experience to another in this effort, Ekwensi is once more able to spotlight the goings on in Nigeria's capital. This time, revivalist churches, shady politics and journalism, the world of women's fashions, the inevitable prostitution, the sexual adventures of men in high places, crime on large and small scales come within his compass.

It took Ekwensi ten years to produce his next novel, *Survive the Peace* which is set in Biafra immediately after the civil war. Yet another picaresque story, the tale follows the fortunes of James Odugo, a radio journalist, as he tries to pick up the threads and resume normal life after the disruption of the war. In the dangerous state of chaos that prevailed between the crumbling of an old order and the setting up of a new, he tries to locate and bring together the various members of his family who had been separated

by the war. The author thus creates for himself the opportunity to present with great vividness the state of insecurity due to the many abandoned guns that fell into ruthless hands, the rampaging soldiers from both sides of the fighting, molestations of innocent civilians, especially young women; the danger on the roads, broken homes, sexual permissiveness; the destructions of war, countless refugees and relief operations. Through a series of flashbacks, certain moments during the war itself are re-created. It is difficult to think of any aspects of life of this period which have not been incorporated, in one way or another, into this simple story.

Ekwensi's place as a novelist of stature is a subject of controversy. Most people would concede his importance in the historical development of African fiction, but only a few will grant him recognition as a serious craftsman because of a number of disturbing qualities in his work. It is, however, misguided to judge Ekwensi by standards to which he has never aspired. As he once disclosed to Lewis Nkosi:

> I think I am a writer who regards himself as a writer of the masses. I don't think of myself as a literary stylist: if my style comes, that is just incidental, but I am more interested in getting at the heart of the truth which the man in the street can recognize than in just spinning words.[79]

Ekwensi is by choice a popular novelist and he launched himself on this career by writing the first Onitsha chapbooks: *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales,* (1947), and *When Love Whispers* (1948). His art has not seriously transcended their level.

[79] Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (eds.), *African Writers Talking*, (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 79.

3. THE IBADAN CLUSTER

While educational developments had resulted in a significant increase in literacy, which enabled Amos Tutuola to concoct his own special brand of English and so give a new turn and wider currency to literary activity among the Yoruba, and which also created both the writers and the audience that were indispensable for the formation of Onitsha market literature in Igbo country, they reached their normal culmination in the foundation of an institution of higher learning in the old Yoruba town of Ibadan in 1947.[80] Once the seat of a University College which had a special link with the University of London, Ibadan also became a centre of intellectual life, whose existence could not but influence the course of budding Nigerian literature. Apart from the fact that students with a gift for the literary art were favoured with the best kind of higher education available at that time in West Africa, the English Department's activities were of primary importance for the growth of a literature in English (as was soon to be the case in East Africa as well): there it was that the literary evolution became as it were informally institutionalized through the publication of a student magazine, *The Horn*. Almost simultaneously a purely literary journal, *Black Orpheus*, was founded, which had some connection with the college's Extra-Mural Department. And after a few years, the Mbari Club was founded as an informal meeting place for writers and artists and other people interested in the growth of local writing, including students, graduates and lecturers of the University College. In this way, Ibadan witnessed the growth and development of a third trend in the anglophone literature of Nigeria.

W. H. STEVENSON[81]

THE HORN

In October 1956, Martin Banham arrived from England to take up a post in the Department of English at Ibadan. He soon came to feel that Ibadan needed an undergraduate poetry magazine, run by students, to encourage student writing. As a student

[80] J. F. Ade Ajayi and T. N. Tamuno (eds), *The University of Ibadan 1948–1973* (Ibadan: University Press, 1973).

[81] Condensed from "*The Horn:* What it Was and What it Did," *Research in African Literatures* 6 (1975), 5–31, by kind permission of the editor, Professor Bernth Lindfors.

at Leeds University (and, incidentally, an M.A. contemporary of Wole Soyinka) he had known such a magazine, *Poetry and Audience*. In 1957 he persuaded one of his students, J. P. Clark, to start one. Clark gathered a committee of three—Bridget Akwada, Aigboje Higo, and John Ekwere—and so in January 1958 the first issue of *The Horn* appeared.[82] The organization of the committee, and the format of the magazine itself, were informal and amateur. But neither these things nor the irregularity of its appearance should mislead the reader, for in these typewritten and cyclostyled pages he is witnessing an essential stage in the creation of modern Nigerian poetry. Student editors came and went; the Department of English and the University itself had no official connection with the magazine; even those among the teaching staff who were actively interested in the venture did not trouble to keep all their copies. However, the collection I have made is now almost complete: it comprises twenty-five issues from seven annual volumes containing 170 poems altogether. Of these, seven are anonymous and another eighteen were contributed by expatriates. These will not be considered further.

All of the forty-six Nigerian contributors were undergraduates at Ibadan, with two or three notable exceptions such as Christopher Okigbo (1932–1967), who had obtained his degree in 1959, and Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), who was a postgraduate fellow from 1956 to 1961. In the last issues, Nelson Olawaiye writes from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, founded in 1962 ("Silence, my Art" and "My Pen"), and Glory Okogbule Nwanodi, (now Wonodi; b. 1936) from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, founded in 1960 ("Salute to Songhai" and "A Memorial").

Of these writers, twenty-seven contribute either one or two poems each. Nine contribute between three and five poems, and only another nine more than five. J. P. Clark (b. 1935) is much the most prolific, with sixteen poems. Mac Akpoyoware has nine; Aig Higo (b. 1932), Pius Oleghe and Wole Soyinka have eight; Frank Aig-Imoukhuede (b. 1935), seven; and Dapo Adelugba, Onyema Iheme and Abiola Irele (b. 1936), six. Not only poems were printed. Many issues had some editorial comment. Reviews were soon added, since University College, Ibadan, was ambitious in theatrical activities as in many other ways.[83] A more important feature was the occasional appearance of articles discussing the nature of Nigerian poetry. In this respect, special interest attaches to an essay by Wole Soyinka, which was part of a symposium on "The Future of African Writing", published in Vol. IV, No. 1 (1960); its playfulness ("I would say that poets like Leopold Senghor, and—blast, who was it again who wrote 'Give me back my dolls' and something else about the 'childish games of my pristine youth'?—are a definite

[82] See *Nigerian Student Verse 1959*, ed. Martin Banham (Ibadan: University Press, 1960).

[83] These reviews are not substantial enough to absorb much time, but it may be worthwhile listing some of the dramatic fare which was being provided for and by students who had no other opportunity for first-hand experience of the theatre. There are plays from the Western stage: Chekhov, Brecht, Ibsen, Fry, Synge and *King Lear*, as well as Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Plautus. There are operas—*The Magic Flute, The Beggar's Opera, The Bartered Bride*, as well as occasional instrumental recitals covered by Abiola Irele. Thirdly, there are plays by Nigerian writers: *The Gentle People, The Trials of Brother Jero* (reviewed on its first night with Remi Adeleye as Jero), *That Scoundrel Suberu* (an adaptation from Molière), Ayo Ogunlade's *Anatomy of Folly*, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede's *The Curse*, and Nkem Nwankwo's *The Heritor*. One Yoruba play, *Love of Money*, by the Ogunmola group is also reviewed in Vol. VI (1963). The variety shows once again the vitality of the cultural life of University College, Ibadan, and one must remember that there was a good deal going on that *The Horn* does not report.

retrogressive pseudo-romantic influence on a healthy development of West African Writing") should not blind us to Soyinka's seriousness.

In Vol. VI, No. 1 (1962), Abiola Irele, in his review of *Nigerian Student Verse* says:

> Few writers have been able to create lasting work in any alien language, and however conversant we have been with English, it still remains for us something of a second language, if not less .... The truth is that we not only study in English, we study it—we do not, like an English undergraduate, come up to *read* it.

It is a considerable achievement that this fact scarcely ever obtrudes on the reader. The awkwardness that is quite often encountered is usually a result of the writers' inexperience as poets, their clumsiness with poetic tools, rather than linguistic failure in a second language. One finds exactly the same awkwardness in any collection of student verse, even when the authors are writing in their own language. If any fault derives from the difficulties of a second language, it is the failure to find a consistent style. A foreign student, who has never heard the language spoken in its homeland, inevitably finds it hard to recognize the registers of the language; specifically, in poetry, in recognizing what is formal and what is colloquial, what is contemporary and what is old-fashioned. There is a good deal of old-fashioned poetic diction in these poems.

It is interesting to see what themes these young writers chose. There are, for example, only a few love poems, and most of them are bad, derivative both in sentiment and style. Unexpectedly, perhaps, there are not many political poems. Those that appear deal with one of two general themes: racial politics in various countries, and the Nigerian political situation. The nature of the first group is indicated by some of the titles—"Katanga," "Lumumba," "Alabama"—but although the strong feeling expressed in these poems is clearly genuine, there is little good poetry in them. Truth is being expressed in clichés. The writers are writing from ideas rather than from experience, so that they are not mediating experience. There is really only one outstanding political poem: Clark's "Ivbie".[84] This poem, dated 28 October 1958, takes up one of the themes of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*—a point not missed by Obiajunwa Wali in his review of "Ivbie" (II, 3, pp. 3ff.)—the disruptive effect of an alien culture on Clark's own homeland in the Delta. No other poet in *The Horn* takes up this theme, though it might have seemed an obvious one, especially after Achebe. Wali, who regarded "Ivbie" as an interesting failure, thought that Clark's error was to use the theme stated in the alternative title "The wrong done to you without any hope of justice" as "a thesis, a scaffolding, which the poet is to stuff with life and blood" (II, 3, p. 8), a theme more suitable for the novel than for poetry.

Almost all the other poems on Nigerian political themes deal with the great perennial problem of the corruption of politicians. Again, these poems are most successful when ironic. "Man an' Equality", by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, is a satirical companion-piece to his better-known poem in pidgin, "One Wife for One Man":

[84] *The Horn*, 2, 2 (1959–60), 2–15. This poem was republished in whole or in part in John Pepper Clark, *Poems* (Ibadan: Mbari, 1962), in *A Reed in the Tide* (London: Longmans, 1965), and in the 1966 special issue of *Présence Africaine, Nouvelle somme de poésie du monde noir*.

You say dem born you equal with me? Sure?
Den tell me why your fingers long pass my own?...
Okay Oga,
Make you talk now. Any time I say make' A
Rise for reach only your chest, you low me down;
Any time I try run pass you, you give me back stud.[85]

There are some "political" poems that do not concern themselves solely with corruption. The only poem in the whole collection not in English is a celebration of the proclamation of Nigeria as a Republic in 1963, and of the independence of the University of Ibadan from the University of London, through the figure of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa: entitled "La tête de la tête," this not altogether successful attempt in French by Chidi Ikonne appeared in the same issue that also contained the more sophisticated "Salute to Songhai," by G. Okogbule Nwanodi, which was published again in *Black Orpheus,* No. 16, p. 32. The last issue, dated May 1964, contains "Afterwards," a poem on the sinister theme of tribalism. This was the time when the prime minister of Western Nigeria was talking about the "constitutional extermination" of his non-Yoruba opponents, and it is probably no accident that the author of "Afterwards", A. T. C. Anamelechi, was an Ibo. It is not a good poem, but it shows the new and threatening trend of events at the time the last issues of *The Horn* were appearing:

The ethnic fraternity rears
the façade—that bulwark
of enervating glowing hope
that pretends to unify.

This is a theme of the middle 1960s, however. *The Horn* was founded, and flourished, in the years when these dangers had not yet been fully realized. Students of the late 1950s and the first years of independence felt themselves to be living at the beginning of a new era—as indeed they were. Their poems may be expected to reflect their self-awareness at such a time. Three themes are worth studying, for their relative frequency: *alienation,* that common disease of the modern world, *negritude,* then a popular concept among black writers, and *self-awareness.*

One might have expected poetry illustrating the mental struggles of undergraduates coming from the villages (as so many of them did) into the sophistication of a modern university, and a town of a million or more inhabitants. Many were indeed townsfolk, but it would seem natural to find poetry contrasting the ways they had known and the ways in which they now found themselves: poetry of the conflict between the demands of the family at home and of the westernized world they were entering; between the traditions they had been brought up in and the indeterminate morality of this new world. These are the themes of a hundred novels, and it is natural to look for them in *The Horn.* Yet there are very few poems directly contrasting the new and the old. One is Frank Aig-Imoukhuede's "Life in the Country...Life in the Town," and the mark of this poem

[85] *The Horn* 4, 2 (1960), 4. "One Wife for One Man" was first printed in *Ibadan;* it was reissued in *The African Assertion,* ed. Austin J. Shelton (New York: Odyssey Press, 1968), pp. 204–205.

is irony, rather than nostalgia. There are a few poems about the University, but they are nearly all slight verse about the burden of essays or examinations laid on them by unsympathetic teachers. For example: "History of Mystery," by Minji Karibo (I, 1); "Penitence," (anon., II, 1); "Road Closed" by Yetunde Esan (II, 4); "Dream-in-Life" by Obi Wali (II, 6); "College at Night" by Abiola Irele (II, 6).

Almost all the "college" poems are found in the first two volumes. There is a solitary exception in one of the last issues of *The Horn,* Emeka Okonkwo's "They Sleep Not" (VII, 1 [Jan. 1964], pp. 9–10). It describes the consolation found by the student forced to leave college for lack of money to pay the fees, in the thought of his ever-present ancestors. The style is awkward, and the rhythm broken, but the theme is ingeniously handled. Okonkwo does not underline the "moral," that the student is finding the strength of tradition when the new world has failed him, but simply states it, and lets the ancestors speak.

This, however, is not "alienation," but self-rediscovery. Something more recognizable as "alienation", in the usual sense, is found in certain introspective poems in which the authors express their doubts and hesitations about their present and future states in this strange world. Obiajunwa Wali, in the very first issue, considers the state of the apparently futile intellectual scorned by his more "productive" peers. And J. P. Clark's "The Cry of Birth," "Agbor Dancer," and "Tide-Wash", are well-known, as is Christopher Okigbo's "Debtors' Lane."[86] The style is caught from the English poets of the 1960s, and in particular from Robert Conquest's anthology *New Lines* (1956), which all students of English knew as a set book. Sometimes their own efforts look like a pastiche, admirably done perhaps, but not necessarily profound. These are poems which, without leaning heavily on any "objective correlative," speak symbolically of the author's state of mind. As one turns the pages of *The Horn,* one comes across such poems from time to time, but only as one by no means dominant kind among many.

The concept of negritude seems closer to *The Horn*'s poets. In the 1950s, students keen on independence, both political and cultural, might have been expected to catch hold of the negritude of Césaire and Senghor. And in fact *The Horn* gives us a picture of the rise and fall of negritude in Nigeria. There are only a few references to the word and the concept, but they are enough to show how the students felt about it. The editorial in the very first issue, presumably written by J. P. Clark, declared, "We venture to submit 'Negritude' as a most compendious word!... it stands for... that new burning consciousness of a common race and culture that black men in America, the West Indies, and Africa are beginning to feel towards one another." Later he says, "It is to arrest such subtle imperialism [i.e., by Westernized education] that we join those already fighting to preserve our heritage by launching this magazine." John Ramsaran, in Vol. I, No. 3, put in a warning against this sentiment, saying that it "is a negative view of things, a passive acceptance without that inner conviction which comes with the glimmering of truth." In Vol. I, No. 5, the editorial, "Looking Back," accepted this, pointing out, "Of course, we have flown with the harmattan, swum with mermaids in the creeks and besides

[86] Respectively in I, 3 (April 1958); III, 1 (Nov. 1959); III, 3 (Jan.–Feb. 1960); and III, 2 (December 1959).

being caught in a tornado, have won fame for even the blind beggar. The point however is that we also met Oxford punters, uncanny robots, and Russian sputniks and satellites —all fellow-passengers... And here lies the great realisation: human contact with men everywhere. For what is poetry that lacks that?"

The note of negritude, as distinct from this note of universal humanity, was occasionally struck again. In the introduction to Clark's "Ivbie" (II, 2, p. 2), Abiola Irele said he hoped the poem "will contribute to that spirit of 'Negritude' which he [Clark] so ably championed as the first editor of this paper". And again, in the closing editorial of the volume, "Bend in the River" (II, 6, pp. 15–16), Irele wrote that the famous black authors are like a river "flowing towards the great ocean—the great ocean of *Negritude*".

Many of the poems in *The Horn* can be seen as supporting the concept—the poems that consciously recall the cultural heritage of the writers. But negritude was an idea that took only shallow root in Nigeria, and it soon withered. When Wole Soyinka, coming to fame as Nigeria's first internationally known playwright, attacked it (Vol. IV. [1960], No. 1) in his essay "The Future of West African Writing," its doom was sealed. "The significance of Chinua Achebe is the evolvement, in West African Writing, of the seemingly indifferent acceptance" of the "West African subject-character." There follows what is, I believe, the first appearance of a famous saying:

> The duiker will not paint 'duiker' on his beautiful back to proclaim his duikeritude; you'll know him by his elegant leap. The less self-conscious the African is, and the more innately his individual qualities appear in his writing, the more seriously he will be taken as an artist of exciting dignity. But Senghor seems to be so artistically expatriate that his romanticism of the negro becomes suspect and quite boring sometimes.

After this, the word is, I think, never again used in *The Horn,* except once, and poetry clearly dependent on the concept almost disappears. The "once" is a satiric poem by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede in Vol. IV (1960–1961), No. 2, "The Poor Black Muse" (which was reprinted in *Black Orpheus,* No. 10, under the title "Negritude"):

> I cannot continue in a strain that's both forced and
> unnatural.
> The sounds, if you think they're 'negritude', make
> the 'idiot boy' of me.
> O Ne-negri-gri, gri-tud—thud! (does that sound well?)
> -tudes!
> Why can't you leave the black Muse alone?

The common feeling among Nigerian writers and critics has always been that they can do without the "self-consciousness" of negritude, which has always seemed to them a foreign concept. But in one poem towards the end of the magazine's life ("Insomnia," VI, [1962–1963], p. 1), Irele briefly brings negritude back. Sent in from Paris, where Irele was carrying on his postgraduate studies, the poem reads almost like a translation from the French.

Negritude, or the intellectual atmosphere that encouraged it, was however, invalu-

able in disposing of one error to which the students were prone. Their "upward mobility", and the belief that such mobility was necessarily "progress", had been inculcated in them as schoolchildren, not only by their westernized education but also by their relatives, who could see all the benefits that such education brought to the pupil and to the family. One result of this had been depreciation of tradition and the old ways, of indigenous art and culture. But the students were now engaged in a fascinated and delighted rediscovery of themselves and their tradition. They were learning to look again at their surroundings, and to write about what they saw. Not everyone was happy about such poetry. Its Romantic origins were suspect, especially among those who sought "modernity" in poetry. Edward Blishen, who gave a B.B.C. talk on poetry from Africa, quoted in Vol. IV (1960–1966), No. 3, p. 12, said that "Modern English verse... would, I should think, be a far better starting-point than our romantic verse for the journey towards a truly African poetry." He is no doubt right as far as diction is concerned, but otherwise he has missed the point, which is that, for these young writers, Romanticism was in some ways much more relevant than the tired disillusionment of the post-war English intelligentsia.

In particular, Romanticism led the students to express their own experiences. Most Nigerians, like farming people the world over, have more of an eye to the work that Nature brings than to her beauties. Now the students made the double Wordsworthian discovery: that the metropolis was not the only source of art, and that great poetry can, and probably does, reside in peasants' homes. The discovery was supremely liberating. Some of the poems it produced are simply vividly descriptive, but Mac Akpoyoware's "Olokun" (I, 1 [1957], p. 8), is not simple. It begins like a Romantic, or perhaps even Georgian poem on the pleasures of Nature and youth. But the second-hand diction fades into something more direct as the experience becomes more real:

> We will go again to that easy Place?
> To plunge, to frolic in the noontide sun,
> Drift on rafts to midstream and vie
> For the shore and bask and lazily dream
> Those little lovely things of youth.
>
> Some say she wraps three goddesses
> In her dark sultry waters...
> We know in her we store up, too,
> At least our fears; in that queer coldness
> we know she must be there.
>
> It is an idle place and you hear
> That unanswered calling note; you watch
> That eddying leaf: sometimes it breathes;
> Exudes votive offerings brought by the dozen
> As they take home the rare catch.

We have sat in the canoe and watched
The sun skip and dodge beneath the mangrove,
We have heard wings beating the silence
And the dark: we've heard children suddenly cease
To laugh and run for home...

Such poems as these are the essence and the best of *The Horn*. It would have been easy for those young men and women to have concocted occasional verse, moralizing on the obvious themes—the old and the new, freedom and colonialism, the conflict of traditions. It would almost certainly have been bad verse, like most of the political poetry in *The Horn*. In fact, the best poems embody the reconciliation, rather than the conflict, of the divergent elements in their lives, not by talking about them, but in another way. Their lives had hitherto been spent largely in the villages, and this foundation therefore provides the *themes* of much of the poetry. Their hopes and fears, yet unformed, provide the *mood* and direction. University College, Ibadan, its Department of English, and its teachers, syllabuses, books and examinations, provide not another piece of subject-matter, but a *method*. In these poems the students are expressing their vision of life, African life, through the medium provided by their Western education, and it is this conjunction of themes, moods and processes that relates the divergent elements.

That is, perhaps, why confidence, rather than doubt, is the dominant note of *The Horn*. Even such poems as "Olokun" show it, because the important thing is not whether the poet is at ease with the legends of the spirits or not, but the fact that he is at ease with himself. He knows where he is, where he came from, and where he is going. Minji Karibo, for example, treats a similar subject to "Olokun" in her "The Waterman" (1, 5 [April 1958], p. 7) with a similar acceptance both of the traditions of her home and of the viewpoint of her rationalist education. And although Frank Aig-Imoukhuede is better known for his pidgin poems, he too can be more serious, as in "The Olori" (IV, 4 [May 1961], p. 8).

In his review of *Nigerian Student Verse,* (1959), Martin Banham's selection from *The Horn,* Abiola Irele concludes, "This is certainly not a collection of great poetry... but I venture to say, fully aware of the risk, that this collection holds within its pages some poems."[87] Admittedly, *The Horn* does not reveal many great poets who have since been lost to the Civil Service, commerce or academia. It is a pity that Mac Akpoyoware did not write more, or that Frank Aig-Imoukhuede is known to the world at large only by one comic poem, since he shows more variety than any other poet, not excepting Clark and Soyinka. But the same would be true of any university coterie. Admittedly, too, both Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka were already older, more accomplished poets when they contributed to *The Horn*. Okigbo contributed only two poems, "Debtors' Lane" (III, 2 [1959–1960], pp. 6–7), reprinted in *Black Orpheus,* No. 11, p. 6, and "On the New Year" (III, 4, pp. 4–9), which has not, I believe, been reprinted, although it is not without the familiar Okigbo power. As to Soyinka, he has, to my knowledge, reprinted only two of the eight poems that he contributed to *The Horn:* "Season" and the justly famous "Death in the Dawn," both of which appear in the anthologies of

[87] *The Horn,* 4, 1 (1960), 9.

Moore and Beier, Donatus Nwoga[88] and *Présence Africaine,* as well as Soyinka's own *Idanre.* Yet, some of Soyinka's other poems are very fine. They are certainly varied. There is Soyinka's contribution to pidgin verse (which he normally seems to disparage) in "Proverb: Okonjo de Hunter" (in III [1959–1960], p. 3). The same issue contains the rather loose—for Soyinka—political poem, "Poisoners of the World, Unite," whose theme is the French insistence on exploding "atomic devices" in the Sahara. Two poems in Vol. IV, 1 (1960–1961), "From the red silk lining..." and "Audience to Performer," are more subtly and more personally satiric. When he wrote them, Soyinka seems to have been suffering disillusionment with his audiences, who are likened to the still watchfulness of a chameleon or a frog, apparently asleep, but actually looking for something to destroy. Another brilliantly witty, semi-political poem is "Committee Man" (IV, 3, pp. 10–11). But the finest poem of all those that are still in limbo is "Epitaph for Say Tokyo Kid" (Feb. 1962, p. 10), where Soyinka in a manner that presages *The Road,* puts over the comedy, simplicity, power, crudeness and pathos of the passenger lorry, one of the most homely features of life for those who belong to West Africa, and one of the quaintest and most exotic for those who only visit.

Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo had studied their art in Britain before *The Horn* made use of them. Their poems add greatly to the value of *The Horn,* but they would have published anyway. The same may perhaps be true of J. P. Clark, but it remains a fact that *The Horn* gave him his first opportunity to offer his poems to a critical audience. The single most important feature of *The Horn,* in other words, is the appearance of J. P. Clark. Sixteen of his poems appear in the copies of *The Horn* that I have, and all but two were good enough to be reprinted in more permanent form, in the Mbari collection (1962) or in *A Reed in the Tide* (1965). "Ivbie," his most ambitious early poem —and, indeed, the longest and most ambitious poem by anyone to appear in *The Horn* —was reprinted in its entirety in the Mbari collection, and selections have appeared both in the anthologies mentioned above and in the *Nouvelle somme de poésie du monde noir* (1966). The anthology of Moore and Beier (1963), contains three Clark poems from *The Horn:* "The Cry of Birth," "Fulani Cattle," and "The Imprisonment of Obatala."[89] Langston Hughes' *Poems from Black Africa* (1966) includes "Agbor Dancer" and a surprisingly bad text of "Fulani Cattle," among the poems from *The Horn.* Clark who contributed to, and first edited, *The Horn* was clearly no hesitant beginner.

It is interesting, nevertheless, to follow through the emendations of Clark's poems as they travel from *The Horn* through various reprintings in different collections. "The Cry of Birth" and "Fulani Cattle," because they have been reprinted so often, provide many interesting comparisons, and it is easy to see what has happened. In the two years between the first writing and the first real public appearance in the Mbari *Poems,* Clark has been refining his art. Almost all these alterations are directed to one end—to a greater immediacy of poetic effect. One method is to make the verse more compact. The other method is to eliminate the Romantic rhetoric.

[88] *Modern Poetry from Africa,* ed. Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963); *West African Verse,* ed. Donatus I. Nwoga (London: Longmans, 1967).

[89] In issues I, 3 (ca. March 1958); III, 2 (Dec. 1959); III, 5 (May 1960), respectively.

A study of *The Horn* demonstrates that the flowering of talent came chiefly with the students who came to Ibadan during the late 1950s. From 1961 on, the quality of the verse is lower, and mediocrity is less often balanced by talent. There are about thirty poems in each of the first four volumes; in Volume V (1961–1962) this number is halved. Editors become more insistent and more apologetic in their search for usable poetry, and the quantity of prose (mostly reviews of Arts Theatre productions) relative to poetry increases. A few good poems appear, such as Nwanodi's "Salute to Sonhai" and Olawaiye's "Silence, my Art," but the best poetry of *The Horn* undoubtedly is to be found in the first four volumes, and comes from writers who began to publish in the first two. Without Aig Higo, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, and especially Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark, Volume IV (1960–1961) would be negligible.

What is the reason for this? Why should these young people, with Mac Akpoyowa-re, Minji Karibo, Pius Oleghe and their friends, display poetic ability while their student successors did not? The explanation can be reduced to two incentives: the mutual encouragement of a small group of enthusiasts, and the sense of beginning. J. P. Clark and his friends created *The Horn*; their successors merely found it, and in spite of the efforts of Juliet Udezue (now Okonkwo—herself almost a founder-member of the group though, strangely, never a contributor), Molara Ogundipe (now Leslie) and Onyema Iheme (who spent a good deal of effort in maintaining *The Horn* in its last years), students from 1960 on never felt the enthusiasm that the founders had known. Numbers had a lot to do with it. In 1959 there were seven Honours graduates in English. Between 1960 and 1963 the class was eleven or twelve. The last Honours class as such was the twenty-two who graduated in 1964. Then the system changed, classes became much larger, and the cross-fertilization by which students had brought poetry out of one another in 1958–1960 began to fail. Student interests noticeably changed. The desire to write Nigerian poetry shifted to a desire to study it—an easier option.

The Horn was essentially a family affair; the members of the family are named on the pages of those first issues. After about 1961, whatever attempts were made to keep the tradition alive, it was bound to wither away, as all but the most massive student societies do. That it existed so long was due to its avoidance of the error of most Nigerian student organizations—obsession with the workings of a constitution and a vast committee. Because it was always in the hands of three or four enthusiasts, working only half-formally, it was able to survive long enough to encourage poetry from the universities at Nsukka and Zaria, which at that time were still at that stage of first beginning which had nurtured *The Horn*.

BERNTH LINDFORS[90]

BLACK ORPHEUS

The first issue of *Black Orpheus,* "A journal of African and Afro-American Literature," was published in Nigeria in September 1957. Its declared purpose was "to encourage and discuss contemporary African writing" and to introduce African writers from French, Portuguese, and Spanish territories in English translation; works by West Indian and black American writers and samples of African oral literature were to be included as well. The first number, a collector's item today, contained three poems by Léopold Sédar Senghor, three poems by Gabriel Okara, a critical essay on Amos Tutuola by Gerald Moore, an essay on "The Conflict of Cultures in West African Poetry" by editor Ulli Beier, a discussion of "Ijala: the Poetry of Yoruba Hunters" by Adeboye Babalola, a conference report by co-editor Janheinz Jahn on the first World Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, and reviews of Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Richard Wright's *Black Power*. There were photographs of hunting scenes on a carved Yoruban door and of writers and artists attending the Paris World Congress. Susanne Wenger[91] contributed an attractive silk-screen cover, a striking title page, and lettered headings, and some of G. M. Hotop's illustrations for a German edition of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* were used as vignettes. Fifty-two large pages of high-quality paper were held together by two sturdy staples. In all, it was a handsome and intelligent issue, an auspicious beginning for the publication that was to become the most important literary journal in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ulli Beier,[92] a German living in Nigeria, was inspired to begin *Black Orpheus* after attending the first World Congress of Black Writers and Artists organized by *Présence Africaine* in September 1956. There was very little writing in Nigeria or other English-speaking African countries at this time, and Beier felt that a good literary journal might help to stimulate literary activity by providing an outlet for writers and by publishing outstanding works by established black writers from other parts of Africa, the West Indies, and North and South America. The journal took its name from Jean-Paul Sartre, who coined the phrase "Black Orpheus" in his prefatory essay to the collection of French-African poetry edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1948; Sartre compared the black poet's return to his native land and search within himself for his black soul, to the descent of Orpheus into Hades to reclaim Eurydice from Pluto. The journal *Black Orpheus* would help the African writer to discover himself and to rediscover his past in the great traditions of oral literature.

Beier persuaded the Nigerian Ministry of Education to publish the journal and relied heavily on material from the files of his German co-editor, Janheinz Jahn

[90] The first section of this essay is in part a reprint of Bernth Lindfors, "A Decade of *Black Orpheus*," *Books Abroad*, 2 (1968), 509–516, by kind permission of the University of Oklahoma Press.

[91] On this artist's contribution to Nigerian culture, see Ulli Beier, *The Return of the Gods: The Sacred Art of Suzanne Wenger* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975).

[92] See biographical notice in Jahn, *Who's Who in African Literature*, s. v. "Ijimere, Obotunde," which Beier used as a pen-name for his creative writing in English.

(1918–1973),[93] for the first few numbers. When Jahn resigned in 1960 after No. 6, he was replaced by Ezekiel Mphahlele and Wole Soyinka. Soyinka served until No. 14 and Mphahlele until No. 17, when Abiola Irele became co-editor. Beier himself did not leave *Black Orpheus* until 1967 and it was chiefly his energy that kept it alive and flourishing.

After the first few numbers, *Black Orpheus* was never starved for material. Beier estimates that eight out of ten manuscripts received had to be rejected. Nearly all contributions were submitted voluntarily; only a handful of critical articles and translations were solicited. While *Black Orpheus* was published by the Ministry of Education, writers were not paid, but after No. 12, when Longmans began publishing it, the Congress for Cultural Freedom provided funds for paying the contributors. Distribution of the journal was slow at first, because the Ministry of Education was inexperienced in this kind of work, but it improved when Longmans took over. Gradually, as *Black Orpheus* earned an international reputation, its circulation rose to a respectable 3,500. In Africa, writers and would-be writers read it avidly.

Black Orpheus was full of delightful surprises. Virtually every number broke new ground, ventured into undiscovered corners, revealed fresh talent. A typical issue would contain a collection of traditional poetry, fifteen poems by three or four contemporary poets, three short stories, perhaps a few folk tales, two critical essays on modern literature, an essay introducing an unknown painter or sculptor, pictures and prints by at least two different artists, several photographs of traditional African art, and five book reviews. While every issue struck some kind of balance between literature and the visual arts, old and new, African and Afro-American, French and English, later numbers tended to be more evenly balanced than the early ones. Africans writing in English were by then beginning to carry more weight. Keeping an alert finger on the pulse of African literary activity, *Black Orpheus* responded to currents of change by turning in new directions and pointing to new achievements. The contents of *Black Orpheus* are an index to the development of African literature in the first decade of independence.

Black Orpheus can be said to have moved through three phases. In the first, lasting roughly three years and seven issues, emphasis was placed on the literary achievements of West Indians and French West Africans, particularly on their poetry. The maiden issue contained the first English translations of Senghor, the most distinguished French-African poet. The second number featured and discussed poems by Aimé Césaire, Senghor's equal from Martinique. The third focused on Afro-Cuban poets. Of the twenty-six poets introduced in the first seven issues, eighteen were from the West Indies, two from French West Africa (Senghor and David Diop), three from America (Langston Hughes, Paul Vesey, Mason Jordan Mason), one from South Africa (Ezekiel Mphahlele), and two from Nigeria. Only the Nigerians, Gabriel Okara and Wole Soyinka, were new voices, both of them remarkable discoveries.

West Indians also dominated the short story, contributing six of the ten stories published in this initial phase. The best stories, two by Andrew Salkey and one by E. A. James, had an originality and boldness of style which only one other writer,

[93] On Jahn and his works, see obituary notice and bibliography by Ulla Schild in *Research in African Literatures*, 5 (1974), 194–205.

Camara Laye of Guinea, was able to match. Stories by veteran writers from South Africa (Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele) and Nigeria (Cyprian Ekwensi) were, as usual, starkly realistic.

Most of the literary criticism concentrated on established writers. Twelve of sixteen critical articles dealt exclusively with West Indian and French West African poets and novelists. The only other writers discussed at any length were Amos Tutuola, Paul Vesey and Joyce Cary. Of course, there was a good reason for this imbalance. The West Indians and French West Africans had written prolifically in the fifties, and several had produced work of sufficient maturity and sophistication to interest critics. African writing in English, on the other hand, had hardly begun. Before 1960, only Tutuola and the South African Peter Abrahams seemed worthy of serious attention. Also, the purpose of *Black Orpheus* in these early years was to make known to English-speaking Africans in general and Nigerians in particular the literary achievements of their West Indian and French West African cousins. During this propagandistic phase it was more important to demonstrate the excellence of the literature produced elsewhere by publishing and discussing old, established writers than to display the immaturity of African literature in English by publishing new writers who were not worth discussing. *Black Orpheus* did want to stimulate Africans to write, but it insisted that they write well. Inferior writing simply was not tolerated.

Although creative writing from English-speaking Africa seldom appeared in the early issues of *Black Orpheus,* oral traditions from these areas were often included. For example, one finds creation myths of the Yoruba and Ijaw of Nigeria and oral poetry of the Yoruba and of the Akan and Ewe of Ghana, together with informed commentary by African translators. The French-speaking territories are represented by Bayeke chants from the (Belgian) Congo, a Kono creation myth from Guinea, and a long, stately Bambara tale of courtly love from Mali. One also finds articles discussing various forms of traditional art from Dahomey, Nigeria, and the Ivory Coast. Nearly all the modern art displayed, however, is the work of European artists, usually Beier's wife Susanne Wenger, a long-time resident of Nigeria. Thus, for the older traditions of verbal and visual art *Black Orpheus* could rely on West African contributions, but for newer literary and artistic accomplishments it most often had to look elsewhere.

In the next three years, 1961–1963, the situation changed radically and *Black Orpheus* entered a new phase. West Indians and French West Africans were given far less space, Nigerians and South Africans far more. In Nigeria these were the exciting, effervescent years immediately following political independence, a time of intense literary activity. In South Africa they were the years in which African writing was being smothered under new blankets of censorship, a time when experienced writers who were not in prison or under house arrest were either fleeing the country or sending their manuscripts abroad. *Black Orpheus* provided an outlet for both the new tide in Nigeria and the old wave from South Africa.

West Indian and French-African writers still made substantial contributions, but they no longer dominated the journal. Their gradual displacement by Africans, writing in English can be observed in Nos 8–13, but most dramatically in No. 12 which contains no West Indian or French-African poems, stories, oral traditions, art or literary criti-

cism. All the literary contributions in this number were prize-winning entries in a writing competition organized by Mbari in 1962, and all were by South Africans or English West Africans. *Black Orpheus* was consequently busy reaping the new harvest.

The poetry in these issues was exciting. The number of Nigerian poets had suddenly grown; John Pepper Clark made his debut in No. 10, Christopher Okigbo in No. 11, Michael Echeruo in No. 12, and Gabriel Okara and Wole Soyinka, who had been introduced earlier, were seen again. Lenrie Peters of Gambia, George Awoonor-Williams of Ghana, and Dennis Brutus and K. A. Nortje of South Africa were also discovered during this period. From the French territories there were further translations of Senghor and Césaire, as well as pioneer translations of Tchicaya U Tam'si of the (French) Congo and of Flavien Ranaivo and Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo of Madagascar, but the balance had obviously shifted. Africans writing in English now supplied about half the poetry published in *Black Orpheus*.

They also supplied more than half the fiction. Practised South African short-story writers such as Alex La Guma, Alf Wannenburgh, Bloke Modisane, and Arthur Maimane wrote powerful protest literature, while the Nigerians Nkem Nwankwo, Gabriel Okara, Horatio Edward Babatunde Jones, and the Ghanaian Christina Aidoo experimented with form and technique. Two new writers from Sierra Leone, Gaston Bart-Williams and Christina Attarrah, offered humorous stories, and a Kenyan, Grace Ogot, told a modern East African fairy tale. Though the West Indians, French Africans, and Americans were now outnumbered, they continued to make their presence felt by contributing some of the most daringly original and accomplished fiction in *Black Orpheus*.

While all this new literary activity was going on, the critics were silent. Only three critical articles appeared, one on Langston Hughes, the other two introducing Flavien Ranaivo and Tchicaya U Tam'si. The West Indians and French Africans who had attracted a great deal of attention in the first numbers of *Black Orpheus* were no longer mentioned; the new writers springing up in every issue were perhaps too new and too little published to be intelligently discussed. For the critics it was a time of watching and waiting, a time for writing book reviews rather than lengthy articles. During this period, many more reviews in *Black Orpheus* were devoted to African novels, plays and poetry in English.

Black Orpheus changed in other ways, too. All the traditional literature published —Malozi and Wapangwa creation myths, Luo songs, Swahili poetry—now came from East and Central rather than West Africa, and the art work displayed and discussed was more frequently African than European. *Black Orpheus* introduced such gifted artists as Demas Nwoko of Nigeria, Vincent Akweti Kofi of Ghana, Ibrahim Salahi of the Sudan, and Valente Goenha Malangatana of Mozambique, and occasionally reviewed exhibitions of their work. It also publicized the work of several talented artists from Brazil, Germany and the United States. A restless explorer, *Black Orpheus* was constantly seeking new horizons.

In its next four years, *Black Orpheus* continued to discover exciting young writers and artists and also drew heavily on those it had introduced earlier. Africans writing in English remained prominent but not as dominant as in the preceding phase. *Black Orpheus* was now more cosmopolitan, better balanced, and its contributors more ac-

complished, more assured. Having passed through a West Indian infancy and a West African adolescence, it had now achieved full maturity, a rich, solid and complex ripeness.

Among the poets who made their first appearance in *Black Orpheus* during this period were Agostinho Neto of Angola, Mbella Sonne Dipoko of the Cameroons, David Rubadiri of Malawi, Cliff Lashley of Jamaica, K. N. Darwulla of India, Joseph Miezan Bognini of the Ivory Coast, LeRoi Jones, A. B. Spellman, and Paul Theroux of the United States, and Okogbule Wonodi, Pol N. Ndu, Romanus Egudu, Clem. Abiazem Okafor and Bona Onyejeli of Nigeria. The Nigerians, interestingly enough, were all students or graduates of the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, which is surprising since nearly all the Nigerian poets published in earlier issues of *Black Orpheus* had been graduates of Ibadan University. This suggests that there were two distinct schools of poetry growing up in Nigeria, the older one with its roots at Ibadan, the younger emanating from Nsukka.

The twenty-five writers who published fiction in the later numbers of *Black Orpheus* hailed from sixteen different countries and wrote in at least as many different styles. Camara Laye of Guinea contributed a hauntingly symbolic fantasy, Sylvain Bemba of the Congo, a story of an African student in Paris going mad, Mongo Beti of the Cameroons a hilarious account of a seduction, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria a political satire, Jan Carew of Guyana an exquisite fable, Henri Krea of Algeria a war story, Olympe Bhêly-Quenum of Dahomey a tale of a tough African Robin Hood, D. O. Fagunwa of Nigeria, a description of a hunter's wrestling match with a sixteen-eyed monster. These remarkably heterogeneous stories had one thing in common: every one was very well written.

The literary critics now focused much of their attention on African writing in English, especially from Nigeria. The achievements of Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Chinua Achebe and D. O. Fagunwa were carefully assessed in individual essays, and the salient features of Nigerian market chapbooks were described in an amusing article. There were surveys of South African fiction, Anglo-African poetry and Southern Bantu literature, as well as thematic articles on "African Literature and the African Personality", "Africa in West Indian Literature", and "The Negro Poet and His Landscape." Other essays dealt with Claude McKay and Cliff Lashley of Jamaica, Agostinho Neto of Angola, two black Latin poets, and three African autobiographies written in the eighteenth century. During this period African writing in English continued to dominate the book-review section.

Except for a few South African and Egyptian poems, an Amharic love song, some Brazilian lorry inscriptions, and scattered folk tales, the traditional literature in the last numbers of *Black Orpheus* was entirely West African and primarily Nigerian. Since the journal was published in the heart of Yorubaland, it is not surprising that much of the Nigerian material—sacred chants, divination verses, funeral songs, riddles, folk tales —was Yoruba. Lengthy essays on Hausa and Ibo poetry, however, helped to offset this imbalance.

The art work too was now predominantly Nigerian, nearly all of it by contemporary artists working in different media. There were paintings by Colette Omogbai and Demas

Nwoko, lino cuts by Jacob Afolabi and Rufus Ogundele, a silk-screened cover design by Adebisi Fabunni, vignettes by Muraina Oyelami, sculpture by Adebisi Akanji, metal work by Asiru and terracotta reliefs by O. Idah. There were illustrated articles on the etchings of Twins Seven Seven and the naive sign paintings of untrained artists in Nigerian cities. From non-Nigerian artists there were vignettes by Hezbon Owiti of Kenya and eight-year-old Pedro Guedes of Mozambique, calligraphy by Shibrain of the Sudan, paintings by A. Chandra, and cover designs and vignettes by Susanne Wenger and Georgina Beier. The only traditional art objects pictured were some terracotta toys made by the Falashas of Ethiopia. In art as in literature, *Black Orpheus* had come a long way in ten short years.

Although it may never be possible to measure precisely the amount of influence that *Black Orpheus* had on the development of African literature during its first decade, there is evidence to suggest that it was a powerful source of stimulation and inspiration for a number of African authors, particularly in Nigeria. Besides encouraging writers by publishing their first works, *Black Orpheus* showed them what their contemporaries at home and abroad were writing. Several writers appear to have made use of ideas gleaned from its pages. Under the Yoruba pseudonym of Obotunde Ijimere, Ulli Beier based his play *Woyengi* on an Ijaw folk tale told by Gabriel Okara in *Black Orpheus,* No. 2. The same writer's play *The Imprisonment of Obatala* and J. P. Clark's poem of the same title may have been inspired by Susanne Wenger's handling of a Yoruba myth on her batiks, one of which was reproduced and described in No. 7.[94] Christopher Okigbo's poem "Lament of Lavender Mist" in No. 11 with its recurring image of "black dolls" appears to owe something to Leon Damas' poem "Black Dolls" in No. 2. Also, several novelists used the pages of *Black Orpheus* to try out new ideas which were later developed into full-length works. A version of the first chapter of Gabriel Okara's experimental novel *The Voice* (1964) was published in No. 10. Details from Chinua Achebe's story "The Voter" in No. 17 are echoed in his novel, *A Man of the People* (1966). Amos Tutuola's story "Ajaiyi and the Witchdoctor" in No. 9 may have been the starting point for his longest work of fiction, *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967). These are only the most obvious examples. It would be very hard to find an early Nigerian writer who could claim to have completely escaped the influence of *Black Orpheus*. They all read it and many wrote for it.

While it made its greatest impact in Nigeria, *Black Orpheus* also exercised an influence abroad. It continued to draw contributions from the entire black world, publishing in ten years works by 224 writers and artists from twenty-six African nations, fourteen West Indian and Latin American states, England, Germany, Sweden, India, Persia, Indonesia and the United States. More important, it was read by a discriminating international audience quick to recognize and applaud original talent. *Black Orpheus* thus served as a first-class publicity agent and promoter for new African and Afro-American writers and artists, helping to make them known to the outside world.

[94] For both plays, see Obotunde Ijimere, *The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1966). Clark's lasting interest in myth and legend is evidenced not only in this poem but also in his play, *Ozidi* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1966) and especially in the bilingual, Ijo-English, edition of *The Ozidi Saga* (Ibadan: University Press, 1977).

Black Orpheus owes its reputation and longevity to the industry, intelligence and skill of its editor, Ulli Beier. He was its architect, co-ordinating engineer, mason, day labourer, and work-horse; in ten years, sometimes under pseudonyms such as Sangodare Akanji and Omidiji Aragbabalu, he wrote twenty-two articles, fifty reviews, and forty translations for *Black Orpheus,* many of them breaking new ground in unexplored regions of the arts. *Black Orpheus* stands as a landmark in African literary history, a monument to black creativity. It is also a monument to Ulli Beier, the man who made it what it was.

When Ulli Beier left Nigeria for Papua-New Guinea in 1967, many of its devoted readers feared that *Black Orpheus* would perish. The country was becoming embroiled in a civil war, many talented Ibo writers had fled to secessionist Biafra, and the literary movement which *Black Orpheus* had helped to set in motion looked as if it was about to come to an abrupt halt. There was talk that the magazine would continue under new editorship, but as the war gathered momentum, this idea was dismissed, even by the most sanguine observers, as mere talk. *Black Orpheus* seemed doomed.

There were writers and artists in Nigeria, however, who were determined to keep it alive. In 1968 playwright John Pepper Clark and critic Abiola Irele teamed up to edit the first issue of the "new" *Black Orpheus* (Vol. 2, No. 1) and announced that two more issues, one devoted to traditional African literatures and another to politics and the arts in Africa, would appear within the year. It actually took a bit longer than twelve months for these issues to materialize, but over the next five years or so, Clark and Irele managed to bring out an average of one issue per year, enabling the journal to survive the civil war and its aftermath.

The new *Black Orpheus* looked very much like the old. It had the same size, same format, same kind of striking silk-screen cover, many of the same contributors, roughly the same price, and even some of the same typographical errors. There was a reassuring air of constancy and familiarity about it which conveyed the impression that it would continue to do exactly the kind of work it had done so well in the past. This was a misleading surface impression, however, for there were also clear signs that *Black Orpheus* had changed, that it would henceforth move quite deliberately in a rather different direction.

The first evidence of a break with the past could be found in its new subtitle. Under Beier, *Black Orpheus* was called "A Journal of African and Afro-American Literature," and literary and artistic contributions were solicited from all parts of the black world. West Indians and French West Africans tended to dominate the early issues, with English-speaking West Africans, particularly Nigerians, coming to the fore in the early and mid-sixties. Though the journal became somewhat less cosmopolitan in its later issues, it was never parochial. Guineans stood cheek by jowl with Guyanans or Ghanaians or Guadeloupeans or even Germans; articles on Nigerian pop art were balanced by studies of Cuban rumba rhythms, Arabic calligraphy, or Swahili poetry; the literary pages occasionally admitted an odd Swede, Persian, East Indian, or American Peace Corps volunteer. Each issue was an international potpourri.

But under Clark and Irele, *Black Orpheus* appeared to have a much narrower

geographical range. The first issue in the new series was subtitled "A Journal of the Arts from Africa", the second "A Journal of the Arts in Africa." Virtually all the contributors were Nigerians, Ghanaians, or white expatriates working in these two countries, and their contributions dealt almost exclusively with West African literature, art, music or dance. Such a close regional focus was perhaps unavoidable in the circumstances. It is difficult enough to resurrect a half-dead literary review in times of peace and tranquillity. To do so during a civil war, with one editor out of the country (Irele was in Ghana), required extra resourcefulness and perseverance. So it was not surprising that Clark and Irele had to rely primarily on material they could scare up from their friends and colleagues. To have waited for promised manuscripts to arrive from other parts of Africa would have delayed publication indefinitely. Of course, since they did solicit a number of contributions from writers outside West Africa, some of the later issues of the new *Black Orpheus* had a slightly wider scope, but not one ranged quite as freely from continent to continent in search of new black talent as had most of the issues of its predecessor.

Nevertheless, the reincarnated *Black Orpheus,* despite its new geographical isolationism, managed to remain sufficiently diversified in content. The first issue contained poetry by Ken Tsaro-Wiwa, Aig Higo, Bruce King (an American), and the late Christopher Okigbo; an anonymous short story on a political theme; a definition of "The Language of African music" by composer Akin Euba; an essay by J. P. Clark on the issue of the English language in African literature; a description by Jamaican novelist Lindsay Barrett of stage designer Demas Nwoko's studio in Ibadan; reviews of a Yoruba novel, a book of Yoruba proverbs, and Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*; and art work by Bruce Onobrakpeya. The second issue, a special number devoted to traditional African literatures, featured transcriptions and translations of Yoruba Ifa divination verses, and Idoma ancestral mask chant, and the prologue to an Ijaw saga; there was also a brief account of the Ghana Dance Ensemble by Oyin Ogunba, a long essay on "The Poetry of Akan Drums" by the distinguished ethnomusicologist from Ghana, J. H. Kwabena Nketia, some poems by Samson Amali, art work by Demas Nwoko, and reviews of Edward Brathwaite's long poem *Rights of Passage* and S. A. Konadu's novel *A Woman in Her Prime*. Several of these contributions merit further comment.

Certainly the most exciting reading in the first issue was Christopher Okigbo's poetry. These were probably Okigbo's last works, for he was killed early in the war while serving as a major in the Biafran army. Most of the poems are dated so one can see they were written between December 1965 and May 1966, the period during which Nigeria experienced its first military coup, then a counter-coup followed by massacres of Igbos in the North. Okigbo, an Igbo, was reacting to these events in his poems, which are collectively called "Path of Thunder." An obituary facing the first poem in the group declares that "his 'chant' forms a personal, prophetic record of the torment and trauma of a nation in tragic grip of self-recognition," and the editors have taken the liberty of placing an additional title, "Poems Prophesying War," above "Path of Thunder." The poems do indeed seem prophetic for they are filled with fearful images of iron, violence, and gathering storms. Later poems, which describe what happens after the thunder has

broken, are saturated with visions of the machinery of war—howitzers, detonators, bayonets, cannons, "the iron dance of mortars," etc.; these were written at least a year before the civil war broke out.

But Okigbo's poetry is never just a metaphorical prophecy of armed conflict. Each poem has a number of inter-related meanings, for Okigbo is one of the few African poets who can move along several planes of significance simultaneously. Moreover, he is an exceedingly musical lyricist with an extraordinarily subtle control over rhythm and sound. "Path of Thunder" reveals that he was still growing as an artist, still exploring fresh territory—this time in the murkiest corners of the human spirit. It is a tragedy that he was lost to African literature during the cataclysm he foresaw.

The other highlight of the maiden issue was Clark's essay, "The Legacy of Caliban."[95] Borrowing from Shakespeare's *Tempest* the image of Prospero and Caliban in conflict, which has been used by political scientists, historians, and psychologists as a paradigm of the colonial situation, Clark argues that the African writer who, like Caliban, expresses himself in his foreign master's tongue, must strive to remain true to himself and his own vernacular idiom while doing so. He must create an authentic indigenous style in an alien language. "The African writer thus occupies a position not unlike that of the ambidextrous man, a man placed in the unique and advantageous position of being able to draw strength from two separate equal sources. His is a gift of tongues."

An opportunity to study how effectively Clark himself utilized this gift was provided in the next issue of *Black Orpheus*, which carried a partial translation of the seven-night saga upon which Clark had based his English play *Ozidi*. Only the beginning of the prologue to the first night of the saga was reproduced, but the events in this portion of the epic narrative corresponded quite closely to those dramatized by Clark in the first act of *Ozidi*. A great warrior is killed by conspirators, and his son, who will later avenge his death, is born. Clark embroiders not only the action but the language of the original to create a work which has an integrity of its own yet clearly owes its inspiration to native sources. Such passages prove that Clark has not just a "gift of tongues" but a gift for theatre.

Another highlight of the second issue was Nketia's lucid discussion of the types of poetry produced in Akan society on talking drums. Nketia, an expert on the subject, gives detailed descriptions of the drums and drummers as well as of the drumming, and the reader cannot help but be impressed by the musical sophistication and rigorous training required of those who aspire to become "custodians of drum poetry." Drumming is a high art in Africa, but among the Akan (and presumably many other West African peoples) it is also something of a science. Nketia's essay, a masterful ethnomusicological study, takes us deep into an exciting musical universe.

Such interesting contributions made one willing to forgive the new *Black Orpheus* for its erratic publishing schedule, its myopically regional focus on Nigeria and Ghana, and some of its genuinely bad poetry. It was clear that there was still some life left in this revitalized organ.

[95] Reprinted in John Pepper Clark, *The Example of Shakespeare* (London: Longmans, 1970), pp. 1–38.

By the time the third issue appeared, Okigbo was dead and the war had almost run its course. Three laments for Okigbo by Igbo, Yoruba and British poets opened the issue, followed by essays and poems gathered around the topic "Literature and Politics in English-speaking Africa." Despite its emphasis on anglophone areas, this was a better balanced issue than the two preceding; it had articles by South Africa's Ezekiel Mphahlele and East Africa's Ali Mazrui and Okot p'Bitek as well as Gerald Moore's critical study of "Poetry and the Nigerian Crisis," and clusters of poems by Nigerian, American and Caribbean authors, including the early black nationalist Marcus Garvey. Indeed, it began to look as if *Black Orpheus* was returning to its earlier international orientation.

But the next issue (Vol. 2, No. 4) narrowed the journal's range of focus once again, this time limiting it almost exclusively to studies of Nigerian art and architecture. A few poems by Congolese and Ghanaian bards and a routine survey article on "Modern Drama in West Africa" by Oyin Ogunba did little to correct the imbalance. *Black Orpheus* now seemed to be sliding back into parochialism.

However, it achieved a new height of diversity again in Vol. 2, Nos 5—6, a double issue devoted primarily to the novel in Africa. Essays by scholars from Africa, Europe and the United States on such writers as Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono, Peter Abrahams, Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoano, Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara and Wole Soyinka took up more than half the space, and an assortment of poetry, fiction, reviews and even pedagogical and bibliographical contributions rounded out the rest of the issue, giving it that old international flavour once again.

But the editors could not sustain this outward momentum. The next issue was given over almost entirely to things Nigerian. The only significant "foreign" element was a group of seven superb "Harmattan Poems" by the talented West Indian poet Edward Brathwaite. As before, the pendulum had swung back in an easy homeward direction.

Between 1972 and 1974 *Black Orpheus* ceased publication and appeared moribund. Abiola Irele withdrew from the editorial board and launched a new journal, *The Benin Review*, which did not survive beyond its maiden issue. J. P. Clark, however, re-resurrected *Black Orpheus* in mid-1974, publishing it from the University of Lagos, where he was Chairman of the English Department. It was billed as a "bi-annual, devoted to the arts of Africa and related lands," and it looked very much like its predecessors. The first issue (Vol. 3, No. 1) was dominated by Nigerian contributors but included some interesting war poems by Gabriel Okara, a piece on African music by Akin Euba, a few strident poems by Afro-American Jayne Cortez, and a play prepared by Martin Banham for a drama workshop at the University of Sierra Leone. In all, it was a respectable start for a second rebirth of the journal.

The next number did not appear for more than a year, eventually being published as a double issue (Vol. 3, Nos 2—3). In an apology to subscribers, the editor explained that *Black Orpheus* "has been suffering from the usual publication delays that at present plague most journals in the country," but he hoped to "regularize" production by the end of 1976. The issue was almost evenly split between Nigerian and Afro-American contributors, with Denis [sic] Brutus being arbitrarily placed among the Americans in the table of contents. The most significant pieces were poems by Sonia Sanchez and Robert Hayden, an excerpt from a war novel by Flora Nwapa, and a pioneering study

of the content and form of Hubert Ogunde's popular theatrical works in Yoruba done by J. P. Clark's wife Ebun.

But this was the most cosmopolitan issue that *Black Orpheus* was to produce in its third phase. Vol. 3, No. 4 was another nearly all-Nigerian affair, the major ingredients being a set of oral poems translated from various Nigerian languages, a solid study of "Rhetoric in Modern Nigerian Literature" by Robert Wren, and a rather strange critical essay entitled "Literature and the Cosmic Schizophrenic Tendencies of Man" by Sulayman S. Nyang. No new issues of *Black Orpheus* have been published since 1976, and though there have been rumours of yet another imminent re-resurrection, it seems that *Black Orpheus* may never rise again.

Even if it does re-emerge, it is unlikely that it will regain the influence and importance it had in its first decade of existence. Indeed, one must admit that the *Black Orpheus* revived and re-revived by J. P. Clark has been only a shadow of its former self. The journal's irregularity of publication and inability to attract a steady flow of manuscripts from outside Nigeria combined to vitiate its impact on the African literary scene. Also, a very poor distribution system made *Black Orpheus* virtually impossible to obtain anywhere but in Lagos so that even its most enthusiastic fans abroad were unable to read it anymore. As a relic of the past or as a literary magazine of modest regional circulation, it may be able to survive a little longer on the strength of its name alone, but as an important cultural outlet, as a major catalyst of creative expression in the black world, *Black Orpheus* died a long time ago.

JEANNE N. DINGOME

MBARI

In 1954, at the University College of Ibadan, Professor Molly Mahood delivered an inaugural lecture dealing with "The Place of English Studies in an African University," in which she challengingly remarked that "a country does not attain nationhood without a literature, and Nigeria has not yet a literature."[96] This provocative statement, spotlighting the centrality of cultural autonomy in nation-building, was undoubtedly meant as a warning for Nigeria, a country which, while it was demanding political independence, was often written off as a literary desert. At the time, the dons of the English Department, in their collective capacity as the repository of Western enlightenment, were hoping to reproduce the ideal of the Oxbridge gentleman-scholar in Nigeria, that is, to produce a social and intellectual élite that would in due course fill the vacuum left by the British withdrawal. Generally speaking, the Western-oriented type of education which was dispensed at Ibadan, the *prima donna* of higher learning in West Africa, failed to give the Nigerian students meaningful insights into their indigenous cultures. And in particular, there was little or no encouragement for budding fiction writers to draw their

[96] Molly Mahood, "The Place of English in an African University," Inaugural Lecture given at the University College of Ibadan in November 1954, p. 1.

inspiration from the vigorous forms of traditional literatures in a way that could have aptly mirrored the startling changes through which Nigeria was passing in order to meet the demands of a new civilization.

To be sure, popular literatures continued to flourish in Nigeria. This was particularly true of the indigenous Yoruba operatic theatre which had been popularized in the late forties and afterwards by Hubert Ogunde's and Kola Ogunmola's amateur dramatic societies; but because the repertoire of these pioneers was available only in the Yoruba language, their message could reach but a limited audience and consequently their initiative could not take on a dimension of any national significance. Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* published in 1952, was available in English, of course, but his wildly spontaneous idiom, although an accomplishment in its own right, only aroused dumb bewilderment among the Nigerian intellectuals of the time; as a result, his highly original venture also fell short of the hope expressed in foreign quarters, that it might inaugurate a literary tradition.

In any event, westernized Nigerians were faced with the tremendous task of generating a national literature in English that befitted their country's stature and ambition. It was in the mid-fifties that they responded swiftly to this challenge. Their new assertiveness coincided with the growing momentum of nationalistic movements at a time when there was a keen sense of destiny or at least very strong self-confidence about the future of the country, as indeed of Africa as a whole. Those were hectic days for Nigerian intellectuals; the people in academia, and particularly those with latent artistic talents, were infected with a general ferment of creativeness, which in turn acted as a catalyst in liberating their genius. A sizeable, powerful crop of Nigerian writers leapt on the world literary scene at this historic moment primarily because the most sensitive ones were beginning to see their role through the haze and were, there and then, getting ready to take up the challenge and fulfil their creative mission.

This general euphoria crystallized in 1961 in the creation of the Mbari Club of Ibadan as an intended centre for the activities of all artists in Nigeria, Africa and the black world generally. Prior to the founding of the club, two significant literary developments had made Ibadan the cultural hub of Nigeria. In 1957, a few undergraduates at the English Department had founded *The Horn,* where they tried their hands at poetry and literary criticism in the hope of inspiring a wider creative movement. In the same year, Ulli Beier and the late Janheinz Jahn[97] had launched *Black Orpheus* for the Nigerian Ministry of Education: upon their return from the 1956 World Congress of Black Writers and Artists convened by *Présence Africaine* in Paris, these two German-born expatriates had aspired to bring together authors writing in different languages in a fruitful exchange of ideas that would fire young Nigerians with a genuine interest in a distinctively African kind of literature and thereby, so they hoped, stimulate them into producing works of their own.

To a certain extent then, the idea of setting up a Mbari Club in Nigeria was a continuation of these earlier literary activities. The foundation of the club more or less

[97] Janheinz Jahn had nothing to do with Mbari. In a private correspondence Ulli Beier reports that when Mbari was created in July 1961, Jahn was no longer in Nigeria.

confirmed the mighty creative impulse which had started in the country in the mid-fifties. But although Mbari came at a later stage in a long process, its originality lay in the fact that it succeeded in generating outside the University an atmosphere which was to capture and channel the creative fervour of all manner of artists of that period. The time was ripe indeed especially for young Nigerian writers, to start turning to their own cultural background for inspiration. They deliberately exploited forms and themes indigenous to their cultures in order to realize something entirely relevant to Nigeria's predicament and evolution. It is this new stance which was nurtured and supported by the Mbari Club of Ibadan and its two main offshoots, the Mbari-Mbayo Club of Oshogbo (1962) and the Mbari-Enugu Club of Eastern Nigeria (1963). Interestingly, it was the novelist Chinua Achebe, an Igbo by birth and culture, who suggested the Igbo word *mbari* as a suitable name for the prospective association. A definition of this word, together with a brief analysis of the *mbari* ritual in traditional Igbo society may help us towards a proper assessment of the purpose and the literary impact of the club.[98]

In its simplest definition, *mbari* is a sacrifice which the Igbo people make to a variety of divinities in their pantheon. But more often than not, it is a prayer and thanks-offering to their fertility goddess Ana. Traditionally, when an Igbo community is visited by a series of crises such as abnormally high death rate, successive poor harvests or constant wars, its members must undertake the erection of an *mbari* house, as an act of propitiation to Ana and a prayer for peace, health and prosperity. Ana's privileged position in the Igbo pantheon is only matched by her supreme power over the entire creation:

> The sun shines on Ana,
> Ana is drenched with rain
> The air surrounds Ana
> Ana supports all life.[99]

In Igbo folklore and common usage, Ana, also known as Ala or Ani, stands for all that is morally good and beautiful. She is one of the four elemental spirits, the others being Anunu (the winged race), Anyanwu na Agabala (the spirit of fire), and Imo (the spirit of water). It is a common belief that all four elemental spirits are inter-related with Ana, their nexus and life-giving principle.

Although the *mbari* ritual expresses the totality of the Igbo people's creative experience, there is strong evidence that the word itself is of Hamito-Semitic origin. It comes from the root reduplicated in Borebore, the name of the Akan creator divinity in Ghana. "To create" or "to shape" is *bara* in Hebrew; in Arabic *bara* is "to form, to

[98] On the Mbari Club and the underlying concept, see notably: G. I. Jones, "Mbari Houses," *Nigerian Field*, VI, 2 (1936), 77–79; Ulli Beier and Gerald Moore, "Mbari Houses," *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 49, (1956), 184–198; Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Mbari First Anniversary," *New Africa*, 1, 8 (1962), 7; Gene Ulansky, "Mbari —The Missing Link," *Phylon* 26 (1965), 247–254; Begum Hendrickse, "The Mbari Story," *African Forum*, I, (1965), 109–110; Herbert Cole, "Mbari is a Dance," *African Arts/Arts d'Afrique*, II, 4 (1969), 43 and 79; and "Mbari is Life", 3, ibid., 8 and 87; Chike Ezimora, "Mbari back from Brink of Collapse," *Daily Times*, (October 26, 1972), 12–13; and Fred J. Parrott, *Introduction to African Arts of Kenya, Zaire and Nigeria*, (New York: Arco, 1972), pp. 118–127. See also Uche Okeke, *Modern Nigerian Art* and *Igbo Art* (Nsukka, forthcoming).

[99] Quoted in Ego Uche-Okeke, *Uche Okeke, His Work and Thought on Art*, B.A. thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, June 1975, p. 148.

fashion by cutting." Hebrew *bara* also means "to begin," agreeing with Yoruba *bere*. Note that *mbido* is Igbo for 'beginning'; it is cognate with Arabic *baba,* "to begin," and Hebrew *bada,* "to devise, to invent."[100] This etymology helps to throw some light onto the adoption of *Mbari* by the Igbo people as the best expression of the crowning glory of their art and culture. In their world view, *mbari* describes the divinely inspired faculty of creation; by extension, it sums up any individual or communal venture in which the light of the gods is reflected in the work of men.

The building of Mbari houses, or shrines, to which attention had been drawn in 1956 by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, is an essential element in Igbo culture. As Ulansky was to explain,

> In the traditional Igbo religion, an Mbari house is built when Ala, the earth goddess, reveals to her priest that a new one is needed. Its construction is a communal effort; young men and women from each household in the village work on it together, thereby reaffirming the unity of the religious community. When completed, the house is decorated with wall paintings and filled with large mud figures. Then the house is left to become dilapidated; no effort is made to repair it. After this condition has been reached, a new house is built according with the wish of Ala, because it is the act of building which constitutes the worship. This attitude holds that religious art, and for that matter any religious act, needs constant renewal; for only in this way can the power of the gods be reinforced by human action and man's relationship with the gods be actively recreated.

The *nde mgbe* and the *nde oka* are the two groups of sanctified workers who are selected by a diviner, the Dibia Afa, to work on the building of the *mbari* sanctuary. During the unveiling ceremony that follows the completion of the structure, the entire community is urged to offer sacrifices to the appropriate divinities represented; they feast, dance and make merry. After this celebration, the purpose of *mbari* is fulfilled: the building is left to disintegrate, and its mud sculptures ultimately merge again with the earth which, personified as Ana, called them into being. In other words, the *mbari* idea allows for decay and the re-enactment of a ritual that is all-embracing because the emphasis is not so much on the artifact or the finished object as on the very process that brings it into being. Symbolically speaking then, *Mbari* stands for the process of artistic creation seen both in its physical and its spiritual sense. The word itself, with its connotations of deep faith, artistic creativity, communal endeavour, and a sense of constant renewal, was an apposite name for the nascent community of conscious artists who were brought together by Ulli Beier.

The Igbo word, however, was also meant to carry overtones not only of Nigerian, but also of African and even black unity. Indeed, the Mbari Club was a non-racial and non-sectarian association, which was first set up by two foreigners, Ulli Beier from Germany and Ezekiel Mphahlele from South Africa, as well as by a few Nigerian intellectuals such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Mabel Aig-Imoukhuede and the Yoruba novelist D. O. Fagunwa. While Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola were regarded as honorary members since they played no active role in

[100] Modupe Oduyoye, "What Is Mbari?", *Nigeria Magazine,* No. 119 (1976), 29–33.

the club, the team also included the painter Demas Nweke, Frances Ademola from Ghana and Begum Hendrickse, a South African of Malay origin. The whole venture further benefited from the support of Mercer Cook, the black American student of African literature. Moreover, the purpose of Mbari was to stimulate cultural activities in all possible ways, not only in literature. Exhibitions of the work of African and other artists were organized. Informal courses in the visual arts were instituted. Collections of drawings by African artists were printed. The practice and study of African music and dance was encouraged. Ogunmola's Yoruba opera, *Love of Money* was performed at the Ibadan Mbari Club in 1963. As a publishing concern, *Mbari* was a cosmopolitan venture bent on supporting those works by Nigerian and other African writers which showed confident daring in their creative ideas as well as a diversity of views and a range of vision that shunned the beaten track. It certainly provided Nigerian writers with a forum and facilities which had never been available locally. It was a most propitious ground for literary cross-fertilization where all manner of artists worked to the best of their talents, interchanging their creative ideas and experiences. It gave several gifted writers an unfettered start and paved the way towards fame for the most talented artists.

Mbari was the brainchild of Horst Ulrich Beier, who was born in Glowitz, Germany, in 1922. In 1950, he came to Nigeria and settled in Oshogbo although he was appointed lecturer in the Ibadan University Department of Extra-Mural Studies. A keenly perceptive scholar, Ulli Beier brought to his host country the German tradition of interest in anthropology which had been demonstrated at the turn of the century by Leo Frobenius. Before Nigeria's independence, Ulli Beier carried out valuable research into various aspects of traditional cultures and religions. But he was alone in his work at that time, not really knowing whether his efforts to popularize these cultures would bear fruit. The idea caught on suddenly owing to the creativity at the time of independence, but also because of the presence in the same place at that peculiar moment in history, of a conglomeration of art-conscious individuals who possessed the vision, the initiative and the conviction to organize, stimulate and participate in the revaluation of their own cultures, whether it was in writing or in the visual and the performing arts.

Although Beier was largely instrumental in bringing to the association the advantage of foundation money—and indeed, the weak spot of the club was precisely its dependence upon foreign initiative and capital—the first president of the Mbari committee was, appropriately, an African, Ezekiel Mphahlele, who was more than a dozen years older than the new Nigerian writers. Born in Pretoria in 1919, he had left South Africa in 1957, settling in Ibadan as a lecturer in the Extra-Mural Department, where he taught English language and literature. After chairing Mbari in 1961–1962, he directed the African Program of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1962–1963; this Paris-based, left-wing, non-Communist organization sponsored Mbari until 1964 when the American Farfield Foundation stepped in. Presumably, it was because Mphahlele was the oldest of the group and certainly because in his exile he devoted a great deal of time and energy to helping a development programme in African literatures and arts, that he was unanimously elected the first president of Mbari.

However, the personality of Ulli Beier was undoubtedly the decisive factor in the

setting up of Mbari. It was through his personal links and external contacts, namely with John Hunt, the Director of the Congress in Paris and with the black American writer and diplomat Mercer Cook, who acted as intermediary, that Mbari saw the light of day. From his residence in Oshogbo, Beier controlled the growth of the association from 1962 to 1964, with Begum Hendrickse, in charge of current office matters. As co-editor of *Black Orpheus*, he linked the latter with Mbari in the expectation that the unique position which the journal had occupied in the creation and critical assessment of the literatures and arts of anglophone Africa would be maintained and if anyting strengthened further. When Mbari set up an indigenous publishing firm in December 1961, the *Black Orpheus* special publications appeared under the Mbari imprint, most books being copiously illustrated, and printed by the Caxton Press, West Africa Limited, in Ibadan.

The following chronological list[101] of Mbari publications, is of outstanding interest for the literary history of Nigeria and even of anglophone Africa in general, because it evinces the catholicity of taste and the critical acumen which Mbari had in common with *Black Orpheus*:

1961: *Sonf of a Goat*, a play by John Pepper Clark (Nigeria)
African Songs, a selection of poems by Léon Damas (Guyana), translated by Miriam Koshland and Ulli Beier
1962: *Poems*, a selection of poems by John Pepper Clark (Nigeria)
24 Poems, a selection of poems by Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo (Madagascar), translated by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier
Heavensgate, a collection of poems by Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria)
A Walk in the Night, a novel by Alex La Guma (South Africa)
1963: *Three Plays: The Swamp Dwellers, The Trial of Brother Jero and the Strong Breed* by Wole Soyinka (Nigeria)
Sirens, Knuckles and Boots, a collection of poems by Dennis Brutus (South Africa)
1964: *Limits*, a collection of poems by Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria)
Rediscovery, a collection of poems by George Awoonor-Williams (Ghana)
Poems, a collection of poems by Lenrie Peters (Gambia)
Icheke and other Poems, a collection of poems by Glory O. Nwanodi (Nigeria)
Oriki, a collection of rare traditional Yoruba poems by Bakare Gbadamosi (Nigeria)
Brush Fire, a translation of poems by Tchicaya U Tam'si (Congo)
Three Plays: Oba Waja, Oba Koso and *Oba Moro* by Duro Ladipo (Nigeria), translated by Ulli Beier
The Moon Cannot Fight, an adaptation of traditional Yoruba children's songs by Ulli Beier and Bakare Gbadamosi (Nigeria)

The considerable advance made by francophone poetry during the fifties was acknowledged in the translation from Damas; unexpectedly, the exceptional genius of

[101] This list intentionally excludes the drawings by Uche Okeke (1961), Yemi Bisiri (1961), Ibrahim El Salahi (1962) and Malatangana (1963).

Rabearivelo was duly recognized; and the talent of Tchicaya was detected at a remarkable early stage. The all-African bias of the firm was apparent in its publishing work originating in South Africa, Ghana and the Gambia: indeed, Dennis Brutus was awarded the Mbari prize for his collection of 1962. That Mbari's interest was not limited to the promotion of English writing became evident in the translations from the Yoruba which appeared in 1964; of exceptional importance in this respect was the close association between Ulli Beier and Duro Ladipo, the founder of the Mbari-Mbayo Club of Oshogbo: it was Beier who suggested to Ladipo the theme of his Oba trilogy, and he helped with the list of the final English version.

On the whole, however, the movement was sustained by the Nigerian troika—Clark, Okigbo and Soyinka—all belonging to a generation of intensely individualistic artists who accepted the Mbari idea precisely because it gave much room to the artist's individual freedom. The club had no ideological or political axe to grind; neither was it out to set up a literary doctrine and to bully its creative members into writing to order. The intellectual elaboration and rhetoric of *Négritude*, were utterly foreign to the tradition of this generation of anglophone writers, although the allegation that Africans in the French colonies were assimilated while anglophone Africans were not, seems to be a simple if not simplistic explanation of the differences between the Mbari and the negritude movements. In Mbari writing, there was no common direction other than a certain natural assumption by the individual writers of their Nigerian and African setting: Clark wrote with the very physical feel of the Niger Delta region in his mind; Soyinka appropriated the Yoruba god of iron as his favourite deity; Okigbo's poetry celebrated Igbo mythology and folklore.

John Pepper Clark was born in 1935 in Kiagbodo, Midwestern Nigeria, into an Ijaw family. He read English at Ibadan University, where, he gained some fame in 1957 as the first editor of the student verse magazine, *The Horn*. At the time Mbari was created in 1961, he was employed as Information Officer in the Ministry of Information, Ibadan, and he acted as the first secretary of Mbari from July to September 1961. He then moved to Lagos as features editor of the Daily Express Group of newspapers. In this new job, he reserved a special column for the various activities of Mbari, thus giving it useful free publicity.[102]

Wole Soyinka was a Yoruba born in 1934 in Ijebu Isara near Abeokuta. He read English at Ibadan and graduated at Leeds in 1957 (B.A. honours with specialization in drama). In 1960, Soyinka returned to Nigeria on a Rockefeller grant. His play *A Dance of the Forests* won first prize in the Nigerian independence drama competition which was sponsored by the *Congress for Cultural Freedom* with Ulli Beier and the editor of *Encounter*, Stephen Spender, as members of the jury.

[102] Mbari also benefited from free advertising on radio and television through Frances Ademola, a Ghanaian by birth, who was married to a Nigerian lawyer. A member of the first Mbari committee, she was a controller of radio programmes in Ibadan in 1961. Further contact between Mbari and television was effected through Segun Olusola, a TV producer in charge of the drama and arts sections. He devised a TV programme known as *Spotlight*, which was purposely created to introduce the artists visiting Mbari and to provide them with pocket money during their stay in Nigeria. The presenter was the ubiquitous Wole Soyinka. When Segun Olusola was transferred to Lagos in 1964, he initiated yet another TV programme, *African Voices*, a series of TV poetry readings in which Mbari writers featured prominently.

Christopher Okigbo was an Igbo born in 1932 in Ijoto near Onitsha (Eastern Nigeria). He read Classics at the University of Ibadan. At the inception of the Club, he was a private Secretary with the Federal Ministry of Research and Information in Ibadan. He was then writing poetry as a hobby, and his first collection of poems appeared under the Mbari imprint like J. P. Clark's.

It was largely through Ulli Beier's efforts that this group of university graduates came into contact with the less sophisticated world of tradition in the person of Duro Ladipo. In December 1961, Duro Ladipo performed his famous Christmas cantatas at the Mbari Club of Ibadan and he became fired with the pervading revival spirit. Back in Oshogbo, he founded a Yoruba version of Mbari in April 1962 by transforming his compound into an art gallery and open-air theatre with a subsidy granted by the Congress for Cultural Freedom. This Mbari-Mbayo Club became known as the "Oshogbo School of Artists"; owing to its more popular appeal, it seems to have achieved greater impact than any other Mbari club in Nigeria, not excepting the one that was founded in 1963 at Enugu, an important town in Igboland, the original homeland of Ana-worshippers and *mbari* houses. Like the club in Oshogbo, Mbari-Enugu was run independently of the parent institution at Ibadan. But although it had been expected to provide a new impetus to local creativity, it never reached a level of activity and fame comparable to that of Mbari-Ibadan and Mbari-Oshogbo. On the whole, however, in its successful attempt to bring together the traditional and the academic, Mbari became the vital link between the way Western-educated Nigerian writers were making use of modern forms, styles and techniques, and the way traditional African literatures were meeting the demands of a society in the grip of turbulent modernity. It contributed powerfully to interpreting and redirecting the work of young African writers, "whose vision either remained inward to their own culture or was occluded by the wrong exposure to Western aesthethics."[103]

The influence of Mbari, however, was not limited to Nigeria. Apart from publishing works in English from other parts of Africa, the club was largely responsible for organizing an important conference of African writers of English expression, which was held at Makerere College in June 1962 under the auspices of the English Department there and with financial help from the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The presence of a number of prominent writers from South and West Africa, including several Mbari authors, contributed decisively to the early growth of anglophone creative writing in the area. In 1963, Ezekiel Mphahlele who had helped with the organization of the conference, founded the Chemchemi Cultural Centre in Nairobi with a wide-ranging purpose which was clearly inspired by his earlier experience with Mbari:

> to search for the broken threads of traditional idioms of culture and to try to look for the points of harmony between tribal modes or to reconcile them; to help the writer, the artist, the musician and the intellectual outside the arts to negotiate the tricky bend which marks the meeting point between their basic African-ness and outside cultures so that they should know what to do with the various impacts of

[103] J. Rea, "Aspects of African Publishing, 1945–74" in *African Studies since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson*, Christopher Fyfe ed. (London: Longmans, 1976), p. 101.

the present; to help them contain the shock that they experience in confrontation with other cultures that have different sets of values from theirs.[104]

Mbari also acted as a kind of prototype for the Mphala Creative Society of Zambia, in which Mphahlele was likewise to play a part in the late sixties.

By 1965, then, Mbari-Ibadan had become a well-established, non-profit organization with a sizeable art collection and other assets. It had clearly outgrown its premises in West End (near Dugbe Market, the most buoyant district in the center of Ibadan). It was at this point that John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo and to a certain extent Wole Soyinka, all of whom were again living in or around Ibadan, decided to acquire new premises at Central Hotel on Oyo Road, Ibadan. Ulli Beier was naturally informed of this move and reportedly rejected the idea on the grounds that it was an uneconomical and extravagant if not grandiose scheme.

This minor difference of opinion was indicative of a flaw in the partnership which resulted partly from the fact that Ulli Beier's insistence on his own, possibly esoteric, standards had led to some controversy and was rapidly bringing him into open intellectual conflict with Clark and Soyinka. Though this quarrel was fatal to the spirit of solidarity that had sustained the association, in retrospect it should perhaps rather be regarded as a positive sign of the growth and maturing of these young Nigerian writers, whose work had gained international recognition by the mid-sixties. Mbari itself could hardly be expected to pass unharmed through the charged atmosphere of suspicion and acrimony which was beginning to prevail, and which was compounded by the "discovery" that the financial backing of the club was in fact "cold war money."[105] The Nigerians then sought assistance from the American Farfield Foundation, which investigated the situation and came to the conclusion that any grant awarded to the club would have to be seed-money invested with a view that Mbari should ultimately become financially independent. Meanwhile, the conflict between Beier and his Nigerian erstwhile friends and partners had reached such extremes of bitterness that the latter requested that Beier should submit an account of the Mbari funds, which he had been managing since July 1961: the case was actually taken to the Ibadan High Court.

The Biafra war dealt a further grievous blow to whatever remained of the Mbari spirit: while Soyinka was doing his utmost—which landed him in jail—towards restoring the unity of his torn country, a number of Igbo members chose to espouse the cause of Biafra. Soyinka reportedly lamented the hurried flight of his close friends with the disenchanted comment, "they have left us in the lurch." As he later observed, by 1967, "it was impossible, physically impossible... for the writers to come together in their own country."[106]

The war ended in 1970, and some efforts were made at reviving Mbari. Dr. T. O. Oruwariye, a medical practitioner with a keen interest in the arts and cultures of Africa

[104] *Bulletin of the Association for African Literature in English*, 1 (1964), 8.
[105] For inside information concerning this regrettable episode, I am indebted to Professor John Pepper Clark (interview of 3 July 1978).
[106] Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in an African State," *Transition*, No. 31 (1967), 11–13.

and the black world generally, was called in to preside over the association, with poet Aig Higo (b. 1932), at the time managing director of the Ibadan branch of Heinemann Educational Books, as secretary. Some activity was maintained until 1975, but although the Mbari Club has to all intents and purposes disappeared at the time of this writing (June 1979), it is yet to be wound up legally.

4. CHINUA ACHEBE AND THE GROWTH OF THE NOVEL

Before independence little was heard of English-language writing in Nigeria: the mediocre poetry of Osadebay had attracted little attention and did not deserve more; although the originality of Tutuola was recognized everywhere, his *Palm-Wine Drinkard* was regarded as a freak of the literary imagination and became for that reason the object of a heated controversy; Ekwensi's *People of the City* had awakened considerable interest, but chiefly as a social document and a sample of popular writing devoid of any high aesthetic ambition or value. The first major event to bring together Nigerian creative literature and the literary establishment outside Africa was the publication by Heinemann of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. The enormous success of this novel, which, in less than ten years' time, was translated into thirteen languages, including Uzbek, Afrikaans, and ... Yoruba, was bound to encourage all those who thought they had something to say, and sufficient knowledge of English to tell it in a language with such world-wide potential readership. In the course of the half-dozen years that elapsed between independence and the civil war, the novel became the most prominent genre in Nigerian writing as it had been in francophone writing during the previous decade. Until the civil war, the experience of which seemed to divert his inspiration from extended prose fiction to poetry and the short story, Achebe remained the leading Nigerian novelist. Very soon, however, he found himself surrounded by a host of colleagues and/or competitors, his contemporaries, born in the 1930s, the vast majority of whom were, for some reason, Ibos. But mention should first be made of two novelists who belong to the generation of Tutuola and Ekwensi: Timothy Mofolorunso Aluko (1918–1984), who is a Yoruba and Gabriel Okara (b. 1921), who is an Ijaw.

PATRICK SCOTT

THE OLDER GENERATION: T. M. ALUKO AND GABRIEL OKARA

T. M. Aluko and Gabriel Okara represent two very different strands in the early development of the Nigerian novel. Both are rather older than the majority of well-known Nigerian writers; both made their first literary impact in the years around

national independence; and both have received since that time rather a mixed reception from academic critics. But the scale, methods, and language of their respective works show a very marked contrast. Aluko has produced five novels, which treat day-to-day Nigerian life basically within the conventions of the realistic novel, and he has used for the most part "standard English" as his medium; he has been fiercely criticized over the years for what his castigators allege is a lack of cultural and linguistic authenticity, and only recently have there been voices raised in his defence. Okara, on the other hand, first became known as a "modern" poet, and was widely respected for his innovative and sensitive work in that genre, before the publication of his single short novel, *The Voice*; his novel itself is defiantly experimental and literary in its symbolic narrative method, and Okara has drawn criticism, not like Aluko for linguistic conservatism, but for the very strangeness of his innovations in incorporating directly into English the Ijaw idioms of his home area. The reputations of both novelists have suffered from the stereotyping of early critical responses, and they are both, within their chosen modes, much subtler than their critics have sometimes acknowledged. The contrast between the two men's works, and careers, serves to illustrate several issues of importance to subsequent Nigerian writing.

Aluko is probably the most underrated of Nigerian writers. His novels are often passed over as snobbish, middle-brow comedies, whose treatment of Nigerian traditional life betrays the patronizing attitudes of the first smug generation of the modern élite.[107] But both his themes and his cultural attitudes are more ambitious and complex than that, and his novels merit revaluation. In one way or another, all five of Aluko's novels grow out of his own career as a government official, and taken together they make for an unsentimental, even critical, exploration of his government experience.

Timothy Moloforunso Aluko was born in 1918, at Ilesha, in what were then the Southern Provinces of Nigeria.[108] He was educated at Government College, Ibadan, and the new Yaba Higher College, near Lagos, and thereafter, from the early nineteen-forties through to the mid-seventies, with two intervals for engineering studies in Britain, Aluko has held a succession of technical and administrative posts of increasing importance, starting as a junior engineer in Public Works, moving to be District Engineer in the early fifties, and then serving as Permanent Secretary of Works and Transport for the Western Region, and in the early seventies as State Commissioner of Finance for the Western State. He was one of the first generation of Nigerian administrators to take over from their expatriate predecessors, and is unusual among Nigerian authors in the way his professional life has immersed him in the technical, as well as the human, problems of modernization. The experience of cultural discontinuity, the processes of administrative transfer, and the human implications of the consequent relocations of power within

[107] See, e.g. Ulli Beier's review of *One Man, One Wife*, in *Black Orpheus*, No. 6 (1959), 52–54, or Ladipo Adamolekun "T. M. Aluko," *Afriscope*, 5, 2 (1975), 57–59. For more qualified criticism, cf. Bernth Lindfors, "T. M. Aluko: Nigerian Satirist," *African Literature Today*, No. 5 (1971), 41–53.

[108] Biographical details from standard reference sources, and Kole Omotoso, "Interview with T. M. Aluko," *Afriscope*, 3, 6 (1973), 51–52.

Nigerian society, form the theme of his five novels. His books are neither paeans for progress, nor elegies over a vanished colonial past, but tragi-comedies of change.[109]

Aluko's first novel, *One Man, One Wife* (Lagos, 1959; London, 1967) is set in a small Western Nigerian village, apparently in the nineteen-thirties, and concerns two parallel conflicts: that between Christian monogamy and traditional polygamy, and that between the traditional response to a smallpox epidemic (the propitiation of Shonponna) and the modern secular response in the imposition of health regulations. Aluko's satire is directed as much at the narrowness of the mission Christians and their one-eyed pastor, as at the intransigence of the village elders, and, when the novel ends with the suicide of the old chief and with the local pastor endorsing an *aladura*-style prophet who can synthesize mission beliefs with the villagers' traditional reverence for the Odan tree and stream, one feels that Aluko himself retains some ironic reserve about the value of modernization, or even of such a new cultural synthesis. The theme of the book is not just a literal polygamy debate, such as took place in many Nigerian churches early in the century, but the "cultural polygamy," cultural mismatching and cultural promiscuity that are brought during modernization. The first edition of the novel was marred by many small clumsinesses of style (since revised), and attracted some rather unfair criticism: far from being naive, the novel is, if anything, overloaded with imagery (the Odan tree itself, the stream's drought and floods, the central symbol of the rivals over marrying the beautiful village maiden), and it foreshadows the themes and methods of Aluko's maturer work.

His second novel, *One Man, One Matchet* (London, 1964) focuses more closely on the interaction of cultural change with the practicalities of modern secular administration. Again, satire is directed evenhandedly at mission religion, the increasing unreality of traditional rulers, and the opportunism of progressives, but a new target is now added in the pomposity and capriciousness of the central colonial government. The novel is set in the late nineteen-forties, and Aluko's hero is the first Nigerian District Officer to take over responsiblity from a white; the central image through which his difficulties are presented is the attempt of government to eliminate cocoa disease by cutting down whole farms, a policy which does not command the whole-hearted agreement of the local farmers; the struggle over this parallels the attempt made by the administration to neutralize, indeed eliminate, a nationalist demagogue (Benja-Benja, one of Aluko's great comic creations), who is stirring up inter-village conflict for his personal gain. The new D.O. tries to enforce government regulations, only to find that the farm-clearing is no longer necessary, because disease-resistant seedlings have been developed elsewhere in the third world, and are being imported with the blessing of his superiors; this anti-climatic outcome to the cocoa-disease plot images the difficulties felt by local administrators over sudden policy changes by central government in the treatment of the anti-colonialist movement. Because of the rioting caused by Benja-Benja, the D.O. cannot simply give up his district, even though he has been made to look stupid by the policy changes. He has to keep going until another Nigerian can take over. This second novel is much more

[109] Cf. the detailed appreciation by Margaret Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannon* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 169–177, esp. p. 173.

developed in its stylistic irony than Aluko's first, both in broad humorous parodies of nationalist journalism and speech-making, and in much subtler exploitation of the understatement in the D.O.'s civil service style; even in style, the novel seems to say, extremism is dangerous, and an informed and intelligent neutrality is the best Aluko can hope for.[110]

Aluko's third novel, *Kinsman and Foreman* (London, 1966), is his best to date. Again, the central character is one of the first generation of Nigerian administrators, Titus Oti, posted to his home town as District Engineer. Simeon, his foreman in the Public Works Department, is also his kinsman, and he faces an acute moral dilemma as he discovers that Simeon has been milking the position for his own financial advantage. The novel explores the conflicts between modern administrative attitudes, and traditional kinship ones, in their impact on work, family, and even the church, and is also concerned with the conflict between the world of external legal judgement and that of inner moral conviction. Where the novel goes further than Aluko's earlier ones is in its concern with Titus' own ambivalence about the dilemmas he faces; he is squarely against speculation and deceit, but his problems are matters of social pressuring rather than simply of moral choice, and he suffers a nightmare crisis of psychological identity, felt most forcibly when, going on tour and stopping at a rest house where a colonial officer had years ago been killed, he comes to believe he is himself being attacked. The novel paints a very negative picture; the *alasoteles* in this book can offer only psychic escape, not cultural synthesis, with their prophecies of the end of this conflict-ridden world; modern government is revealed as quite incompetent to govern, when Simeon is cleared of embezzlement in court, and again by a Commission of Inquiry;[111] and the zany sentimentalism of modern Western understanding of Africa is satirized when some Chicago benefactors decide, after reading *Time* magazine, to endow the village church as the centre for a new black theology. Titus himself, like the hero of the previous novel, can only stick with his job, and find psychic integration in facing realities. One of the recurring images of the book is a furiously driven and wildly out-of-control mammy-wagon (truck), rather hopefully named *Safe Journey*, which Titus as district Engineer is meant to inspect for roadworthiness, but which he can do little about; it is a crucial image for Aluko's attitude to Nigerian politics in the sixties. His administrator can plan, with great difficulty, the building of roads and bridges, but he has very little control over the modern Nigeria that will use them.

Chief the Honourable Minister (London, 1970) reflects Aluko's move in the sixties from technical postings closer into the political arena. Unlike any of his other novels, it is set in central government, in the capital of a fictional Afromacoland, and it deals with the gradual breakdown, after Independence, of civilian government, and the consequence of a military coup. The obvious comparison is with Chinua Achebe's

[110] Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature* (New York: Africana, 1973), pp. 153–175, identifies Aluko's parodic style as specifically Yoruba; on his "civil service" understatement, see Ayo Banjo, "Language in Aluko: the use of colloquialisms, Nigerianisms," *Ba Shiru*, 5 (1971), 59–69.

[111] Beatrice Stegeman, "The courtroom clash in T. M. Aluko's *Kinsman and Foreman*," *Critique*, 17, 2 (1975), 26–35.

A Man of the People (1967),[112] and the differences between the two works are significant. Achebe's hero is an intellectual outside the government, and his politician is the villain, a blatantly opportunistic rogue; Aluko's central character is both intellectual and politician at once, an ex-schoolmaster who is brought into the Cabinet on Independence, who is switched from education to the Ministry of Works (from theory to the practicalities of "nation-building"), and who finds himself constrained by the responsibilities he has undertaken. He is drawn into not only political crudeness and election-rigging, but also into a *rapprochement* he finds disturbing with traditional culture, into blood oaths scientifically administered with a hypodermic syringe, and a chieftaincy initiation that is purely for political purposes. Unlike Achebe, who uses the first-person narrative to get us inside the experience of his protagonist, Aluko uses the more objective third-person voice, to chart, almost clinically, the way weakness, rather than wickedness, led to the Minister's fall from power. The failing of the novel is that the main narrative rests on an irony about political rhetoric that makes it very difficult to respond unironically to the final radio speech about the military takeover. The book's primary significance is perhaps historical, rather than purely literary.

In his next novel, *His Worshipful Majesty* (London, 1973), Aluko returned to his earlier focus, on local events, and to his favourite time-setting, the early nineteen-fifties, but with some interesting differences. The novel deals with the introduction of the Western Region's new Local Government Act in 1952, which was intended to set up democratic local councils alongside the tratidional structure of chiefly authority. This was a small-scale version of the larger general problem of the relocation of power as traditional societies modernize, and the novel dramatizes the inevitable clashes of two incompatible political patterns. Some critics have argued that it represents a new sensitivity on Aluko's part to the values of traditional culture.[113] Certainly, his picture of the lawyer Morrison, a modern outsider who wants to enter local politics, satirizes his initial ignorance of tradition and shows him having to learn more about it. The novel dwells at greater length than the earlier ones had done on the ceremonial grandeur as well as the stubborn resistance to change of the traditional ruler, the Alaiye. But the change is partly one of point of view, rather than of heart. Aluko tells the story through the eyes of Kale Roberts, the secretary both to the Alaiye and to the local council, a man with a deep investment in both worlds, comic in his efforts not to fall between the old and new stools, and his account is a self-justification rather than an objective narrative. Indeed, Morrison's new-found and very diplomatic interest in tradition seems itself to be satirized, and his ultimate fate (madness, and then death after being administered a traditional cure) is hardly encouraging. The very extent of the ruler's speeches tempers the reader's ability to stand outside the traditionalist point of view, but the plot of the novel shows the Alaiye's traditionalism as stubborn rather than heroic, and indicates

[112] Cf. Robert M. Wren, "Anticipation of civil conflict in Nigeria: Aluko and Achebe," *Studies in Black Literature*, 2, 1 (1970), 21–32.

[113] See, e.g., Oladele Taiwo, "T. M. Aluko: the Novelist and his Imagination," *Présence Africaine*, No. 90 (1974), 225–246, and his *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 149–180 (an important revaluation of Aluko); and Eustace Taiwo Palmer, "Development and Change in the novels of T. M. Aluko," *World Literature Written in English*, 15 (1976), 279–296.

that once again Aluko is concerned with exploring the complexity of social change rather than with questioning its inevitability.

It will be seen, even from this brief survey, that Aluko's novels are somewhat deceptive in their apparently limited realism. The plots he has chosen invariably have a wider representative and historical significance. His style, too, most frequently noted for its broad caricature and exuberant parody, more often achieves its effects through carefully controlled authorial irony, which conveys the multiplicity of viewpoints surrounding "objective" judgement in Nigeria during the years of modernization. Aluko's irony has always been at its most effective when he is presenting some cultural interface —not just between Western and Nigerian culture, or between ancient and modern, but also between the varying cultures of different groups and classes within Nigeria, and between the idealism of political and religious rhetoric and the reality of the secular practical world in which he has made his own career. To these cultural complexities, his novels are a specific and a very sensitive response.[114]

Gabriel Okara's novel, *The Voice* (London, 1964), grew out of the same cultural situation faced by Aluko, and it shares with his work some of the same pessimism about the Nigeria of the Independence years, but its mode is very different. It is much more evidently a prophetic allegory in its intention, and it rejects the more traditional realistic novel for an attempted synthesis of traditional, episodic, oral narrative with the symbolic resonances of European modernism. Nearly all critics have acknowledged the worthiness of these ambitions; the reservations have been about Okara's success in carrying them out.

The author's biography gives some hints about his aesthetic orientation. Gabriel Okara was born in Bumodi, in the Niger Delta, in 1921.[115] He was educated at Government College, Umuahia, and, like Aluko, at Yaba Higher College, and subsequently at Northwestern University in the U.S.A. Throughout his career there always seems to have been a split between his literary ambitions and themes and the rather mundane ways in which he has earned his living, first as a book-binding craftsman, then with the Eastern Region Ministry of Information, and most recently with his own Rivers State Publishing House. He first became well known as a poet, and acknowledges the influence of the Welsh writer Dylan Thomas. He was closely connected with the Mbari artists' group, and with *Black Orpheus,* in which he published both poetry and short stories, including an excerpt from his novel.[116] He has described himself as "a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy, and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible,"[117] and some of his poems, such as the famous

[114] Patrick Scott, "The Cultural Significance of T. M. Aluko's Novels," *Bulletin of the Southern Association of Africanists,* 7 (1979), 1–10.

[115] Biographical details from standard reference sources, and Theo Vincent, "Introduction," in Gabriel Okara, *The Fisherman's Invocation* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1978), pp. ix–xv.

[116] His poems have now been collected in *The Fisherman's Invocation;* on the ethos of *Black Orpheus,* see Louis James, "The Protest Tradition: *Black Orpheus* and *Transition,*" in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature,* ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro (New York: Africana, 1969), pp. 109–124.

[117] Okara, "African Speech. English Words," *Transition,* 3 (1963), 15–16, reprinted in *African Writers on African Writing,* ed G. D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 137–139.

"Piano and Drums", with its contrast between the Western piano solo and the communal mystic rhythm of jungle drums, show similarities with French negritude writing. At the time he wrote his novel, Okara seems to have seen himself as a symbolist writer, a literary visionary, but also as having to fulfil the programme of the time for a new African literature.

The Voice tells the story of the young man Okolo, who after studying abroad returns to his homeland to find it corrupted by materialism and falling into moral decay, because the people trust in their leaders' promises of "the coming thing". He tries to rouse Amatu, his home village, to share his own other-worldly morality and to take up with him the quest for "it", the undefinable transcendent meaning of life, but he is rejected by the villagers, by the village establishment, and by the political powers, both black and white, in the nearby town of Sologa. He is falsely accused of seducing a young bride, imprisoned as a lunatic in the town, and finally set adrift down the river to die, bound back-to-back to a witch, and mourned only by a cripple.

The story is significant on at least three levels. First, as a social and political parable for the time of Nigeria's Independence, it attacks the spiritual losses Okara saw as accompanying modernization. In the scramble for advancement and material gain, he claims, the soul has been forgotten; as one elder says, "Everybody's inside is now filled with money, cars, and concrete houses."[118] Okolo's message, and Okara's, is threatening to his audience, because "when you question they fear a tornado is going to blow down the beautiful houses they have built without foundations" (p. 89). In an interview, Okara said that at Independence he had "apprehensions about the state of affairs," and that his novel was about "the predicament of any intellectual, young or old, who had the courage to speak up" against current trends and majority opinion.[119] In Amatu, even an educated man like the elder Abadi (M.A., Ph.D.) is depicted as selling out his principles and using his educated speech simply as a tool to get and keep power. The picture of authority, and of all society, in the book is uniformly corrupt, and it is only in escaping to the hut of social outcasts, the witch and the cripple, that Okolo can find any psychological freedom or any understanding.

Okara tries to balance the alienation of this political theme, however, at his second level, that of culture and language, where he ostensibly stresses the continuity and communality of Ijaw tradition. The conversations of the chief's messengers and of the village elders seem to evoke Ijaw drama, and the presence throughout the novel of river imagery, and of the coming and going of spirits by water, seems also to have analogues in Ijaw myth, though there is as yet no published discussion of either aspect. It is the linguistic component that has been heavily discussed. Okara tries to reproduce in English the idioms and word-order of his native Ijaw language, not just for speech but also for the narrative itself, doing consciously for artistic effect what Tutuola had stumbled into

[118] Okara, *The Voice* (London: Heinemann Educational 1969), p. 50. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[119] Interview of December 1, 1972, in *Dem-Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Austin, Texas: African and Afro-American Studies and Research Center, 1974) pp. 42–43; this political theme accounts for many of the parallels with *Hamlet* discussed by Sunday Anozie, "The theme of alienation and commitment in Okara's *The Voice*," *Bulletin of the Association for African Literature in English*, No. 3 (1965), 54–67.

in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Okara's programme was to "make his writing African" in language as well as subject.[120] Sometimes the effect is a rather cloying pseudo-naivety ("We are know-God people", p. 32), or mere quaintness ("his umbilical cord is in the ground of this town buried," p. 74), and the translation of the verb "to be" is especially awkward ("Who are you people be?", p. 26). The repeated idioms are more effective, however, as when Okolo is described by the villagers as having "no shadow" (p. 23), and the repetition of such idioms, inevitably strange to the majority of readers, and of special word-usages (like "inside", for mind and soul and inner self, all at once), builds up its own quasi-poetic structure of meaning.[121] The process of such "translingualism", as of all literal translation, means that there are very few dead metaphors, and it makes even ordinary sentences vividly pictorial. Even the inversion of modern English word-order into the normal Ijaw order of subject-object-verb gives an almost medieval, surreal effect to the narrative. The extent of such linguistic deviation should not be exaggerated,[122] but the overall consequence of Okara's way of using Ijaw culture and language, because of its eccentricity even to most Nigerian readers, is, paradoxically, to reinforce, not the sense of a communal culture, but the strangely personal nature of the novel's vision.

It is on the third level, symbolic meaning, that the novel's power rests. Throughout the book, even simple narrative descriptions are charged with moral significance, as, for instance, in this passage, where Okolo is voluntarily returning by canoe to Amatu, to face almost certain death:

> Every available space was occupied, not even a space to stretch his legs. So Okolo sat with his knees drawn up to his chin, trying not to touch anybody's body. This little he had now learned. He smiled in his inside. But is it possible for your body not to touch another body, for your inside not to touch another inside, for good or bad? (p. 110)

Okolo's response to the crowding of the canoe clearly symbolizes both the alienation forced on him by his recent experiences, and his feeling of revulsion against that alienation.[123] But the symbolism is universal as well as local (one of the running images of the book is Okolo's experience of darkness), and it is also structural. As E. N. Obiechina has pointed out, the plot of the novel follows the Passion of Christ in the sequence of teaching, being mocked, persecution, rejection by the crowd and by the learned men, and a redemptive acceptance of unjust death.[124] The analogy with Christ is suggested also by the occasional biblicism of language (they "opened not their mouths", p. 40). Behind the surreal nightmare of Okolo's inner struggles, and the

[120] Okara, "African speech," and cf. *Dem-Say*, pp. 43–45.

[121] Bernth Lindfors, "Gabriel Okara: the Poet as Novelist," *Pan-African Journal*, 4 (1971), 420–425; Donald Burness, "Stylistic Innovations and the Rhythm of African Life in Okara's *The Voice*," *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, 13/14 (1972), 13–20; and cf. the very critical comments in Abiodun Adetugbo's essay "Form and Style," in *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (New York: Africana, 1972), pp. 173–192, especially p. 180.

[122] See Taiwo, *Culture and the Nigerian Novel*, pp. 69–73, for a study of Okara's stylistic variety.

[123] On the symbolic nature of the narrative description, see Arthur Ravenscroft, "Introduction," in Gabriel Okara, *The Voice* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969), pp. 1–21.

[124] E. N. Obiechina, "Art and Artifice in Okara's *The Voice*," *Okike*, I, 3 (1972), 23–33.

intensity of physical description through which they are presented, lies, if not a specifically Christian, at least syncretistic, religious quest for renewed "belief in something" (p. 88). As Okolo says, "Belief and faith in that something we looked up to in times of sorrow and joy have all been taken away and in its stead what do we have? Nothing but a dried pool with only dead wood and skeleton leaves" (p. 89). The novel implies a nameless religion, the common goal of "Christians, Moslems, and Animists" alike (p. 112), but it is not so much the belief, but rather the search for belief and the threat such a search poses to conventionality, that Okara is stressing. He allows a concluding hint that Okolo's passion will not be in vain, that his teaching will be remembered in Amatu, and that a time will come when society is healed, even though Okolo must first be drawn into the whirlpool and the river must close over him "as if nothing had happened" (p. 126), but this hope, like the existence of Okolo's "it", remains a matter of faith, sustaining the novel but not to be demonstrated within it.

Aluko and Okara faced the tensions of their generation with different literary strategies. Aluko's realism was, in general, dismissed by contemporary critics as timid and inauthentic, while, aside from some reservations about language use, Okara's novel received considerable early praise, particularly from non-African critics, not so much for what it achieved as for its ambitions as an experiment in Africanness, "something new", "a form that could be handed on" and developed by others.[125] Looking back now, we can see how much such a relative valuation of the two authors reflected critical presuppositions about what African novelists ought to be doing, rather than offering an analysis of the books themselves. The privateness and self-absorption of Okara's novelistic mode has found little echo in subsequent Nigerian writing; by and large, the Nigerian novel since the mid-sixties has been more concerned with the interplay of individual and social worlds, than with private visions. To a more recent, African, critic, *The Voice* appears, not as a beginning, but as "the swan-song of the Period of Romanticism" in African literature.[126] Both novelists, the work-a-day realist and the messianic visionary, were attempting in the wake of colonialism to cope with the literary problems raised by the threatening multiplicities of language, culture, and value, and both suggest an underlying sense of tragedy, in surprising contrast to the official and widely diffused cultural optimism of the Independence period.

[125] John F. Povey, "Changing Themes in the Nigerian Novel," in *New African Literature and the Arts, I*, ed. Joseph Okpaku (New York: Crowell, 1970), p. 40; Adrian A. Roscoe, "Okara's unheeded voice: explication and defence," *Busara* 2, 1 (1969), 16–22.

[126] Sunday O. Anozie, "The Problem of Communication in Two West African Novels," *The Conch*, 2, 1 (1970), 12–20.

CHINUA ACHEBE

Chinua Achebe[127] was one of the first graduates of Ibadan University College and had contributed short sketches and editorials (the former reprinted in *Girls at War and Other Stories*) to the Ibadan *University Herald* and to *Bug*. Those early pieces gave little intimation of the subtle craftsmanship and profundity that were to characterize his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, completed in the same year that saw the first issue of *Black Orpheus*, although not published until 1958. It is a novel which shows the influence of neither of the two most significant Nigerian novelists who preceded him, Ekwensi and Tutuola, but which responds most immediately to Europeans who set their novels in Africa, to Greene, Haggard, Conrad, and especially to Joyce Cary:

> I know around '51, '52, I was quite certain that I was going to try my hand at writing, and one of the things that set me thinking was Joyce Cary's novel set in Nigeria, *Mister Johnson*, which was praised so much, and it was clear to me that it was a most superficial picture of—not only of the country, but even of the Nigerian character and so I thought if this was famous, then perhaps someone ought to try and look at this from the inside.[128]

Achebe's "inside" story of the Nigerian clerk who takes bribes while working for the British administration, of the clerk's disgrace and of the coming together of African and European modes of thought, finally became two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, the second of which at first glance seems to carry the burden of responding to Cary's story. But while the plots of *Mister Johnson* and *No Longer at Ease* are similar, thematically *Things Fall Apart* takes up the issues raised by the Cary novel. It is, as the statement quoted above suggests, an attempt to give a less "superficial" and distorted picture "not only of the country, but even of the Nigerian character". It also takes up the themes of intuitive feeling as opposed to rigidly dogmatic statements and codes, liberalism and conservatism, creativity and sterility. Cary's novel supposes Mister Johnson the spontaneous and natural African man of feeling in conflict with both a corrupt but unchanging native culture and a European civilization of abstract ideals without feeling. Achebe contrasts the rigidity of his central character, Okonkwo, who insists on a firm and unbending adherence to the letter of the law of the clan (and in this resembles the missionaries and the District Comissioner who come to bring "enlighten-

[127] Recent books dealing with Chinua Achebe are: a revised edition of G. D. Killam's *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (1969) re-titled *The Writings of Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1977); *Critics on Chinua Achebe 1970–76*, ed. John Agetua (Benin City: Author, 1977); *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, ed. C. L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1978); and a new edition of Arthur Ravenscroft, *Chinua Achebe* (Harlow: Longmans, 1978). For bibliographical information, see Victoria K. Evalds, "Chinua Achebe: Bio-Bibliography and Selected Criticism," *African Journal* 8 (1967), 101–130 and *Current Bibliography on African Affairs* 10 (1977–1978), 67–87; Bernth Lindfors, "A Checklist of Works by and about Chinua Achebe," *Obsidian*, 4,1 (1978), 103–117; E. Saint-André-Utudjan, "Chinua Achebe: A Bibliography," *Annales de l'Université du Bénin, Togo:* Série Lettres 4,1 (1977), 91–103.

[128] Chinua Achebe in an interview with Lewis Nkosi, in *African Writers Talking*, ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Denis Duerden (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 4.

ment" to the supposedly benighted Igbos) with the intuitive compassion felt by Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who becomes a Christian convert. Whereas in Cary's novels these opposing tendencies of prosaic dogma and poetic feeling cluster around European and African respectively, in *Things Fall Apart* they become associated in Okonkwo's mind especially, but also in the reader's, with masculine and feminine.[129]

The fact that the conflicts are located *in* the African community, although shadowed by the British characters, in itself marks a significant break with traditions established by European novelists, for in Achebe's drama the Africans are complex individuals, not mere symbols of qualities which, however important, are nevertheless subordinate elements in the total composition of the European psyche.

In responding to Cary's characterization of Mister Johnson, however, Achebe was concerned not merely with presenting a fuller cast, but also with creating a self-contained world, which the European world might shadow—in all senses of the word. More importantly, in terms of the later novels both by Achebe himself and those who have been influenced by him, the author is concerned with portraying not *an* African, a free-floating character who is the sum of the author's perceptions, accurate or inaccurate, of various African clerks, servants and "pagans", but *Igbos* who are the products of a particular culture at a particular time and place. Okonkwo's values, his thoughts and actions all grow out of Igbo values, Igbo sayings, an Igbo system of rewards and punishments. And by the end of the novel, the reader has come to see Okonkwo in Igbo terms ("from the inside") as "a great man", and not from the outside as a character whose story might make an interesting paragraph in the British District Commissioner's account of *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.*

Readers of the many contemporary African novels influenced by Achebe's work may easily forget the extent to which *Things Fall Apart* was breaking new ground in its attempt to tell the story of Nigerians "from the inside." It was an attempt which involved a divergence from the ways in which European novels had conceived of and judged Africans, and from their narrative technique, a technique which grew out of a long and specifically literary tradition, assuming certain conventions and relationships between writer and reader. The opening paragraph of *Things Fall Apart* immediately suggests another tradition, another set of conventions and relationships:

> Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights.[130]

[129] Recent studies of Achebe's first novel include Yedieti E. Coulibaly, "Weeping Gods: A Study of Cultural Disintegration in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan, Série D*, 9 (1976), 531–542; Emmanuel Groga-Bada, "Okonkwo ou la volonté d'un destin exemplaire," Ibid., 521–530; Kate Turkington, *Chinua Achebe:* Things Fall Apart, (London: Arnold, 1977).

[130] *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976), p. 3.

Not only does this passage introduce Okonkwo as a heroic figure and wrestler (who will be seen to wrestle with others, with his *chi,* his father's heritage, his own character, and with the white man), but it also reveals the primary characteristics of the narrative voice. His world is that of the nine villages from Umuofia to Mbaino; areas outside of these boundaries have little significance as yet, belonging simply to that vague realm "beyond." His values are those of his society, recognizing "solid personal achievements" and approving those who thus bring honour to their village, a value which in turn emphasizes the close tie between individual success and the welfare of the community. And he is the recorder of a legend which will link up with the legends recorded by the old men of other great heroes and wrestlers. As in other tales which are primarily oral in tradition, such as *The Iliad* or *Beowulf,* history, myth and legend are closely connected; poetry and history are intertwined. The narrative voice is primarily a recreation of the persona heard in tales, history, proverbs and poetry belonging to an oral tradition; it represents a collective voice through which the artist speaks *for* his society, not as an individual apart from it—he is the chorus rather than the hero. As such he embodies the values and assumptions of his community, its traditions, its history, its past; and the present must be seen as growing out of that past, a product of it, as Okonkwo is seen as a product of his community and its structures.

The opening paragraph also suggests a kinship between the speaker and his implicit audience, for instance in the assumption that values are shared in regard to what constitutes worth-while achievements. A sharp awareness of the needs of the audience, its call upon the speaker, is implied in the very qualities which make both the opening paragraph and the work as a whole, with its numerous digressions and episodic structure, reminiscent of oral composition. Explanations like that concerning the identity of Amalinze and the source of his nickname are inserted as the narrator feels his fictive audience's need for them, not with regard to a preconceived structure and sense of proportion.

The nature of the story of Okonkwo as legend and as an embodiment of an oral tradition is particularly significant when contrasted with the closing paragraph of the novel, in which the British District Commissioner contemplates what is to be *his* record of the events which the novel has just related.

The end of the book emphasizes not only the replacement of Igbo culture by English culture, and of the Igbo language by the English language, but the displacement of the oral tradition by the written. Legend is supplanted by history; the oracular statement and proverb by continuous prose. With this change comes the self-absorbed and self-conscious concern with form, with the nature of the book, its chapters and paragraphs and title. The audience has become distant and impersonal—a vague and passive entity for which "the story of Okonkwo would make interesting reading."

The language used by the narrator is also closely related to the speech of the Igbo characters who are the centre of the novel. Expressions and proverbs used by Okonkwo, Obierika and others are repeated or echoed by the narrator, and thus the identity of the narrator as spokesman for the Igbo community is emphasized. At the same time, the dialogue is seasoned with proverbs which, while giving the conversation flavour, for

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TUDOMÁNYOS AKADÉMIA
KÖNYVTÁRA

"proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten," also characterize the speaker, his mood, and the values of the society he represents.

While the ending of *Things Fall Apart* emphasizes the gap between the British and the Igbo perspectives and cultures, Achebe's second novel, *No Longer At Ease* (1960,[131] presents the unhappy coexistence of those two cultures in the mind of Okonkwo's grandson, Obi (a back-to-front Igbo!). Like Mister Johnson, Obi is a man caught between two cultures, with the result that lacking any deeply felt moral conviction, he falls into debt, takes bribes and is condemned by the colonial legal system, becoming to the outsider yet another example of the intrinsically corrupt and debilitated "African" character.

But if the outsider's analysis of Obi's downfall is inadequate, so too is that of the insider, the people of Unuofia, his home village, who sent Obi to England, paid his legal fees, and now seek to help their kinsman. For the Umuofians the answer is that Obi has insufficient knowledge, that he has not learned the white man's skills adequately, and so he is found out. Obi's tragedy is that he recognizes the inadequacy of both attitudes; there is no one authoritative voice which can speak for him, and the two voices which coexist in his consciousness are flattened voices without moral or emotional depth. The tone and narrative voice of the novel is correspondingly flat and uncommitted, a detached voice which owes allegiance to no community and suggests most closely the literary observer that Obi's degree in English Literature has trained him to be. While the flatness of character and tone seems right for the subject, it has inevitably led readers who expected another *Things Fall Apart* to be disappointed by *No Longer at Ease*.

Insofar as it is the story of the interaction between colonists and colonized, *Arrow of God* (1964), set about twenty years later than *Things Fall Apart* (and about the same time as *Mister Johnson*), can be seen as yet another response by Achebe to Cary. It is a response which, as Robert Wren has argued,[132] seeks to illustrate complexities of cause and effect barely guessed at by Joyce Cary and his colonial administrators. And in both works the building of a road is a significant event which is both cause and symbol of the disruption of the ordinary, everyday world of the indigenous society.

But while the concern with making a response, a counter-statement might be seen as dominant in *Things Fall Apart*, and perhaps in *No Longer At Ease*, the central concern of *Arrow of God* is not so much to assert the worth of that indigenous society as to explore it. The world in *Arrow of God* differs from that of *Things Fall Apart* not just in historical setting; the difference is not merely twenty years, although many critics have written as if the white man's presence and the difference between Ezeulu as priest and Okonkwo as warrior were all. The greatest difference between Umuofia and Umaro arises from the stress on complex relationships and rivalries, the *jealous* concern for status which influences almost every social contact in *Arrow of God*. Okonkwo, although a

[131] See Alain Severac, 'Structure causale dans *No Longer at Ease*," *Annales de la faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Dakar* 7 (1977), 115–148.

[132] Robert Wren, "*Mister Johnson* and the Complexity of *Arrow of God*" in Innes and Lindfors op. cit., pp. 207–218. See also M. M. Mahood, *The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels* (London: Collings, 1977), pp. 37-64; Charles Nnolim, "A Source for *Arrow of God*," *Research in African Literatures*, 8 (1977), 1–26 and C. L. Innes' reply, ibid. 9 (1978), 16–18; Robert M. Wren, "From Ulu to Christ: The Transfer of Faith in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*," *Christianity and Literature*, 27,2 (1978), 28–40.

product of his society's valuation of achievement, is seen as an extremist in an otherwise harmonious and almost placid community. But Ezeulu, the novel's priest-hero, is surrounded by a whole web of conflicts and rivalries: his eldest son, Edogo, is troubled by his father's preference for the younger sons, Obika and Nwafo; his two wives are constantly quarrelling and jealously guarding the rights of their children; the children are also seen more often than not quarrelling, and in one rare peaceful scene, they are telling one another a chant of vengeance. There is rivalry between the wealthy Nwaka and Ezeulu, and between the priest Idemili and Ezeulu, as well as between the different villages, so that at the time of the story "few people from the one village would touch palm wine or kolanut which has passed through the hands of a man from the other."[133]

One mark of the difference between the two communities of Umuofia and Umuaro is in the story-telling. Whereas the predominant "voice" of *Things Fall Apart* is the collective one, and the perspective is a fairly unified one, so that the shock of the District Commissioner's differing perspective when one reaches the final pages is all the more effective by contrast, the voices of *Arrow of God* are much more various. Not only are we given the contrasting cultural perspectives of Igbo and British communities, but also a series of contrasting views and voices within each community. On Government Hill, Wright is excluded from the bleak social gatherings of Winterbottom and Clarke; Clarke sees Winterbottom as smug and oldfashioned; Winterbottom is bitterly opposed to the Lieutenant Governor's directives concerning indirect rule. And in Ezeulu's home village of Umuchu, there are a number of quite different views—not only those representing the conflict between generations, and between Christians and traditional believers, but also the opposing views and statements of Ezeulu and Ezidemili concerning the founding of Umuchu and the status of their gods, between Ezeulu and Nwaka concerning the farmland claimed by Okperi, and between Akuebue and Ofoka concerning the motives for Ezeulu's actions. In the dispute between Nwaka and Ezeulu, the reader is given no indication which version is correct, and it is Nwaka's rhetorical skill, together with his insinuations concerning Ezeulu's bias towards his mother's home village, that sways the assembly. Of course, the reader may have his own personal bias in Ezeulu's favour and, like Ezeulu, he may feel that the outcome proves Ezeulu right, whether we see in it the hand of Ulu or some other form of Providence!

This variety of perspectives and their lack of resolution is fundamental to the theme of the novel in three ways: first, in comparison with *Things Fall Apart*, it proves a much more convincing and complex portrayal of a traditional community and the tensions and rivalries which make it active and vital; secondly, this varied community becomes both the background and the most stringent test for the traditional Igbo forms of policy-making and leadership, for the balancing and reconciling of rival claims, and for raising issues concerning individual and communal authority; thirdly, these opposing perspectives are concerned with the central theme of the novel, the problem of "knowing", a problem with which Ezeulu wrestles in the first chapter of the novel, as his mind, "never satisfied with shallow satisfactions," creeps to "the brinks of knowing" (p. 4): to put it

[133] All quotations and page references are from the revised edition of *Arrow of God* published by Heinemann Educational, London, 1974.

another way, *Arrow of God* is "about" the problem of authority, about the related questions of whom or what to believe (and follow), and if, as David Carroll complains, "the author is unwilling to commit himself finally on the precise relationship between inner and outer, between Ezeulu's need for power and the god he worships, between Winterbottom's aggressiveness and the rituals of power he practises,"[134] it may be because Achebe wishes to leave the reader involved in the problem of "knowing". Moreover, the problem of knowing is intimately bound up with questions of language (or languages), with "naming" and the power to manipulate words and ask the right questions. Like the priest Ezeulu, Achebe in this novel "creeps to the brinks of knowing," and takes his reader on a profoundly philosophical exploration of the limits of knowledge, power and action, of the nature and function of man-made gods, and of man's responsibilities to his god and his community.

Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, published in 1966, is set in contemporary Nigeria amidst political events leading to a military coup.[135] Although Odili, the callow young narrator is very different from the proud priest who dominates *Arrow of God*, Achebe's latest novel does continue in a different mode his exploration of the themes of language and power, of the manipulation and abuse of both, and of the individual's responsibility to his community. Like *No Longer at Ease*, it is concerned with the lack of an authoritative voice which can speak for the whole nation, but the narrator's optimism and zest for life, as well as his opponent's effrontery and vitality, both charming and dangerous, and the excitement of the political campaign, give *A Man of the People* humour, vigour and variety lacking in the earlier novel.

The Civil War and Achebe's involvement as an official spokesman for the Biafra cause put a temporary end to his novel-writing. Since 1966, however, he has published a volume of poems, *Christmas in Biafra*, and a collection of short fiction, *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972). As the titles suggest, many of the works in these volumes are responses to the experiences, attitudes and scenes he encountered during the Civil War. So too is the moving fable for children, *How the Leopard Got his Claws* (1972), written with John Iroaganachi. Achebe's concern with providing Nigerian children with an authentic Nigerian literature has been a continuing one, and his other children's books include *Chike and the River*, *The Drum*, and *The Flute*.

Dating from 1964, the essays in *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (1975) express Achebe's insistence on the writer's responsibility to his community and on the need to establish worthy models and criteria—and specifically African criteria—for writing in Africa. That need was also the motive for the founding of *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing*, which Achebe edits at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka.

Both as a creative writer and as a critic Achebe has had considerable influence, particularly on younger African writers. Since the early sixties, *Things Fall Apart* has

[134] *Chinua Achebe* (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 118. Carroll's work is the most substantial and subtle of the three published book-length studies of Achebe's novels.

[135] Nkwelle Ekaney, "Corruption and Politics in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*," *Présence Africaine*, 104 (1977), 114–126; Chukwudi Maduka, "Irony and Vision in Achebe's *A Man of the People*", *Ba Shiru*, 8,1 (1977), 19–30; Koku Amuzu, "The Theme of Corruption in *A Man of the People* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*," *Legacy*, 3,2 (1977), 18–23; E. N. Obiechina, "Post-Independence Disillusionment in Three African Novels," *Nsukka Studies in African Literature*, 1,1 (1958), 54–78.

become a standard text for school and university study, and more recently *Arrow of God* has been prescribed in many African schools. Writers such as Agunwa, Nwankwo, Nwapa, and Munonye have taken up the theme of the conflict between European and Igbo tradition as well as the proverbial or African English style of which Achebe is a master. Some writers have taken up this theme and style to satirize it; others have seen him as the father figure from whom they must break away. Whatever their reaction, Achebe's position as the founder of a new tradition of novel writing in Africa, his mastery of that tradition, his profound concern with the cultural and social development of his nation and the writer's contribution to it, make him a figure that no writer, reader or critic of African literature can ignore.

ALAIN SEVERAC

THE IGBO NOVELISTS

In the wake of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* a spate of novels flowed from Eastern Nigeria, as though potential authors had only been waiting for a signal to start writing. One may wonder whether these novelists were impelled by a true sense of calling or whether, true to the Igbo spirit of enterprise, they just ventured into literature as others did into religion or into trade. Most of them obviously took their inspiration from Achebe—some candidly acknowledging the debt—partly from a lack of personal inspiration, partly in an attempt to reproduce a recipe which had proved enormously successful with *Things Fall Apart.* Among these early novelists two trends can be distinguished, one comic and satirical, the other realistic and sociological. Both are present in Achebe, whose art is in part characterized by the subtle interplay of irony and seriousness. None of his followers really tried to emulate this. While Nwankwo, Egbuna and Ike are primarily comic writers, the other six novelists, (Amadi, Agunwa, Akpan, Munonye, Nwapa and Nzekwu) adopt a more serious tone, justified by their description of the harsh realities of Igbo village life but too often reminiscent of the ponderousness of sociological treatises.

As early as 1961, Ekwensi and Achebe, the two Igbo fathers of the Nigerian novel, were joined by Onuora Nzekwu (b. 1928) with a full-size novel, *A Wand of Noble Wood,* which was rightly hailed as a promise of future prosperity for Nigerian creative writing in English. A Catholic school-teacher, Nzekwu was a less fastidious and discriminating writer than Achebe, without his mastery of English and of novelistic techniques. This was all the more painfully evident as there were some superficial similarities between his first novel and *No Longer at Ease,* which had appeared the year before: Nzekwu's hero, Peter Obiese is a westernized journalist, whose love for Nneka is thwarted by the fact that she is under a family curse. Yet the situation is not exactly the same: although Peter pays lip-service to modern scepticism, he does his best to go through the rituals that are supposed to lift the curse; the rites do not work because some white stone is missing, and Nneka commits suicide rather than have Peter come under the curse with her.

A Wand of Noble Wood is the work of an apprentice. Characters often seem to exist only for the purpose of asking one another leading questions. The language itself, particularly in the numerous dialogues, is unnatural, making the characters even less convincing. The central theme, marriage, offers the writer an opportunity to describe native marriage customs. The latter half of the novel, devoted to the marriage negotiations and to the preparations for the wedding is a little less prone to didacticism and Nzekwu scores a notable aesthetic achievement with the dramatic death of Nneka. As Martin Tucker was to put it, "what distinguishes the book is Nzekwu's use of supernatural devices without irony."[136] The writer strongly identifies with the magic beliefs that control tribal life. In spite of the heavy load of ethnological commentary that overburdens the story, this was the first modern novel in which an attempt was made to render the specific quality of traditional life, a trend which remained Nzekwu's peculiar theme, although his example was to be followed by a number of Nigerian, especially Igbo, writers.

In spite of Nzekwu's own claim that his main interest was the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the African's attempts to reconcile new practices with long-established customs; it is significant that his next novel, *Blade among the Boys* (1962), also ends in the defeat of the new way of life. The hero, Patrick Ikunga, wants to become a Catholic priest in the face of stiff opposition from his family: they object to his rejection of ancestor worship and are horrified at his acceptance of celibacy and childlessness. Here again tradition triumphs in the end, as Patrick is thrown out of the seminary after impregnating a pretty girl who had given him a magic love potion. The central theme is criticism of the Christian religion and priests as they operated in south-east Nigeria in the first half of the century. This criticism however is weakened by the purely negative portrayal of the Catholic hierarchy, which proves both narrow-minded and unjust. Under the circumstances one finds it difficult to understand Patrick's vocation: it is justified neither by reasons of social prestige and material welfare,—since the traditional priesthood has more to offer him in these respects—nor by spiritual reasons, for Patrick shows no signs of an over-sensitive conscience when he starts "eating bribe" and womanizing as soon as the opportunity arises. His sudden renunciation of his "vices" and application for admission to the seminary seem based on mere caprice, and so does the later episode in which he goes to bed with Nkiru, the wife his family had chosen for him. The same inconsistency of characterization is to be found in Nkiru herself and in Patrick's mother. The less important characters, being mere types, are more successfully drawn. On the whole, however, this second novel exhibits a marked improvement in language and in the fusion of character and incident. Though not highly individualized, the language becomes plausible and, in description, even evocative. Priesthood performs the same function as an emblem of westernization vainly trying to oppose traditional belief and custom in *Blade among the Boys* as love did in *Wand of Noble Wood*. This thematic parallel results in structural similarities which were shrewdly pointed out by John Povey in the first critical article devoted to Nzekwu's work: in both novels,

[136] Martin Tucker, *Africa in Modern Literature* (New York: Ungar, 1967), p. 95.

> There are a series of incidents which lead with treacherous expectation towards a happy and 'modern' solution. Then this hope is destroyed by violent magic power.... The traditional forces and their magic are invariably victorious. Nzekwu appears to be indicating that the pressures of tradition will always overcome the specious belief in enlightened ways. There is no escape in rationality here. This conclusion would be doubly pessimistic because as the situation is presented there is no evidence that Nzekwu is making any claim of superiority for the traditional values, only remarking upon their consistent power. Victory is not awarded to the better, more moral side of this continuous debate.[137]

It is therefore hardly surprising that *Blade among the Boys* should suffer, like *A Wand of Noble Wood,* from the intrusion of sociological comment and from long disquisitions on the merits and demerits of priests and of religious practices. *Highlife for Lizards* (1965) almost completely eschews the faults of the earlier novels. Here, as is the case with all successful Igbo novels, village life is seen from the inside. Like Achebe and later Amadi, Nzekwu blends history with the daily life of the individual, making his protagonist participate in the resistance movement against the British administration, which was to culminate in the historical Aba riots. But Nzekwu's most significant innovation is that this is the first West African novel in English to centre on the life of a married woman in a polygamous household, a theme first employed some thirty years earlier by Hazoumé in *Doguicimi* and by Plaatje in *Mhudi.* Indeed, the greatest achievement of the novel is the creation of three convincing characters: Agom, her husband Udezue, and his second wife, Nwadi. The reactions of the three characters to the main issues of the novel—childlessness, polygamy, the relationships with others, participation in communal life, change—are entirely personal but still they tell us more about the Igbo way of life than the earlier novels had done. Nzekwu's Agom is one of the most impressive portrayals of African womanhood, and her story, which takes place during the first half of this century in a traditional township, makes short work of a number of prejudices or generalizations, some of them encouraged by African writers themselves: though Agom remains childless for many years, she does not lose her self-respect or her husband's love; like Ekwensi's Jagua Nana, albeit in very different circumstances, she seeks and finds fulfilment in trade and thus acquires wealth and status; she comes to be held in great respect for her energy and wisdom, and even becomes the mouthpiece of the village women in their protest against some of the projects of the colonial administration. Whereas culture change in African novels and drama is mostly effected, or at any rate attempted, by educated characters who have been exposed to Western influence and consciously try to syncretize tradition and innovation, *Highlife for Lizards* emphasizes the forces for social change and individual adjustment built into the very texture of Igbo society. Nzekwu's remarkable achievement is due on the one hand to the almost complete absence of didactic statements, on the other to a marked improvement in his use of technique generally and language in particular. Every incident bears upon the lives of the characters, thus taking on dramatic significance: conflict takes place between individuals, not spokesmen and, as G. D. Killam writes,

[137] John Povey, "The Novels of Onuora Nzekwu," *Literature East and West,* 12, 1 (1968), 68–84.

The dramatic treatment is enhanced and supported by an abundance of imagery and metaphor almost wholly lacking in the first two novels, which adds an extra dimension of implication to the story.[138]

In spite of this, and of Nzekwu's very effective use of African proverbs and metaphorical phrasing the drama remains incidental, because he allows it neither to intensify into tragedy, nor even to disturb the peace of the characters in any lasting fashion.

The mid-sixties saw the emergence, year after year, of new Igbo novelists. The two writers who reached book publication in 1964, Obi Egbuna and Nkem Nwankwo, had one thing in common which had not featured prominently in modern Igbo fiction so far: a keen sense of comedy. *Wind versus Polygamy*, the only novel of Obi Egbuna (b. 1938) —who is chiefly known for his play, *The Anthill* (1965), and the collections of short stories he issued in the early seventies—diverges markedly from the pattern set by Achebe and soon to be followed by the majority of Igbo novelists. It is a humorous tract against the enforcement of monogamy among the polygamous Igbos. Egbuna spares us the tediousness which often attends on polemical writing by inventing a tightly-knit plot and enlisting the support of comedy and suspense. The structure is that of a four-act play. In the first act, Elina Ofodile is hard pressed by two suitors, neither of them eligible in her eyes, between whom she will be compelled to choose for family reasons. Father Joseph comes to her help by suggesting that she should appeal to the wisdom of Chief Ozumba. In the second act, Chief Ozumba solves the difficulty by marrying Elina himself, to the discomfiture of the priest and of the two suitors. This marriage affords the militant chief an opportunity to challenge the recently passed anti-polygamy legislation. The third act stages Chief Ozumba's trial and his triumph over his prosecutors, whom he dumbfounds by his scientific knowledge as much as by his reasoning. The jury recommends the suspension of the anti-polygamy bill. However, the fourth act culminates in the victory of monogamy when Elina, who had not actually been wedded to Chief Ozumba, is joined with his son in a strictly monogamous union. Egbuna's masterful handling of the plot, the vigorous characterization, the terseness of the dialogue, which replaces exposition, the constant humour and lightness of tone bring this work closer to drama than to the novel whose qualities of realism it lacks.

Like Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards*, then in the process of publication, *Danda* (1964) by Nkem Nwankwo (b. 1936) is located in an Igbo village some time after the Second World war. But unlike Nzekwu, Nwankwo is not interested in a clash between European and Igbo values, or in the impact of foreign influences upon native customs, though he occasionally alludes to the consequences of christianization. He is a humorist. His eponymous hero turns every aspect of communal life into a laughing matter. Danda is an *akalogholi*, a ne'er-do-well, who takes advantage of his father being a wealthy *ozo*, or titled man, to loaf about the village, playing his flute and jingling his bells, illicitly bearing the anklets of title and carrying the *ngwu agelega* or *ozo* staff, seducing the

[138] G. D. Killam, "The Novels of Onuora Nzekwu", *African Literature Today*, No. 5, (1971), 35.

chieftain's wife, stealing when his incensed father refuses to feed and house him, shirking every obligation, prancing about unruffled by unanimous disapproval when others would commit suicide in shame. An artist in his way, who makes a stand facing the antinomies of new and old, Danda is also a picaresque clown, who picks at his own sweet will among the items of tradition and of modernity and thus, in a way, makes havoc of both while maintaining a precarious, almost acrobatic, balance in his own self-centred world. But Nwankwo's witty irony lacks focus, as does the reckless vitality of Danda. This was felt as a weakness by Gerald Moore:

> Is *Danda* simply a picaresque novel with a type of vagabond-artist hero new to African ficton? Or does Nwankwo intend him as a personification of all that restlessness, that impatience of constraint and that insistence upon individual self-expression which dooms the traditional order to extinction? We are never quite sure.[139]

Sunday O. Anozie also emphasized Danda's "ambiguous indifference" to the problems of his society, and wondered in his turn whether this reflected the assurance of an optimistic individual, or the antics of a tired cynic.[140] But Nwankwo's comic touch provides perhaps a more faithful picture of how the acculturation process is actually experienced than does the ponderous pathos of many other African novelists.

The novel is loosely structured round the succession of Igbo festivals and the series of pranks played by Danda and condemned by the *ozos*. But while most other Igbo novels insist on the solemnity of festivals, the respect, for hierarchy, the weightiness of proverbial speech, Nwankwo shows the disorder and drunkenness which often prevail, the disrespect to elders and titled men, the endless, repetitive and meaningless speeches at communal meetings. Yet he is not really a satirist: he is a jester, using his gift of observation, his sense of ridicule and his untiring wit, not to castigate but merely to entertain. His potentialities for genuine satire were not to be realized until his second novel, *My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours* (1975).

This comic vein, first introduced by Egbuna and Nwankwo, was taken up by Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike (b. 1931) with *Toads for Supper* (1965), in which he exploited his experience first as a student at Ibadan, and later as a member of the administrative staff at Ibadan and at Nsukka. This first Nigerian university novel describes the plight of a college student whose tribal loyalties are eroded by university life. Chukwuko Amobi, an Igbo student in a college located in Yorubaland, is confronted with one dominant issue: marriage. He is saddled with three prospective wives: a"good-time girl" who claims he made her pregnant, the Igbo girl to whom he has been betrothed since childhood, and the girl of his own choice, a Yoruba student. While avoiding the pitfalls of sociological comment, Ike describes student life and the relations between students and staff with good-natured humour sometimes bordering on vulgarity. However the

[139] Gerald Moore, *The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World* (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 193.
[140] Sunday O. Anozie, *Sociologie du roman africain* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1970), p. 144.

loose structure, the shallow and inconsistent characterization which imparts an element of arbitrariness to the action, prevent the reader from taking the novel seriously and even from enjoying the humour. The would-be macabre and tragic ending fails to convince and only succeeds in seeming ludicrous.

Ike's second novel, *The Naked Gods* (1970), achieves greater unity of tone and action and combines the satire of the academic world with a topical and dexterous plot. The main theme is the competition between American and British academics for the control of the first university of Songhai, an emergent African nation. Feuds develop, supporters change sides, "cola" is offered, juju rules, and so does sex. Scholarly pursuits seem the only negligible feature of academic life and the occupation least likely to lead to promotion. Ike's satirical humour is here seen at its best. It spares no one among the Africans or the Europeans; it controls the delineation of the various academic types: it is responsible for the creation of a remarkable comic character, Mrs Ikin.

It can be said that as a comic novel *The Naked Gods* has fully achieved its purpose, much as Egbuna's *Wind versus Polygamy* had done. But Ike seems to have entertained other ambitions than the writing of satirical comedies: in his third novel, *The Potter's Wheel* (1973), without relinquishing his satirical outlook, he turned to the Igbo vein of regionalism and the description of village life, drawing on reminiscences from what Senghor had solemnly called "the kingdom of childhood."

The year 1965 also saw the publication of *The Wooden Gong*, by an older writer from Eastern Nigeria, Ntieyong Udo Akpan (b. 1924), who is not an Igbo but an Ibibio. The novel relates the fictional life history of a traditional chief, Imam, who is also the head of the local society of masqueraders, but whose adherence to Christianity and acceptance of colonial rule make him unfit to fulfil his spiritual and political role in his own society. As Sunday O. Anozie put it, when he is assassinated by his opponents at the end of the novel his death is presented as "the ultimate heroic act of a martyr":[141] it is meant to be a tragic ending, not an indictment of the protagonist, with whom the writer obviously sympathizes. Akpan's purpose is to defend and define the essential nature of traditional chieftaincy in Igboland. Chief Imam is described going about his daily business, not the least part of which is the drinking of palmwine—at a rate which Tutuola's "drinkard" would be happy to claim for his own. Both in his official and in his religious functions he is seen as devoted to communal discipline and welfare. Tolerant of churches, he makes every effort and every concession in order to promote education and, in a scene which calls to mind Ezeulu's relationship with Winterbottom in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, we witness his dignified cooperation with the British D.C. He succeeds in satisfying the legitimate demands of churchmen and traditionalists, in preventing most excesses and in using the strength of conflicting groups to promote the common good. His assassination gives Akpan the opportunity to denounce the excesses of 'spiritualists' as well as those of an unscrupulous police. The book is admittedly of only slight literary value: a series of incidents is used in lieu of plot and there is no attempt at characterization. Yet a sense of unity is provided by the person of Chief Imam who plays a part in almost every incident and who, though not really characterized in the round, finally

[141] Ibid.

offers a convincing and endearing picture of a public man, beset by communal problems, attacked by some villagers, betrayed by others, but always doing his best and doing it rather well. Furthermore, though the incidents are merely an excuse for an exposition of local customs and the role of the chief, Akpan usually allows the scenes to take place without undue interference in the form of sociological comment. He sometimes even succeeds in creating a sense of drama.

The year 1966, opening with the military coup that had been anticipated by Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People* was also decisive in the literary sphere because it witnessed the first appearance of three novelists who were to prove more faithful to their craft than most of the writers discussed so far.

Flora Nwapa (b. 1931), the first woman novelist in Nigeria, provided a much-needed complement to the masculine view of Igbo village life which, with the exception of Nzekwu's Agom, had dominated the first half-dozen years of Igbo fiction in English. Both in *Efuru* (1966) and in the later *Idu* (1970), her outlook and technique appear highly feminine. Both novels are named after the heroines whose married life they depict in all its material and emotional detail. Efuru and Idu experience love and hatred, communion and betrayal, sterility and fecundity, maternity and bereavement. They are at once exceptional and ordinary. Exceptional on account of their beauty and virtues, ordinary because they are confronted with the same problems as other women and do not fare any better than the majority. Efuru is betrayed twice and loses her only child; Idu is deprived of a loving husband and dies of grief. If cicumstances make the two heroines' lives different, their characters are much the same. They are images of the perfect Igbo woman, much as Pamela was for Richardson the ideal English girl of humble origin. The very perfection ascribed to such protagonists, though not unnatural, detracts from their credibility, and the misfortunes that befall them too often seem to be mere excuses for showing how to behave in adverse circumstances. Furthermore, Flora Nwapa relies heavily on gossip both as a structural device and as a substitute for action. A very large proportion of each novel consists of the exchange of news, the spreading of rumours, the giving of advice by women who meet at the market or at the stream, or call on each other. While this simplified technique is responsible for the aesthetic limitations of these stories, it enables the author to avail herself of her considerable gift for natural and lively dialogue and to convey a vast amount of information which, for all its being essentially ethnographical, is of considerable interest since the tales are set in a tribal context unadulterated by Western influences.

With *The Only Son* (1966), John Munonye (b. 1929) embarked on an unexpected career as the most prolific and assiduous of all Nigerian novelists, the author of six novels between 1966 and 1978. Yet, this firstling was just a heavy ethnographical novel recounting how a widowed mother's life is destroyed when she finds herself totally estranged from her son, whose new-fangled ideas she cannot accept or even understand. The ending is, to say the least, ambiguous: Nnana, the son, joins the Roman Catholic mission, and Chiaku, the mother, remarries; yet this is by no means a happy solution for, as Munonye explained, "it was far more honourable for a woman, once widowed, and provided she had a male child who would continue the lineage, to remain a widow."

Had it not been for the Catholic priest and his teachings, Chiaku would have found complete fulfilment in rearing her son as a service to her late husband and to his lineage.

This laborious and pedestrian narrative in fact inaugurated the central theme to which Munonye was to devote his first three novels, namely, the life of the early converts in Igboland where, as is well known, the Catholic missions had been especially active since 1889. While *The Only Son* discussed the background of early conversions and the socio-economic consequences attendant upon christianization, *Obi* (1969) takes the story a step further and examines some of the difficulties which a young Christian couple have to face on their return to their native village: having achieved comparative prosperity in the city Joe and Anna return home to rebuild the family homestead *(obi)* in compliance with Igbo custom. But Anna is sterile, and the main plot of the book deals with this ideal Catholic couple's resistance to various attempts made by Joe's family to have him take another wife, or else resort to witchcraft, in order to ensure the continuation of the family. Both cases, the Christian and the traditional, are put with clarity and objectivity, but, as is so often the case, the issue is evaded at the end: Anna is cured of her sterility through modern medical treatment in hospital.

Though the narrative avoids didacticism, the plots of the first two novels bear signs of manipulation and the characters remain two-dimensional. The drama of Chiaku, the widow with an only son, fails to move the reader deeply. As for Joe and Anna's struggle to defend their marriage against the whole village, it is often so obviously inspired by the old tradition v. Christianity debate, that the characters do not really come alive. It is a different matter with *Oil Man of Obange* (1971) which seems to illustrate Obi Okonkwo's definition of tragedy in *No Longer at Ease:*

> I remember an old man in my village, a Christian convert, who suffered one calamity after another. He said life was like a bowl of wormwood which one sips a little at a time world without end. He understood the nature of tragedy. (p. 39)

One would look in vain in Achebe's work for a better instance of a tragic existence than that of Jeri, the protagonist of Munonye's third novel. A Christian oil man who has set his mind on sending his five sons to school, he is dogged by one calamity after another: an accident, the death of his wife, disablement and finally the theft of his working equipment. He is saved from committing suicide by a merciful fit of madness soon followed by death. An indifferent, even slightly ridiculous character at first, Jeri gradually wins his way into the reader's heart by his stubborn courage and endurance. Pathos slowly but relentlessly intensifies to reach the climax of Jeri's sudden breakdown. We are reminded here of Ezeulu's tragic end.

Unlike several of the Igbo writers who had emerged in the mid-sixties, Munonye did not lose his inspiration as a novelist after the defeat of Biafra: *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973), *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974) and *Bridge of a Wedding* (1978) testify to a persevering productivity which is not to be compared with sustained inventiveness like Soyinka's, or with facile journalism like Ekwensi's. Munonye has things to say about his own experience and about his people and he says them quietly, almost humbly but, in the end authoritatively. His manner as a writer evokes that of Jeri, the oil man: he

does not indulge in wild flights of fancy but goes about his work with scrupulous honesty offering only unadulterated wares, trusting in his conscientiousness to achieve his aim. Some lines taken from the first page of *Oil Man of Obange* will sound almost like a caricature of both Jeri's and Munonye's workmanship:

> First, he removed the pair of shorts and, from habit, flicked it hard with both his hands before he began putting it on. This, of all his clothes, agreed with palm-oil best. Made of hard and black, dependable tarpaulin, the shorts had lasted him nearly two years now without noticeable signs of wear, except that the seat, from its squeaky, grinding, contact with the bicycle-saddle, was fast becoming threadbare...

The author then proceeds with the description of the shorts, passes on to the singlet and the hat, then to the loading of the tins of palm-oil on the bicycle and to the hazardous launching of the contraption. Munonye's resources are different from Achebe's though the two writers resemble each other in their sobriety. His language is poorer in imagery and his plots in invention; he achieves his effects in a more laborious way, but with *Oil Man of Obange* he had proved his ability to create a world of living characters acting out their simple human tragedy in a realistic atmosphere. It is this peculiar quality which, after the civil war, endeared him to younger generations of readers.

The most original and talented of the novelists that came forward in Eastern Nigeria in the mid-sixties was Elechi Amadi (b. 1934), an Ijaw from the Rivers State like John Pepper Clark and Gabriel Okara. *The Concubine* (1966) relates with exceptional authenticity and insight the tragic fate of a woman whose husbands die one after the other because, unbeknown to herself, she is the favourite of the jealous sea-god, who destroys all his human rivals. Like Flora Nwapa's *Efuru,* the story takes place in a village as yet unaffected by missionary or administrator: it thus appears as an imaginative reconstruction of pre-colonial life. Beautiful and strong-willed, intelligent and dedicated, hard-working and unpretentious, Amadi's heroine, Ihuoma, is yet another portrayal of the ideal African woman. This theme is of special interest in view of the many prejudices entertained outside Africa about the condition of women on the Black Continent. Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* had already shown the social function of woman—as glamour girl and/or merchant princess—in contemporary urban society. The portrait of Agom in Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards* emphasized the indomitable moral strength of a wife who keeps her household together in spite of her husband's weakness and her own sterility. Nzekwu also showed the part a woman could play in the running of village affairs. In contrast, Amadi's Ihuoma, like the protagonist of *Efuru,* is a passive figure, an idealized image of womanhood, utterly submissive to supernatural forces.

Indeed, Amadi's main concern is to investigate the role of the supernatural in traditional village life. While *The Concubine* made use of a love plot to achieve this, *The Great Ponds* (1970) centres on a war between two rival villages over fishing rights. Although this second novel seems to have a hero in the person of Olumba the warrior, the real subject matter is the feud over the ownership of the pond of Wagaba, and the means, natural and supernatural, licit and illicit, employed by the combatants. One of the dominant themes is the nature and efficacy of the priests who take part in the

struggle. They are all anxious to serve the community but, as their interventions counteract each other, no decision is reached and the villagers' demands for action grow louder. Wago, one of the war leaders, finally requests Igwu the priest to "cook" the champion of the enemy village. Igwu refuses at first, for "cooking" is witchcraft, forbidden by the gods and by the code of priests and medicine men. Amadi here tackles again one of the major issues of *Arrow of God*: can a priest decide against the will of his community? Ezeulu stood alone and was deserted by both god and community. Igwu yields, but far from ensuring the victory of his clan, he unleashes the wrath of the gods, releasing forces which he cannot control:

> But it was only the beginning. Wanjo, as the villagers called the great influenza of 1918 was to claim a grand total of some twenty million lives all over the world. (*The Great Ponds*, p. 217)

This is an allusion to the world epidemic that decimated many Nigerian villages: Amadi identifies completely with the African cosmology, which interprets all such events in terms of human guilt and divine vengeance. In no other African novel has the reader the feeling of being so completely immersed in an ancient utterly non-European world. But it is Amadi's distinctive gift that his objective manner of telling the story without attempting to superimpose modern rationalizations, gives an air of inevitability, verisimilitude and even matter-of-factness to the characters' uncanny experiences, to their involvement with supernatural forces. Whatever the reader's own beliefs, Amadi's novels seem neither implausible, nor extraordinary nor even unrealistic—at least no more so than *Wuthering Heights* or *Moby Dick*. Just like Achebe or Ngugi, he lets us enter the society which he describes; he makes us share in the lives of his heroes, he achieves the necessary suspension of disbelief and makes us participate in this existence governed by alien forces and the will of the gods. Characterization, the description of customs, are not his primary aims. The struggle between the forces of good and evil, the difficult relationship between men and gods through their priestly intermediaries, are described in such a perceptive, sympathetic and sensible way that the actions and beliefs of the characters appear entirely natural and logical.[142]

Although there are many cultural similarities between the Igbos and the other societies of Eastern Nigeria, many Ijaws were reluctant to embrace the cause of Biafra independence during the civil war. Amadi was one of them, and he was imprisoned on the orders of the Igbo leader, General Ojukwu. He gave up imaginative writing, but described his war experiences in *Sunset in Biafra* (1973).

The last Igbo novelist to have emerged in the sixties was a man of lesser talent, Clement Agunwa (b. 1936), whose only piece of creative writing, *More Than Once* (1967), is a clumsily written, boringly moralizing tale, reminiscent of the Onitsha pamphlets in spite of the author's ill-fated efforts to imitate Achebe's technique. The book

[142] These aspects of Amadi's work have been elaborated in the unpublished masters' dissertations of Mamadou Kane, *Man and the Supernatural in Elechi Amadi's Novels* (Dakar, 1974), and Fatou Kandji, *The Image and Role of the Priest in Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, The Concubine, The Great Ponds* (Dakar, 1979).

tells the edifying story of Nweke Nwakor, a gifted village boy who misses his chance of a school education and comes to realize that his later failure in business is the consequence of his illiteracy; a rather obvious and—considering that the writer was addressing an English-speaking audience—redundant plea for education, the book also contains the many anthropological digressions which second-rate African novelists seem to consider a service to their own societies and a matter of exotic interest for the European readership. Unfortunately, the homely scenes describing the daily activities of the village hardly contribute to the progress of the plot or the characterization of individuals, as they do in Achebe. Like his mentor, Agunwa resorts to a succession of flashbacks in order to relate the career of his hero, but after the first three chapters, he makes up his mind to start again at the beginning, following Nweke's fate chronologically from the days of his youth to his later misfortunes and ultimate ruin. Nor is the novel any better as regards characterization: while the most convincing and picturesque character is a minor figure who appears in his manifold roles as poacher, palmwine tapper, gate-carver, village monitor and masquerader all rolled into one, the protagonist himself is depicted without much success, indeed, with unusual lack of coherence: his temporary prosperity as an oil-merchant is hardly consistent with his helplessness in adversity, and his obvious weakness is in stark contradiction to his masterful way of controlling his authoritarian wife.

In retrospect, it seems that the most important event of the period was the publication of *The Interpreters* (1965), which signaled the entry of Wole Soyinka, the already well-known Yoruba playwright, into the field of narrative fiction. This was one, perhaps the very first one, of the few African novels whose author had outgrown the straightforward narrative devices of nineteenth-century realistic fiction to avail himself of the more sophisticated techniques introduced by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley. The main characters are representatives of the new élite: a journalist, a lawyer, a university lecturer, a painter, a foreign ministry official, and an engineer who is also a sculptor. These young Nigerian intellectuals of different origins, religions and professions are bound by friendship and a common wish to conduct their lives in fairness to themselves and their society. They are all highly intelligent and articulate. They are sharply differentiated in outlook and each of them is determined to think for himself. Think and talk is about all they do. The novel has no plot in the conventional sense, although events do occur, sometimes as flashbacks or else as projections into the future. Soyinka's target in this satirical story is not so much corruption—which is dealt with almost perfunctorily and as a matter of course—as phoneyness: the status-seeking and the hypocritical behaviour in government and university circles. The sheer exuberance of Soyinka's verbal genius, his intriguing symbolic use of Yoruba myths, and the complexity of his narrative technique have prompted some critics to blame him for "tedious and finally aimless virtuosity." But the rich imagery, the precision and sharpness of characterization, the wit and originality of the dialogue, above all, the sense of human drama which owes little to suspense or pathos, all combine in producing intensely vivid scenes.

The tone of *The Interpreters* ranges from the satirical and the burlesque to the poetic and the tragic. Now blunt and lethal, now allusive and tolerant, though ever critical, the

comprehensive picture it offers always remains concise, often to the point of being elliptical. This last quality, added to the relative complexity and discontinuity of the structure, has earned *The Interpreters* the reputation of a difficult novel. Actually, the unifying structure is more thematic than chronological and factual, but the simple pattern of initiation provides both unity and a strong sense of purpose, underlying the teeming multiplicity of themes. For *The Interpreters* brings out the various facets of a preoccupation that had become increasingly intense since the year of independence, when Soyinka had used the stage to warn his countrymen, in *A Dance of the Forests*, against the dangers of idealizing obsolete traditions. The writer's innovations in style and technique enabled him to convey with almost lyrical immediacy, the crushing sense of failure and disillusionment to which Ekwensi and Achebe were giving more classical shape—in *Beautiful Feathers* and in *A Man of the People*—during the same period. In his relentless search for intellectual and artistic honesty, Soyinka had sensed from the beginning of his writing career that negritude, or—as he was to put it two years later—"the myth of irrational nobility, of a racial essence that must come to the rescue of the white depravity, has run its full course."[143] In his dramatic works, he had vented his deep conviction that "the African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past." But although *The Interpreters* dealt with present-day Africa and made full use of local imagery and symbolism, the very choice of characters gave it a universality which Soyinka defined as the apocalyptic awareness that "the situation in Africa today is the same as in the rest of the world; it is not one of the tragedies which come from isolated human failures, but the very collapse of humanity."[144]

Whatever collapse was symbolized by the situation in Africa in the mid-sixties, it certainly marked the end of a period in the history of the Nigerian novel. For while the civil war which broke out in 1966 brought new inspiration to established authors as different as Soyinka and Munonye, and while it produced a new generation of writers, it caused others—Achebe, Amadi and lesser talents such as Egbuna—to give up the novel in favour of poetry, the short story, or autobiographical writing. And if several promising beginners of the sixties (Nwankwo, Nwapa) managed to bring forth one novel each in the course of the seventies, others (Akpan, Agunwa) had fallen silent.

[143] This and the following quotations come from a paper read by Wole Soyinka at the African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference held near Stockholm in February 1967: "The Writer in a Modern African State" in *The Writer in Modern Africa*, ed. Per Wästberg (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), pp. 14–21.

[144] For recent discussions of Soyinka's first novel, see L. R. Early, "Dying Gods: A Study of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 12, 2 (1977), 162–174, and John Docker, "Wole Soyinka as Novelist: *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*," *New Literary Review*, 1 (1977), 44–53.

JOEL 'YINKA ADEDEJI

5. WOLE SOYINKA AND THE GROWTH OF DRAMA

Modern Nigerian drama in English was born under the combined influences of Western acculturation and native inspiration. Through the educative process and other forms of exposure, the Nigerian playwright accumulates knowledge and information, both formal and informal. The environment in which he acquires his experience serves as a strong base for his creative activities and gives his artistic work orientation and focus. Invariably, he creates with a twinge of conscience which comes from a feeling of loss or commitment. His creations evince an aesthetic form which sums up the effects of his experience and conscience. In order for him to succeed his projective expressions must have intuitive recognition and identification.

The emergence of a new theatre culture and the influences that control its specificity raise intriguing questions concerning dramatic traditions and the typology of dramatic genres. Throughout its early phase, the artistic modalities of "modern" Nigerian drama were experimental and informative. Its main representatives were James Ene Henshaw (b. 1924), of Efik parentage, John Pepper Clark (b. 1935), of Ijaw origin, Yoruba playwright Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), Duro Ladipo (1931–1978), whose work, composed in Yoruba, is also available in English, and a writer who signed himself with the Yoruba name of Obotunde Ijimere, and whose true identity remained a mystery for several years. In spite of obvious background differences, apparent in the distinctive features of their plays, and with due regard to the complexity of detail in the works of each artist, the principle of artistic pursuit binds their output together into a unifying pattern.

The dynamism of the movement spans the period just before the home-coming of Wole Soyinka on the occasion of Nigeria's political independence in October 1960, to his incarceration in August 1967 during the Civil War. Soyinka's significant and distinguished contribution to the growth of Nigerian drama defines the essence of a "movement of transition" which, according to Soyinka himself, is the burden of severance and the experience of the process.[145] But in examining Nigerian drama from a historical

[145] In *The Road*, Soyinka describes the continuous search for the "Word" by the tragic hero of the play as the "movement of transition." According to Professor Oyin Ogunba in *The Movement of Transition: A Study of the Plays of Wole Soyinka* (Ibadan: University Press, 1975), pp. ix–x. Soyinka is concerned with a society which is moving from a state of colonialism to a new age of political and cultural awareness whose aim is, ostensibly, to restore the lost dignity of the individual and to rehabilitate an erstwhile battered culture. For bibliographical information see A. Olu Ashaolu, "A Bibliography of Modern Nigerian Drama in English," *World Literature Written in English*, 17 (1978), 372–421.

point of view, it must be emphasized that it did not begin with independence and that Soyinka was not its earliest practitioner. Actually, pre-independence Nigerian drama was championed by James Ene Henshaw, a Dublin-trained medical practitioner whose taste for the stage and knowledge of drama had been sharpened by exposure to the British theatre and by the study of English literature at school. Henshaw's first play, *This is Our Chance,* was first staged by the Association of Students of African Descent in Dublin in 1948 while the playwright was still a medical student. The title betrays the intention of its author. While not really relevant to the meaning of the play, it describes the stance of one of Africa's foremost playwrights in his pioneering effort. Of his next two plays, *A Man of Character* illustrates the antagonism between tradition and modern education, while exposing the frequency of bribe-taking among civil servants, and *The Jewels of the Shrine,* which won a prize in the All-Nigeria Festival of the Arts (Lagos, 1952), relates how a group of clever "modern" youths are foiled in their attempt to grab an old man's money. These first three plays[146] set the main theme of Henshaw's abundant output, which usually deals with the conflicts brought about by rapid social change. They had obviously been designed to meet the need for plays written by and produced for Africans in their own surroundings with familiar characters and with a will to preserve worth-while traditions. In the preface to his first play, Henshaw claims that stagecraft is one way in which writers can "catch the conscience" of people. The spectators must understand the situations and the things spoken about in the plays must have "relationship with the problems which face the African audience."[147]

Obviously, Henshaw wrote with the "school play" in mind. This was a production intended to enliven the English literature classes with a theatrical activity that gave flesh and blood to the class-room study of literary texts—play analysis and critical appreciation. The school play involved acting and memorization, dressing up in voluminous foreign costumes with a lot of mimicry, pretensions to role-playing and great faith in mimesis without any exercise of the imagination or any true involvement in the essence of creativity. When *This is Our Chance* was first printed in 1956, its impact was felt beyond the confines of he school hall where the plays became popular for end-of-the-year entertainments: for both dramatic societies and amateur theatre clubs the plays of Henshaw came as a respite from those of Shakespeare, Sheridan or Shaw. For many Africans they did create a genuine interest in play production. In view of its popular appeal due to the treatment of folk life and the cultivation of the moral aspect of man, *This Is Our Chance* is, to all intents and purposes, "a piece that we may fairly call our own."

By 1966 Henshaw had written and published more than ten plays but it is through content rather than form that an identification with his African consciousness can be effected. Short plays like *This is Our Chance, Jewels of the Shrine, Magic in the Blood* and *Medicine for Love* (1964) serve better as homilies than as works of art of intrinsic literary worth. The author does not attempt to interpret the reality of the African world

[146] They were published together in 1956 under the title *This is Our Chance: Plays From West Africa* (University of London Press) and have remained popular ever since; by 1970, the collection had gone through its tenth printing.

[147] Preface to *This is Our Chance,* p. 5.

he depicts beyond his presentation of the stereotype. The inhibiting impact of European attitudes and methods on his creative sensibilities leads to contradictions in his effort to "fit bedrock traditionalism into his everyday concept of a newer Africa."[148] By the middle of the nineteen-sixties, however, Henshaw's concern with the aesthetics of the theatre had developed to a point where it was possible to have a better appreciation of his commitment. In his introductory note to *Dinner for Promotion* (1967), he clarified his views on "The African Writer, the Audience and the English Language" by dealing with the problem of art for art's sake, concluding that "it is far more important today for African writers to explain Africans to each other than to Europeans or Americans."[149]

While *This Is Our Chance* (1956) served as a pace-setter for African drama and was heavily didactic, a later play such as *Children of the Goddess* (1964) shows the extent of Henshaw's exploration beyond the confines of cultural values and the felicities of language. He had realized that an African background was not enough, that the conventions of the "well-made play" were not the sine qua non of play-writing any more than the ethical value of the denouement, that the play must be a work of art, not a rehash of traditions and that it must be a product of creative insight. In *Children of the Goddess* (1964) the confrontation between the old and the new is resolved in a dynamic syncretism without the usual dialectical pretensions, and the play opens by transposing the convention of the proscenium stage into an arena of transcendental essence:

> A small bay, just where a little river passes near Labana. There is the usual abundant tropical vegetation with palms, tropical ferns and shrubs. Here and there are stumps of trees jutting out of the water. On one of these in the distance the head of a crocodile is visible. Over all this the setting sun makes an enchanting background of golden yellow, orange and red, the general effect of the scenery being peaceful and most pleasing to the eye.
> (Suddenly the crocodile submerges, the sun is hidden, the trees and leaves are moved by the wind. ASARI AMANSA and her MOTHER are frightened. They cling to each other whilst the storm continues.)[149/a]

This dramatic technique compares with a stage direction in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests:*

> Back scene lights up gradually to reveal a dark, wet atmosphere, dripping moisture, and soft, moist soil. A palm-tree sways at a low angle, broken but still alive. Seemingly lightning-reduced stumps. Rotting wood all over the ground. A mound or two here and there. Footfalls are muffled.[150]

The dramatic expression of a community and its social structure and religious beliefs are closely intertwined. Drama succeeds when it reflects the cultural needs and perceptions of the people whose life it mirrors. But the steady encroachment of Western

[148] James Ene Henshaw, *Medicine for Love* (University of London Press, 1964), Introduction, p. 13.
[149] Id., *Dinner for Promotion* (University of London Press, 1967), Introduction, p. 6.
[149/a] *Children of the Goddess* (University of London Press, 1964), p. 15.
[150] Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 68.

dramatic traditions as exemplified in the works of most African playwrights has become a perennial source of concern. Before the emergence of Wole Soyinka on the scene James Ene Henshaw's courageous onslaught could be regarded as an enthusiastic outburst designed to bring the African dramatist to his feet. But his efforts had turned out a poor alternative to the English treasury of plays he set out to replace. Soyinka's strategy started from a better vantage point for a well-directed attack. Sustained by a methodological approach which relates substance (subject-content) to form (technique or the whole body of means and devices employed to objectify the subject), Soyinka inaugurated a movement for a new theatre culture which is at once African and yet of universal applicability. According to him, there is a pressing need for the African to undergo the spiritual experience of total introspection and ruthlessly to exploit his African environment so as to achieve his own "regeneration". The purpose of the theatre is to impart experience, not to provide "meaning" or "moral"; it is "to set a riddle which gives the audience a headache, not only in the theatre but afterwards.[151]

Soyinka's dramatic models must be traced to his wide experience of the European theatre during his studies in Britain from 1954 to 1957. After graduating from the University of Leeds, he served as a play reader for the English Stage Society based at the Royal Court Theatre from 1957 to 1959. His contact with the 'avant-garde' theatre movement in Europe must have made profound impressions on him and influenced his commitment to a "theatre for change." Indeed, already while in England he had written several plays which were variously performed in Britain and in Lagos during the late fifties, although they did not reach print until later. They include *The Trials of Brother Jero, The Swamp Dwellers,* which were published in 1962, together with *The Strong Breed,* and *The Lion and the Jewel,* which was not printed until 1964.

Although they are very different in tone and subject-matter these early works already evince the subtlety of Soyinka's outlook: a full awareness of the dilemmas that face the new Africa, combined with the comic power to deflate commonplace assumptions and utopian ideals. This mixture often makes for confusion, as in *The Swamp Dwellers,* which seems to focus on the familiar conflict between tradition and progress. Actually, the message of the play is rather that this is a far from clear-cut issue. The hero is a young man who has migrated to the city, where he has been victimized by the pitiless greed and agressive self-seeking of the new business world; he hankers after the imagined stability, security and spirituality of life in the traditional village community. Yet, when he does come back to the village, it is only to find that the rains have destroyed the crops, that the local priest is a corrupt impostor who fattens on the sacrifices he prescribes in order to propitiate the gods and make the rains stop. *The Trials of Brother Jero* is a light satire on the immorality of unscrupulous Christian prophets who take advantage of the common people's ignorance and gullibility. *The Lion and the Jewel* is a rollicking comedy in which no one is spared: the "jewel" is a village belle, Sidi, who is courted by the village schoolmaster, Lakunle: this "modern" young man, whose manners and ideas are an inexhaustible source of puzzlement to Sidi, dresses in Western fashion, he is addicted to the strange, unhealthy habit of kissing, he wants to emancipate African womanhood,

[151] Soyinka in *Drum* (March 1961), 27.

he refuses to pay the bride-price. Sidi is also coveted by elderly chief Baroka, the "Lion" of the title, whose household is already adorned with four other wives. Sidi loathes him because he is old and dirty, but she ultimately falls for his wiles and marries him, obviously because his erotic know-how undermines her resistance.

These early plays provided overwhelming evidence of the originality, range and depth of Soyinka's talent. With unprecedented mastery of the English language, they evinced a critical outlook which had outgrown both the hackneyed theme of anticolonialism and the simplistic descriptions of acculturation problems. For the contemporary African is indeed thrust between the myths of the African past and the realities of his Euro-American contaminated present. His image of himself has the complexion of the bastard who gropes self-consciously for his true identity. To evolve a new dramatic art based on the aesthetics of the traditional African style of performance, a re-orientation both in style and in essence was needed. For Soyinka, the contemporary theatre is an aspect of African "culture in transition."

Seizing the occasion of Nigeria's political independence in October 1960 to plunge into action, he began his enterprise with the immortal words of Forest Father in *A Dance of the Forests*:

> to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness... hoping when I have tortured awareness from their souls that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings.[152]

Soyinka had started work on *A Dance of the Forests*, a historical commentary in dramatic form, in 1959–60 during his residency at the Royal Court Theatre. Fragments of the composition were incorporated in the programme of the "an evening of experimental theatre" at the Royal Court Theatre in November 1959.[153] But the play was first produced in its entirety as part of the independence celebrations. Indeed, its very subject is a "gathering of tribes" which is itself a symbol for the festive ceremonies that were taking place all over the country. It has an intricate plot dealing simultaneously with a number of themes, and Soyinka's way of using and of distorting the Yoruba pantheon for his own ends does not make it easy to understand without close scrutiny. The main focus of interest, however, is the relation of a new nation to its past, as the living characters conjure up the dead in the expectation that their glorious ancestors will supply them with worthy models for an equally glorious future. Through skilful manipulation

[152] Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p. 82. With Achebe, Soyinka is one of the best-known and most widely studied anglophone writers of Africa. The second edition of Gerald Moore's *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans, 1978) was preceded by two important book-length studies, one in German: Rita Böttcher-Wöbcke, *Komik, Ironie und Satire im dramatischen Werk von Wole Soyinka* (Hamburg: Buske, 1976) and one in Russian: Viktor A. Bejlis, *Wole Soyinka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977). Recent essays on Soyinka's early drama include: Micere Githae Mugo, "The 'Saviours' and 'Messiahs' of Wole Soyinka's Drama", in *The Teaching of African Literature in schools*, ed. E. Gachukia and S. K. Akivaga (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), pp. 139–148; H. H. Anniah Gowda, "Tradition and Talent in Wole Soyinka's Plays," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 19,1 (1978), 108–120; C. O. Ogunyemi, "Iconoclasts Both: Wole Soyinka and LeRoi Jones," *African Literature Today*, 9 (1978), 25–38; Femi Osofisan, "Tiger on Stage: Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Theatre," in *Theatre in Africa*, ed. Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (Ibadan: University Press, 1978), pp. 151–175.

[153] Soyinka, "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?," a paper contributed to the Workshop on Radical Perspectives in African Literature and Society (Ibadan, 21 December 1977).

of flashback techniques combined with the African concept of reincarnation, Soyinka managed to convey the horrified disillusionment of the living as they realize that the dead were as cruel and mean, as bewildered and corrupt, as the living are. Yet, as Ulli Beier put it, "disillusionment with the past does not mean that they can get rid of it." The dead insist on playing their part in the affairs of the living and on moulding the future according to their own views. In the play, this is symbolized by the unborn child, whom a dead woman wants to put into the world. The drama comes to a close as the sculptor, Demoke, refuses to accept the child and returns it to its dead mother. Demoke is a projection of Soyinka's conception of the artist's role in the new society; he alone has the intellectual acumen and the creative vision necessary to single out which elements in the traditional culture are still of vital relevance, and which can only hamper the development of the new nation.

Soyinka's search for a truly African theatre thus began with his awareness of the African traditional festival and its theatrical character. The traditional festival theatre has a loose structure and incorporates what has been termed "total theatre": the bringing together of various art forms into a medley—music, dance, improvisation, singing, drumming, masquerading, etc.—designed in symbolic terms for a presentation which is theatrically spectacular and of deep significance. The looseness of the structure allows for improvisations which in the extreme may be seen as ornamental but, by and large, serve the function of enhancing the form and style of this type of theatre. Although the festival is held in commemoration of a deity or a legendary hero or on a mythical occasion in the life of the people, what establishes the distinctness of form and style of the presentation is the opportunity it gives for audience participation. There is no narrative but the whole drama is delineated in a pattern of episodes sketched out as "situations" and "happenings" depicting a generalized notion of the substance of the festival.

Written for Nigeria's political independence celebration the play itself has the basic plan of a celebration. It is a conglomeration of entities which serve a single purpose —raising communal consciousness at the behest of the gods, offering the sacrifice of appeasement and gaining an insight into the future—an assurance of the continuity of the community. It was therefore a grievous error to describe *A Dance of the Forests* as "a kind of African *Midsummer Night's Dream*"[154] in the same way as Henshaw's *This Is Our Chance* might remind the reader of *Romeo and Juliet*. Soyinka's fascination with the African traditions is entirely spiritual and aims at aesthetic cognition. As the apostle of the "movement of transition," he is anxious to carry out a mythical or metaphysical quest in order to safeguard the essence of the future. But his main contribution rests in his laying the foundations for a dramatic mode which is essentially informed by traditional stage practice. The traditional African theatre is a visual expression, a representation of substance and form, an embodiment of knowledge and magic. Through the transposition of forms, communication takes place and the significance of life is made real. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, therefore, becomes the model of a "truly African

[154] Martin Esslin, "Two Nigerian Playwrights" in *Introduction to African Literature*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans 1964), p. 260.

theatre"[155]—an expressionistic theatre where time and space do not exist, where life is a medley of fantasies, absurdities and improvisations and where reality is only an appearance whose mask must be pierced through. In the presentation of the play Soyinka shows how Western dramatic traditions can be made subservient to African traditional style of performance. There thus arises a paradigm of the form and substance of the "festival theatre"—"the truly African theatre" as represented by *A Dance of the Forests*,—which might be sketched as follows:

I. *Form:*

(a) *Stage Design:* Arena: a cyclical layout showing an alternating sequence of "locus" and "corridor" in a series of scene changes leading up to the "mansion," i.e. the grandstand.

(b) *Dramatic Design:* A medley of dramatic genres (tragedy, comedy, satire) loosely connected; episodic features of play structure show the "locus" to contain "situations" and "corridor" to hold the "happenings" or improvisational asides. The grandstand is the meeting point in which the situations reach their climax.

II. *Substance:*

(a) *Matter:* A Fable without the paraphernalia of a narrative. The core may include a re-enactment to represent memory in form of a flashback, or a symbolic representation of reality.

(b) *Theatricalism:* There is no sharp dividing line between the dramatic types, that is to say, the tragic and the comic scenes succeed each other sometimes with satire as a superimposition. There is always an imaginative core, an unfailing illusion which holds the structures together as an integrated art. Serious situations are usually surrounded by comic scenes which serve both as a respite and as openings for audience participation.

Most criticism of Nigerian drama has centred on content and analysis holds in terms of plot, character and setting. According to Soyinka, the essence of drama lies in performance which is viewed from a spatial perspective and is manifested through physical and symbolic means. The essence should not be sought in the printed text alone as an autonomous entity.[156] The essence of the drama cannot be realized through a system of fragmentation but only from the standpoint of the totality or configuration of the dramatic experience. It is for this reason that a discussion of the "species" of the drama becomes necessary since knowledge of the components of a work of art within its own terms of reference is the best way to judge it. Soyinka's interest in dramatic genres is in evidence when one reads through his plays. But although it is easy to distinguish and isolate comic, tragic and satirical elements in them, it is significant to note that there are no sharp dividing lines between the plays. This also proves the point that in the traditions of African theatrical style there are no such classifications. Since a play in the

[155] See Joel Adedeji, "The Nigerian Theatre in English and its Audience" in *Das Theater und sein Publikum* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977), pp. 238–257.

[156] See Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 43–44.

traditional style is usually an enactment or re-enactment of mythical, legendary of historical events, it is designed as a mélange with a satirical tinge, a kind of variety entertainment. Soyinka's dramatic range is as all-embracing as his vision but his brilliant use of the satirical mode underlines the significance of the tradition he sets out to develop.

The most significant of Soyinka's plays after *A Dance of the Forests* is *The Strong Breed,* which appeared under the Mbari imprint in 1963, and which the writer himself regards as his favourite one-act play.[157] Often referred to as a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense of the word, the play in its archetypal layout lends itself to different interpretations. Instead of appreciating its essence within the framework of African ontology,[158] critics are too ready to treat the play against the background of Christian eschatology. It must be granted, however, that the form of the "festival theatre" regarded as the distinguishing aesthetic of Soyinka's drama is rather too compact in *The Strong Breed.* Unlike *A Dance of the Forests,* the play does not contain the usual satirical interludes, and there are no improvisations (including games). Nevertheless, there is a union of substance with form in a symbolic relationship. The play is *about* a festival and not set out *as* a festival. In a sense, the author enjoins the audience to think about the substance of an African festival rather than its form which is the theatre. Thus we miss the directness of music and song, mime and dance, drumming and repartee but, on the other hand, we are gripped by its atmosphere, its illusion and magical effect. Eman of *The Strong Breed* is a tragic hero of a different dimension from Demoke of the *Dance.* The latter is a worshipper of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, and pursues his objective under a cultic obligation ordained by Ogun. In his search for a sustaining power that will ensure the continuity of life for the tribes that have gathered for the coming celebration, Demoke confronts death; he has no option but to replace the sacrificial victim, the Half-Child, on the tree; however, he is granted a timely rescue by Ogun, whose cause he serves. Eman, on the other hand, is a stranger in the new domain where as a scapegoat he encounters death—the essence of tragedy; but he pursues a principle of individuation and self-will and is finally destroyed in punishment for such behaviour. Eman succeeds as a tragic hero not in his death as a "carrier" but in his realization of the tragic essence through his confrontation with his past and his perception of his own future. Soyinka's flashback technique is a mystic substitute for the usual consultation with the Oracle or Ifa where, during divination, one is given an overview of the past and a preview of the future. The modern playwright's rendition involves chants and songs, parables and formulas in an evocative way. In the flashback Eman confronts his father in the ancestral universe and receives approval of his action. The cycle of continuity is intact, the universe, though disturbed at a tangential point, will pull together. Eman is sacrificed but Omae is expecting Eman's child. He will carry on and the principle of continuity will

[157] See Lewis Nkosi's interview with Soyinka in *African Writers Talking,* ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pierterse (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 173.

[158] See J. A. Adedeji, "*The Strong Breed,* An Aspect of Soyinka's Existential Imagination," unpublished paper presented to the African Literature Seminar, University of Ibadan.

be upheld. It is this consciousness that forms the basis of African catharsis and is the essence of the tragic syndrome.[159]

In the characters of those two tragic heroes Soyinka expresses the African tragic view of life. He recognizes that the dramatist's search for ritual roots from which to develop visions of modern experience, can gratify the deep-seated need of creative man to recover his archetypal consciousness. The tragic essence is made manifest through the archetypal struggle of the hero against exterior forces. This manifestation can be achieved through physical and symbolic means. The struggle can be internalized within the protagonist. It could be between natural forces and metaphysical conceptions or between individual "self" and communal presence.[160]

In a traditional Yoruba performance, the two great rhythms of drama, the comic and the tragic, cannot be compartmentalized just as there is no sharp dividing line between the sacred and the profane. In Soyinka's plays, even comic characters such as Lakunle the teacher in *The Lion and the Jewel* or Jeroboam the prophet in *The Trials of Brother Jero* illustrate this complexity. Indeed, Eman, the "carrier" of *The Strong Breed,* can be seen in an ironic light if looked at from a three-dimensional perspective. And Soyinka has always had an inclination for satire, which, he observed in 1965, "is a weapon not yet fully exploited among the contemporary dramatists of Nigeria, fertile though the social and political scene is for well-aimed barbs by sharp, observant eye."[161] This was illustrated in two topical plays composed for the Orisun Theatre Company which he founded in 1964. While *The Republican* (1964) never reached print, *Before the Blackout,* which was to be published several years later,[162] is essentially a "revue" with the structure of a variety entertainment incorporating dance, music, drumming, mime, acting and improvisation including the use of symbolism in presentation. In this exciting experiment Soyinka appeared to be interested in bringing his audience to a wider and deeper awareness of what had been happening to Nigerian society since 1960, as well as in exploring the depths out of which certain emotions have arisen. He was more concerned with tracing motivations than with finding solutions to the problems raised. At one level he wanted to laugh and he wanted his audience to laugh with him, but at a deeper level, his main purpose was to indict society through poetic truth.

This trend reached maturity in *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), where Soyinka breaks out of his cocoon of rites and rituals to delve into the contemporary cesspit of life and death produced by politicians trying to impose a new order on African society, trying to replace the old divinity with a new god. The theme of the play, which was first performed in 1965, is the pattern of power struggle which was becoming an obsessive preoccupation with the best Nigerian writers. The story takes place in the imaginary but easily identifiable African state of Isma; the power of its leader, Kongi, an Nkrumah-type despot, is challenged by the "spiritual" authority of Paramount Chief Danlola who knows how

[159] It is equally important to note that Ifada—who has been created by Obatala, the Yoruba god of creation—is saved and he and Sunma depart in a new relationship, a rapprochement that ensures the balance and continuity of life.

[160] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World,* pp. 42–43.

[161] Soyinka, "Theatre in Nigeria: A Brief Review," *Cultural Events in Africa,* 5 (April 1965).

[162] Wole Soyinka, *Before the Blackout* (Ibadan: Orisun Acting Editions, 1971).

to exploit traditional customs to his own advantage. Victory ostensibly goes to Kongi, and the New Yam Festival becomes an integral part of the Five-Year Development Plan. However, the true tragedy in *Kongi's Harvest* is very often missed especially when appraisal is reduced to an analysis of its content as a commentary on political life in a modern African state, on the confrontation between a modern dictatorship and the traditional ruling system. For this reason a number of critics saw it as a topical feast of dishes that would soon turn stale and unappetizing if its model, Nkrumah's Ghana, should weaken or change physically or psychologically. Soyinka himself has refuted this as escapist criticism claiming that the play is about "Kongism," a universal phenomenon that symbolizes and includes a political system seeking to eliminate the status quo through the dissemination of doctrinaire tracts and manifestoes and even through outright subjugation.

While the play ends with an assertion of life as against the death principle, its tragic essence lies in Kongi being overwhelmed by the sight of death: the death of Segi's father who has been offered as a sacrificial lamb to the cause of restoring the old order. The play seems to end on a note of tragic fallacy. Kongi's discomfiture is seen in the breakdown of the structure and machinery of power that he has set up. He is let alone to stare at the abyss into which they are all thrown—both his henchmen and antagonists, all end up in a "Hangover", or transition. The "Hangover" provides what Soyinka describes as "moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack [the protagonist] of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and of his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will."[163] The tragic consequence of Kongi's posture is seen in his progress towards the ultimate denouement. The final submission of traditional power by Danlola has provoked the offer of sacrifice; the sacrificial victim is Segi's father whose head is brought before Kongi. Usually such a sacrifice is made to a god. Kongi has not yet become one and the presentation turns into a symbolic curse. Kongi is overwhelmed by his own effervescence. The resolution is in the "Hangover"; as Danlola says,

> What happens now? The hornet's nest
> Is truly stirred. What happens to
> The sleeping world?[164]

In the same vein, the play had opened with the Hemlock, the symbolic "opening glee" of Yoruba drama.

> The pot that will eat fat
> Its bottom must be scorched
> The squirrel that will long crack nuts
> Its footpad must be sore
> The sweetest wine has flowed down
> The tapper's shattered shins.[165]

[163] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 149.
[164] Soyinka, *Kongi's Harvest* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 88.
[165] Ibid., p. 1.

And so when the parable is over, it ends on a note of unrealized hope but with an escape route thrown open. This links up with the principle of continuity and the hope for "new beginnings." But the tragic essence is still there and—characteristic of Soyinka—it is perceived in the very cinematic final stage directions:

> [Danlola] starts briskly back in the opposite direction. A mixture of the royal music and the anthem rises loudly, plays for a short while, comes to an abrupt halt as the iron grating descends and hits the ground with a loud, final clang.[166]

Symbolically, Soyinka has produced Ogun, the god of iron, as the *deus ex machina* to relieve the "Hangover". The old (essentially traditional) flows into the new (modern consciousness) in the two types of music but the "new beginnings" will perhaps be found in the essentials of the Daodu/Segi union. Daodu's metallic sounds (his farming implements) produced through Ogun's divine inspiration, will evoke the god of fertility. It is in the union of Daodu and Segi that the spirit of "earth," reproduction and growth will be evoked to usher in the "new beginnings."

Basically, the notion of tragedy in African drama lies in the movement of transition culminating in the ultimate union of individual and group consciousness. The tragic essence becomes clear when the individual involved in the fluid process of dynamic change which we call transition is overwhelmed by the violent events which he has himself created. The final outcome is not just death or a state of transformation, it is the emergence of a new situation, a new consciousness which allows for "new beginnings." African tragedy therefore is not an imitation of an action but the representation of an experience—the act of bringing about change or transition—and continuity is preserved by the absorption of experience. Death, therefore, is not an end or a negation of life. The tragic rhythm reveals a quest for the essence of death and the tragic hero reaches an understanding of this essence when he is overwhelmed by its violent effects in a "Hangover" or in "transition."

The concept of "hangover" or "transition" has been developed by Soyinka from his understanding of the African world-view. *A Dance of the Forests* reveals Demoke the protagonist in "hangover":

> Enter Ogun, catches Demoke as he falls. Black-out. Dawn is breaking. Ogun enters bearing Demoke, eyeing the sky anxiously. Ogun gently lays down Demoke, leaves his weapons beside him, flees. It is now fully dawn. Agboreko and the old Man enter. The Old Man rushes towards Demoke, lying inert, raises him to a sitting position. Demoke opens his eyes.
> OLD MAN
> Safe! What did you see? What did you see?
> DEMOKE
> Darkness enveloped me, but piercing
> Through I came
> ...
> I lodge below, with the secrets of Earth.[167]

[166] Ibid., p. 90.
[167] Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, pp. 83–86.

In discussing *Kongi's Harvest* it is easy to argue that Soyinka has moved away from an indulgence in the substance and form of the "ritual theatre" which "aims to reflect through physical and symbolic means the archetypal struggle of the mortal being against exterior forces"[168] *(A Dance of the Forests)* to a feeling for content and form and to a modernist preoccupation with happenings in contemporary society *(Kongi's Harvest)*. From whatever point of view one would like to distinguish between the two works, it is clearly evident that the form of the festival theatre has been retained in *Kongi's Harvest*. The shuttle back and forth of the scenes which shift from one location to another in quick succession are in line with the design layout of "locus," "corridor" and "mansion" in the grandstand of the harvest scene in Kongi's Square. The structure of the drama displays the episodic features of "situations" and "happenings," plot baselines and side-shows, respectively. Structurally however, the provision of such scenes as "hemlock" and "hangover" may be seen to relate to the conventional "prologos" and "epilogos" of classical Greek tragedy, yet they embody a new aesthetic which is significantly African.

Kongi's Harvest is usually regarded as a satire exposing Kongi to public ridicule. Nevertheless, a search for truth is involved and the serious side of the play can be discerned in the attendant jokes. This element of play so skilfully exploited by Soyinka is informed by the Yoruba view on the aesthetic role of satire in society.[169] Soyinka's use of satire is no aberration. To preserve the comic element in drama, laughter is a necessary means of dissolving tension, thus bringing relief to the mind which anticipates the foibles of life or human nature. The Yoruba laughs too readily in "tragedy" because he does not moralize on the event, but he identifies the issues behind the event; the Yoruba has no sympathy for what man is, but he is concerned about man's action. Satire has a distancing effect. It helps man's evaluative effort to apprehend certain "essences" in his environment. For the Yoruba, the tragedy of Macbeth calls for laughter. A correct appraisal of the satirical element in Soyinka's dramatic *œuvre*, therefore, implies some understanding of the Yoruba mental attitude toward satire. For to the Yoruba mind, satire is not an entertainment designed to provide relief through histrionics. It is an instrument for change. It has a magical and psycho-social foundation. It instructs the mind to improve man's condition. It is a rhetoric of reason rather than an art of persuasion. In the Yoruba conception of the theatrical art in its essentials, satire and tragedy are in a symbiotic relationship. What is usually considered to be Soyinka's originality derives to a large extent from his deep understanding of this, and from his willingness to allow his empathy with his own people to feed his creative talent. By 1966, a London critic could rightly claim that Soyinka's contribution was in itself "enough to declare Nigeria as the most fertile new source of English-speaking drama since Synge's discovery of the Western Isles."[170]

[168] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 43.
[169] See J. A. Adedeji, "Form and Function of Satire in Yoruba Drama," *Odù: Journal of African Studies*, 4 (1967), 61–72.
[170] *The Times*, (4 December 1966).

By 1957 the University of Ibadan, at the time a College of the University of London, had become the centre of theatre life in Nigeria. Its Arts Theatre has assumed the role of a cultural centre serving as a laboratory for the many and varied creative experiments of both staff and students. Early in 1959 the Arts Theatre presented Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* in a double bill. The success of this presentation caused great excitement and acted as an incentive for other students with a flair for playwriting. In 1960, a group of students who called themselves "The Wandering Players" presented a triple bill[171] in the Arts Theatre and by 1961 the University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre had become operational. But there was also a desire to take the theatre to the vast majority of Nigerians outside Ibadan. Furthermore, the fact that many allegedly experimental works were adaptations of plays by Shakespeare and Molière must have given grave concern to some of the budding Nigerian playwrights, such as John Pepper Clark (b. 1935) who while an undergraduate reviewed several of the Arts Theatre performances in *The Horn*.[172]

It became obvious that the programmes of the Arts Theatre were designed to take the students through an acculturation process. Equally significant was the fact that the movement for a new African theatre culture could not be contained within such programmes, the alienating effects of which were beginning to show and to be called in question. As an alternative, the Mbari Club was inaugurated in the heart of the city of Ibadan in 1961 to provide the artists of "the movement of transition" with a haven for their own artistic ventures. J. P. Clark who by then had graduated from the university with an honours degree in English was one of the brains behind the realization of this cultural centre which was equiped with such facilities as rest-rooms, seminar rooms, an art gallery and an arena for stage presentations. "Mbari" became the launching-pad for writers like J. P. Clark, whose first play, *Song of a Goat,* was not only produced but also published by the club in 1962.

Critics of this play, which was first produced by Wole Soyinka's own company, The 1960 Masks, often quote it as evidence of Clark's attempt to marry some features of his African cultural heritage with those of the Western tradition which he had encountered as an undergraduate at Ibadan. Indeed, the very title indicates that the writer was deliberately going back to the proto-theatrical sources of Greek drama, much of which originated in fertility cults: the play is a tragedy of sterility. Fertility is of course a major concern in pre-industrial societies with a subsistence economy, high infant mortality and low life expectation. Begetting many children is an investment for the living individual, for whom they represent welcome help and assistance in work and in old age; they are indispensable to the mere survival of the group. These are some of the reasons why opprobrium, shame and ridicule attach to impotence or sterility. Such attitudes are not peculiar to black Africa; there is a revealing similarity in theme between Clark's play and Lorca's *Yerma*.

[171] *Don't Say It in Writing* by Yetunde Esan; *Woman Palaver* by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede (b. 1935) and *The Trials of Brother Jero* by Wole Soyinka.

[172] *The Horn*, 1,3 (1958), 8–9 and 2,3 (1958), 10–11. For recent discussions of Clark's plays, see A. Olu Ashaolu, "The Tragic Vision of Life in *The Raft*," *Obsidian*, 3,3 (1977), 20–25, and "J. P. Clark: His Significance as Dramatist" in *Theatre in Africa*, ed. Ogunba and Irele (1978), pp. 177–199.

The tragedy in *Song of a Goat* results from the frustration of Ebiere's acute desire for motherhood because of the impotence of her husband, Zifa. As

> Custom dictates those who die childless
> Be cast out of the company of the fruitful whose
> Special grace is interment in the township,

both separately seek the advice of a character named "the Masseur" who is the voice of tribal wisdom. When the latter suggests that Ebiere should go to Zifa's younger brother, Tonye, to get a child, both recoil in horror and anger. Yet Ebiere is unable to resist her impulse and succeeds in seducing Tonye. The evil does not lie in the act, but in the fact, that it does not take place openly, with Zifa's consent and with due observance of the proper rites. All three characters share in this guilt. Zifa undertakes to cleanse his house and to propitiate the gods by sacrificing a goat—which, in the early performances, was actually killed on stage. But, in the words of Zifa's half-mad visionary aunt, "When the gods ask for blood, it is foolish to offer them oil." When Zifa thrusts the goat's head into his wife's earthen cooking-pot and breaks it, Ebiere senses unconsciously that he is symbolically trying to destroy her womb and the child in it. She begins to miscarry, while Tonye runs away to hang himself, and Zifa, racked by horror and remorse, goes to the sea and drowns himself. In spite of dark suggestions that Zifa and his family are under a curse, this tragedy of haunting poetic power is also perfectly coherent in terms of human motivation. For the curse that hangs over Zifa is not his impotence, but his overweening pride, which prevents him from acknowledging, and thus exorcising, his shame. It causes him to frustrate his wife's most legitimate impulses. It obliges her to seek fulfilment in secret ways, and so to desecrate the family group.

There is no denying that *Song of a Goat* is a typical, though exceptionally talented, product of what Clark himself has described as "the new community of Nigerians who have undergone a new system of education and therefore share a new kind of culture, a synthetic one which exists alongside the traditional one."[173] But although he admits that foreign influences abound in his creations and unwittingly regrets this form of alienation in the concluding stanza of his poem, "Agbor Dancer"—

> Could I, early sequester'd from my tribe,
> Free a lead-tether'd scribe
> I should answer her communal call
> Lose myself in her warm caress
> Intervolving earth, sky and flesh,[174]—

there is also sufficient evidence that his plays relate to the essence of the "movement of transition": as Wole Soyinka put it, *Song of a Goat* offers "an excellent premise from which to enter the matricial consciousness of the African world."[175] The far-reaching

[173] See *Palaver*, ed. Bernth Lindfors *et al.* (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972), p. 16.
[174] John Pepper Clark, *A Reed in the Tide* (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 7.
[175] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 50.

effects of *Song of a Goat* as an example of contemporary Nigerian drama must be seen in the light of Clark's contribution to the dynamics of the "movement" and not in the narrow outlook which confines an appreciation of his work to the ritualistic origins of Greek drama—in spite of the latter's affinities with traditional Africa drama,—nor in the allegation that his attempt to write a "Nigerian *Oresteia*" only succeeded in the creation of a "diptych"[176] with an umbilical cord linking *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade*. The latter, like *The Raft,* which was published at the same time,[177] is admittedly a slighter achievement; yet both plays, within their limitations, make successful use of African experience and environment, beliefs and rituals. What is significant is Clark's artistic vision in his portrayal of an African universe where a dynamic correspondence is established between the "tide in the Niger" and the individuation of the "transitional man."

If the form of Clark's early plays owes something to imitation of Western classical archetypes, the aesthetics of *Ozidi*[178] is hard to define. This play is a by-product of a project which Clark had initiated concerning a mythical and epic tale which was, as he was to put it later, "the proud property of all Ijo speaking people in the Niger delta." In Clark's own summary, the story

> begins with the treason and treachery committed by a group of war-lords in the city-state of Orua against the brothers Temugedege, who is king, and Ozidi, the leading general of the state. The rest of the epic tells of the posthumous birth of the general's son, the extraordinary manner of his growing up under the magic wings of his grandmother Oreame, and of the numerous battles the hero does with all manner of men and monsters to regain for his family its lost lineal glory. In this process, he oversteps the natural bounds set to his quest, and it is not until he has received divine visitation from the Smallpox King that he emerges purged and is received back into the society of men.
>
> Ozidi is a supreme warrior who has to perform a number of seemingly impossible feats to reach a destined end ... Together, they spell out a mission arising out of a personal sense of wrong, the settlement of which determines the future course of public affairs in a powerful state. ...
>
> But it is not simple human power and courage that takes Ozidi triumphantly through his trials ... Ozidi overcomes [his opponents] because the gods are with him, right up to Tamara the Almighty, and they are with him because of his filial piety, his devotion to duty typical of many epic heroes. He is in fact a straight instrument of justice, and wielding him all the time is his grandmother Oreame of the supernatural powers, who is fate as well as conscience driving him on. When Ozidi later forgets his true role and overreaches himself in a series of excesses, he is visited with divine punishment, and this time not even the supreme witch his grandmother can save him.
>
> It is here that by one quick turn of irony humanity comes back into its own in the emergence of Ozidi's mother Oreame. Innocence and simplicity are the kit she brings to the rescue of her heroic son so that, when he recovers purified, there

[176] Martin Esslin, "Two Nigerian Playwrights," in *Introduction to African Literature,* ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 259.

[177] J. P. Clark, *Three Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[178] J. P. Clark, *Ozidi,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

is a general sense of relief and rejoicing that natural order has at last been restored.[179]

The structure of the traditional "Ozidi" consists of a composite performance over seven nights of dance, music, mime, and ritual in seven different locations around the Niger Delta. It uses the design framework of the festival theatre even though it has the characteristic features of the story theatre.[180] But Clark's treatment of the saga in his play reveals a slight departure from tradition. The Story-Teller begins in the manner of the traditional raconteur but merges into the action as the protagonist of the drama. There is a chorus of spectators who are integrated not only as singers and dancers but also as actors playing the different characters. The movement of the action from place to place, the use of symbolic modes of presentation, the general shifting of the pattern from the parameters of the proscenium stage and its frame of reference have provided ammunition for adverse critics of the play and yet these are the dynamics of its strength: with the composition of *Ozidi*, Clark reached a critical stage in his career as a playwright; a direct response to critics of his earlier works, it has undoubtedly served as a catalyst in the dramatic syndrome of the "movement of transition" and it exemplifies the writer's search for an art form which is consciously and deliberately African.

Ozidi focuses on the paradox of fate and free will. The protagonist does not pursue the essence of his own being by leaving his destiny to the whims and caprices of the gods as Demoke does in *A Dance of the Forests*. Ozidi's destiny is disturbed by his grandmother's witchcraft. His struggle is not due to his own will to survive his confrontation with external forces but to his loss of individuation. In the end he experiences the anguish that results from the loss of the eternal essence of his own being. Instead of seeing a re-enactment of the myth of eternal return which is the essence of the traditional festival of Ozidi, we are presented with a revenge tragedy that lacks a natural climax. The visitation of the Smallpox King and his affliction amount to a rejection of Ozidi, the protagonist who had set out to restore the regenerative essence of his lineage. He has been tainted and will not be allowed to pass into the realm of ancestral transcendence. Clark's tragic view distorts the ritual significance of the "saga" as a commemorative act evidenced in the folk celebration. He is more interested in Ozidi as an individual whose being is imposed upon by the ties of the extended family in spite of the need for societal harmony. We miss what Soyinka described as "a common theme in traditional mask-drama: a symbolic struggle with chthonic presences, the goal of the conflict being a harmonious resolution for plenitude and the well-being of the community."[181] The modern play appears rather as a demonstration of the ultimate potential in man's pursuit of the essence of continuity and the dilemma that results from the effort:

[179] J. P. Clark, *The Ozidi Saga*, (Ibadan University Press and Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. xx–xxi.
[180] See Joel Adedeji, "Theatricalism and Traditional African Theatre," a paper read at the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), Lagos, 1977.
[181] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 38.

When a guest
Comes on a visit, he goes home after.
Return therefore, our late visitor, taking your flesh
With you, but leave behind for us
Our skin and bones.[182]

Thus, Clark ends Ozidi's life in the arms of the Smallpox King, a sad end for a god-forsaken adventurer. But man is not worth the anger of the gods. Ozidi's sacrilegious presumption turns Orua into "a rank forsaken land." And we miss the essential theme that is conjured up in the ritual dramatization of the saga in the traditional mode, a celebration that evokes evil for the purification of the community.

In 1964, Wole Soyinka had the opportunity to produce a film for the American television in the Esso World Theatre series.[183] Entitled *Nigerian Culture in Transition,* it offered a golden opportunity for restating the credo of the Mbari artists' commitment to change. It reflected the dialectics of the "movement of transition" through a number of episodes illustrating the Mbari microcosm as follows:

(a) An Mbari House—the Shrine of Ala, the Earth goddess: A Pledge
(b) Christopher Okigbo's "Watermaid"—Poetry Reading: A Contemplation
(c) J. P. Clark's "Agbor Dancer"—Poetry in Performance
(d) African Popular Art—Exhibition of Fine Art
(e) African Folklore—In Praise of Ogun: A Vignette of the Creative Essence
(f) Amos Tutuola's "The Palm-Wine Drinkard"—Traditional Narrative Art (Story-telling)
(g) Duro Ladipo's Opera—"Oba Moro" (the Ghost Catcher): A Contemporary Play in Yoruba
(h) Wole Soyinka's Drama—"The Strong Breed": A Contemporary Play in English

The film reveals Soyinka's individual sensibility but also his concern for an integrative art, the ordering of experience to project a mode of creative expression governed by a lucid vision of African reality. The film is also an expression of the creative spirit of the African, whose natural disposition is for a form of "variety entertainment" which is both similar to and very different from, the European–American concept, underlining the individual nature of taste and asserting the value of *divertissement* as more than a mere pastime. Finally, the film symbolizes the spirit of Mbari and its movement of conscious transition with its basic need to restore the continuity with the past. As Soyinka was to put it four years later, even though "the African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past... the past exists, the real African consciousness establishes this—the past exists now, this moment, it is co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future."[184] The African world-view is not stagnant; the continuing evolution of tribal wisdom through an acceptance of the elastic nature of knowledge as its one reality guarantees the continuity of the species. This,

[182] Clark, *Ozidi,* p. 120.
[183] The film is available from the Film Library of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.
[184] Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," in *The Writer in Modern Africa,* ed. Per Wästberg (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), p. 19.

according to Soyinka, can be termed "the metaphysics of the irreducible: knowledge of birth and death as the human cycle."[185]

In this respect, the inclusion of Duro Ladipo's first Yoruba opera was of considerable significance, for the very design of the play was built upon the desire for continuity:

> Let us abandon this place of refuge
> And rebuild our glorious city Oyo Ajaka.[186]

And Duro Ladipo had heeded the teachings of the bards of old:

> The flutist has taught us to respect our fathers.
> Let us return home,
> Let us pay homage to our ancestors.[187]

Oba Moro (The Ghost catcher) was first performed on March 17th, 1962, on the occasion of the foundation of the Oshogbo Mbari Mayo club (a phrase meaning "If I could see it, I would be glad"), which was inspired by the Ibadan Mbari club. It was printed in 1964, together with two of Ladipo's other plays, *Oba Koso* and *Oba Waja,* in an English version by Ulli Beier entitled *Three Yoruba Plays.* It is in this form that they have come to be linked with the English-language drama of Henshaw, Soyinka and Clark, and it is in this context that Ladipo's works are universally appreciated and discussed.

This procedure, however, raises a number of problems. For example, the very title of Ladipo's next "opera", which was performed on the club's first anniversary in 1963, can be spelled either as *Oba Koso* (the spelling used by Beier and accepted by Soyinka) or as *Oba Ko so* (the spelling adopted by the Ibadan Institute of African Studies).[188] The former simply means "The King of Koso", referring to the place where King Sango of Oyo, the tragic hero of the play is supposed to have killed himself in despair and disgust after his subjects had betrayed him. It is to the latter spelling that the translation adopted by both Beier ("The King does not hang") and by Soyinka ("The King did not hang")[189] can be applied, and this translation fits the play best, for it ends with the apotheosis of Sango, who ascends the heavens and takes his rightful place in the Yoruba pantheon, thus appearing as the protagonist who "dares the symbolic abyss of transition on behalf of his people."[190]

Because of his skilful blending of myth and history on the stage, Duro Ladipo thus became a protagonist of continuity. Both *Oba Moro* and *Oba Koso* are usually claimed to derive from the *History of the Yorubas* which a Yoruba minister, the Rev. Samuel Johnson (1846–1901) had written in English in the late nineteenth century although it

[185] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World,* p. 53.
[186] Duro Ladipo, "Oba Moro" in *Three Yoruba Plays* (Ibadan: Mbari, 1964), p. 37.
[187] Ibid., p. 51.
[188] After publishing *Selections from Oba ko so* in 1966, the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ibadan published *Oba ko so (The King did not hang): Opera by Duro Ladipo,* transcribed and translated by R. G. Armstrong, Robert L. Awujoola and Val Olayemi, in 1968.
[189] See Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World,* p. 57.
[190] Ibid., p. 58.

was not published until 1921.[191] As to the third play, *Oba Waja*, it refers to a true event that happened in the recent past.[192].

In what seems like an apologia, Ulli Beier explains aspects of the contradictions that abound in his own versions of the original works:

> Those who will be able to watch a performance of these plays will probably never see the exact version printed in this book. Because Duro Ladipo works constantly on his plays and two performances are hardly ever the same. The present versions have been arrived at after much rewriting as the result of experiences gained on the stage.[193]

The texts themselves offer two reasons for the textual differences between them. First, Ladipo does not attempt to treat his historical sources with accuracy, but uses his material freely, bringing it to bear on his own vision and experience. Secondly, Beier's versions are handicapped by his own ignorance of the Yoruba language and its felicities. However, Beier claims that the plays have survived translation, adducing as evidence that "*Oba Koso* has even been performed as a radio play in German on Radio Munich. (German adaptation by Klaus Stephen.)"[194]

Like the other two plays, *Oba Waja*, though not a chronicle, is based on history. It refers to an incident that created quite a stir in the ancient city of Oyo in 1946, when a British civil servant prevented the sacrificial suicide of Chief Elesin, who was ritually prepared to obey custom and follow his late king to the grave. Sharing in the sense of history characteristic of the Yoruba mind and giving free rein to his fascination with the living dynamics of the people's cultural heritage Ladipo in this play illustrated what Soyinka was calling at the time *"historic vision*—a convenient term for the total acceptance of the human heritage."[195] As Adrian Roscoe was to observe, "*Oba Waja* demonstrates the strength and adaptability of Yoruba drama, and suggests once again the solid foundations on which the English-speaking dramatists can build."[196] Indeed, some ten year later, Soyinka himself was to re-create the very same incident in *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), rejecting in advance, in an "Author's note", any facile "clash of cultures" interpretation and giving his due to Duro Ladipo, who, as he put it elsewhere, had "epochalised History for its mythopoetic resourcefulness".[197]

Duro Ladipo's *Moremi*[198] (1967) is another play which illustrates the dilemma of

[191] See, however, Oludare Olajubu, "The Sources of Duro Lapido's [sic] *Oba ko so," Research in African Literatures*, 9,3 (1978), 329–362.

[192] See on this Ulli Beier's postscript to *Three Yoruba Plays*, p. 74.

[193] Ibid.

[194] See his "Introduction," to Obotunde Ijimere, *The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays*, (London: Heinemann Educational, 1966).

[195] Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," in *The Writer in Modern Africa*, ed. Per Wästberg (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), p. 16.

[196] Adrian Roscoe, *Mother is Gold. A Study in West African Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), p. 192.

[197] See Soyinka's unpublished paper "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?" (1977).

[198] Duro Ladipo, "Moremi: An Historical Play," in *Three Nigerian Plays*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 1–34. In the present context, reference is made to this adaptation, and not to Ladipo's *Moremi*, translated, with an introduction and glossary, by Joel 'Yinka Adedeji (Niamey: UNESCO African Regional Centre for Oral Tradition, 1972).

the African artist when his consciousness of traditional aesthetics and values conflicts with the encroachments of external influence and the trappings of acculturation. In the published version, an "English Adaptation by Ulli Beier", Ladipo's artistic vision shows evidence of subjectivity. While the story is derived from the historical account of Moremi as given by Samuel Johnson, [199] the substance and form of the written work depart from the traditional play as performed at the Edi Festival at Ile-Ife. Although Ladipo must have known this, using as he does songs and dances from the festival play, he did not shape his play on the pattern of the "festival theatre" which is to be found in the traditional folk performance, but designed it to fit into the formal structure of the proscenium stage.

The tragic concept of Ladipo's play is Aristotelian even though the hubris of the protagonist lacks the necessary motivation. Moremi assumes a redemptive role and is left to choose between the sacrifice of her only son to secure the freedom of her people and achieve immortality, and her own self-glorification through material considerations. She is finally overcome by her belief in redemption, a Christian eschatology. She willingly sacrifices her only son, Oluorogbo, to buy peace,

> Oluorogbo
> who fights on earth and in heaven
> Oluorogbo
> messenger between heaven and earth.[200]

But we miss the bases of Moremi's deification, her restoration to the divine role of protector and the significance of her commemoration in the annual Edi Festival.

In the traditional Edi Festival the "Play of Moremi" is a re-enactment over seven days and in seven locations of certain aspects of her life. The presentational style complies with the model of "festival theatre"—the arena of a symbolic communication that brings society, man and the universe into a relationship of deep significance. The archetypal struggle of Moremi against external forces in her human environment in spite of her redemptive mission to bring peace and prosperity to Ife, is serialized episodically without a narrative: it is reflected through "physical and symbolical means" during performance through the use of "locus", "corridor" and "mansion." In the finale, Moremi is symbolically sacrificed through the medium of a "carrier," Tele, to secure her role as the protector of Ife. This is an act which Soyinka describes as "a loss of individuation, a self-submergence in universal essence. It is an act undertaken on behalf of the community, and the welfare of that protagonist is inseparable from that of the total community."[201]

But the shaping of the published play violates the sensitivity of African drama. The mythic consciousness gives way to the ethical sense where the dramatic action employs the logic of reason. The function of the expressionist and symbolic mode of presentation which illuminates the festival play is taken over by the realism of literary drama. The

[199] Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas* (London: Routledge 1921), pp. 147–148.
[200] *Three Nigerian Plays*, p. 32.
[201] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 42.

cyclical process and the mytho-poetic essence are likewise disrupted. Nevertheless, Ladipo, with his roots in the nation's history, does not belabour his point. His works are decisively enlivened by his felicitous use of Yoruba poetic traditions and the intrinsic musicality of the language. His work represents a new art form in the history of Nigerian theatre. His main achievement rests in his conscious return to and skilful use of, the local past—a response to the "insistent voice that bids us return to our sources."[202]

One of the *Three Nigerian Plays* that were printed together with Ladipo's *Moremi* in 1967 was *Born with the Fire on His Head* by an unknown writer who, as Ulli Beier explained in his Introduction, [203] had chosen the pen-name of "Obotunde Ijimere." A product of the Oshogbo Writers' Workshop of the Ibadan University Extra-Mural Department where Ulli Beier was doing tutoring work, "Obotunde Ijimere"—whose name happened to be the pseudonym of the first masked actor of the traditional Yoruba theatre[204]—was already responsible for a Yoruba version of *Jedermann* (1912), a German adaptation by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) of the famed medieval morality play *Everyman*. This Yoruba play, first published as *Eda* by Mbari Mbayo in Oshogbo (1965), was produced by Ladipo and his company with great success, not only in Nigeria, but also in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Belgium.[205] Likewise, a Yoruba version of *The Imprisonment of Obatala* achieved considerable popularity after its inclusion in the repertoire of the Duro Ladipo National Theatre. It was not until 1972 that Janheinz Jahn's revelation that "Obotunde Ijimere" was a pseudonym of Ulli Beier himself created a hair-raising problem of classification which need not concern us here.[206] But Obotunde Ijimere's *The Imprisonment of Obatala,* his most significant contribution, did bring a new dimension to the growth of Nigerian drama.

The fact that the tragic concept is blurred may be related to Beier's aesthetics and/or to his own world view. Obatala, the tragic hero, sets out on a journey to visit his long-sought friend, Sango. His wife Yemanja tries to stop him—

> Do not provoke the god of fate—with this rash trip.
> The Kingdom of Oyo is harsh[207]—

[202] Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," in *The Morality of Art,* ed. D. W. Jefferson (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 119.

[203] *Three Nigerian Plays,* p. xiv.

[204] Joel A. Adedeji, "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines,* 12 (1972), 254–276.

[205] See Ulli Beier's Introduction to Ijimere, *The Imprisonment of Obatala.*

[206] At this point, it is perhaps advisable to mention one other classificatory problem arising from the extraordinary fecundity of Yoruba culture and religion in the field of creative writing: in 1968, Yoruba author Oba Balogun (b. 1945), who had studied in Dakar, Caen and Paris, and who was then a press attaché at the Nigerian embassy in Paris, published the first Nigerian play in French: *Shango.* Like Ladipo and others, Balogun took his subject matter from Johnson's *History of the Yorubas.* The play recounts how king Shango in his uncontrollable lust for power managed to obtain magic powers which destroyed not his enemies, but himself, after which he was turned into a god. While the plot is rather skeletal, Ologun's French is perfectly correct, even though it does not have the poetry of Yoruba plays in the vernacular or in English. The dramatic technique is not sophisticated and seems to combine the two traditions of French William-Ponty drama and of the Yoruba folk opera. Nevertheless, Ologun, too, has attempted to invest local myth with universal significance: Shango's story shows that "no one can become like a god, and yet stay a man." (Ed.)

[207] Obotunde Ijimere, *The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1966), p. 5. Page references are to this edition.

but she fails. Obatala's hubris is contained in his reply:

> Then I will call the father of secrets
> To hear what awaits me on this trip.
> His advice I will follow,
> All necessary sacrifices and concoctions I will make.
> Yet even if his prophecy is death:
> My longing will be stronger than his wisdom
> And my desire stronger than his knowledge. (pp. 6–7)

The tragic note is introduced through the divination of the Babalawo, the priest of Orunmila (God of Wisdom):

> Obatala ....
> Divine craftsman, second only to the owner of heaven:
> You have an account to settle with the God of fate. (p. 9)

Soyinka sees Ijimere's presentation of Obatala's journey as "a parable of confrontation with Destiny"[208]:

> You betrayed the trust of Olodumare
> You drank the milky wine of the palm. (p. 10)

Ijimere's Obatala sets out with bravado:

> Whatever fate awaits me
> I will accept
> Whatever suffering Eshu has thought up for me
> I will suffer! (p. 11)

His act of hubris therefore leads to a disruption of the balance within nature.[209] Remembering the prophecy of Orunmila, Obatala bears his suffering with equanimity and fortitude. Upholding the principle of individuation, he suffers imprisonment in atonement for his own failure.

The role of Ogun in *The Imprisonment of Obatala* contrasts with that in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. The fiery Ogun is unleashed onto the scene, not in order to intervene as he does on behalf of Soyinka's Demoke, the craftsman, but to take revenge. In the end he bows to the spirit of the master craftsman, Obatala, and retires into the darkness of his forest.

> I will return to the silent darkness of my forest.
> Death and creation
> Cannot live too close together
> Yet remember: They cannot live too far apart either. (p. 38)

[208] Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 20.
[209] Ibid., p. 19.

The tragic rhythm of the play sounds a note of despair and hope as it drags to an end leaving the notion of continuity, the essence of "new beginnings" to the contemplation of Babalawo, the Priest of the God of Wisdom: "The time of creation has come" (p. 41). The "hangover" of the play may be seen in the Epilogue when Eshu muses:

> The time will come when the owner of Heaven
> Will send me back to confuse the heads of men.
> Then Ogun will burst out of his forest
> To cool his parched throat with blood.
> Then the father of laughter will be driven from the city.
> And the rule of iron returns. (p. 43)

In the Yoruba tragic world-view there is a difference between "Fate" and "Destiny." Fate (in Yoruba *Ayanmo*) refers to what is inevitable because it comes from an endowment by the supernatural. Destiny (in Yoruba, *Akunleyan*) can be described as a man's experience of the choice he has made and which has been sanctioned by the supernatural. The difference resides in the dynamics of the transition between the moment of endowment *(Ayanmo)* by Olodumare (the supreme deity) and the moment of selection or choice *(Akunleyan)* by the individual or self, on "bended knees", before birth. This is aptly formulated in a traditional saying:

> Akunleyan, l'adaiyeba
> Adaiyeba, l'adaiyese.
> Akunleyan oun l'adaiyeba
> Kadara eni oun l'Ayanmo eni.

(Destiny is what one finds in the world/What one finds in the world is what one does in the world./Destiny is what one finds in the world/one's endowment is one's Fate.)

Both Fate and Destiny form a duality in the god Ori, but the separation of their functions is controlled by Eshu, the errant god who, in the Yoruba world-view, is in charge of the vital principle and dynamic element in every being. Destiny can be altered through the offer of sacrifice as decreed by Orunmila, the oracle divinity, and consigned by Eshu.

Obatala has "an account to settle with the god of fate," but his hubris prevents him from seeking to change his destiny by performing the sacrificial rites prescribed by the Babalawo, the priest of Orunmila. Instead, Obatala is prepared to face the consequences which have become inevitable in the course of his journey. But it is predicted that he will "thrive in suffering," and so he does. This is an assurance that he will transcend his Fate. Thus the Yoruba tragic rhythm of a cyclical movement that ensures a process of regeneration, is made plausible.

The third of Ulli Beier's *Three Nigerian Plays* was *The Scheme,* by a much younger writer, Wale Ogunyemi (b. 1939), a professional actor who had been a member of the Nigerian Theatre Group and had worked with Soyinka's 1960 Masks before entering

the Ibadan Drama School in 1966 and the Ibadan Theatre Arts Company. Based on an incident that actually took place during the author's childhood, *The Scheme* is concerned, like so much of the Nigerian drama produced by Yoruba playwrights, with the power of the gods and the influence of religious beliefs on Yoruba behaviour. In his Preface, Beier explains that during the Oroke festival, a worshipper may drive the first cow he meets on the road to the shrine of the god Esile as a sacrifice. On one such occasion, it happened that a minor chief picked on the only cow belonging to the priestess of Esile. In her anger and bitterness, the old woman revenged herself by secretly taking the sacred image of the deity to the chief's doorstep, after which she falsely accused him of sacrilegiously breaking into the shrine. Banned by the king, the chief was about to leave for exile when the god himself drove the priestess to a public confession of her crime. Ogunyemi's play provides a dramatic definition of the rationale and the moral relevance of traditional belief: as one of the characters says,

> The power Esile bestows
> is a sacred trust
> not to be used at will in private interest.
> Terribly the curse rebounds
> if uttered in an unjust cause.

Wale Ogunyemi, who later wrote both in English and in Yoruba, was the youngest representative of what has been called the "movement of transition" in Nigerian drama between the end of the colonial system and the civil war. The dialectics of this movement resulted in the creation of a new African theatre culture, endowed with a new aesthetics, which reflects socio-cultural, political and economic developments in Nigeria during those years. While Western influences, and first of all the introduction of the proscenium stage, inevitably impinged on the consciousness and craft of Nigerian playwrights, indigenous aesthetic modes remained fundamental. This does not mean that the authors, though necessarily committed to change, were consciously striving to effect the inescapable change through a deliberate, artificial mingling of two heterogeneous art forms. The best among them, with Soyinka at their head, displayed neither a conscious determination to preserve traditional culture unaltered, nor a self-conscious desire to adopt the modes and techniques of Western literary drama wholesale: they made use, as suited them best, of dramatic traditions coming from both Africa and the Western world. In so doing, they lay secure foundations for a "truly African" modern theatre that can be understood and appreciated in the whole world.

Romanus N. Egudu

6. CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO AND THE GROWTH OF POETRY

While the bulk of Nigerian poetry belongs to oral art, is performed in African languages, and has been in existence from time immemorial, the beginning of Nigerian poetry in English can be assigned with accuracy to the year 1952, when Dennis Chukude Osadebay (b. 1911) had his only collection of poems printed in Britain.[210] The impact of Osadebay as a poet was not felt until that moment, even though he had been writing poetry from about 1930.[211] Although his literary work properly belongs to the colonial period and falls, as it were, on the wrong side of the demarcation line established by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier[212] between "modern" and, implicitly, "non-modern" African poetry, and by Donatus Nwoga between "pilot" and "modern" poetry in West Africa, it is necessary, within the context of Nigerian literary history, to reassess the significance of Osadebay's place in it.

A cogent example of the underrating of Osadebay's poetry, which gained currency in the years following independence, can be found in Adrian Roscoe's *Mother is Gold.* After quoting Osadebay as saying that the "underlying theme of his verse is the 'Urge in the heart of the African to be free"', Roscoe goes on to argue that the poet "is unsure of the direction in which he wants his art to move" and that the poem "Young Africa's Plea" "spells out his confusion and uncertainty". Commenting on this poem, Roscoe accuses the writer of being unable to stand boldly before the world and he blames the poetry for lacking in anything that might suggest "the existence close at hand of an ancient poetic art laden with metaphor and teeming with imagery." Speaking of the poem "Young Africa's Resolve" Roscoe says:

> One feels sure that it is European civilisation which he is anxious to explore, not the civilisation of his forebears. It is the Pyrrean *[sic]* stream from which he will drink, not the stream of wisdom that has flowed down the centuries from his ancestors. He does not appear to be thinking of Old Mali, Ghana, Songhai, or Timbuctoo.[213]

[210] Dennis Chukude Osadebay, *Africa Sings* (Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1952).
[211] See *West African Verse,* ed. Donatus I. Nwoga (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 136.
[212] *Modern Poetry from Africa,* ed. Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).
[213] Adrian Roscoe, *Mother Is Gold: A Study in West African Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), pp. 15–17. The writer is probably referring to Pope's "Pierian spring," an allusion to the reputed home of the Muses in Thessaly.

Roscoe's accusations, true as they may be, betray the critic's basic lack of a sense of history. Osadebay wrote these poems at a time when Nigeria still had a long way to go before reaching independence. It would be unreasonable to expect that he should have unilaterally, even if only in artistic terms, declared the nation's independence so prematurely. Cultural independence comes after political independence: before Nigeria gained political independence, it would have been ill-advised for a writer to assert cultural independence in his work. Indeed even, two decade after the attainment of political independence, Nigeria, like other African nations, was still struggling to come to full cultural independence.

It is clear that poetry as an art was not Osadebay's primary vocation. He wrote poetry in English for propaganda purposes. He only used poetry with a political aim in view—to alert his compatriots to the need for political freedom. It was physical freedom rather than cultural that he was preaching. To demand that he should have been occupied with collecting Nigerian traditional metaphors and other literary paraphernalia, is to demand that he should have behaved irresponsibly like that dog in our folktale which carelessly wandered off into the bush to relax instead of carrying a message of life to God, thus leaving the tortoise to deliver the message of lasting death.

Furthermore, at the time he wrote, Osadebay was living under the shadow of those colonial masters from whom he was crying to be freed. In such a position of thraldom or tutelage, it was impossible for him to display before these masters' eyes that spirit of cultural independence which they were so anxious to stifle. Osadebay could not be as bellicose as were the negritude poets of his time: while he wrote as an isolated individual, his francophone counterparts were able to form a "school" and to write and fight as a group.

With regard to the point about Osadebay's imitation of English writers, it should be recalled that only the literature of the colonial masters was available to him. As a pioneer in Nigerian poetry in English, he had no works by Nigerians to fall back on or to learn from. Indeed, early Nigerian poetry in English is comparable to American poetry of the colonial period in many ways: in both cases the poetry was predominantly of the protesting and complaining type; it was marked by religious overtones; in both countries authors were heavily influenced by the English tradition. For example the poetry of such as Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672), Edward Taylor (1642–1729) or Philip Freneau (1752–1832) can hardly be described as American with regard to diction, imagery and rhythm, for it was vastly influenced by English literature; this is even true of the whole of American poetry written before the Civil War (1861–65). [214] Thus it is only natural that Osadebay should have been influenced by the writings of the people who educated him in their own language and literature and thereby re-created him in their own linguistic and literary image.

Osadebay's volume marks the beginning of Nigerian poetry in English in more

[214] See Geoffrey Moore, *American Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 18: "To say that American Literature has its own tradition is not to suggest that it has grown up in isolation from English literature. On the contrary ... English models were at first extensively imitated, and there has been an intimate connection between the two literatures ever since."

than a simply historical sense. His concern is with Africa and with the problem of colonial domination which she was facing. As Kolawole Ogungbesan once phrased it, "if we cannot now say that colonialism gave rise to modern African literature, the colonial situation very much influenced that literature."[215] The poetry of Osadebay demonstrates the truth of this statement. Thematically, he can be called the pathfinder of Nigerian poetry in English: the theme of culture conflict which resulted from the colonial experience has been dominant in Nigerian literature ever since. As the Ghanaian poet Kwesi Brew once observed,

> The past
> Is but the cinders
> Of the present.[216]

The break from Osadebay's kind of poetry—one of direct statement and political propaganda—occurred in 1957 when three poems by Gabriel Okara (b. 1921) appeared in the first issue of *Black Orpheus*. These were "Spirit of the Wind," "The Call of the River Nun" and "Were I to Choose,"[217] and their publication constituted a turning point in the history of Nigerian poetry in English, which became a highly conscious art requiring intellectual effort and technical craftsmanship.

It was apparently in the same year that Christopher Okigbo (1932–1967) became aware of his true vocation. As he himself reminisced in the course of an interview conducted by the South African critic and playwright Lewis Nkosi at Ibadan in 1962,

> I started writing poetry seriously in 1957. I mean everybody wrote poetry at one stage at school and at the university, but I didn't consider that as something very serious ... I never took poetry very seriously until 1957, and the first poem I have preserved dates as far back as 1957.[218]

This "first poem" is likely to be "Song of the Forest", the first of *Four Canzones,* which was written at Lagos in 1957.[219] Regarding the date when Okigbo "started writing poetry seriously," there is a contradiction with a statement by J. P. Clark, who claimed:

> if there is anybody I have worked with very closely—I have stayed with him when I was at the University College at Ibadan, and he was working as a teacher—in fact, if there was any one great champion of my own poetry, it was Chris. And I can say this—that *I started him off in his writing...*[220]

This refers to a period from 1959 to 1960 when Okigbo taught at Fiditi Grammar School in the then Western Region of Nigeria. After the poet's death, replying to an

[215] Kolawole Ogungbesan, "The Modern Writer and Commitment," paper read at the *Conference on Literature and Modern West African Culture,* University of Nigeria, Nsukka, (September 11–15, 1972).
[216] Kwesi Brew, "The Search" in *The Shadows of Laughter* (London: Longmans, 1968), p. 26.
[217] Gabriel Okara, "Three Poems", *Black Orpheus,* (1957), 36–38.
[218] *African Writers Talking,* ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemman, 1975), pp. 134–135.
[219] See S. O. Anozie, *Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric* (London: Evans, 1972), p. 25.
[220] Duerden and Pieterse, op. cit., p. 66. My italics.

inquiry from Anozie about Okigbo's connection with *The Horn*, Clark confirmed that this was indeed the period of his close contact with Okigbo: "Chris was no part of *Horn* except while he was at Fiditi and shunting to Ibadan and to and from me in 1959–1960[221] It is logical to regard 1957 as the year in which Okigbo started writing serious poetry: but as for whether Clark "started him off in his writing" at any point, Okigbo himself gave the answer when, in reply to a question from Nkosi asking what had inspired him "to begin to write," he said: "But I don't know what inspired me to write poetry other than the fact that—in fact I just started writing poetry at the time, I don't know what inspired me, or what didn't inspire me."[222]

From 1957 on the Nigerian literary scene was marked by the publication of poetry that reflected serious artistic consciousness. In January 1958, *The Horn*, founded and edited by J. P. Clark (b. 1935), had its first issue: for some time this journal performed the important function of providing an outlet for the works of young poets including Christopher Okigbo, whose second *canzone*, "Debtor's Lane", written in 1959, was published in its pages.[223]

Another important agent of promotion of Nigerian poetry in English was the Mbari Club which was formed in Ibadan in the early 60s. The Club soon organized itself into a publishing house and produced collections by several Nigerian poets: Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962), Clark's *Poems*, and *Icheke and Other Poems* (1964) by Okogbule Glory Nwanodi (b. 1936: now Okogbule Wonodi). Meanwhile, two expatriate members of the Mbari Club had edited in Britain an important anthology titled *Modern Poetry from Africa* (1963),[224] which covered writing in French, Portuguese and English and in which six Nigerian poets are represented: Okigbo, Clark, Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), Michael Echeruo (b. 1937) and Frank Aig-Imoukhuede (b. 1935). All of these contributed in different ways and in varying degrees to the early growth of Nigerian poetry in English. By the time the civil war broke out, Okigbo had come out with two collections —*Heavensgate* (1962) and *Limits* (1964)—as had Clark—*Poems* (1962) and *A Reed in the Tide* (1965). Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems* came out in 1967, Echeruo's *Mortality* in 1968, while Okara's *The Fisherman's Invocation* did not appear until 1978. As to Aig-Imoukhuede, much of whose poetry was in pidgin English, he soon turned his attention to stagecraft and journalism.

Christopher Okigbo[225] is obviously the most significant poet of this generation not only because of his national relevance but also because of his artistic excellence. He can rightly be described as the poet of Nigerian history, for there is a movement in his work

[221] Anozie, op. cit., p. 12.
[222] Duerden and Pieterse, op. cit., p. 135.
[223] See Anozie, op. cit., pp. 12 and 26.
[224] See n. 217 above.
[225] See Joseph C. Anafulu, "Christopher Okigbo, 1932–1967: A Bio-Bibliography," *Research in African Literatures*, 9 (1978), 65–78. After the poet's death, a selection of his poems, prepared by himself, was published as *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* (New York: Africana, 1971); recent work on this, and on Okigbo's poetry in general, includes: A. Luvai, "For Whom Does the African Poet Write? An Examination of (Form/Content in) the Poetry of Okigbo and Soyinka," *Busara*, 8,2 (1976), 38–52; Anne-Marie Heywood, "The Ritual and the Plot: The Critic and Okigbo's *Labyrinths*," *Research in African Literatures*, 9 (1978), 46–64; Anthony Nazombe, "Meaning in Okigbo's Poetry," *Odi*, 3,1 (1978), 34–42.

which parallels that of the history of Nigeria from her contact with the white man to the early stages of the civil war, when Okigbo died. *Heavensgate* and *Limits* are a re-enactment of the cultural (especially religious) alienation which the country experienced during the colonial era; "Distances"[226] is a conclusion to *Heavensgate* and *Limits,* and a final reversion to indigenous traditional religion; "Silences: Lament of the Silent Sisters"[227] and "Lament of the Drums"[228] are a study in Nigeria's post-colonial politics with its confusion and lack of any sense of direction which led to the disillusionment of the masses; and "Path of Thunder"[229] is an assessment of the *coup d'état* of January 1966 and a verdict that is also a prophecy of war.

If Okigbo's poetry is "one long elaborate poem" as one critic remarked,[230] or if it has "organic relatedness" as another observed[231] and as the poet himself stated,[232] the binding link must be sought in the story of the country from the colonial period to the beginning of the civil war rather than in any other source. In spite of Anozie's argument that what makes all of Okigbo's poems one long poem is verbal linkage, the fact remains that each sequence of poems except perhaps "Four Canzones" crystallizes around a chapter in Nigeria's historical experience. If Okigbo is the hero of most of his poems, he is so only in the sense that he carries the burden of his people's cultural and historical evolution. The sufferings of a nation can also be seen as those of any one man in the country.

Okigbo's poetry is therefore much less personal than many people think. The religious conflict which is dealt with extensively in *Heavensgate* and *Limits,* for example, is grounded in firm historical reality. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* which (like *Things Fall Apart*) deals with the same period of Nigerian history, we read as follows:

> "Mr. Goodcountry told the converts of Umuaro about the early Christians of the Niger Delta who fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana. He told them of Joshua Hart, his kinsman, who suffered martyrdom in Bonny.
> 'If we are Christians, we must be ready to die for the faith', he said. 'You must be ready to kill the python as the people of the rivers killed the iguana.... It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it do not count yourself a Christian.'"[233]

We may compare this passage with the following lines from *Limits,* which show a similar hostile attitude toward the animal totems that represent the gods of the indigenous religion:

[226] Printed in *Transition,* 16 (1964), 9–13.
[227] Ibid., 8 (1963), 13–16.
[228] Ibid., 18 (1965), 16–17.
[229] *Black Orpheus,* 2,1 (1968), 5–11.
[230] O. R. Dathorne, "African Literature IV: Ritual and Ceremony in Okigbo's Poetry," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature,* No. 5 (1968), 79–91. Dathorne had already made this observation in his review of *Limits* in *Black Orpheus,* 15 (1964), p. 59.
[231] Anozie, op. cit., pp. 173 ff.
[232] See his Introduction to *Labyrinths: with Path of Thunder* (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. xi.
[233] Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 56–57.

Their talons they drew out of their scabbard,
Upon the tree trunks, as if on fire-clay,
Their beaks they sharpened,
And spread like eagles their felt-wings,
And descended upon the twin gods of Irkalla

And the ornaments of him,
And the beads about his tail,
And the carapace of her,
And her shell, they divided.
Limits (X)

AND THE gods lie in state
And the gods lie in state
Without the long-drum.

And the gods lie unsung,
Veiled only with mould,
Behind the shrinehouse.
Limits (XI)

The twin gods here are the same "twin gods of the forest" mentioned earlier in the poem. Okigbo tells us in a footnote that they are "the tortoise and the python." Their religious significance as totems is similar to that of the sacred iguana and the royal python in *Arrow of God.*

Besides, in *Heavensgate* and *Limits,* Okigbo mentions two Christian historical characters by name: Leidan and Flannagan. The Rev. Fr. Leidan and the Rev. Fr. Flannagan were missionaries at Onitsha early in the 1940s. They thus took part in the suppression of indigenous religion. In *Heavensgate* (IV) Leidan is referred to as the "archtyrant of the holy sea," the phrase being a pun on "Holy See," and in *Limits* (VII) it is Flannagan who

Preached the Pope's message,
To where drowning nuns suspired,
Asking the key-word from stone;
and he said:

To sow the fireseed among grasses,
and lo, to keep it till it burns out...

It is significant that these examples of historical relevance and factual links are found in Okigbo's early poetry, for it is often with reference to his early work that critics have asserted that Okigbo was pursuing "art for its own sake"[234] or that "meaning" was not his concern.[235] Okigbo himself gave this impression that he did not care for meaning:

[234] Anozie, op. cit., p. 175.
[235] Robert J. Stanton, "Poet as Martyr: West Africa's Christopher Okigbo, and his *Labyrinths: with Path of Thunder*", *Studies in Black Literature,* 1 (1976), 10–14.

"Personally I don't think that I have ever set out to communicate a meaning. It is enough that I try to communicate experience which I consider significant."[236] In spite of this statement, however, there is meaning in his poetry—meaning that is historical, not just personal, though it is coloured by personal experience. Indeed even "Four Canzones,"[237] Okigbo's earliest poem which has no overt historical links still has much social relevance. The first and third canzones compare and contrast the city and the village and find that the latter possesses all the blessings which the former lacks. The second canzone is a social comment, while the fourth deals with a private love experience. In this way "Four Canzones" constitutes a logical introduction to Okigbo's later poetry, giving an early hint of the three major areas of experience which were to be developed in his poetry: namely, cultural atavism (nostalgia), socio-political problems, and the nature of carnal love.[238] Thus of all Nigerian poets, Okigbo can be said to be the most Nigerian from the point of view of not just nationality alone but, most importantly, of comprehensive national consciousness. Hence his central position in the growth of Nigerian poetry.

This consciousness is not limited to the content of Okigbo's poetry; it is also present in the form of his verse. More than any other Nigerian poet writing in English, Okigbo has explored and exploited the art of his indigenous (Igbo) traditional oral literature and the vernacular rhetoric of his people. The incantatory quality of his poems derives from the musical nature of Nigerian oral poetry, at times adopting its very form.[239] Okigbo has also drawn some of his images from Nigerian folk tales and from the local environment. For example, the image of a bird standing "on one leg" in the second section of "The Passage"[240] recalls the story of a fowl that went to a strange land and stood on one leg because it did not understand the customs of the people of that place. The experience re-enacted in the poem is that of solitude in spiritual (religious) exile, when, though the protagonist had been initiated into Christianity, he was ignorant of the customs of the new religion, and had therefore to stand apart, at a loss, like a bird on one leg. Examples of imagery based on the local environment are rife in Okigbo's poetry. Many of his poems are set against the background of shrines in groves which are customarily the scene of traditional religious worship and sacrifice. He can also fashion a specific image out of a particular feature of his rural surroundings: "Faces of black like long black columns of ants."[241] Furthermore, Okigbo enhances the form of some of his poems by working into them vernacular expressions which have been translated literally. In "Lament of the Lavender Mist"[242] for example, he equates the lady of the poem with "Kernels of the waters of the sky"; this is a word-for-word translation of the Igbo term for hailstone, itself an object considered by the Igbo people to be a symbol

[236] Duerden and Pieterse, op. cit., p. 144.
[237] Contained in *Black Orpheus*, 11 (n. d. [1962].), 5–9.
[238] See Romanus Egudu, *Four Modern West African Poets* (New York: NOK, 1977), pp. 3–22, for a full exposition and analysis of these themes.
[239] The second stanza of "Hurrah for Thunder" in *Labyrinths*, p. 67, is modelled on a Yoruba praise poem. See Chinweizu, "Prodigals, Come Home!", *Okike*, 4 (1973), 1–12, especially 3–4.
[240] First printed in *Labyrinths*, pp. 3–5.
[241] "The Passage," ibid., p. 5.
[242] "Four Canzones," *Black Orpheus*, 11 (n. d. [1962]). 8–9.

of purity and delicate beauty. Also the expression "shadow of rain" in "Eyes watch the stones"[243] is a direct translation of the Igbo term for the nimbus cloud which is the harbinger of rain.

By means of these and other artistic devices, Okigbo gave his poetry the imprint of Africanity, and subsequent poets have seen this as a major factor in making Nigerian poetry truly Nigerian in spite of its being written in English.

While Christopher Okigbo thus appears indeed as a pace-setter in the art of Nigerian poetry, he was not alone in establishing a specific artistic tradition which future poets could be expected to maintain. Other poets of the sixties contributed, both thematically and stylistically, to the mainstream of Nigerian poetry. The quality of musicality, of poetry as song, which is at the heart of African oral art and which is so characteristic of Okigbo's writing, actually seems to have been first introduced by Gabriel Okara, of whose early poems it could rightly be said that everything he touches is transformed into song. One skill in which Okara excels above all other Nigerian poets is the perfect combination of simple diction, lyric beauty, imaginative compulsion and profundity of thought. Almost any stanza from any of his poems demonstrates this. For instance, here is the opening address to the "River Nun"—the river of childhood:

I hear you call
I hear it far away
I hear it break the circle
of these crouching hills;

and in "Were I To Choose," this:

And now the close of one
and thirty turns, the world
of bones is Babel, and
the different tongues within
are flames the head
continually burning.

and finally, we have this from "Adhiambo":[244]

I hear many voices
like it's said a madman hears,
I hear trees talking
like it's said a medicine man hears.

Maybe I'm a madman,
I'm a medicine man.

[243] Moore and Beier, op. cit., p. 104.
[244] Ibid., pp. 96–97.

It is because of the incantatory nature of his poetry that Okara can be described as a truly Nigerian poet, for he has carried this tradition from our literary past into his own practice of poetry. Besides, he often alludes in clear and striking terms to beliefs, institutions and characters that are unmistakably Nigerian. In terms of *melopoeia* (music-making) and *logopoeia* (thought-making) Okara is by no means inferior to Okigbo; though with regard to *phanopoeia* (image-making) Okigbo stands out as clearly superior.

John Pepper Clark comes closest to Okigbo in his overall commitment to our national issues; but he goes beyond these to comprehend a lot of other matters. In his first two collections, *Poems* and *A Reed in the Tide,* he is concerned with national issues, general problems of life, and his own personal experiences especially in America. His longest poems, "Ivbie,"[245] deals with the evils of colonialism; and his "Emergency Commission", "His Excellency The Masquerader" and "The Leader" deal with post-colonial Nigerian politics.[246] Clark also tries to relive in his poetry some of the mythical and social experiences of Nigerian traditional life, as in "Olokun," "The Imprisonment of Obatala," "Abiku," "Agbor Dancer," "Fulani Cattle" and "Night Rain." Over and above these themes he deals with the universal experience of the tragic nature of human existence in "Cry of Birth" (*Poems,* p. 15), and with his personal experiences of America in several poems of *A Reed in the Tide.*

Thematically, Clark embraces a wider world than did Okigbo; and this is in consonance with his stated artistic creed. Speaking about *Song of a Goat,* Clark said that the "play was simply for human beings everywhere and about human beings who happened to be in one particular place and situation."[247] This applies even more to his poetry than to his plays; for some of his poems are not just for human beings everywhere, but are about human experiences everywhere. It was only in his last collection of poems, *Casualties* (1970) that Clark concentrated his attention on Nigeria, and in particular on the Nigerian civil war which had just come to an end.

Clark's main contribution to the art of Nigerian poetry consists of indigenous imagery and the use of Nigerian myths. On one of the best examples of local imagery in his poetry, Chinua Achebe offered the following comment:

> I think that the picture of water spreading on the floor, 'like ants filing out of the wood' is beautiful .... But Clark's inspiration derives from the same source which gave birth to the saying that a man who brings home ant-ridden faggots must be ready for the visit of lizards.[248]

The image appears in "Night Rain," a poem which exemplifies local colourism at ist best. In his use of such immages drawn from his immediate physical environment Clark shares with Okigbo a common idea of how Nigerian poetry ought to be written.

[245] *Poems* (Ibadan: Mbrai, 1962), pp. 44–51.
[246] All three poems are contained in *A Reed in the Tide* (London: Longmans, 1965), pp. 22–23, 37.
[247] *America, Their America* (London, 1964), p. 65. This observation had been made earlier, in my book, *Four Modern West African Poets,* p. 26.
[248] Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer," *Transition,* 18 (165), 27–30. See also Egudu, op. cit., p. 27.

With regard to the exploitation of indigenous Nigerian myths, however, Clark has an edge over Okigbo. While the latter made use only of the local myth of Idoto, a river goddess (his other myths being Christian, Greek and Sumerian) the former has worked into his poetry the myths of Olokun, Obatala, Olumo and Abiku (all Yoruba) and Oyin, the Ijo counterpart of the Greek Tiresias. Obviously, drawing upon such a variety of local myths helps to characterize Clark's poems as truly Nigerian.

Abundant and skilful use of indigenous myths is also a characteristic feature of the poetry of Wole Soyinka as it is of his early plays. "Death in the Dawn" and "Idanre" in which the Yoruba myth of Ogun is extensively exploited, and "Abiku"[249] which is based on the myth of reincarnation, are by virtue of these myths more Nigerian in style than all the other poems Soyinka wrote before the civil war. Like Clark, he is concerned with common human life and his own personal experiences; but unlike Clark's his poetry did not deal with specific national problems before the crisis of 1966. Such early poems as "Death in the Dawn," "Prisoner" and "Season" are about the tragic nature of man's existence on earth, an existence seen by the poet to be contradictory in its unfailing promise of both birth and death. When the crisis of 1966 set in, however, Soyinka could not but be attracted to those concrete examples of life's futility. Thus, for his as for Clark, the carnage that split Nigerian society in 1966 constituted a case study of the general human tragedy.

"Idanre" is clearly the greatest of Soyinka's early poems by virtue of its epic conception and cosmic scope, its expression of national consciousness, and its use of traditional Nigerian oral art.[250] The single piece of advice or warning given by way of proverbs in section IV of the poem is enough to rescue a nation almost lost in her search for life through death:

> We do not burn the woods to trap
> A squirrel; we do not ask the mountain's
> Aid, to crack a walnut,

The entire poem is punctuated by such images which reflect Nigeria's traditional life and world view.

But this appears to be the only poem of Soyinka's in the period under consideration which uses such home-spun artistic devices. His other poems are turgid exercises in cryptic language and confusing syntax. His conceits are as brilliant as those of the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets, but more abstruse. With regard to general obscurity, Soyinka invites comparison with Okigbo of the period before "Path of Thunder"; but Okigbo's early poetry is relieved by its musicality and a wealth of images that are at once familiar and shocking—qualities that are lacking in most of Soyinka's poems.[251]

[249] All three poems are contained in *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967), pp. 10–11, 28–30, 57–88.

[250] See Heddzy Maduakor, "Cyclic Determinism in Soyinka's 'Idanre'," *Ufahamu*, 8,1 (1977), 175–187.

[251] For recent comments on Soyinka's poetry, see Kolawole Ogungbesan, "Wole Soyinka and the Poetry of Isolation," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 11 (1977), 295–312; K. L. Goodwin, "Invective and Obliqueness in Political Poetry: Kasaipawlova, Brathwaite and Soyinka," in. *Awakened Conscience: Studies*

Some of the thematic and stylistic elements that have been noted in the poetry of Okigbo and Clark were brought together in the early works of Okogbule Glory Nwanodi (now Wonodi) who was still an undergraduate at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, by the time he published *Icheke and Other Poems*. His second collection, *Dusts of Exile* (1971), contains poems dealing with social problems during the Nigerian civil war.

In his early poetry, Wonodi, like J. P. Clark, describes and reflects on nature and city outline. Such poems as "Enugu to Millike Hill" and "Nsukka" are in the tradition of Clark's "Ibadan" and "Ibadan Dawn". Wonodi's "Resumé", one of the best pieces in the collection, also has the thrust and compactness of Clark's "Ibadan", though the two poems have different themes. Finally, like Clark, Wonodi is prone to celebrate such aspects of traditional culture as a burial ceremony ("Echoes of the Gone"), moonlight play (in a poem of that title), traditional beliefs (in "Shifting Scenes" and "Icheke", both of which deal with the culture clash). "Nature" readily calls to mind J. P. Clark's "Agbor Dancer" for in both poems the dancer is a beautiful girl whose body movements have a seductive carnal appeal for the protagonist.

With regard to his artistry, Wonodi has achieved much in the way of developing a personal voice. Nevertheless some of his phrases very much echo Okigbo's rhythm. Indeed, he has tried his hand at the use of the superpository method for which Okigbo is noted; the last two lines of "Enchantment"—

> Then stretch the rags over the trench
> and we are saved

are modelled on the lines from Okigbo's "Siren Limits IV"

> Wake me near the altar,
> and this poem will be finished.

Again the image that closes Wonodi's "Nsukka"—

> a canopy
> shading the rain-pursued goats

performs a structural and thematic function similar to that of the last line of Okigbo's "Siren Limits II": "A green cloud above the forest."

Like Okigbo also, Wonodi draws upon folk tales and vernacular idiom for his imagery. For instance, in "Getting Married"—which, like Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," deals with the delay caused by the girl's coyness—he creates two images out of Igbo speech and an Igbo tale. The first is

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in Commonwealth Literature, ed. C. D. Narasimbaiah (New Delhi: Sterling, 1978), pp. 251–260; Brian Last, "Soyinka's Poetry: Threats and Violence," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 19,1 (1978), 108–120; Donatus I. Nwoga, "Perception, Style and Meaning in Soyinka's Poetry," *Nsukka Studies in African Literature*, 1,1 (1978), 5–18; Okpure O. Obuke, "The Poetry of Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark: A Comparative Analysis," *World Literature Today*, 52 (1978), 216–222.

I'll wait for you
until eyes see the ears.

The Igbo phrase "my eyes have seen my ears" is usually employed in lamentation by one who has been struck by some calamity. But Wonodi has converted it to a different use indicating timelessness, since the eyes cannot see the ears literally unless the ears are cut off! The second image is that of fruits growing on leaves. This is based on a tale which has to do with trickery. According to the story, the Tortoise once left his home as his sick father was nearing his death. In order to evade the duty of paying for his father's burial, he instructed his relatives not to send for him unless what had never happened in life should occur. His father died shortly after and his relatives could not send for him, since death is not something that had never occurred before. However, one of them came up with the suggestion that the Tortoise should be told that palm-nuts had grown and ripened on palm leaves, for such a thing was never known to have happened before. Thus by means of a trick the tricky Tortoise was brought home to bury his father. Such images and the many others which Wonodi draws from the local environment and culture demonstrate that his poetry is deeply rooted in Nigerian tradition.

Of the poets who were represented in Moore and Beier's *Anthology* and/or who had had collections of their own printed before the civil war, Michael Echeruo (b. 1937) is the least "Nigerian" in terms of national consciousness and especially of poetic style. In his only volume of poetry, *Mortality* (1968), which appeared rather late, though not quite as late as Okara's, his curious interest in biblical episodes which he does not believe in and his satirical attitude to Christianity are revealed in sections I and IV. Furthermore with his abstruse records of his own love experiences, Echeruo has shown little or no concern for the socio-political problems of Nigerian society. Like James Joyce's Daedalus, after whom the last poem in *Mortality* is named, his mind is the sole stage upon which his poetry is acted out. But whereas Daedalus as he goes into exile sets himself the noble task of forging in the smithy of his soul the "uncreated conscience of his race,"[252] Echeruo appears to belong to no particular race and to be conscious of none.

It does not follow from this, however, that Echeruo's poetry has no significance or artistic merits. It may have these, but not as Nigerian poetry; rather, perhaps, simply as poetry without a local habitation. For instance, the writer's erudition is exhibited in the Latin-clogged lines and biblical allusions. Whatever success this kind of poetry achieves will certainly be determined by criteria other than those relevant to the Nigerian situation. For compared with similarly difficult poets like Okigbo and Soyinka, Echeruo's poetry is not relieved by such melodiousness or pleasantly startling imagery as we find in the former or by the use of indigenous myth and proverbs which enlivens the latter. Nor is there any artistic link between his poetry and the literary tradition of his people. Indeed, except for the images of *udara* fruit in "Melting-pot" and *Kakadu* in "Song of the Kakadu," and the scene of traditional religious exercise in "The Signature," there is hardly any reference to the African environment.

Almost any poem by Echeruo can be cited as evidence that his inspiration is so

[252] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 253.

private and personal that its significance is not readily shared by the reader. For instance, it is not easy to pin down the particular experience behind the poem "They ...":

So, he...
cliff on cliff
as dawn on May morn,
digesting earth's hangovers
after the mysteries of the night.

So, she ...
hand on down
like a dream remembered
as are dreams of odd tales
heard
between age and wonder...
Nun in scarves of coal
after the miracles of the blood.

If commitment to the country's social problems and the use of oral literary tradition and of images drawn from the local environment are the criteria for determining a poet's contribution to the growth of Nigerian poetry (and I think they should be), then Echeruo's contribution can be described as marginal.

The last poet of genuine significance to have emerged before the civil war is Pol Ndu (1939–1976), whose only collection, *Songs for Seers* (1974), appeared in New York shortly before his untimely death, although about half of the poems it contains had been written between 1960 and 1967. This, his early poetry, starts with traditional cultural life and progresses to the national crises of 1966. The first poem in the book, "Ofo," is a nostalgic celebration of an indigenous Igbo religious rite of sacrifice: the poet laments that this cultural institution is now lost to the new generation. In the next poem, "Home sick" (I–III), Ndu expresses his aching desire to return to his home culture from the "new master" to whose culture he has been transposed; he laments that the "water Goddess" has lost her hold on and control of the people:

The needy who come
to you at night for counsel
now pass unannounced, unheeding,
for where you lived,
a grey-white,
four-nosed-stone
now lives...

The goddess of the land has now been displaced by the foreign power of the new order (the Christian church). It is this same force which in "Royal drums II"

ploughs rich simple souls
to uproot an earthen-god
and replant bastard barrenness.

This latter tragedy occurs on "a Sunday" in a church where a "white black man" and a "black white man" preach "black sermons (on white sundays) to coloured congregations".

One easily notices in these poems the same concern about a culture that is being destroyed, which engaged Christopher Okigbo's mind; and there is in the works of both poets the same kind of nostalgia for the ancestral home. Ndu's "Homesick" recaptures the moods and anxiety in Okigbo's "Idoto" and "Distances"; but while Ndu is still feeling homesick, Okigbo has come back home at last: "I am the sole witness to my homecoming."

From an awareness of the past that is fast disappearing, Ndu moves on to an awareness of the calamity that befell his country in 1966. The counter-coup of July 1966 is the subject of the poem "July 66 I". This experience aroused in the poet's mind an all-embracing contempt for mankind and led him to condemn as meaningless and futile the whole business of life:

> I despise mankind;
> vanguarded tractors
> bullying tracks of their kind
> raising sputum and spittle
> both passing t.b.
> on wings of winds
> down lungs of all kinds.

This "manking, mankind, apeking, apebrand", Ndu feels, should be swept off the face of the earth, so that God might re-create the world:

> bring steel brooms
> and metal bags
> for Chukwu may start afresh.
>
> This time
> with plastic apes.

Pol Ndu's poetic art, like his consciousness, is rooted in his culture and society. He himself said in the preface to *Songs for Seers* that "the necessary development is that the African artist generates patent imagery and symbolism which capture his roots and sensibility in a distinctive style." His art is a vindication of this statement. Most of his images are fashioned out of the culture, the literary tradition and social life of his people. And the musicality of his poetry, like Okigbo's, is a creative continuation of the sonorous quality of Nigerian oral poetry and folksongs. It is for this reason, more than any other, that Michael Echeruo could rightly say, in his Introduction to *Songs for Seers,* that Pol Ndu "has taken his place with the best of the new young poets of Africa. A tremendous achievement." His death at 37, less than ten years after Okigbo's disappearance at 35, was a great loss for Nigerian poetry: of his poetic genius might be said what Marlowe wrote of Dr Faustus' learning:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
That sometime grew within this learned man[253]

The development of Nigerian poetry in English from its beginnings to the civil war exhibited a two-pronged growth pattern which had a thematic and a stylistic aspect: shifting thematically from the trauma of colonialism to the national disaster in the young republic, and stylistically from the general imagery and techniques of the English speaking world to the specific principles of Nigerian aesthetics. It established the basic trends for the future development of poetry in the country: in the works of future Nigerian poets there is bound to be more and more social and national consciousness, and increasing use of our indigenous literary and aesthetic heritage.

[253] Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*, Act. V, Sc. III. Where for Faustus it is "this learned man," for Pol Ndu it is "this great poet."

7. AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The four years' civil war that followed Biafra's attempted secession had a traumatic effect on Nigerian literature. Its psychological and social meaning rather than the actual fighting became an obsessive theme with a large majority of Nigerian writers old and new, inspiring poems, short stories, novels, memoirs, etc.[254] But the trauma took other shapes as well, for whatever side they might have chosen, the major writers, the founding fathers of Nigerian literature, were all deeply affected.

Of the many ways in which the civil war affected Nigerian literature the most obvious was the untimely death of Christopher Okigbo (1967), a major in the Biafran army. This was a grievous loss for Nigerian poetry. There had been some hope that a new generation of poets at the University of Nsukka (founded in 1960) might pick up where he had left off. Pol Ndu had studied and taught at Nsukka. But despite the efforts of Peter Thomas, who taught there till 1965,[255] by the time of Pol Ndu's death in a car crash (1976), it seemed evident that in the ten post-war years few new poets had been "weaned from the easy appeal of shoddiness and mediocrity"—to use Femi Osofisan's phrasing.[256] Indeed, this admittedly exacting critic found that the new generation had produced little that was worthy of praise. In Nyong J. Udoeyop's *Poems, 1969* (1969) he found evidence of "emotional paucity," characteristic of "an intensely bourgeois poet, solely conscious of the banal, material aspect of experience." Apart from imitation of Okigbo, he discovered in Femi Fatoba's *Song of a War Victim* (1973) the hall-mark of an "immature poet" who never knows "when passion turns into vulgarity." While

[254] See notably John Povey, "The Nigerian War: The Writer's Eye." *Journal of African Studies*, 1 (1974), 354–360; Arthur Ravenscroft, "The Nigerian Civil War in Nigerian Literature" in *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek (Brussels: Didier, 1975), 105–113; Willfried F. Feuser, "A Farewell to the Rising Sun: Post-Civil War Writings from Eastern Nigeria," *Books Abroad*, 49 (1975), 40–49; Ime Ikiddeh, "Literature and the Nigerian Civil War," *Présence Africaine*, 98 (1976), 162–174; and Romanus N. Egudu, *Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 104–125.

[255] Peter Thomas publicized Nsukka poetry in a number of articles such as "The Water Maid and the Dancer: Figures of the Nigerian Muse," *Literature East and West*, 12,1 (1968), 85–93; "Two Voices from the Biafran War," *Concerning Poetry*, 4,2 (1971), 10–17 and "Ibo Poetry in English Since the End of the Nigerian Civil War", *Books Abroad*, 48 (1974), 34–41. See also Hezzy Maduakor, "Peter Thomas and the Development of Modern Nigerian Poetry," *Research in African Literatures*, 11,1 (1980), 84–99. According to Maduakor, *Nsukka Harvest* (Nsukka: Odunke, 1972), an anthology edited by Chukwuma Azuonye, of which Thomas' last-mentioned article is an extended review, should be regarded as a second harvest, the first "having been garnered from the work of the poets who schooled under Peter Thomas."

[256] Femi Osofisan, "The Quality of Hurt (2): The New Voices," *Afriscope*, 4,9 (1974), 46–55.

admitting that Fatoba had "the makings of a tragic poet," he seemed to have a secret preference for "the boundless humour, uproarious if malicious" of Oyeleke Fowowe's poetry, although its "kinship with popular art" did not turn it into "great poetry." Speaking of Okogbule Wonodi (b. 1936), he found that *Dusts of Exile* (1971?), with its "simplicity" was "successfully done" within "a limited vision, more proclamatory than exploratory," and represented therefore an advance on the poet's earlier volume, *Icheke* (1964).

While drama and the novel suffered far less than poetry, the ambiguous impact of the war may clearly be observed there, a handicap to some, a challenge to others. The major writers of the first generation seemed to suffer under a kind of numbing spell which stifled their creative imagination in some way or other. While John Pepper Clark, turned away from creative writing and devoted his time and learning to a very sensitive scholarly edition of the traditional Ijo saga, *Ozidi,* Chinua Achebe's inspiration as a novelist seemed to dry up and he dedicated his creative abilities to short fiction and poetry. Wole Soyinka, whose interest in fundamental political issues had been most openly expressed in *Kongi's Harvest,* was the only member of his generation whose literary productivity continued unabated. Indeed, it became more diversified as his experience in jail for meddling with practical politics sought literary outlets in poetic, dramatic and narrative shapes in the flow of books that this prolific artist poured forth during the early seventies: *Poems from Prison* (1969),[257] *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), *The Man Died* (1972), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972),[258] *Season of Anomy* (1973),[259] *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). Soyinka's increasingly bitter disillusionment with man in general and with Africa in particular, was not alleviated by a fastgrowing inclination towards esoteric wording: this unpalatable combination attracted criticism from such diverse critics as Ali Mazrui[260] and Bernth Lindfors.[261] It was perhaps in order to counter such criticisms and to allay his own sense of dereliction that he tried to effect a dramatic syncretism of the Yoruba outlook with considerably older written traditions, providing an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* (1973) and a remarkable yorubaization of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and Bertolt Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* under the title *Opera Wonyosi* (1977). Soon, however, the whole of the Okigbo–Achebe–Soyinka triumvirate, having laid sturdy foundations for Nigerian literature in English, came in for harsh questioning and sarcastic protest from the younger generation.[262]

Whereas lyrical poetry suffered a decline of sorts, and whereas the immediate post-war novel displayed an obsessive concern, soon turning to triteness, with the

[257] Kolawole Ogungbesan, "Wole Soyinka and the Poetry of Isolation," *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* 11 (1977), 295–312.

[258] Hezzy Maduakor, "Conquering the Abyss of the Crypt: Survival Imperative in Soyinka's *Shuttle,*" *World Literature Written in English,* 16 (1977), 245–255.

[259] Joyce Johnson, "'The Transitional Gulf': A Discussion of Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy,*" *World Literature Written in English,* 18 (1979), 287–310.

[260] Ali Mazrui, "Letter to Wole Soyinka," *Afriscope,* 3,5 (1973), 44, 47.

[261] Bernth Lindfors, "Wole Soyinka, When Are You Coming Home?," *Yale French Studies,* 53 (1976), 197–210; repr. in *Le Critique africain et son peuple* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977), pp. 338–351. This was a paper read at a symposium organized in Yaoundé in 1973.

[262] See notably Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike, "The Leeds–Ibadan Connection: The Scandal of Modern African Literature," *Okike,* 13 (1979), 37–46.

experience of the war, talented younger writers emerged for whom the war was already an unfortunate incident in a nearly forgotten past: witnessing the speed of change in Nigerian society, they sought and found new themes and a new language to convey and interpret on the stage and in the novel what it was like to live in Nigeria in the seventies.

DIETER RIEMENSCHNEIDER

THE NOVEL

Historical, political and social events are apt to shape or even change the course of literature. The Nigerian crisis with its political and social unrest, its military coups, the secession of the Eastern region and consequent declaration of an independent state of Biafra and ultimately the Civil War itself have influenced the authors' consciousness, their choice of topics and narrative methods. The course of events in the country during the late sixties resulted not only in a political but also in a cultural caesura. This is already evidenced in the statistics concerning the most popular literary genre, the novel.[263] In 1966 the number of works published decreased dramatically, and from 1967 to 1969 only five novels were published, of which "the majority were in the hands of the publishers before hostilities started."[264] From 1970 to 1973 approximately five new novels came out each year, and by 1975 publishing output was back to the pre-war level. Since 1970, i.e. since the end of the Civil War, altogether sixty novels have been published, a figure which surpasses the total output from 1952 to 1969.[265] What were the factors that contributed to this renaissance of the Nigerian novel?

First of all we have to remind ourselves of the fact that Nigeria, the most populous African country, has a relatively high literacy rate. Until 1966 it had produced the majority of novels written in English, a position it regained in the mid-seventies. Furthermore, the number of British publishers interested in creative African literature generally increased, and the Nigerian novel in particular profited from this patronage. Besides, new Nigerian publishing houses contributed towards this development, companies such as Di Nigro Press in Lagos, Ethiope Publishing Co. in Benin City (1972), Onibonoje Press and Book Industries in Ibadan (1973), and Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. in Enugu (1977). There is ample proof that the majority of publishers were interested in bringing out texts by African writers to satisfy the ever increasing demand for school textbooks. They were encouraged by the Examination Boards (e.g. the West African Examination Board) and the Cultural Ministries which advocated the inclusion

[263] For a general assessment, see notably Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), a comprehensive investigation into the development of the Nigerian rather than the West African novel. Dan Izebaye in his, "Issues in the Reassessment of the African Novel," *African Literature Today*, 10 (1979), 7–31, concentrated on the "continuities" of the African novel, thus emphasizing the critics' concern with identifying those characteristics which might be seen as typical of the genre.

[264] J. P. O'Flinn, "Toward a Sociology of the Nigerian Novel," *African Literature Today*, 7 (1975), 34–50.

[265] Ibid.

of African literature in school and university syllabi. All publishing houses concerned were aware of this situation, first and foremost among them Heinemann Educational Books of London. By 1980 this publishing company had brought out over a hundred titles in their African Writers Series, of which more than twenty were Nigerian novels. Thus, Heinemann contributed towards approximately one third of the total output of Nigerian novels in the seventies. Other British publishers, though lagging far behind, competed with African companies for the rest of the market.[266]

Finally, the number of authors rose considerably after the end of the war and no fewer than two thirds of the thirty novelists whose works were published during the seventies belonged to a new and younger generation. Although many of the older established writers born in the twenties and thirties resumed their literary careers after the break of the war years—for example, John Munonye (b. 1929), Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), Ogali A. Ogali (b. 1935), Cyprian Ekwensi (b. 1921) or Elechi Amadi (b. 1934) —a new generation born in the forties and after came to the fore, including Kole Omotoso (b. 1943), Dillibe Onyeama (b. 1951), Isidore Okpewho (b. 1951), Eddie Iroh, Femi Osofisan (b. 1946) and two new female novelists, Adaora Lily Ulasi (b. 1937) and Buchi Emecheta (b. 1944). The main problem remains of course whether "the search for new, more authentic forms of creative expression, in terms of treatment of themes and character"[267] continued.

From a thematic viewpoint, it seems significant that while such favourite pre-war themes as the colonial past or the culture clash have not yet become irrelevant, no Nigerian novelist has tackled the subject of the pre-colonial era as a number of Nigerian playwrights[268] and Ghanaian novelists[269] have done with considerable success. Inevitably, the Civil War was bound to impress itself upon the writers' imagination as an obsessive theme, covering the period leading towards the Biafra secession, the war itself, and/or its aftermath. Just a year after the victory of the Federal Government, Heinemann issued *Behind the Rising Sun*—a reference to the state symbol of Biafra—by Sebastian Okechukwu Mezu (b. 1941). Young writers such as Kole Omotoso, S.M.O. Aka (b. 1940), I.N.C. Aniebo (b. 1939), Isidore Okpewho or Eddie Iroh had their works published during the ensuing years, and so did novelists of the older generation like Soyinka, Munonye, Ekwensi or Flora Nwapa (b. 1931). Soon however, another major theme came to predominate—the depiction of life in the city—thus reflecting the interest of African writers generally and Nigerian novelists in particular in the experiences of people in large, anonymous and usually hostile towns. Ekwensi, who had portrayed city life as early as 1954 in his *People of the City*, and again in 1961 in *Jagua Nana*, had dealt with this theme but the "urban novel" as such belongs very much to the post-war period.

[266] Collins/Fontana, Longman and Rex Collings published about half a dozen Nigerian novels each from 1970 to 1978. The Nigerian Di Nigro Press, Onibonoje and Fourth Dimension produced each about the same number. Altogether 60 novels were published by 17 publishing houses.

[267] Clive Wake, "Nigeria, Africa and the Caribbean: A Bird's Eye View" in *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (Lagos, 1971), p. 205.

[268] For instance, Ola Rotimi, *Kurunmi* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1971) and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1974).

[269] See Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973) and *The Healers* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1978), and Y. M. Boateng, *The Return* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1977).

Finally, a minor literary by-product of social and economic evolution was an interest in portraying the fate of Nigerians in England: Buchi B. Emecheta's novels *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) are the two most outstanding examples.[270]

The Civil War provided inspiration not only for many poets[271] and several dramatists but also for more than a dozen novelists. Among them Soyinka proved his exceptional literary abilities but unlike other writers he did not directly refer to the events of the war. On the contrary, in a number of poems, a play and two prose texts he is concerned with the fundamental problematics of the young and politically independent Nigerian society. The Civil War for Soyinka has become a symbol and a metaphor of the political and social ills which have befallen his country. He is the Nigerian writer whose works "represent the largest body of writing inspired by the war by a single Nigerian writer."[272] Published in 1971 his play *Madmen and Specialists* bears witness to the author's utter dejection after his gruesome experiences in prison. The following year his anthology of poetry *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and the autobiographical description of his imprisonment by the Federal Government, *The Man Died,* came out. Again a year later the novel *Season of Anomy* brought to a temporary close Soyinka's literary involvement with the recent development of events in his country. The two prose works, though essentially dealing with the same historical experience, are very different in purpose and style: placed side by side, *The Man Died* and *Season of Anomy* illustrate Soyinka's unquestionable development as an artist and a thinker.

The Man Died, which is sub-titled "Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka" and contains several poems included in *A Shuttle in the Crypt,* is rather more than a direct account of the author's experience of two years' imprisonment which for the most part were spent in solitary confinement. The three parts of the book describe his arrest, the period of custody in Lagos and Ibadan (pp. 17–122)[273] and in Kaduna (pp. 124–210 and 212–286). "Prison notes," however, is a misleading phrase because the book is no detached account but for the most part a highly subjective, and at times extremely moving, sequence of recounted episodes and experiences. Although until his arrest Soyinka had demonstrated he was by no means lacking in courage to stand up for his policital convictions either by word or by deed,[274] it has been possible to characterize his descriptions of his life in prison as a shocking portrayal of the "acrid experience of

[270] As a result of a large variety of factors, exile has become a frequent motif in African fiction in English. See for example Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We so Blest?* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), from Ghana; Yulisa A. Maddy, *No Past, No Present, No Future* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973) from Sierra Leone, and Kenneth Watene, *Sunset on the Manyatta* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974) from Kenya.

[271] See John Pepper Clark, *Casualties* (London: Longmans, 1970); Wole Soyinka, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London: Collings, 1972); *Nsukka Harvest: Poetry from Nsukka, 1966–1967,* ed. Ch. Azunoye (Nsukka: Odunke, 1972); *Don't Let Him Die. An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo,* ed. Chinua Achebe and D. Okafor (Enugu, 1978); *Voices from the Trench,* ed. Mamman J, Vatsa (Enugu, 1978).

[272] Ime Ikkideh, "Literature and the Nigerian War," *Présence Africaine,* 98 (1976), 162–74, reprinted in *Teaching of African Literature in Schools,* ed. Eddah Gachukia and S. Kichamu Akivaga, vol. I (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), pp. 149–162. See also Willfried F. Feuser, "A Farewell to the Rising Sun: Post Civil War Writings from Eastern Nigeria," *Books Abroad,* 3,2 (1975), 40–55, and Tom Lodge, "Nigerian Literature and the Civil War," *Work in Progress* (Johannesburg), 5 (1978), 21–58.

[273] Page references are to Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died* (London: Collings, 1972).

[274] Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heineman Educational, 1973), p. 11.

eating the fruit of the tree of very bitter knowledge."[275] "Portions of the prison notes which make up this book" (p. 8) were written down between the lines of other books which the author had with him, and this piece of information underlines his warning to the reader not to expect more than a personal testimony, "the private record of one survival" (p. 25). When a critic of Abiola Irele's stature seems to blame Soyinka on the grounds that

> there are passages in the book which suggest spitefulness and a personal interest on the part of the author that detract from the force of his public attitude,[276]

he overlooks the writer's own words. Besides, though there are passages which might justify such accusations they are by no means characteristic of the tone of the whole book; it is too uneven in style and form to deserve such a verdict. The first two parts are predominantly descriptive and reflective: under arrest, Soyinka draws strength from his friends' support as well as from his own uncommon creative power. Further, as he becomes gradually aware of the insidious effects of his imprisonment, memories of those (like Christopher Okigbo) who had died in the name of convictions they shared with him helped him to fight against this weakness. Besides, single episodes in these two parts of the book indicate that he feels threatened in his essential pride as a black man, e.g. in the bitter irony of being chained up by fellow blacks rather than by white oppressors, of being victimized by three Africans in "Lagos in 1967 [and] not as a 'convict' in a chain-gang in South Alabama or Johannesburg" (p. 39). This experience proved to be so shocking that he decided on the spot to go on a hunger strike in order "to bring the futile spasms of rage... under control" (p. 40). In later instances he remarks that he needed all his strength to fight against the overpowering idea that he was buried alive: "I must struggle free through the trapdoor of my mind. I must breathe, deeply" (p. 153).

In the third part of the book, entitled "Kaduna 1969" (pp. 212–286), he describes a prisoner, himself, on hunger strike, whose death seems imminent. His desperation, arising from both physical and spiritual exhaustion, forces him almost automatically to develop strategies of survival such as constructing mobiles or working out mathematical calculations, but also venting his aggressive moods on "small envious functionaries" (p. 225) whom he calls "the mindlessness of evil made flesh" (p. 226). The experiences of his last months of imprisonment are conveyed not so much through narration and reflections but through moving poetic passages (pp. 249–265) which reflect Soyinka's total withdrawal from tangible reality. Still, a poem such as "I anoint my flesh," particularly its concluding line, "Let evil die," shows that the writer is still clinging to life, that he has not even now surrendered himself to his fate. Indeed, it is especially in these pages of the book that his will to survive as a man becomes as apparent as his conviction that it is wrong of people to "submit willingly to the 'daily humiliations of fear'" (p. 16) because this, indeed, would mean that "the man dies" (ibid.). The book

[275] Arthur Ravenscroft, "The Nigerian Civil War in Nigerian Literature" in *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World*, ed. H. Maes-Jelinek (Brussels, 1975), p. 105.

[276] Abiola Irele, "The Season of a Mind: Wole Soyinka and the Nigerian Crisis," *Benin Review*, 1 (1974), 111–122.

ends on a hopeful note, concluding with a statement which was to become one of the central themes of *Season of Anomy:*

> That it did not matter in the end for how long they manœuvered to keep my body behind walls, they would not, ultimately, escape the fate of the defeated. At the hands of all who are allied and committed to the unfettered principle of life. (p. 286)

"The solidarity and unity of all those committed to the principle of life" describes this very theme. In contrast to *The Man Died,* in which a man's fight for survival and his suffering for others are portrayed by the author with reference to his own personal plight, *Season of Anomy* is not only a broad appeal "addressed... to the people to whom I belong" (p. 15),[277] it should also be seen as a literary foreshadowing of this fight, a struggle not of one individual but of a whole people endeavouring to realize the principle of life. It is precisely this shift of emphasis, this change of attitude which indicates Soyinka's almost revolutionary development as a man and a writer.

The term "war novel" again is not strictly appropriate for *Season of Anomy* since it deals with the period immediately preceding the secession of the Eastern State in Nigeria which led to the Civil War. Moreover, part of the world of the novel cannot, in point of fact, be called realistic since it is only a potential, purely hypothetical world where all people "seek truth, a better life, all the things which men run after" (p. 9). This is the world of Aiyéró, that "quaint anomaly" which is scorned by the "radical centres of debate headed by Ilosa... as the prime example of unscientific communalism, primitive and embarrassingly sentimental" (p. 2). In form and style *Season of Anomy* is more pretentious than *The Man Died.* To begin with, a comparison with *The Interpreters* (1965), at that time Soyinka's only published novel, seems justified since the beginnings of both books are equally incomprehensible, suggesting the demand for "a special kind of audience response."[278] However, the comparison ought not to be carried too far: both works are fundamentally different with regard to their intentions and achievements. Though they both demand the reader's full attention, the difficulty with *The Interpreters* lies in its complex structure, the frequent changes of perspective, its hazy characterization and numerous flashbacks either by the narrator or by the individual characters; on the other hand the complexity of *Season of Anomy* is due to the point of view chosen by Soyinka: Ofeyi, the main character, is the focus of attention, which means that the reader only knows as much about events and their significance as does Ofeyi himself. One of the results of this narrative technique is the portrayal of highly individualized characters — apart perhaps from the person of Iriyise, Ofeyi's mysterious mistress.

To overcome difficulties in understanding the novel it is of primary importance to

[277] Page references are to Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (London: Collings, 1973). On this book, see John Docker, "Wole Soyinka as Novelist: *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*," *New Literary Review*, I (1977), 44–53 and Eustace T. Palmer, "Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*," *World Literature Written in English*, 17 (1978), 435–449.

[278] Nick Wilkinson, "Literary Incomprehension: Wole Soyinka's Own Way with a Mode," *Nsukka Studies in African Literature*, 1,1 (1978) 44–53. See also, on Soyinka's growing esoterism, Bernth Lindfors, "Wole Soyinka, When Are You Coming Home?" in *Le Critique africain et son peuple comme producteur de culture* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977), pp. 33–51.

recognize its structure as the literary parallel to Ofeyi's psychological and spiritual development. The narration is divided into five parts which—ironically and ambiguously —are called "Seminal," "Buds", "Tentacles", "Harvest," and "Spores." They are ambiguous because they refer to the natural cycle of birth and death valid simultaneously for Ofeyi's world as symbolized by Aiyéró and that of the cocoa cartel. At the same time the subtitles reflect Soyinka's understanding of history as a cyclic process.

The first part of the book concerns Ofeyi's visit to Aiyéró. He is the promotion man for the cocoa cartel which sends him, his team and Iriyise across the country to popularize Nigeria's main export product and, as later comes to light, thus to consolidate its economic and political power. In Aiyéró, a fishing and farming community somewhere in southern Nigeria—which, incidentally, did exist once—Ofeyi and Iriyise meet people who practise a style of life with which they are totally unfamiliar. Ofeyi returns several times to learn from Ahime, one of the elders of the community, about the principles and goals of life in Aiyéró. He learns that its young people do not live alienated from the outside world and isolated in their community but work "abroad" to learn new techniques and new insights which vill be useful to their own community. They always return to Aiyéró, thus maintaining the contact between their own world and the outside without, however, allowing themselves to be lured away from their own principles. Once convinced and converted Ofeyi feels that Aiyéró's young men could and should spread the ideals of their community throughout the country, thereby enabling him to organize resistance against the political power of the cartel with the ultimate aim of breaking it. The cocoa cartel, supported by the military has the land under almost total control. It swiftly realizes Ofeyi's intentions and, in order to re-educate him, sends him out of the country. On his way back Ofeyi meets two people at the airport who will prove to be important factors in his further development, the "Dentist" and the Indian woman Taiila.

In "Buds" Ofeyi, Iriyise and Zaccheus, the "band-leader," find themselves at the center of events and reflect upon the effects Aiyéró has had upon them. Meanwhile the cartel has gone to great lengths to thwart Ofeyi's influence; he just manages to avoid arrest by fleeing to Aiyéró. The conflict between the two opposing worlds cannot be avoided any longer for both sides have realized how irreconcilable their aims are.

The third part can be regarded as a pause, a taking of stock in which both sides reaffirm their views or standpoints. Technically speaking this is being done by means of the narrator's description of the cartel representatives on the one hand and the discussions between Ofeyi and the Dentist on the other. Whereas the former believes in breaking the cartel by peaceful means, on the grounds of morally superior ideals, the latter feels that violence must be countered by violence including political murder.

As compared with this more contemplative third section the next one is characterized by dramatic action. Iriyise, or "Celestial" as she is now called, is carried off by the cartel to Cross River, obviously the North of the country. Ofeyi and Zaccheus set out to search for her and once they have crossed the river their journey comes to resemble one through the underworld, a world of the dead but also of murderers, tyrants, violent mobs, cripples and madmen. Both witness acts of mass murder, incredible brutality and violence, the persecution of innocent people and near chaos without being able to do

anything about it. Finally, in the last part of the book, Ofeyi, Zaccheus and the Dentist discover Iriyise in a building where physical, mental and spiritual cripples eke out their miserable lives. They exist in a word in which life has assumed a perverse meaning. Iriyise is unconscious and it is not clear whether or not she will survive. She is carried away from her dungeon by the men who have bribed the prison warder and all of them disappear in the woods where followers of Aiyéró have gathered, primarily to survive in hiding but also, perhaps, to start a new and more successful attempt to destroy the power of the cartel.

The structure of the novel is not very complex. Soyinka links scenic descriptions as the principal mode of narrative presentation with flashbacks, particularly those of Ofeyi, and with frequent use of reflective passages. Little time elapses between the chapters so that narrated and narrative time practically coincide. Thus *Season of Anomy,* apart perhaps from the choice of point of view, hardly represents a formal innovation in the Nigerian novel but rather a new tendency with regard to its function. Unlike previous examples in which contemporary Nigerian society was criticized and analysed in order to expose and attack its weaknesses and contradictions, Soyinka's novel gives shape to an alternative society which although utopian, might well come into being. A further innovation is that Soyinka limits its scope to the African experience. It is no longer Europe and her ideas which are taken over to serve as models for the reconstruction of Africa; now the usable past of the continent is the main source of inspiration. Finally, *Season of Anomy* strongly suggests that social change will result from communal action and solidarity rather than from individual acts of courage and vision. In this Soyinka transcends his previously held conviction, perceptible in *The Interpreters* and, in part at least, also in *The Man Died,* namely that individuals must overcome their own personal predicaments by their own exertions, unaided by others.

Such a view is certainly not to be found in Elechi Amadi's autobiographical *Sunset in Biafra* (1973) which can be contrasted with *The Man Died.* In this book, too, a well-known author recounts his personal experience; unlike most of those who wrote about the war, however, he did not support Biafra but the Federal Government; like Soyinka he was arrested and imprisoned for spurious reasons. From the beginning of his account there is no doubt about Amadi's support of the Federal Government; unfortunately, this causes him to ignore established historical facts. Thus he never seems to be really interested in objective presentation though, unlike Soyinka, he puts forward vocal claims at objectivity. Besides, Amadi's story is altogether too analytical, oversimplifying the issues and over-generalizing in its judgements. Towards the end he concentrates his attention solely on his personal fate thus detracting even more from his commitment to an objective presentation of events. Though his experiences in prison certainly affected him deeply, he hardly ever achieves the dimension of immediacy and truth which characterizes Soyinka's account. Amadi seems altogether too involved in the personal side of his story to be able to create a meaningful and artistically convincing depiction of what happened in Nigeria during the late sixties.

Sunset in Biafra, however, is representative of the war novel in that it deals with the war as such. Among the writers who chose this theme E. Iroh is the only one who, after the completion of a third novel, will have published a trilogy consisting so far of

Forty-eight Guns for the General (1976) and *Toads of War* (1979). It is his intention describe the effects of the war on different groups in Nigerian society so as to paint a broad picture of the meaning of the war. In *Forty-eight Guns for the General* it is not with the fate of individuals that the writer is concerned, with their emotional or spiritual perplexity in the face of unforeseen events, but with the dramatic nature of the war in which character is subordinated to action. The motives, feelings and opinions of the main figures are reduced to generalizations: they appear as types rather than individuals. Colonel Rudolph, leader of the white mercenaries, the "forty-eight guns", who fight for Biafra, appears to be motivated by lust for money as much as by his ambition to defeat the central government. He despises his Biafran counterpart, Colonel Chumah, because of the latter's failure to defend Biafra's temporary capital. In turn Chumah's only purpose is to destroy his adversary. He informs the enemy about Rudolph's plans and thus contributes towards the fall of Biafra. The emphasis on a personal conflict in this novel tends to make the reader feel that Iroh's main concern is to expose the senselessness of a war in which, soon after its outbreak, political or ideological issues are no longer at stake. War is mainly described as offering human beings an opportunity to gratify their personal egoistic needs, their lust for power, their vanity, personal rivalry and general pettiness.

In *Toads of War,* a comparatively short piece of fiction, Iroh depicts life on the home-front. Selecting a group of distinctly individualized characters, the "toads of war," he exposes most of them as egoistic and materially minded war-profiteers in Owerri, a town captured by the Biafran army. They have lost all interest in the political aspect of the struggle but are anxious to secure personal advantages out of it. The protagonist —or rather antagonist—is Kalu Udim who sometimes acts as a narrator himself and sometimes is replaced by an impersonal third-person narrator. Kalu has lost an arm in the war and is only able to keep himself alive by begging since the government offers him little assistance. Kalu's vacillation between cynicism and resignation shows that, as far as he is concerned, there is no moral justification any longer for Biafra's continued existence as a political entity. As in his previous novel Iroh is satisfied with a rather superficial description of people and events. At no time does he attempt to elucidate the background of events or the significance of the war for the further development of the nation of Nigeria. Neither the author himself nor any of his characters stands apart from the events, which he is thus unable to assess in a proper, balanced way.

Iroh's episodic style can be contrasted with that of John Munonye's *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973), a long novel of broad epic proportions. The narrator, Roland Medo begins his account not with war-time events but with the eve of Nigerian independence. Whenever he portrays the attitudes, gestures and opinions of the "future leaders", his tone is ironic in the beginning, becoming satirical at times:

> I have always been strongly of the view that our country's principal contribution to political thought is in the field of party names... There were at this time, P.I.P., N.P.P., P.N.D.L., N.I.P., C.D., C.D.R. (p. 39)[279]

[279] References are to John Munonye, *A Wreath for the Maidens* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973).

In addition, the novel also contains elements of the *Bildungsroman* in that it combines Medo's spiritual and intellectual development with a presentation of the political and intellectual crisis, the moral decay during the war and suffering. In the end there is a strong appeal for moral responsibility and a re-assertion of the author's faith in the future of man. As Medo says:

> The root cause of the present struggle is greed and injustice. And much as it has been said that injustices and wrong will always remain the lot of man, it is equally true that man will ever continue to struggle for justice and fair play, not minding what it costs. (p. 219)

An important aspect of *A Wreath for the Maidens* is the author's concern for the fate of the young people of the country. He is unable to detect the real cause for which they have been sacrificed and this may explain why in the course of the narrative Medo becomes more and more serious-minded and gives up satirizing events which have become too gruesome.

The Anonymity of Sacrifice (1974), I.N.C. Aniebo's first novel, portrays the same futility of death in war which Munonye attacked. The fate of two soldiers who come from different social backgrounds serves as a paradigm of the meaningless death of thousands of Nigerians between 1967 and 1970: like most of their comrades, both were too young and inexperienced to understand why this war had to be fought. Likewise, Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976) depicts a number of characters each of whom embodies a different meaning of "the last duty." Toje, a businessman and distinguished citizen, is determined to maintain his social role and status in spite of all the changes which the war has brought about. His opponent, Oshevire, whose wife Aku Toje tries to gain for himself, has an almost equally twisted sense of duty: he knows nothing apart from moral conduct and responsibility towards himself and demonstrates through his inflexibility that he does not even notice the changes the war has brought about in the lives of the common people. It is especially Oshevire's relationship with Aku and with their child that suffers from his adherence to his "last duty". Aku, on the other hand, cannot help accepting Toje's willingness to support her and the child although she sees through his desire for her. Finally there is Ali, the local commandant whose concept of duty is bound to be a military cliché; ironically he is relieved of his post because he did not carry out his military duty satisfactorily.

Kole Omotoso's *The Combat* (1972) is unmistakably different from all these works: using allegory rather than realistic narration the author points more convincingly than the others to the senselessness of the events which led to the war. The narrative analogy unfolds step by step starting with a quarrel between two friends over a moral question: one of them has unintentionally killed a young boy but is not prepared to admit his carelessness, let alone apologize for it. As it turns out later in a court trial both friends had already been quarrelling over the child because each had claimed him as his son. The interaction of the personae is simple but carries conviction: the two friends represent the two opposing parties in Nigeria, their son is the young Nigerian state, his mother the Nigerian people. Since all the persons involved must be viewed as symbols and not

as individuals, their motivations, actions and reactions are of a representative rather than individual nature. Without taking sides the author manages to illustrate the Nigerian leaders' general short-sightedness and obstinacy which have inevitably led to confrontation and war. The characters in the story turn more and more into puppets as they are made to see that the course of events cannot be changed. Similarly, as the story progresses the satirical note is replaced by the grotesque and the macabre: the dead boy's mother reclaims his body and places the corpse in front of the guests she has invited. Everyone runs from the place not because they are horrified, however, but because of the unbearable stench. They will all reassemble to watch the wrestling match between the two former friends.[280]

The war novels of Soyinka, Munonye, Okpewho and Omotoso represent important and interesting new departures in the Nigerian novel. In contrast the works of Aniebo and Iroh, as well as Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* (1976), Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1971), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1976) and Aka's *The Midday Darkness* (1973) are straightforward old-fashioned narratives which reflect a widespread interest in the war theme but do not contribute any new impulses to the development of the Nigerian novel.

For all the impact the civil war had on the whole of Nigerian literature, the most important single theme of the novel in the 1970s lay in the problematics of the young urban generation. This age group had not experienced the struggle for independence but it had to adapt itself to a world which had little in common with the world of their elders. For these young people the search for personal or, at least, professional fulfilment after the completion of a Western-oriented education was the most important task ahead. Their difficulties and problems were no longer seen as being of a political but of a personal nature. The conflicts that had disturbed and challenged the older generation, whether the culture clash or the urbanization of a rural society, were now of little relevance. The younger generation, refusing to define their difficulties as deriving form the antinomy between two different ways of life, tried to model their own lives on Western patterns, without much hope of success.

The large number of Nigerian novels which focus on this theme cannot, however, disguise the fact that the majority of them are simple in characterization, stereotyped in the handling of the theme and conventional in narrative technique. Neither an experienced author like Munonye, with *Oil Man of Obange* (1971), *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974) or *Bridge to a Wedding* (1978), nor an extremely popular one like Ogali A. Ogali with his novel *Coal City* (1977)[281] avoid the pitfalls of slick writing. A comparison of *A Dancer of Fortune* with a much earlier, yet very similar story, *Danda* (1964) by Nkem Nwankwo (b. 1936), demonstrates the literary superiority of the latter work, in which urban life is presented not only in its farcical aspect but also in its grim social reality, with considerable impact.

[280] On this writer, see Cheryl M. L. Dash, "An Introduction to the Prose Fiction of Kole Omotoso," *World Literature Written in English*, 16 (1977), 39–53.

[281] See Reinhard W. Sander, "A Checklist of Works by Nigerian Popular Writer Ogali A. Ogali," *Research in African Literatures*, 9 (1978), 445–448.

In a few cases authors turn to particular professional groups which may be regarded as representative of modern urban society. For instance Chukwuemeka Ike (b. 1931) places the disputes over the foundation of an African university at the centre of *The Naked Gods* (1970),[282] Anezi Okoro (b. 1929) depicts the social and economic tensions in Nigerian society through the life experience of a doctor practising in a big city in *Dr. Amadi's Postings* (1974). Both novelists attempt to offer an authentic picture of modern town life, the former in a satirical manner and the latter in realistic terms. Perhaps because of the narrative mode chosen, however, the events are depicted superficially, and problems and conflicts are seen on an individual level rather than in a more comprehensive social context.

Several younger authors followed Ike's example in resorting to satire, as for instance Obi Egbuna (b. 1938) in *The Minister's Daughter* (1975), or Femi Osofisan (b. 1946) in *Kolera Kolej*, a short piece of often sardonic fiction where the portrayal of Nigerian society is effected in such scathing terms that the tension built up in the reader is hardly ever relieved. But it is Nwankwo's *My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours* (1975) which appears to strike the best balance between satire and seriousness, entertainment and social criticism. The author portrays a happy-go-lucky young man, Onuma, whose self-esteem is based on the ownership of a big car. Whereas the satirical presentation of this character is effective and convincing throughout the first half of the novel, the latter half, after Onuma has lost his car and his friends and is forced to live by his wits, is much less interesting. The novel ends with Onuma's escape in a stolen Mercedes and it remains debatable whether Nwankwo considers this a solution of his hero's dilemma—and that of a whole generation of uprooted young people—or whether he simply wants to point out how today's society drives the individual to a dead end.

Side by side with this frequent use of irony and satire, moral didacticism still has a part to play: it is represented, for example, in *The New Religion* (1973) by S. O. Ifekija (b. 1942). But the prevailing trend in Nigerian fiction, i.e. the interest in the everyday problems and conflicts of ordinary people, is probably best illustrated in a number of works whose artistic value may not be of the highest, but which are meritorious in trying to offer a faithful, naturalistic image of urban society in present-day Nigeria. I. Okpewho's *The Victims* (1970) is an early example of this development, to which works like Ch. Njoku's *The New Breed* (1973), I.N.C. Aniebo's *The Journey Within* (1978) and F. Iyayi's *Violence* (1979) are important contributions. None of them are free of melodrama but they all arouse their readers' interest in contrast with a book like Munonye's *Bridge to a Wedding*, in which action and characters remain trivial throughout. *The Victims* is a straightforward story which recounts the mental and physical decline and the emotional collapse of Obanna, an alcoholic who destroys not only himself but his whole family as well. Although the author does not show why his protagonist, his two wives and their children are involved in endless quarrels with each other, he succeeds in presenting the complete hopelessness of people who are poor, desperate, resigned and without any expectation of better days to come. They are all victims of their own weaknesses and

[282] On this topic, see Oyin Ogunba, "The Image of the University in Nigerian Fiction," *West African Journal of Modern Languages*, 2 (1976), 127–135.

there is not the slightest hope that they may break out of the vicious circle of poverty, hunger, despair and aggression.

Autobiographical experiences and events are, in all likelihood, an essential ingredient in Njoku's *The New Breed,* and though political events such as the independence of the country are of importance for the development of the protagonist, Patrick, it is his growing up, the process of finding out who he is, which is of central concern. Here again, what constitutes the core of the story is not so much the clash between different or even opposing sets of cultural values—a problem which, incidentally, is tackled only at the end of the story—but the generational conflict, puberty, the school, the question of a family's social background. The work stands out because of its very introspective narrative mode which underlines the focus on the individual as a characteristic of the modern Nigerian novel.

I.N.C. Aniebo's *The Journey Within* also refrains from tackling major political or cultural issues in order to concentrate on the psychological problems of ordinary people. Nelson, the main character, earns his living as a railway employee; Christian, a second major figure, is a small businessman. Their rather uneventful lives are disturbed because of marital problems. Whereas Christian has drifted away from his wife because she cannot bear healthy children, Nelson finds his male superiority questioned after an argument with his own wife. Like Christian he tries to assert his ego in adulterous relationships. Neither in form nor in theme does Aniebo's novel achieve more than it intends to do, but the depiction of psychological processes is always convincing because the reader can easily identify with the questions asked and the issues raised: the writer manages to deal with people in a manner which makes them unique and at the same time familiar.

Special mention must be made of Iyayi's *Violence,* a bulky novel relating in minute detail the plight of Idemudia and his wife Adisa, whose marriage is breaking up under the strain of the husband's unemployment. The book has its melodramatic passages, but the characters are sensitively drawn and psychologically convincing. The young couple's fate—unemployment, exploitation and illness, prostitution and criminality—is a result not of individual shortcomings and weaknesses but of the economic conditions of their society. In spite of moral defeats, however, Idemudia is sensible enough to understand and forgive his wife's unfaithfulness. Similarly he demonstrates solidarity with his colleagues at work when he refuses to accept bribes from his employer. Moral integrity is never presented as a cliché; on the contrary the figure of Idemudia is depicted as convincingly as are the characters of those victimized by a system which thrives on the exploitation of man by man. Further, scenes showing solidarity, sympathy and mutual assistance among the oppressed also strike the reader as unusual in the contemporary African novel, which mostly rejects the possibility of solving social tensions and political contradictions, ending frequently on an appeal to individual responsibility or insight alone. On the contrary, *Violence* points out hopes for active solidarity among the exploited against their exploiters. Apart from Ngugi's *Petals of Blood,* no other anglophone piece of extended fiction provided such an accurate and timely description of the class struggle that was developing in independent Africa as a result of industrialization, urbanization, the division of labour and the establishment of a competitive economy.

As the author himself revealed, some of the incidents are autobiographical and it seems that this, together with Iyayi's unquestionable talent, accounts for the high literary quality of *Violence*.

Already in the thirties, the "innocents abroad" motif of the African young man studying in European exile had figured prominently in a novel with a tell-tale title, *Mirages de Paris* (1937) by Ousmane Socé from Senegal. From this to Aké Loba's *Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir* (1960) and to Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë* (1961), it was to remain of central importance in African prose fiction in French. It did not receive the same extensive treatment in the anglophone literature that emerged in the sixties, in part presumably because writers from the former British territories had been going through their higher education on the spot, in such local institutions as Fourah Bay, Ibadan and Makerere colleges. Nigerian novelists of the first generation showed little concern with the problems of exile: they were more interested in the problems connected with the return of the "been-to" as illustrated, for example, in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960). A signal exception was *A Few Nights and Days* (1966) by Mbella Sonne Dipoko (b. 1936), a Cameroonian who received part of his education in Nigeria and studied law in Paris, where he chose to write in English! The theme of exile, however, was bound to grow in importance as an increasing number of Nigerian graduates were in a position to pursue their studies abroad as free, decolonized people, whose expectations of the outside world, and especially of the former colonizing country, differed fundamentally from those of an older generation.

Among the number of novelists describing the experience of young people abroad, two writers deserve special attention: Kole Omotoso and Buchi Emecheta, both of whom were born in the early forties and obviously incorporated a lot of autobiographical material in their stories. In Omotoso's *The Edifice* (1971) the main character is a young African student; in *Second Class Citizen* as well as in *The Ditch* Emecheta deals with an African woman who having followed her student husband to London, is left to bring up and educate their five children on her own. Both authors handle their theme very differently. In *The Edifice* a shift in the point of view introduces a critical dimension —exposing and challenging the phallocatic authoritarianism traditionnally ascribed to the African male—into Omotoso's otherwise mediocre story. In Emecheta's novels, for the first time in Nigerian fiction, the relationship between man and woman in modern Africa is discussed in imaginative terms from the woman's point of view: it is to Buchi Emecheta's great credit that she did so without undue pathos or conventional mawkishness, but in a way which reflects the self-confidence and self-reliance of a truly free young woman.

By the late seventies, then, in part as a result of the civil war, the Nigerian novel (as inaugurated by Achebe and Ekwensi and in their wake, by Amadi, Nzekwu and half a dozen other writers of unequal talent, not to mention Tutuola), had undergone significant changes. These were connected less with form than with theme: in the works of Okpewho and Aniebo, the novel reflected a new emphasis on individual experience as such rather than on a man's representative value as member of a social group or even as citizen of a new nation. In those of Soyinka and Iyayi, the thematic function of the

novel was to propound a model for action through the manipulation of plot and characters. Finally, the impulse towards definition of one's identity and value and the demand for freedom and self-realization were no longer restricted to male authors and heroes; they were endowed with a new dimension as the African woman showed her determination to rid herself of the shackles, taboos, superstitions and traditions which stood in the way of *her* independence. Significantly, the civil war, cruel and insane as it had been, appeared to be of short-lived interest, and then chiefly to elder writers and their epigones. The Nigerian novel was firmly looking ahead to the future.

DAPO ADELUGBA[283]

DRAMA

It is an interesting phenomenon of our age that, all over the world, dramatists are showing a healthy dissatisfaction with their inheritance from the past—national and international—and are attempting, each in his own way, to forge a new language, to evolve a new idiom. It is in the light of this that the dramatic efforts and the stylistic evolution of three Nigerian playwrights who emerged during or after the civil war—Wale Ogunyemi, 'Zulu Sofola and Ola Rotimi—should be discussed and evaluated.

In the late seventies, they were in the prime of life, and statements about their work must needs be tentative: their styles were still in the process of evolution and development; their plays (even the published ones) were works in progress. They were essentially theatre practitioners for whom the word on the page takes a secondary place to the work on the stage or in other media. All three combined a knowledge of world theatre practice and intimate familiarity with Nigerian traditional and modern drama and theatre. It is from this solid base that they moved towards a new form of theatrical expression.

Wale Ogunyemi was born at Igbajo Osun Division (ninety kilometres from Ibadan), Oyo State, on August 12, 1939. As a boy, he had an entrée into shrines and groves because he was dearly loved by his grandmother who was the Iyalode of Igbajo and a prestigious member of the local jury. He was taught about taboos, what to say and what not to say, and he witnessed a wide variety of rituals, ceremonies and masquerade performances. Indeed, he had his own mask as a boy. Ogun and Sango were reverently worshipped in his family, even though his mother is a Christian. This vignette of early biography helps to explain the writer's penchant for plays with a ritual and ceremonial axis, whether they be historical, mythical or cultural. In addition to this kind of drama he has also written domestic dramas, social comedies and satires on contemporary themes, few of which have as yet been published.

Ogunyemi was not yet thirty when he reached publication in England with *The*

[283] This is a slightly revised version of Dr. Adelugba's chapter "Wale Ogunyemi, 'Zulu Sofola and Ola Rotimi: Three Dramatists in Search of a Language," first issued in *Theatre in Africa*, ed. Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (Ibadan: University Press, 1978), pp. 201–220. On this topic, see also Akanji Nasiru, "Folk-Lore in Nigerian Drama: An Examination of the Works of Three Nigerian Dramatists," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 19,1 (1978), 51–63.

Scheme[284], which is based, in Ulli Beier's summary, "on an incident which occurred during the author's childhood":

> Custom has it that during the Oroke festival a worshipper may drive the first cow he meets on the road to the shrine of Esile, as a sacrifice. The owner, in such a case, has no right of redress. It happened, however, on one occasion that Chief Odolofin had picked on the only cow belonging to Lojuse, Esile's own priestess. The old woman was forced to sacrifice her own animal for Odolofin, but bitterness rankled in her heart. In order to revenge herself on Odolofin she picked up the sacred image of Esile and placed it at Odolofin's doorstep at night. She then went and complained to the Owa that Odolofin had broken into the shrine. Following Chief Aro's advice, the Owa decided to keep the matter secret and asked the Egungun masquerader to return the image to the shrine, hoping that the god would not avenge the sacrilege on the town. When Lojuse returned the image a second time to Odolofin's house, however, the Owa had no choice but to ban Odolofin from the town. Odolofin was about to proceed into exile, but Esile, the god himself, resented the misuse of power entrusted to his priestess. He pursued Lojuse and drove her to a public confession of her crime.[285]

Ulli Beier has commented aptly on the play's debt to Yoruba idiom on the levels of language and imagery. While the six main characters—two hunters, Otun Ode and Osi Ode; two chiefs, Odolofin and Oba Aro; Lojuse, the priestess of Esile, and the King, Owa—are convincingly drawn, *The Scheme* is perhaps the most verbal of Ogunyemi's plays to date, but its success in the theatre depends on attention not only to speech but also to mood, atmosphere, music, movement, properties, and costumes. Amateur productions that have been negligent in some aspects of the *mise en scène* have left audiences unsatisfied. Two productions which have done some measure of justice to the playwright's conception are the University of Ibadan School of Drama Acting Company's production directed by Mr. Bayo Oduneve in the Orisun Television Series[286] in January 1968 and Aig Imoru's 1972 National Festival of the Arts presentation in Kaduna.[287] With good acting and direction, *The Scheme* can offer the audience a memorable theatrical experience.

Be Mighty Be Mine[288] is a short play in four scenes (mistakenly called "Acts" by the Editor of *Nigeria Magazine*) which effectively dramatizes the story, well-known among Yoruba people, of the mythical fight between Sango and Ogun over Oya. The fourth scene is the weakest: Oba (a natural ruler) and Yemoja (the goddess of the river) emerge as a fatuous pair; their speeches are full of banalities, but with well-paced delivery, they could pass muster in performance. The sixth character in this six-person drama is Pakoyi, Ogun's next-door neighbour and servant to the Oba, who appears only

[284] In *Three Nigerian Plays*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 35–61.

[285] Ibid. pp. xiii–xiv.

[286] The Orisun Television Series was organized by the present writer. Wale Ogunyemi's plays featured regularly in the series.

[287] Aig Imoru, a graduate of English and Drama of the University of Ibadan, works in Benin. His production of *The Scheme* was a Mid-Western (now Bendel) State presentation at the Festival.

[288] In *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 97 (June/August, 1968), pp. 143–150. *Be Mighty Be Mine* was directed by the present writer for stage and television with the School of Drama Acting Company, University of Ibadan, in 1968.

in Scenes II and IV. In a 1968 production Pakoyi's Egba tonation acted as a comic element and counterpoint to the lofty speeches of Ogun and Sango, the two most memorable characters in the drama. The verse is by and large of average merit, and movement, music, song, properties and costumes are an integral part of the playwright's conception as in *The Scheme*. Sango, in particular, must be a good dancer.

Aare Akogun, described as "A Nigerian Tragedy of the Supernatural based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," hardly matches the original in grandeur of conception but emerges as an interesting experiment in Yoruba/English dialogue.[289] The real charm of *Aare Akogun* is in its recreation of Shakespeare's witches in the light of Yoruba aesthetics and metaphysics. The other *dramatis personae* are pale effigies when compared with Shakespeare's characters and their language is too ordinary to warrant any comment. Wale Ogunyemi was perhaps hamstrung by the fact that *Aare Akogun* is a collaborative work. On stage the play emerges as an authentically Nigerian product and the *mise en scène* adequately compensates for its literary weaknesses.

Eshu Elegbara, a play in four scenes, is based on the Yoruba myth about the creation of the gods and goddesses. The first three scenes are rather slack but the fourth is tautly written and can stand on its own as an effective one-act.[290] Wale Ogunyemi's attempts to translate grave Yoruba sayings into English sometimes produce a bathetic effect, and his translations are occasionally too literal: "cheeks puffed with kolanuts" does not convey the meaning of the Yoruba *eleeke obi*, to cite but one instance. As to *Ijaye War*,[291] it will be discussed later, together with Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* which uses the same historical material.

Poor Little Bird[292] is a short, well-written play in five scenes. Its title, which was suggested by the present writer to the playwright when the original draft entitled *The Great Diversion* was being rehearsed for production, encapsulates the play's theme and conflict on many levels. Like a bird, Morenike is caged by her traditionalist world-view no less than her boyfriend Aderemi, a teacher, who is caged not only by his "modern" attitude but by his rapacity. As a stranger in the village he elects to lock himself up in his room instead of leaving the village, like the sensible Ojurongbe, during the festival of the gods at which strangers are not welcome. In his room Aderemi meets his death when traditional rites of exorcism are performed to purge the village of evil.[293] As in his other plays, Ogunyemi's dramatic conception embraces dance, movement, gesture, music, costumes, properties, setting, and the spoken word in this play, which is in part ritual. The opening stage directions for Scene II are typical:

[289] In *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 100 (April 1969), 404–413. Shakespeare's plot was adapted by Final Year Degree Students of the School of Drama, University of Ibadan, in 1968 under the guidance of one of their tutors, Mr. Dexter Lyndersay. *Aare Akogun* was produced at the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, by the School of Drama Acting Company under the direction of Wale Ogunyemi and Dexter Lyndersay.

[290] Published by Orisun Acting Editions, Ibadan, 1970. The present writer directed the fourth scene in the Orisun Television Series in 1968. In 1970 Wole Soyinka mounted the entire play slanting it towards burlesque and comedy by portraying the gods as jaunty, farcical figures.

[291] Also published by Orisun Acting Editions in 1970.

[292] In *The Study of Literature*, ed. H. L. B. Moody (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972). pp. 55–68. *Poor Little Bird* was directed for stage and television by the present writer in 1968. The play benefited from the suggestions of actors and director during the rehearsal process.

[293] In a private interview, the playwright revealed to me that this cataclysmic incident was based on a real event at Igbajo during his childhood.

Scene II represents the BAALE'S PALACE COURT. Festival music plays in the background loud and tense, the BAALE is seated on the ceremonial throne. His chest is bare, but a white cloth is wrapped round his waist and a white scarf round his head. He wars some colourful beads and has spots of white chalk on his chest. MORENIKE bears two melon pods in either hand, raises them up and balances with them as she dances. She too wraps her cloth at breast level. The WORSHIPPER holds a fanciful ancient cutlass with both a big osuka on MORENIKE'S head. Music stops dead and MORENIKE freezes. The WORSHIPPER hands over the cutlass to the BAALE, moves to MORENIKE, removes the white calabash from her head and remains holding it.

Even when Ogunyemi works in the area of radio drama, his use of drums, music, atmosphere and environmental sounds evinces a fullness of conception which recalls his theatre pieces. Such is the case in *Sign of the Rainbow*[294] of which Wole Soyinka wrote the following appraisal:

> This is a very beautifully written play. I am usually prejudiced against plays which deal with myths, at least just deal with them as a kind of narrative instead of utilizing them in an interpretative way, but this stands out as a very good piece of that particular genre.[295]

There is indeed no conscious straining for effect in *Sign of the Rainbow;* the ease and naturalness with which one speech follows another, one event the next, must be commended.

Obaluaye marks an important point in the literary career of the author, who wrote it in Yoruba.[296] In his introduction to the published version Akin Euba says:

> *Obaluaye* is a Yoruba music-drama about religious syncretism. The Baale of a Yoruba town has brought the curse of Obaluaye, otherwise known as Sanponna, on his town through his refusal to worship orisa. The Baale is a Christian convert who would have nothing to do with orisa. This results in a decline of orisa worship in the town. Obaluaye is angered and summons the help of his fellow gods in inflicting punishment on the town. The punishment, of course, is a small-pox epidemic which quickly spreads round the town affecting both the vaccinated and unvaccinated.
>
> Baale himself soon catches the disease and dies. The Ifa priest is summoned; and after performing a ritual, he succeeds in awakening the Baale. The brief trip to the land of death seems to finally convince the Baale that a man in his position should not neglect his own traditional orisa even if he embraces Christianity.

From the plot summary it is evident that this is not an especially thrilling story. It certainly does not rely essentially on suspense and incident. As Akin Euba, calling upon his insight as stage director, further observes:

[294] In *African Theatre*, ed. Gwyneth Henderson (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 131—148.

[295] Henderson, p. 132

[296] Wale Ogunyemi, *Obaluaye* (Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1972). The play in English is available on request from the Department of Theatre Arts Playscripts Files at the University of Ibadan. *Obaluaye* was first presented at the Fourth University of Ife Festival of the Arts in December 1971. It was performed by the Ori Olokun Players of the University of Ife Institute of African Studies under the direction of Akin Euba, a Senior Research Fellow in Music at Ife.

> *Obaluaye* is based on the style of music-drama.... The term "music-drama" should not, however, be understood to mean that music and drama are the prime elements and that the other artistic elements merely support the music and the drama. In fact, what is attempted in *Obaluaye* is a five-dimensional presentation, consisting of music, dance, drama, design and lighting, in which these elements are given equal emphasis.

Obaluaye has proved to be one of Ogunyemi's most successful plays so far: it is indeed the only one in which the overall felicity of the *mise en scène* is matched by equal success on the level of dialogue. The characters' speeches are appropriately mellifluous, poetic, conversational or rhetorical, as occasion demands. This has led some critics to the conclusion that the playwright should concentrate on writing in Yoruba, a viewpoint not shared by the present writer, to whom a short one-act play written in English with the same title and using the same plot was submitted for production in the Orisun Television Series in 1968. That one-act version of *Obaluaye* is perhaps more compact than the full-length Yoruba play, but both are good theatre. Wale Ogunyemi's machinery of English dialogue might for the present suffer from the occasional creak; with the oil of use, it has a good chance of attaining total functionality. It is a kind of English which I have ventured to describe aş "Yorubanglish" because it carries the weight of Yoruba thought, philosophy, sentiments, innuendoes, imagery and world-view, in which the playwright is unusually at home for a young Nigerian of our age. Wale Ogunyemi is invaluable to us as a dramatist who might well achieve equal competence in two languages. If one reads his *Obaluaye* attentively, one finds that it is excellent not only in the Yoruba dialogue but also in the stage directions which are rendered with precision and detail in Yoruba and in English.

Born on June 20, 1935, 'Zulu Sofola can already look back on a successful career not only as author of several plays and study-aids for schools, but also as university lecturer, scholar and critic.[297] She was born of Igbo parentage in Issele-Uku (Bendel State). As a young girl she was exposed to the traditional dramatic and proto-dramatic tradition of her native surroundings, and although she spent her adolescence and most of her early womanhood in the United States, she took with her a confident belief in the inspiring richness of her native traditions. This conviction led to her M. A. thesis, "A Study of Theatrical Elements in the New Year Festival of the Umu Eze Chima People of Nigeria," written for the Catholic University, Washington, D. C. 'Zulu Sofola returned to Nigeria in 1966 with a Yoruba husband whom she had met in America. Since her return home she has written and directed several plays for the Nigerian theatre and other media, four of which had been published by 1980.

The first draft of *King Emene* (1967; printed 1974) was submitted to the present writer for production on stage and television with the University of Ibadan School of

[297] Mrs. Sofola has directed plays for many educational and amateur theatre groups in Nigeria. She was a Tutor of Script Interpretation and Oral Communication in the School of Drama Acting Company programme (1967–1969) of which the present writer was organizer. Mrs. Sofola is now a full-time lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan.

Drama Acting Company in 1968.[298] Like the plays of her contemporaries, Mrs Sofola's benefit from the production process, after which they are revised for publication. The published version of *King Emene,* for example, has a different ending from that produced by the School of Drama Acting Company in 1968,[299] an ending which must later have been seen by the writer as incredibly melodramatic.

King Emene is a tragedy about the fall of an arrogant, impetuous and power-loving king whose mother had committed murder, a crime for which the king dies. The action occurs in the late nineteenth century in the area known today as Mid-Eastern Nigeria, and the setting is a traditional royal courtyard within the palace. From the point of view of diction *King Emene* is probably the most successful of the plays with which we are concerned here. It might be argued, however, that it lacks ambition, and that the playwright's canvas is rather narrow; but within its narrow scope, the author has come close to perfection. The formal language of the characters borrows effectively from the stately diction of the original Igbo which it mirrors. On the linguistic level the work is almost flawless. Even more important is Mrs. Sofola's meticulous conception of the *mise en scène*: there are careful prescriptions as regards costumes, properties, decor, gestures, movement, music and dance. The dignity of the King and of the assemblies is also prescribed in the writing: even Jigide's scatology is in tune with his character and with the emotional climate of the scene in which it appears, while the tragedy uses irony, imagery and diction with a peculiarly Nigerian (and specifically Igbo) flavour.

Wedlock of the Gods (Ibadan: Evans, 1972) evinces some of the linguistic felicities which *King Emene* triumphs in, but it is a rather uneven work. Some sections emerge as poor verse: Uloko's final speech, which the playwright even quotes in full in her Production Note, is a supreme example. The verse in this speech is marred by purple patches and crowned by the stiff, banal ending:

> Over and around we shall together roam
> Beautifying as we impress! (p. 56)

Nevertheless, the play has a consistency of authentic imagery, diction and rhythm that must be commended. Nneka is a fine study in the rhetoric of anger; Odibei's authentic accents have moments of excellence in Act I, Scene I. Mrs. Sofola's favourite technique of opening a scene in *medias res,* already at work in *King Emene* is seen at its best in Act II, Scene I.

Wedlock of the Gods reminds one strongly of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* without the latter's complex and varied texture. The frustrated love of Ogwoma and Uloko could perhaps have been treated with greater conviction and force. The plotting of the play is altogether too simple and transparent for it to merit serious consideration as a tragedy. Even the trance scene (Act III, Scene II) is too trivial and artificial in its

[298] The lead role in those productions was played by Jimi Solanke. A later production by the playwright has Sonny Oti in the lead role. A photograph from this later production is to be found on the fly-leaf of the published version.

[299] The stage production was directed by the present writer with the assistance of the playwright. For television we broke the play into two halves: the first half was directed by the present writer; the second half, by the playwright herself.

arithmetic progression to carry an audience with it. The ending of the drama is an amazing piece of banality. It must be said in extenuation that the play has some irreproachable scenes: the dignity of the assembly in Act II, Scene I, is consistent and perfectly drawn. Imagery and proverbs are consistently appropriate to the situation. Characterization never falters. The euphemism for sex faithfully reflects the moral probity of the society the playwright depicts, and borrowings from the Igbo oral tradition never seem gratuitous or overdone. *Wedlock of the Gods* is an admirable study in the vehemence of speech but would need to be reworked to attain the stature of tragedy.

In *The Wizard of Law* (Ibadan: Evans, 1975), 'Zulu Sofola undisguisedly takes the medieval French farce, *Maître Pathelin,* and reworks it in terms of a contemporary Nigerian idiom and setting. *The Wizard* is set in Ibadan, a city in which the playwright had been living for nine years. Here she experiments with the poetry of conversational speech, the kind of speech one is now accustomed to hearing in Nigerian towns—a mixture of English, Pidgin and an indigenous language (in this case, Yoruba). The central figure, Ramoni Alao, the lawyer, can rise to appropriate levels of eloquence in English in court but he, like the other characters of the drama, uses this hybrid language when addressing his illiterate wife, Sikira, or Rafiu, the trader, or Akpan, Rafiu's goat-keeper. There are varieties and different levels in this hybrid language and these are skilfully used to establish the different characters' social status, temperament, educational and home background. This handling of language opens up avenues of comic expressiveness which Mrs. Sofola uses delightfully. Speech tags like *nko, hen* are also used to reinforce a message or to achieve comic effect. A non-Yoruba living in a Yoruba society, she has cultivated a keen ear for the potentialities of comedy in Yoruba words —place names, people's names, terms of deprecation or abuse—in the dynamic context of social interaction. Only a full reading of this play (or a night at the theatre as a member of the audience) can fully reveal Mrs. Sofola's skill with language, which one example may serve to illustrate, as at the end of the first scene Sikira tells the audience in confidence:

> That alakori! I could have been the wife of a big man today. I could have been riding in big shiny cars today. I could have been eating moinmoin elemi meje, nba ma miliki, nba ma jaiye ori mi. But now look, buba jatijati for Odun Ileya. (pp. 2–3)

Mrs. Sofola also seizes the opportunity offered by this hilarious farce to make socio-political comments on inflation, "big men," the Government and "cash-madams."

There are, of course, a few faults in *The Wizard.* The ending of Scene III is weak and its dialogue is poor; Scene IV is hardly convincing; and in Scene V Ramoni's inflated, ungrammatical language strains credibility in the playwright's bid for added comic effect. This should not detract from the writer's linguistic power, especially as her sense of the *mise en scène* is also evident in the writing. Words are reinforced by stage directions as for instance in Scene V (p. 28) when the comic point of Ramoni's inflated language is pressed home by Akpan's military posture:

Ramoni: *[smiles and talks with learned authority]* Not alligator, fellow, but allegation. Legal terminological terms. Our occupational jargonry.
Akpan: *[with military rigidity]* Yes, sah.

Mrs. Sofola's experiment with a hybrid language is carried further in *The Sweet Trap* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977). The half-literate Fatima is one of the delightful characters of this play. She says, for instance, in Act II, Scene III:

> It was only ata rodo. It put just small.
> I did not put any ata wewe. (p. 29)

But the real triumph of *The Sweet Trap* is in its creation of a suitable diction for the characterization of westernized Nigerians whose artificiality and varying degrees of emotional callowness are exposed through a deft manipulation of rhetorical techniques. Against the euphonious euphuisms of the Mrs. Ajalas and Mrs. Sotubos, Fatima's brisk and earthy accents stand in bold relief. Dr. and Mrs. Jinadu, the old guard, function as voices of "reason."

The Okebadan Festival is chosen as the occasion of the play. This sets the mood of licence: a seemingly fortuitous choice which, however, Mrs. Sofola deliberately uses to advantage. Not only is the audience regaled with the lewd jokes and clownish abandon of Salami and John in Act II, Scene I, but, more importantly, in the *coup* of Act II, Scene III, the artificial world of the bourgeoisie is violated by Mr. Ajala's thugs who enact a burlesque of the Okebadan, with a difference.

One may perhaps cavil at the leaning of *The Sweet Trap* towards the pattern of the sentimental comedies of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Euro-American tradition, but the choice seems to be deliberate: the playwright's aim is to invite her audience to laugh, and the most emotionally callow of her characters, Mrs. Clara Sotubo, is well on her way to reform at the end of the play.

On the eve of the eighties, 'Zulu Sofola's dramatic efforts indicated a strong interest in the dramatic and ritual heritage of her people and an involvement in the life styles and social modes of contemporary Nigerians. Her theatrical idiom showed a determination to create a new language reflecting the dignity of traditional modes and the reality of contemporary ones, not only in speech but in gesture, costumes, décor and staging as well.

Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi (known as Ola Rotimi) was born on April 13, 1938 in Sapele (Bendel State) to a Yoruba father and an Ijo mother. His father is a trained engineer and a cultured man in the Western tradition. In his boyhood Ola Rotimi had the double advantage of exposure to the traditional Nigerian artistic heritage and to a good deal of the Western artistic tradition. In his Programme Note to a 1966 production of one of his plays he said that he started acting on the stage at the tender age of four.[300]

[300] Ola Rotimi, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Programme Note (University of Ife Institute of African Studies Files). This early play did not reach print until about a dozen years had elapsed (London:

Like 'Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi had a conventional Western school-and-college education. He attended Methodist Boys' High School, Lagos from 1952 to 1957. He was at Boston University from 1959 to 1963 for his undergraduate studies in drama after which he took a three-year course at Yale University and obtained a Master of Fine Arts degree before his return to Nigeria in 1966 (the same year as 'Zulu Sofola). Towards the end of his stay in America, he married a French-Canadian woman, Hazel, who is herself an artist-actress, singer and pianist. Since his return to Nigeria, Ola Rotimi has been based at the University of Ife where he was a Research Fellow from 1966 to 1969 at the Institute of African Studies. Owing to his prolific talents and sense of leadership, he was quickly promoted to the rank of Senior Research Fellow. By the mid-seventies, aged thirty-seven, he could already look back on a successful career. An actor, director and playwright, Rotimi is also a competent theatre critic, scholar and teacher. He had published two cogent articles on drama: "The Drama in African Ritual Display" in *Nigeria Magazine,*[301] and "Traditional Nigerian Drama," a potted historical account, in Bruce King's *Introduction to Nigerian Literature* (1971). He had also published two plays in 1971: *The Gods Are Not To Blame* and *Kurunmi,* but his dramatic *œuvre* extends beyond these.

The Gods Are Not To Blame (London: O. U. P. 1971) is a sensitive re-casting of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in a Nigerian setting. In a review of its first performance given at Ile-Ife by the Ori-Olokun Players[302] in December 1968, the present writer expressed some reservations about aspects of Rotimi's language:

> The blandness of the language aside, and the unsure oscillation between an unrecognizable Nigerian 'patois' and great poetry and magnificent language, there were descents to sheer bathos. There was an abundance of banalities such as 'Talk your talk' and the absurd toying with grand Yoruba saws produced in such phrases as
>
> 'Bad word' and 'Bad words with laughter,' was, to say the least, embarrassing, the inconsistencies manifested in the chasing-at-the heels of such lines as 'Father consoles her' by 'Baba takes the baby' made the audience wince.[303]

Many of these unsatisfactory aspects of the play have been expunged from the published version which is, however, not perfect by any means. The real worth of Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame,* apart from its appeal to modern Nigerians on the ethical level, is its adventurous creation of a new theatre language which borrows effectively from the indigenous oral tradition and uses metaphors and proverbs from our common agrarian background, the flora and fauna of our country, the birds, beasts and flowers of our native land. This has popularized a trend (already set by Wale Ogunyemi in his earlier plays) which will have lasting consequences on the techniques of up-and-coming Nigerian dramatists. As published, *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is, on the verbal

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Oxford University Press, 1977). On the writer, see Akanji Nasiru, "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique," in *New West African Literature,* ed. Kolawole Ogungbesan (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979), pp. 21–30. And for a comparative discussion of Rotimi, Clark and Soyinka, see M. Melamu, "Prophets and Women in Nigerian Tragedy," *Pula,* 1 (1979), 51–63.

[301] *Nigeria Magazine,* No. 99 (December 1968).

[302] A resident company which has since come to be known as the University of Ife Theatre Company.

[303] *Ibadan,* 27 (October 1969), 50.

level, a play in English. But recent productions indicate a new trend: the play now contains a good number of dances, songs and dirges borrowed from our indigenous artistic repertoire and sensitively used within the milieu of modern drama. Like Sofola, Rotimi is creating a new language which is neither exclusively English nor Yoruba but a mixture of both. In the middle of an English sentence he can introduce a Yoruba exclamation, greeting, or speech tag, as occasion dictates.

A careful reading of *The Gods Are Not To Blame* reveals the important fact that, for Rotimi (as for Sofola and Ogunyemi), speech is only one aspect of the theatrical creation. His stage iconography is rich in design: he combines the imaginative skills of a sculptor, painter and designer in his manipulation of stage mass, design and form. Music is also an integral part of the theatrical creation, and he has used his association with the sophisticated Nigerian musician and ethnomusicologist 'Akin Euba' to advantage. Indeed, the choral chant of the Townspeople of this drama has a socio-philosophical content comparable to the role of the Chorus in ancient Greek drama. After publication, the ending of the play was totally reworked in 1974/1975 in terms of dirges borrowed from the indigenous Nigerian musical tradition. In this respect and in others, the play as published in 1971 differs vastly from the play as performed in the Ife repertoire in the late seventies.

The Gods Are Not To Blame is of interest from the aesthetic point of view. A half-Yoruba, Rotimi seems to have a heightened sensitivity for what sounds grave or comic or pathetic in the Yoruba language. The Yorubas say, *Oro buruku on terin* (which Rotimi has translated unsatisfactorily as "Bad words with laughter"), and this saying might be used to describe his perspective in creating tragedy. It might well be that, in order to represent the Yoruba philosophical stance more accurately, Rotimi has deliberately suffused his tragedy with a lot of comic relief. In this light some of the translations of grave Yoruba sayings which come across to the audience as comic in English might be a deliberate artistic choice.

Kurunmi (London: O., U., P., 1971) which Rotimi calls "an Historical Tragedy," also uses this axis of the tragic and comic. Like Wale Ogunyemi's *Ijaye War,* it centres around Yoruba warfare in the nineteenth century. Both plays show ample evidence of careful historical research, but while Rotimi uses the Western perspective of a central hero (Kurunmi), Wale Ogunyemi chooses rather to divide the hero's part among several characters. *Kurunmi* emerges as more compact and focused than *Ijaye War* but the latter is probably more faithful to the realities of history. In *Kurunmi* we once again meet Rotimi's expert stage directions which co-exist with the dialogue in a unified conception, but his sense of theatrical iconography is often unrecorded in the published play. A glaring example is the following dialogue between Fanyaka and the Warriors:

Fanyaka: Landed property,
Kurunmi,
The farms
Kurunmi
The air we breathe,
Kurunmi.
The gods of our fathers
Kurunmi.

Warriors: Kurunmi,
Kurunmi,
Kurunmi!
Abah! (p. 39)

This dialogue obviously depends for its impact on movement, gesture and inflection, which are denied to the reader in his study, a fact which points the way to the need to incorporate more stage directions in future editions of the play.

Wale Ogunyemi's *Ijaye War* uses Yoruba songs, praise-names and exhortations in a more integral manner: in recent productions, there has been a movement to freer synthesis. His play is suffused with a rhetorical flavour which establishes the speakers' Yoruba origins clearly in the audience's minds: Rotimi's characters seem to span the two worlds familiar to the playwright (the West and traditional Nigeria), with the sole exception of Ogunmola whose "Yorubanglish" is unmistakable. *Ijaye War* unabashedly works in this medium which is not just Yoruba English or Yoruba mixed with English but a many-sided attempt to catch the flavour, tones, rhythms, emotional and intellectual content of Yoruba language and thought in an adventurous brand of English. In Scene X Kurunmi talks to Labudanu in a succession of images which are authentically Yoruba:

> Labudanu, a bird, no matter how thick the grove, meanders its way through it with style, without crashing into any of the trees. But it seems the trees are conspiring to create a ridge between the birds and their nests. Consult the oracle. It appears my path is lined with thorns and devil leaves. (p. 41)

In Scene II Kurunmi's orders follow the patterns of Yoruba speech.

> Animashaun indisposed at this crucial period? Is he mad or something? Ask him to be brought before me, now! If he is dying, carry him. If he cannot walk, drag him. And if dead, lay his corpse before me!... What does he take me for, a fool of a General. (p. 16)

But when we turn to Rotimi's *Kurunmi,* we find that only Ogunmola emerges as a consistent creation in the Yorubanglish spectrum. One of his speeches in Act II, Scene I will suffice as illustration:

> Paga! Paga! Paga! You, Balogun Ibikunle, and you too, Osi Osundina, if you are looking for someone to gossip about, someone to say forced you into a war with Kurunmi go look for the scapegoat somewhere else. Do you hear me? Cowards, buy your scapegoat in another market. Let no one, from now on—listen, everybody —let no one call Ogunmola into this matter again. I have nothing to do with it any more. And one more thing. He who calls my name in this matter—everybody listen —I am a son of Fesu, and fearful jujus are my best friends. If anyone talks evil against me, it is on to his own head that evil will return. And one more thing, he who plots with another to bring me to harm, that person is the baby who cries to stop its mother's sleep; it too will suffer the anguish of not sleeping. I said so.... And one more thing. Ogunmola is out of this matter. (pp. 48–49)

Plot, characterization and structure are probably more satisfactorily handled by Rotimi than by Ogunyemi. For instance, Rev. Mann, who is consistently portrayed as a comic figure in *Kurunmi,* is a mish-mash of the pathetic, comic and noble in *Ijaye War.* In terms of the overall theatrical conception Ogunyemi's play uses dance, music, gesture, and movement with a plasticity and verve which mirror the best qualities of the traditional performing arts in Africa. Rotimi's play also aims at this plasticity, but the word is so dominant that dance, music and stage imagery seem subsidiary to it.

Of these three gifted playwrights who came to the fore in the wake of the civil war, Ola Rotimi has been the most privileged, for his occupation as a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute African studies, University of Ife, has been primarily to develop his art and produce plays.[304] In his nine years at Ife he achieved mastery of the theatrical medium and his greatest strength as an artist seems to lie in directing. If Rotimi's proven excellence is in stage iconography, Sofola's lies in her linguistic adventurousness and Ogunyemi's in his pervasive, all-round sense of theatre. All three artists are actors, directors, playwrights and researchers. They are cosmopolitan, widely-travelled Nigerians whose art has an catholicity of appeal, but whose commitment is essentially to a Nigerian audience, although this does not preclude international marketability. All three submit their plays to the test of rehearsals and performances before publication, and, even after publication, the plays continue their organic growth as theatre pieces. All three are not satisfied with purely verbal drama and are concerned with extending the frontiers of theatre and reflecting social and cultural reality. They are responsible citizens with a strong ethical sense. With their admirable vision of a new African theatre and their commitment to serious-minded experimentation, by the eighties they could be expected to scale the heights of dramatic excellence.

FEMI OSOFISAN

THE ALTERNATIVE TRADITION: AN INSIDER'S POSTSCRIPT

Literature in postwar Nigeria presents, at least at first glance, a vital and flourishing landscape. New writers, too numerous to read or remember, flood the bookshelves; a flurry of activity emanates from the proliferating publishing houses; the stalls are noisy with the shuffle of journal and magazine; on television, on radio and on stage, rhetoric pours forth from the pens of jubilant novices startled into the limelight. If the world is a stage, Nigeria, in its present ferment, supplies the script.

Of course there are reasons for this. Every modern culture entrusts its continuity and transmission to the three basic elements of literacy, economic well-being, and leisure. During the military regimes of the postwar period, these three elements received un-

[304] Ola Rotimi has given strong leadership to the University of Ife Theatre which has become a professional travelling theatre in the last few years. His *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi,* a historical tragedy, was printed locally in 1973. By the late seventies his yet unpublished plays included *Cast the First Stone* and *Holding Talks,* an "absurd" drama of uneven merit.

precedented boost, largely owing to the discovery of lavish oil resources. For the literary world, this was timely and propitious.

The expansion in educational institutions (there were thirteen universities in 1978, as compared with only six in 1970) led to a significant growth in literacy. Added to this was the lure of renown, concretized in the inspiring success of our pioneer writers of the first generation. Add also the powerful enticement of a rich financial harvest from the literary field, an illusion made real by the spectacular examples of the Western thrillers. And finally, add the visible increase in both the economic means and the amount of leisure enjoyed by the growing middle class (especially their children) as a result of the short-lived oil-boom and the indigenization policy of the Obasanjo regime. These ingredients—a growing market and ambitious writers—fused into a powerful creative incentive, at the beginning of the dynamic growth of the seventies.

Let us briefly summarize the history of this apparent bloom. In the heady decade following independence, before the Civil War, literature in Nigeria, in its modern form at least, was almost exclusively the business of the small Mbari coterie, dominated by such names as Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Ulli Beier. The war broke up that coterie, driving its leading figures into prison, exile, or the fatal battlefield. And for a short while, modern Nigerian literature went into limbo, in which the new voices such as that of Samson Amali (b. 1947)[305] were so feeble and insignificant that they merely served to reinforce the silence.

But in the decade after the war, in spite of the state of emergency which lasted for most of this decade (lifted in September 1978), literature blossomed out into such a fertile field of activity that it is not possible or even desirable to follow every trend or manifestation of it. For, indeed, this apparent ferment of artistic production was largely deceptive. While there was variety, and an increase in numbers, there was very rarely excellence. In fact, the one great distinctive feature of the immediate postwar literature may well be its almost unrelieved lack of distinction. The reasons which made for expansion and growth also led, paradoxically, to a debasement of value and taste. If it is true for instance that literacy is spreading and that more and more people are able to speak and use English, which remains our national lingua franca, it is no less true that fewer people understand it. And the uncontrolled invasion of novels and films of the gangster or erotic type, especially from America, black and white, coupled of course with their huge commercial success, helped to fashion a model of taste based on cheap sensationalism and primitive sensuality. All this naturally influenced the budding writers, so that when we survey the contemporary creative scene, we find ourselves confronted with the dearth or disappearance of all the lofty ambitions central to a humanist culture. The older writers modelled themselves after Shakespeare or Conrad, the new ones, it seems, after Superfly.

[305] Samson O. O. Amali, who is the only writer in his native language, Idoma, began with a school-play in English, *The Downfall of Ogbuu*, which was composed and performed in 1963; it was published in mimeographed form in 1968. His English poems, as well as some Idoma poems with the writer's own translations appeared in *Poems* (Ibadan: n.p., 1968), *God Poems* (Ibadan: University Bookshop, 1970), *Poems: Time and Events* (mimeographed: n.p., 1970) and *Worlds Within Worlds and Other Poems* (Ibadan: n.p., 1970). For a controversy about Amali's poetry, see several essays and letters published in *Ibadan*, No. 29 (July 1971) and No. 30 (1975). [Ed.]

It is a situation at best of ambivalence, at worst of decline. The older writers represented a watershed, in both the socio-historical and the purely aesthetic aspects of artistic expression, and it was a watershed from which we had to depart in order to keep our rendez-vous with history. But sadly, the new generation, for all its noise and aggressivenesses, gropes still in the wasteland. Muted now are the lyrical, clairvoyant cadences of Okigbo, the raw, inchoative passions of Soyinka and his challenging esotericism: and muted also, Achebe's sedate, serious concern for the often tragic mutations in social culture. These voices, together with their underlying mythopoetic narcissism, had to be outgrown and left behind, because when all is said and done, behind their genuinely humane attitude there was always a plea for a reactionary or simply impracticable idealist utopia, entangled in the false maze of a tragic cycle.[306] Thus it was not the turning away from the concerns of this older generation that was unhealthy, but rather the shallow complacencies of the new generation, their inability to lead us to a new oasis of feeling. In the social decay that followed the discovery of oil, the essence of literature itself dwindled, so much so that the "radical" was often interpreted by such as Naiwu Osahon (b. 1937) or Dillibe Onyeama (b. 1951) in terms of the hysterically vulgar or cheaply melodramatic.[307] In a climate of triviality, we seem to have fashioned out our art for the low slums of artifice in which no genuine perception can be found. Numerous titles abound of at best indifferent quality; there are a great many authors with a modicum of talent and/or skill, and many names come to mind: some, like Chukwuemeka Ike (b. 1931), Obi Egbuna (b. 1938), Nkem Nwankwo (b. 1936) had precociously reached print already before the war; but they were joined by many younger men and women who held some sort of promise: Sulu Ogwu, Adaora Lily Ulasi, 'Dayo Ogunniyi, Tanure Ojaide, T. U. Nwala, Rasheed Gbadamosi (b. 1943), Femi Osofisan, Kalu Okpi, Hagher, Aiyegbuse, etc. But even among the best of these, there are few with the potential for greatness.[308] The new generation of writers are the heirs of Ekwensi.

And yet there is a lot to congratulate ourselves about in this unsatisfactory state of affairs. Without Ekwensi and his heirs, literature would remain the property of the privileged, an enclosed area open only to initiates. What is particularly valuable in the present generation of writers is thus, as in Ekwensi, their original intention, not their achievement. Perhaps because this is the generation to which I myself belong, sharing its best and worst attributes, I find myself in absolute sympathy with the prevailing climate of conflict with the preceding generation. The new writers have deserted the grandiose ambitions of the last decade not by accident, but as a conscious heretical act

[306] For a pungent attack on the first generation of Nigerian writers, see Chinweizu Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, "Towards the Decolonization of African Literature," *Okike*, 6 (1974), 11–27, and 7 (1975), 65–81, and "The Leeds–Ibadan Connection: The Scandal of Modern African Literature," *Okike*, 13 (1979), 37–46. Onwuchekwa Jemie is also known as a creative writer: see his *Voyage and Other Poems* (Ife: Pan African Pocket Poets, 1971). [Ed.]

[307] Choice examples: Naiwu Osahon, *Sex is a Nigger* (Apapa: Di Nigro Press 1971), *The Climate of Darkness* (Ibid.: 1971), *Fires of Africa* (Apapa: Times Press, 1973), *No Answer from the Oracle* (Apapa: Di Nigro Press, 1974), *Shadows* (Apapa: Third World First Publications, 1978); Dillibe Onyeama, *John Bull's Nigger* (London: Frewin, 1974), *Nigger at Eton* (Ibid.: 1975), *Sex is a Nigger's Game* (Akure: Fagbomigbe, 1976) etc. Osahon's *Sex is a Nigger* is briefly discussed in Bernth Lindfors, "The Rise of African Pornography," *Transition*, 8 (1973), 42, 65–71.

[308] See for example, Tanure Ojaide, *Children of Iroko and Other Poems* (Greenfield Center, N. Y.: Greenfield Review Press, 1973); Rasheed Gbadamosi, *Echoes from the Lagoon* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1973).

of self-purgation. They openly dissociate themselves, even while paying due homage, from the attitudes and pronouncements of their predecessors, and seek to create an art that would be accessible to the large majority of the Nigerian public, rather than to a cultured and privileged "élite". Literature, to the majority of this generation born in the 1940s, is not just a passive, even if authentic, mirror of historical processes; it is an active catalyst of social change, and it should be a vehicle for articulating and influencing this dynamic process of evolution. It should achieve this both by exposing "enemies" and furnishing the right kind of enlightenment for its mass public. Thus—to give one spectacular instance of this new sensibility—the omniscient animist gods so precious to the older generation have been expelled or stripped naked on the contemporary stage, as witness for example the distance between Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and a play like Adegoke Durojaiye's *Grip 'Am* (1973). Turning away from the preoccupation with negritudinist exotica, the younger writers focus instead on present society, exploring experiences taken directly from the mundane, quotidian life, and from the stress of living in a complex neo-capitalist economy. This means that the heroes who now inhabit the world of our fiction and stage are recognizable social types: in Munonye's *Oil Man of Obange* (1971) and *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974) and especially in such fiction by younger writers as Okedeji's *Rere Run* (1973), Omotoso's *The Curse* (1976), Bode Sowande's *Afamako* (1977) or Hagher's *The Last Laugh* (1978), the ordinary common man enters history as a worthy symbol of our present incoherence and of the courage of our resistance.

We have before us then a literature which has deliberately set its compass for a horizon of small but valuable ambitions. When I say "small," I am thinking of course of the dangerous limitations inherent in all works of sociopolitical commitment, limitations which some of my contemporaries tend—fatally—to ignore. But where the artist willingly yields pride of place to immediacy and partisanship, he consents almost automatically to forsake depth and refinement, to take the risk of superficiality, although such choice will then depend on the individual writer, on the side he takes betwen the conflicting forces that shape history. I believe that to force literature out of the shrine or ancestral grove, and bring it out onto the dusty streets is in itself a phenomenon of commitment to the communal struggle for survival. The cultic paraphernalia of our forefathers, their emblems and faded caparisons, are perhaps necessary relics for the generation floundering in the sea of history and desperate for a hand-hold, but not for the generation which has survived the shipwreck, whose immediate concerns should be with food, shelter and security, with taming the hostile environment for human use and securing adequate benefits from the sweat of their labour. For all that, we cannot deny that, in order to fulfil these ambitions, and still remain within the province of art, the writer requires talent and intensity, perceptiveness and breadth, as well as taste and vision. Regrettably what we see mostly is vulgar exhibitionism, the clever but ephemeral tactics of the mass-consumer salesman.

There is thus profusion nowadays but a lack of depth, an overbearing concern with surface collisions and transient issues which defy easy classification. However, on venturing bravely into this hybrid growth we discover three principal areas in which the writers have been most active, although I must emphasize that this is merely a division

of convenience since the areas can never be mutually exclusive, and the structural and thematic strands interweave constantly. Therefore this exercise justifies itself only inasmuch as it facilitates a closer acquaintance with the works of Nigerian writers in recent years.

As is to be expected, the subject that has provided the greatest literary impetus has been the civil war: this is clearly the area where our writers have been most fertile.[309] Lack of space makes it impossible even to attempt a summary of the thematic and structural accomplishments of these works; still the most significant among them are perhaps those by Soyinka, both for their profound metaphysical reflections and moral challenge, and for their astonishingly felicitous use of language. The most graphic and most lucidly written is undoubtedly Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra,* which was an instant success on account of its compelling narrative power, its dramatic sense of atmosphere, its skilful manipulation of the techniques of terror and suspense. Iroh's single contribution provides an interlude from the more serious approaches, as exhilarating, on a mental level, as a good game of tennis.

But Iroh also supplies a convenient link with the second of the significant areas of creative endeavour in postwar Nigerian literature: the area of popular literature, whose purpose is directed solely towards entertainment. It is very significant that in the preceding decade, no writer apart from Ekwensi would have accepted the role of a mere entertainer. The dominant Mbari school, nurtured on a tradition of respectable European literature from Homer to Milton, from the Metaphysical poets to the latter-day Surrealists, developed a self-conscious attitude to literature, and held a conception of the identity of the artist which was, at best, romantic. The artist was a solitary and privileged creator, haloed by his special genius, and celebrated by the Muse high above the rest of his contemporaries who, if they wished to approach him, must first remove their sandals. It was this conception of the sacred role of the artist which led to a widening of the distance between the creator and his public, symbolized in the late

[309] For narrative prose, see especially S. Okechukwu Mezu, *Behind the Rising Sun* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971); Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (London: Collings, 1972); Chinua Achebe, *Girls at War, and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972); Elechi Amadi, *Sunset in Biafra* (Ibid. 1973); Flora Nwapa, *Never Again* (Egudu: Nwamife, 1975); Fola Oyewole, *Reluctant Rebel* (London: Collings, 1975); Cyprian Ekwensi, *Survive the Peace* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976); James Ene Henshaw, *Enough is Enough* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1976). Most of those works are designed as personal accounts of war, either overtly or under a thin fictional disguise. In other novels, however, the war merely supplies the decor of conflict as can be observed in John Munonye, *A Wreath for the Maidens* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), I.N.C. Aniebo, *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* (Ibid., 1974), Isidore Okpewho, *The Last Duty* (London: Longmans, 1976), Chukwuemeka Ike, *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), and especially Eddie Iroh's popular thriller, *Forty-eight Guns for the General* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976). In poetry, the experience of war was treated mostly through the prism of metaphor and allegory in a manner which was already apparent in John Pepper Clark's *Casualties. Poems 1966–1968* (London: Longmans, 1970) and reached its apex in Soyinka's works of the early seventies: *Madmen and Specialists* (London: Methuen, 1971), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London: Collings, 1972), and *Season of Anomy* (Ibid., 1973). Among the younger generation, the same technique of indirection was already discernable in Omotoso's second novel, *The Combat* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), but such transformation of war into a window for self-exploration was chiefly conspicuous in poetry: see Kalu Uka (b. 1938), *Earth to Earth* (Greenfield Center, N. Y.: Greenfield Review Press, 1972); Pol N. Ndu, *Songs for Seers* (New York: Nok, 1974); Michael Echeruo, *Distances* (Enugu: I.K. Imprints, 1975).

Christopher Okigbo's now famous statement at Makerere, that he never read his poetry to non-poets. Nigeria reaped her first literary harvest from this cultic conception in the works of Soyinka, Achebe, Clark, and Okigbo—works which were characterized, on the positive side, by the serious tone of their thematic concerns, their refinement of language, and their painstakingly sculptured forms; while on the negative side, they were all, with a few exceptions, highly complex in structure, mannered and sometimes undecipherable. The paradox of their success lay thus in their general unreadability: Soyinka, Okigbo and to a lesser extent Clark became universally famous because they were universally unread. These men became responsible for raising our modern literature within a relatively short period to a status of high respectability; but their success has also been ironically responsible for the existing gap between creative writing and the flowing stream of national life. Until recently, Nigerian literature, as far as the Nigerian public was concerned, was an awesome beast to be confronted only in the classroom and to be hastily fled from as soon as the examinations were over. When the literate public sought entertainment, it turned to James Hadley Chase.

It is really a reiteration of what is common knowledge to remark that no Nigerian public developed which read Nigerian literature for itself, that is, for the sheer pleasure of reading. To be sure, there was a popular literature outside the works of the Mbari group, but it was a literature of the markets, of which the most famous example was the Onitsha chapbooks. It was thus a literature of severe limitations, both in its aesthetic achievement, and in the technical means of production at its disposal.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that, with the dispersal of the Mbari school and the bombing of the Onitsha market during the war, a new generation of writers should have been needed to fill the void, especially as there was at the same time a growing literate public avid for reading material. Appropriately, this new body of literature takes its stance midway between the Mbari works—whose concern for craftsmanship it has inherited, although without the same preciosity—and the Onitsha chapbooks, whose themes and techniques it imitates. This was precisely what Ekwensi's works sought to accomplish, and the reason why he was so unfairly greeted with contempt: largely because his was a minority attitude among the intellectuals in the days of the dominance of Mbari idealism. Throughout the seventies, however, whatever one may think of it, Ekwensi's heirs kept multiplying, and there was a steady rise in the number of works belonging to the popular genre.

This development is not necessarily a happy phenomenon in the history of our literature. It is good, I think, to develop a literature that is accessible to the masses, if only to sustain a continuous literate tradition beyond the colleges. But entertainment in art always carries its dangers, in that the writer can be easily tempted to forsake his responsibilities to his public, and, as illustrated by Euro-American practitioners, to indulge in highlighting only those aspects of human experience that are unquestionably base, frivolous and primitive, all for the sake of quick wealth. In an age when moral values are constantly brushed aside in the mad rush for material wealth, there will always be a ready market for the trivial and the vulgarly erotic, an easy temptation for cheap talent and depraved publishers. Our civilization is endangered when Achebe and Soyin-

ka are driven off the stalls by Osahon or Onyeama, or even by flesh rags like the *Lagos Weekend* and *Ikebe*.

That danger may however still be remote: as the seventies came to an end, most popular works still maintained a healthy balance between sense and scandal, between meaning and sensual manipulation. While the difficulty of writing good popular poetry without being superficial is aptly illustrated in the exertions of Brigadier Mamman Vatsa (b. 1944),[310] there is an abundance of conventional fiction and drama of this type, which largely employs the techniques of realism both in thematic orientation and in structural patterns. Such plays and stories deal with domestic or at least contemporary social crises, with the characters modelled on recognizable social types. Plots are basically simple, if elaborated, the language of the narration is straightforward, without contrivance, and the dialogue is couched in the banal currency of everyday exchange. Finally, the location of the stories is placed within the concrete geographical environment, reinforced by such props of modern living as motor cars, electricity, silver-plate, etc.

Most of the plays of 'Zulu Sofola belong to this category[311] as do the television plays of Laolu Ogunniyi. But perhaps the most successful dramatic expression so far of this popular domestic genre is a play by Wale Ogunyemi (b. 1939), *The Divorce* (1976), which was a roaring success even in philistine Lagos.[312]

In fiction, the most widely read are the works of Obi Egbuna[313] but since the mid-seventies there have been important newcomers like T. U. Nwala, A. Choro or Sulu Ogwu.[314] As far as sales go, the most successful must be the works printed in the Fontana Library of African Literature, which published or re-issued a number of novels by Egbuna, Ike, and Adaora Ulasi,[315] and in the later Pacetter Series, which Macmillan's inaugurated in 1977 with Agbo Areo's *Director!*, Mohammed Sule's *The Undesirable Element* and Kalu Okpi's *The Smugglers*. All the evidence suggests that the fashionable crime and mystery novels will continue to dominate this area.

[310] See Mamman Jiya Vatsa, *Libation, and Other Poems* (Kaduna: Rota, 1973), *Reflections on Warminster* (Walton-on-Thames: Outposts, 1975); *A Bird That Sings for Rain* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1976), *Will live for Ever* (Enugu: Nwamife, 1977).

[311] 'Zulu Sofola, *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1972), *Wedlock of the Gods* (Ibadan: Evans, 1972); *King Emene* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1974); *The Wizard of Law* (London: Evans, 1975); *The Sweet Trap* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977). On this playwright, see John Agetua (ed.), *Interviews with Six Nigerian Writers* (Benin City: n.p. [1976]).

[312] See Laolu Ogunniyi, *Fateful Eclipse* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1975); *Riders on the Storm* (Ibid.: 1975), *Candle in the Wind* (1977), *Secrets to be Kept Forever*, (1978), and Wale Ogunyemi, *The Divorce* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1978). Several plays of 'Zulu Sofola and Wale Ogunyemi are discussed in Akanji Nasiru, "Folklore in Nigerian Drama: An Examination of the Works of Three Nigerian Dramatists", *Power Above Powers*, No. 3 (1978), 51–63.

[313] Ogi Egbuna, *Daughters of the Sun and Other Stories* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), *Emperor of the Sea* (London: Fontana, 1974), *The Minister's Daughter* (Ibid.: 1975).

[314] See T. U. Nwala, *Justice on Trial* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1973); A. Choro, *Dr. Amadi's Postings* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1975); Sulu Ogwu, *The Gods Are Silent* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1975).

[315] For Egbuna, see note 313 above. Adaora Lily Ulasi, *Mony Thing You No Understand* (first published. London: Michael Joseph, 1970); *Many Things Begin for Change* (1975) and *The Man from Sagamu* (1978). Fontana also issued paperback editions of Chukwuemeka Ike, *The Naked Gods* (first published, London: Harvill Press, 1970) and *The Potter's Wheel* (first published ibid., 1973).

The prose fiction of Kole Omotoso (b. 1943)[316] and of Buchi Emecheta (b.1944)[317] which one would expect to fall within this second category of writing, in fact leads us beyond it, into the third significant area of postwar literature. If the first group, because of its subject matter, can be described as "war literature", and the second be called "popular literature," the third could perhaps be best summarized as "socialist literature" in its open desire to bring about a revolutionary change in the established social system. While the first two categories accept the fundamental hierarchical structure of society, only randomly attacking the inhuman practices that occur within it, the third is in outright conflict with tradition and the hitherto accepted moral code of our society. It rejects the apathies inherent in its predecessors' enlightenment, the Mbari writers' repeated resolutions of social conflict in tragic catharsis. However, because the egregious world of Nigerian political engineering is encumbered with pseudo-concepts and distorted terminologies, the term "socialist" as a description of this nascent literary movement is likely to be misunderstood, and I shall therefore refer to this corpus of creative writing simply as "the alternative tradition".

Such a description pinpoints an essential factor of its creative stimulus, namely its stance of direct confrontation with the mode and direction of all preceding literature. The works of the alternative tradition, taking their stand on the aggressive principle that the world is always susceptible to human action and can thus be changed for the better, seek to harness and promote at least two elements which were absent from the Mbari corpus: first, the notion of culture as invalid and even depraved unless supported by the conscious possibility of mass participation (an inspiration similar to the one that inspired the origin of "popular" literature, but different in that it now acquires an aggressive format); and secondly, the idea of literature as an organic phenomenon, ineluctably linked to the process of our historical evolution. Grossly simplified this really means the creation of a popular literature *à thèse*, of a literature which is readable and enjoyable and at the same time deliberately and subtly orientated towards a positive ideological indoctrination. This deliberate evangelism, employing the surreptitious tactics of the thriller novel or the total theatre, is the distinctive mark of the alternative tradition.

By the late 1970s it was still a minority tradition, without the scope or significance of such prominent figures as Sembène Ousmane in Senegal, Daniel Boukman in Martinique or Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya. Moreover in a country where artistic sensibility was still very much controlled by ideological trends and literary sympathies current in the liberal West, this literature which has an undisguised affinity with the Left, was viewed with much suspicion. And this negative critical reception was besides reinforced, and hence justified, by the patent lack of any outstanding achievement so far, since the products of the "alternative tradition" are often full of clumsy contrivances, careless craftmanship, absurd conceptions, and a grating, invidious proselytizing. Very much a

[316] Kole Omotoso, *The Edifice* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971), *The Combat* (Ibid.; 1972), *Miracles and Other Stories* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1973), *Sacrifice* (Ibid., 1974), *Fella's Choice* (Benin City: Ethiope 1974), *The Scales* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1976), *The Curse, A Play* (Ibadan: New Horn Press [1976]), *Shadows in the Horizon: A play about the combustibility of private property* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Bookshop, 1977), *To Borrow a Wandering Leaf* (Akure: Fagbamigbe, 1978).

[317] Buchi Emecheta, *In the Ditch* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972); *Second-class Citizen* (London: Allison and Busby, 1974); *The Bride Price* (Ibid.: 1976); *The Slave Girl* (Ibid.: 1977).

tradition in the making, its claim to attention was perhaps largely due to the vociferous advocacy of the "new" critics such as Biodun Jeyifo, Omafume Onoge, and G. G. Darah of the Ibadan-Ife Group which in December 1977 organized a seminal conference on "Radical Perspectives in African Literature and Society."[318]

Alongside the writings of these critics and the novels of Omotoso and Emecheta, the "alternative tradition" was also illustrated in the poetry of Odia Ofeimun (b. 1950), who was known chiefly through the Ibadan Poetry Chapbooks which he edited with Dr. Samuel O. Asein, and through the ten pieces he contributed to Soyinka's anthology. There are also the plays of Bode Sowande who, although in apparent disagreement with this school of writing, in fact reflects in his work the very same ambitions, notably in such plays as *The Night Before* (1972), *Sanctus or Women* (1976) and *Afamako* (1978).[319] Professor Gerald Moore, the first established critic to have called attention to this group of writers neatly summarized their common purpose as "to articulate both the anger and the alternate vision which can sustain the age through its present, and deliver it into a tolerable future."[320]

These then are the three principal categories into which the bulk of the literature written after the war can be divided. Let me again emphasize the inevitable broadness and subjectivity of such taxonomies: applied too rigorously, they will at once become meaningless, and I imagine that some other criteria of artistic taste would dictate a different kind of assessment. A number of important works fall outside these categories and continue, from their various perspectives, the exploration of traditional culture and its resistance to change in face of external incursion, a theme so commonly found in much of the earlier literature. In Okogbule Wonodi's war poetry, the dominant mood is nostalgic rather than exploratory and forward-looking. The late Ezenta Eze's play *The Cassava Ghost* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1974), based on the Aba riot of 1929, deals with a women's revolt in the mythical city of Nagase in which a colonial power is overthrown, but its progressive intention is weakened by the author's essentially romantic conception of leadership and of revolutionary action, and by his questionable model of Westminster democ-

[318] See for example, Omafume Onoge, "The Possibilities of a Radical Sociology of African Literature: Tentative Notes" in *Literature and Modern West African Culture*, ed. Donatus I. Nwoga (Benin City: Ethiope, 1978), pp. 90–96.

[319] *Poems of Black Africa* ed. Wole Soyinka (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975). Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon* (London: Longmans, 1979) contains, besides the title play, *The Night Before* and *Sanctus for Women*.

[320] Gerald Moore, "Against the Titans in Nigerian Literature", *Afriscope* 5,7 (1977), 19, 21–22, 25. —It would be unfair not to mention that this is the school with which Dr. Femi Osofisan (b. 1946) himself would like to be identified. His works reflect the same ideological concerns. The differences between his output and that of his friend Kole Omotoso are largely those of style: Omotoso's narrative manner is characterized by stylistic convolutions and an endless tussle with chronological sequence, whereas Osofisan tends to work through sustained metaphor and condensed rhythmus. Moreover, although Osofisan authored one novel, *Kolera Kolej* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1975), his preferred medium is the stage, with such plays as *A Restless Run of Locusts* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1975), *The Chattering and the Song* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1976); *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* (1978), and *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1978). Gerald Moore expressed the opinion that "More than any play of Soyinka's, *The Chattering and the Song* offers a model of the new society as well as a condemnation of the old. And this model bursts open the carefree world of the play's opening." Moore further noted that "The same steady deepening of tone can be found in Osofisan's novel, *Kolera Kolej*" mentioned above. See also Oladere Oladitan, "The Nigerian Crisis in the Nigerian Novel," in *New West African Literature*, ed. Kolawole Ogungbesan (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979), pp. 10–20. [Ed.]

racy as the paradisiacal aftermath of such uprisings. Ideologically, therefore, Eze remained at one remove from the writers of the alternative tradition discussed above.[321]

In addition to the unavoidable omissions from these generalized categories, there is also of course the inherent superficiality of such exercises. The critic functions by neat divisions, but the artist obeys primarily the unpredictable laws of his genius. Canons of taste and standards of value are vital to the critic's profession: with them he erects the authoritative arsenal of his critical judgement and of his practice; but experience has shown that no artist submits to the facile circumscription within the limited horizon of contemporary critical judgement. The great writers always override the pretentious hypothetical codes established by the critic, and knock down by the force of their talent the too convenient fences of aesthetic canons. Thus in our postwar literature as elsewhere, the major writers claim attention above, if not completely outside, the classifications we have imposed so far. Hence the need to try and take a brief but closer look at the works of a few selected authors of our time, keeping in mind the inevitable duty to exercise a painful censorship in the interest of brevity.

Of the older writers still active, Wole Soyinka remains the leading star in spite of his multifarious activities, but it is preferable in the present context to devote more attention to John Munonye, the bulk of whose work came after the war, as his writings reflect a more contemporary sensibility. By 1980, he had six titles to his name, and they are mostly—apart from *A Wreath for the Maidens* and *A Dancer of Fortune* which are partly or wholly set in a modern urban environment—located in the tangible, rich world of the Igbo village. Thus they invite inevitable comparisons with those of Achebe, the pioneer in that field, and Munonye's contemporary at Ibadan University. The difference however is that, whereas Achebe focuses on the larger, sometimes metaphysical aspects of the passage of history, on the people's collective traumas as embodied in some grand figure, Munonye's scope is less ambitious and his artistic lens bears more on the telluric, individual dramas within that collective experience. Healthy and robust, his vision is therefore rarely tragic in that profound, cosmic sense which is conveyed in Achebe's works. While Achebe's is a self-conscious process of distillation, that of Munonye is of celebration; the former catches the beat and suspense of nuclear events in our communal evolution, shapes them into fine crystalline clusters in his tragic universe; but the moments captured by Munonye continuously ripple out and expand like an unfolding festival cloth: whole vistas open out on a palpable, credible world, on the spectacle of an existence made dramatic by its cast of extremely vulnerable beings open to the ecstasies of the flesh.

Munonye's themes are relatively mundane, even banal: a woman sacrifices herself for her son's education, but painfully loses the fight to control his growing adult life (*The*

[321] Okogbule Wonodi, *Dusts of Exile* (Ife: Pan African Pocket Poets, 1971); Ezenta Eze, *The Cassava Ghost* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1974). Other significant instances are two plays by Wole Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973) and *Death and the Kings' Horseman* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975); Elechi Amadi's play *Isiburu* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973); and T. Obinkaram Echewa's novel *The Land's Lord* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976).

Only Son); a man tries to establish his social status by rebuilding his father's homestead according to the Igbo tradition of reaching manhood and staking out a man's place in society, and either fails in that quest *(Obi)*, or finally succeeds *(Bridge to a Wedding)*; two friends go through the traumatic experience of their nation's attainment of political independence and its eventual drift into a tragic and wasteful civil war *(A Wreath for the Maidens)*; a dancing salesman outwits his bosses to establish himself finally in a top-ranking position in the patent medicine trade *(A Dancer of Fortune)*.

But out of this thematic banality Munonye always spins out jewels of enthralling tales because the authentic note of his narrative is further enhanced by his thorough knowledge of rural crafts and industries. His works furnish vivid descriptions of a wide range of activities, from the palm-oil trade to farming processes, from bush-clearing to harvesting, to palm-wine tapping, and to house construction. Linked to this is also his knowledge, and evident love, of domestic relationships. The bonds between husband and wife never ring false or forced, even where they widen out into ther larger extended families of the *umuani* and *umuadi*. Munonye's perception of the characters of children is uncanny and unparalleled in African literature. He portrays with confidence the rhythms of African family life, manipulating with ease the tensions that test or temper those relationships; his is a conservative moral world in which the traditional lines which sustain the relationships are never successfully challenged.

In addition to these qualities, Munonye has an excellent ear for dialogue. He is able to capture the various verbal nuances which not only identify personalities, but also indicate the relationships between persons, whether cordial or hostile, distant or intimate. And the humanity of his characters is established through his ever-present infectious sense of humour, the exchange of repartee or abuse, the use of proverbs fashioned out of a close intimacy with forest and earth. This aspect is also underscored by Munonye's language, woven with deceptive simplicity, with hardly any sustained "poetic" flights or complex metaphorical structures. Language itself then becomes a mirror of the social organization established in the world of the author's fiction, a reflection of tribal ethos and of the stream of traditional life in its uncomplicated flow. Thus, in Munonye's most powerful novel, *Oil Man from Obange* (1971), just an old bicycle becomes the symbol of a larger tragic theme, that of the oppressed but indomitable wretched of the earth, a symbol of their pathos and of their heroic destiny.

Although sharing Munonye's sympathies, Kole Omotoso, the most promising novelist in the younger generation, is an altogether different kind of writer. Almost alone among the new crop of Nigerian authors, he has been persistently loud and unflagging in his ideological commitment to the plight of the oppressed. He always deals with problems which are social and contemporary and has no time at all for the cosmic musings of a Soyinka or Achebe. Theme and character come into being on his fictional canvas not out of an imaginative or mythological construct, but rather from the vivid historical present, with all its sharply outlined silhouettes. Conscious of his responsibilities as a writer in the Third World, Kole Omotoso acknowledges openly that he must lend his skill to the gigantic effort of development in his own area of activity. His works focus on the major problems facing African countries: the always memorable, always problematic contact of the black and white races *(The Edifice, Fella's Choice)*; the grand

absurdity of our internecine wars *(The Combat)*; the often thwarted aspirations of youth *(Miracles and Other Stories)*; the questionable validity of the past within the web of contemporary needs *(Sacrifice)*; the callous machinations of our new-breed capitalists and how to confront them *(The Scales)*: the problems of rural development and conflicting political hierarchies in the post-colonial era *(To Borrow a Wandering Leaf)*. Unabashedly he always declares his moral and political prejudices in his chosen arena of conflict, so that the heroes hold high their banners and the villains loom large and ugly.

But it is here precisely that problems arise, for the purely artistic vision always seems to pall in the midst of banner-waving, including Kole Omotoso's. The message is loud, sometimes overbearing, but the aesthetic achievement almost inevitably fails. Starting from what is always a grandiose conception, Omotoso's novels very rarely fulfil the promising elan of their beginnings. The characters, burdened as they are with symbolic or allegorical functions, gradually lose their solidity and concreteness and turn to ciphers as the story progresses. Moreover there is often too much haste in composition, an impatience with the physical and psychological details normally required for verisimilitude and breadth, so that the stories for all their correct ideological motivations, freeze up and shrink ultimately into a plastic experience. Within the recognizable form of language defined as fiction, and against the preconceived cultural parameters surrounding every creative work, Omotoso's artistic achievement regularly falls foul of the golden rules: for this the critic as referee must blow his whistle, if only the better to help a writer who, at the dawn of the eighties is still growing.

Omotoso's weakness, as I see it, is largely one of style rather than of conception. Now, style in all art is the first indication of skill, and is finally the determining measure of achievement. The artist declares himself by the manipulation of available resources, of which the message is a significant yet subsidiary element in the total accomplishment. I regard this as elementary and crucial: being committed to a cause is not, to my mind, the same thing as being subservient to one's means of promoting that cause. The artist must still be in control of his art, as Brecht's example revealed: and his mastery of his art can only be shown in the shaping and moulding of the raw forms of thought and experience summarized as style. Regrettably, it is in this area that Omotoso's failings are most obvious. It would be near impossible for instance to find a work of his that is not in some way or other structurally and stylistically distorted, as if testifying to a complex but incomplete process of parturition. At first glance, this looks like a reflection of great creative energy and ingenuity: we move at an athletic pace through a series of short condensed chapters; but at the end, alas, we are left standing out of breath and unfulfilled: the chapters (at least in the more serious novels) run in alternate structural patterns, from aloof third-person narration to close, introspective self-exposures, from sequences of narrative prose or intellectual discourse to lyrical periods, from soft or tender passages to loud yells (indicated through the use of italics and capital letters); but this mingling is often so complex and bizarre that it becomes a formidable barrier to the communication of meaning. This extreme elasticity of form extends to the artist's conception of time, so that the scene shifts at random from the present to the past or the future and back again; passages of purely mental projection interweave with descrip-

tive flashbacks, and so on. This time-shuttling tactics can sometimes lead to moments of passionate beauty, such as the early chapters of *The Edifice*; but these occasions are rare, and in most cases the chapters come one upon the other violently, like crashing fists.

To Borrow a Wandering Leaf is perhaps Omotoso's most mature work of the seventies, but if it contains almost all the main thematic strands found in the previous works, it also gathers together significantly all the major shortcomings of the author's art: he again uses the by now familiar device of parallel narration, telling two stories simultaneously through interwoven chapters and in two different narrative styles; he also uses the no less familiar shuttle of chronological sequences.

At first, the two stories seem unrelated. In one series of chapters, told in straightforward third-person narration, the story recounts the progress of a group of young intellectuals two of whom are top civil servants, trekking into the hinterland of an unnamed African country, until they reach the village of Aiyede, where they start their journey back to the capital. In the second series of chapters, the story recounts, through a tangle of flashbacks, introspective projections as well as of third-person narrative, the history of the village itself, its origins and political structure, and the activities of one of its illustrious sons, Professor Akowe, who has come back to settle in the village after attaining renown and wealth in the city. But the two stories link up when the touring party reaches Aiyede and meets Professor Akowe who, frustrated and disillusioned now, decides to go back to the city with them.

This looks like a simple story, but once again, it abounds in rich but unfulfilled expectations as the theme, which starts off with exhilarating momentum, ends in inertia. The brilliant idea of a trek into the interior invokes at once the ancient and familiar device of a journey or quest—which had just been exploited in Wale Ogunyemi's *Langbodo* at Festac 77—in which the author leads the characters through a cleansing ritual to purgation or catharsis. And here too the composition of the touring team suggests a potentially rich mixture of clashing personalities and conflicting convictions: from Kobina Quashie, the Principal Secretary to the Ministry of Economic Planning and Industrial Development and chief architect of his country's new ten-year development plan, to Kwame Williams, an Nkrumahist, on secondment from the UN as Economic Director to Kobina's Ministry, to Kehinde George, the aspiring capitalist in search for investment potential in the country, to Philip Laoluwa, lecturer in Comparative Literature and an inveterate traveller, and finally to the driver Salimonu, who had been through the country many times before, carrying "irate whitemen" or "responsible people from the Ministry". From this interesting group of differing talents and ideas, isolated together in a land-rover on a trip of many weeks, we expect a process of argument and discussion, of conflict and challenge, through which the author, using appropriately close-knit techniques, would put forward and define the various ideological options available and so act as a catalyst for our own response to social change. No such positive fulfilment comes from this journey, which soon turns lamentably into a chronicle of the group's concupiscence.

There are other thwarted hopes. The trip fails to be, as one expected, a means of illustrating in concrete terms Kobina's ten-year plan which could have served as a model

of national development. Instead he continually utters the usual "political" platitudes to the villagers about the provision of amenities. Nor is Salimonu exploited as a possible window into the mind of the lower class as regards their opinions about the ruling élite (whom he is carrying in the land-rover) or about the peasantry, with whom he comes in contact on the trip. Even Kwame is portrayed finally as a hedonistic charlatan, with his tiresome joke about "lubricating" the revolution with drink.

But it is the other strand of the book—the story of Aiyede and of Akowe—that glaringly reveals the author's failure as a craftsman. There is too much interference with the time sequence, a too arbitrary shuttling of chronology, so that merely following the story becomes an act of hermeneutics. This disjointed concatenation is not justified by any logic of conception: the story of Aiyede, the web of human and political relationships within the village, the impact of Akowe's idiosyncracies are neither so complex nor so spectacularly unique that they could not have been presented in their logical time sequence. In art, the failure of communication is always a warning sign of paralysis. There is a suspicion of authorial self-indulgence or ineptitude here, an unconscionable propensity for mischief and capricious ellipsis, which could lead to the death of art. The result, especially as we frequently have to pause and rejoin the trekking party in its own adventures, is massive confusion and unnecessary hindrance of the narrative flow. Even the persona whose voice dominates this series from the beginning disappears abruptly, only to reappear many pages later without explanation. Professor Akowe's dramatic relationships with the village now and in the past leave us with unanswered questions: his final decision to return to the city in spite of his prosperous business is never fully explained; nor are we made to see the relevance of his eventual link with the touring team. *To Borrow a Wandering Leaf* remains, at best, an abortive attempt, of rich potential but tangled meanings, a brave exploration which ends in the wasteland. Since Omotoso is unquestionably one of the Nigerian authors with a relevant message for the new generation, at that stage in his career many entertained the hope—to which his recent revision of *Sacrifice* lent substance and credibility—that he would find a means of curbing his penchant for unnecessary convoluted stylistic devices.

In order to illustrate present-day writing by women, it seems more apposite to select Buchi Emecheta rather than 'Zulu Sofola. The latter clings to an exotic past, describing essentially obsolete traditions as eternally immutable and sacred, an attitude which binds her solidly to the old negritude school of the pre-independence era. The former, on the contrary, constantly challenges the existing social order and passionately pleads for a new and more humane system, especially on behalf of women. Drawing largely on her own experience of a brutal and unsuccessful marriage, with a callous egoistic husband and parasitic in-laws and on her sufferings as a fugitive mother of six, all alone in a racist London, Emecheta has produced semi-autobiographical works of fiction in which the plight of the female in present-day society comes to acquire a passionately tragic dimension.

Through her first three novels, *In the Ditch, Second-class Citizen,* and *The Bride Price* there runs a sense of injustice and personal indignation, of misfortunes experienced mainly because of the condition of women, and hence a severe indictment of men,

particularly of the Igbo male. But this is always accompanied by a sustaining feeling of optimism and resistance, an enduring quality of faith in life that carries this anger beyond mere sentimentality or maudlin self-pity. Because for the most part she tells her own story, there is a ring of authenticity and a depth of passion that are rare in African literature. And she writes with controlled skill and emotion, except at the moments when she allows herself to interrupt with unnecessary authorial comments, whose bitterness mars the aesthetic achievement. Like an unfolding flower, her work opens out gradually through layers of painful parturition into delicate patterns of beauty. Her protagonists are, expectedly, female, and her themes bear on the problems of women trying to assert their individuality and their freedom in a conservative, male-dominated world. This incipient revolt manifests itself mainly through their attitude to marriage, and conversion to Christianity easily becomes one of their weapons. The heroines of her stories, victims all, find ultimate relief in their emotional attachments to other social outcasts and to strangers. Emecheta's art usually shines most brightly when the female passionately confronts the male, as when the girl Aku-nna faces her suitor in *The Bride Pride,* or Adah her husband Francis in *Second-class Citizen.* As to the central idea, voiced most insistently in *The Slave Girl,* it is the image of the female as social pariah, chained down by inescapable customs and laws: "All her life a woman always belonged to some male. At birth you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master, when you grow up your new master who had paid something for you would control you" (p. 112); "No woman is ever free. To be owned by a man is a great honour" (p. 158). And when Ojebeta, the heroine, finally marries, she is only "changing masters."

The works are not without their faults of course. Emecheta, who is more familiar with the urban world of Lagos and London than with bush villages, loses her narrative when the locale of her fiction shifts away from the cities. She lacks only too obviously the strength of Munonye's dialogues, his skill in sketching out domestic settings, his knowledge of rural crafts and his intimacy with the structure of communal politics. And she is excessively conscious of her readers in England (or maybe of her publishers) so that, in a surprising act of artistic recidivism, she consciously loads her works with undisguised sociological data and anthropological explanations, as the first generation of African writers in English used to do. Nevertheless, to read Emecheta is a welcome change from Flora Nwapa or even 'Zulu Sofola.

In the field of drama, although Wale Ogunyemi is probably the most prolific playwright to have emerged after Wole Soyinka, his resources are still comparatively meagre, and first place must go to Ola Rotimi (b. 1938) for his thematic versatility, his mastery of stagecraft, and his experience as director of a vibrant professional company at Ile Ife.[322]

[322] Ola Rotimi, *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), *Kurunmi* (Ibid.: 1971), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (Berlin City: Ethiope, 1973), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977). As is frequently the case, Rotimi's plays were not published until some time had elapsed after their first performance on the stage. On the writer, see Akanji Nasiru, "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique," in *New West African Literature,* ed. Kolawole Ogungbesan (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979), pp. 21–30.

It was with a clarion call for the liberation of women that he burst upon the Nigerian stage in 1966. The play, a comedy entitled *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, deals with the attempts by a former military officer, Major Rahman Taslim Lejoka-Brown, now leader of the National Liberation Party, to lead his party to victory in the impending elections through the use of military tactics. But domestic wrangles with his three wives and his irascible temper are his undoing in the end and the women take over both his home and the leadership of his party, chanting their freedom song: "Man and woman are created equal!"

After this play, which was in fact first staged in the U.S.A. under the direction of the late Jack Landau, Rotimi wrote many others—*The Gods are Not To Blame* (1968), *Kurunmi* (1969), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1970), *Holding Talks* (1970), *Akassa Youmi* (1977)—whose mood and temper differ radically from that comic beginning. Exploring different themes from play to play—or, more exactly, different aspects of the heroic personality and the tragic experience—Rotimi stamps his unmistakable identity on each work mainly through his unique style of production: his conception of dramatic space as a comprehensive entity, his regular assault on the customary barrier between audience and performer, and his constant recourse to the totality of the physical resources which make up theatrical mechanics. Indeed, it is not so much by its theme as by its audio-visual impact that a Rotimi play establishes its distinctive character.

He has no equal on the Nigerian stage when it comes to the control of physical space or the manipulation of audience response. Soyinka, the master, has an intuitive knowledge of dramaturgical mechanics, but his link with the audience is not always total or successful, and his major plays creak in parts like the intrusive boards of the proscenium. But Rotimi is the lord of the arena stage, and his link with the audience is immediate, tactile and sensual, nourished on a wanton and profligate taste for the spectacular. Soyinka may be the master-drummer or the dancer behind the mask. Rotimi is the theatre's courtesan. And the audience never fails to surrender to the seductive thrill of his scenic effects: euphonious songs and heart-rending dirges, poetry dense with echoes of traditional wisdom, the colour and glitter of costume, the synchronism of gestures in mime or dance, the seduction of lights, the dazzle of the war spectacle, the rapture of ritual, etc. Rotimi's productions offer everything with voluptuous abandon.

And this precisely is also the flaw in his productions. From his statements, it is obvious that Rotimi takes his work seriously and wants it to give more to the audience than just sensual gratification. Every writer, he once declared to Bernth Lindfors, "should have some commitment to his society. It's not enough to entertain, the writer must try to excite people into thinking or reacting to the situations he is striving to hold up to them in his drama or narrative. I think there must always be some social relevance in what one presents."[323] One can go further and claim that it is this belief that has inspired the three significant elements in Rotimi's dramaturgy, namely the creation of characters reflecting the broad spectrum of African society, not just the limited élite; the creation of a type of dialogue which deliberately tries to approximate the speech rhythms

[323] *Dem-Say. Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Austin: African and Afro-American Studies and Research Center, 1974), p. 66.

and the simple vocabulary of the common folk; and finally, a stage setting structured like a microcosm of the national state.

The problem is that, in performance, these elements tend to acquire their own independence and frustrate the thematic intent. The surface appeal, enhanced by the power of these three elements, is so strong and so enthralling, that our intellectual response is continuously drowned in a wave of intoxication. There is noise but no silence; laughter and wailing, but no terror: spectacle and, at best, a peopled solitude. The odour of exoticism lingers embarrassingly on after the last actor has departed from the stage, and follows us to the exit. Ola Rotimi, more than any other playwright, lives in performance, not on the page of the book: his appeal is more to the affective sensibilities than to the rational consciousness. That is why, although a master entertainer who can fill the theatre effortlessly night after night with enchanted audiences, he had not by the late seventies created or promoted a distinctive mode of thought. No profound line of inquiry or philosophical insight has emerged to deepen the sensual hue of his works. For instance, he has created a number of historical tragedies each based upon the personality of some particular leader at a decisive moment in the struggle against European imperialism, but much of what he says is merely a localization of familiar subjects, reminiscent for instance of the francophone repertory. The manner of his re-enactment, its dramatic statement, remains memorable and vivid, but the plot and dialogue lead us repeatedly back to the wearisome starting point. The dialectical aspect of historical crises, prominent at the onset of the play, rapidly yields to the thrill and colour of the game. If we take seriously his declared aim of providing intellectual as well as visual stimulation, then Rotimi is a playwright who succeeds in the theatre because he continuously fails.

No significant new poet appeared during most of the first decade that followed the civil war. After the premature deaths of Christopher Okigbo and of Pol Ndu, three major figures of the older generation contributed their share to the perpetuation of Nigerian poetry.[324] But as the seventies were coming to an end, it became clear to those who had had the privilege of reading some of his—as yet mostly unpublished—work that Odia Ofeimun was the poet of the future, the man of talent who would soon assume Okigbo's mantle, the apostle in verse of the new "messianic" creed (to borrow Echeruo's term for the alternative tradition). Indeed, in the perceptive essay that has already been quoted Gerald Moore described him as a

> new poet of unusual strength and maturity who seems to have missed or quickly disposed of the romantic or introspective phase so common in early Nigerian poetry. His voice is urgent, public and clear. No search here for the "initiation", the "cleansing" or the re-united self so often pursued by the older writers. He is ready immediately to turn his pen to the issues which overhang his contemporaries.

[324] Wole Soyinka's *Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972) came after John Pepper Clark's *Casualties: Poems 1966–1968* (London: Longmans, 1967) and Chinua Achebe's *Beware Soul Brother and other poems* (Enugu: Nwankwo-Ifejika, 1971).

It may therefore be appropriate to close this survey of Nigerian literature with a few lines from Ofeimun's poem dedicated to Chinua Achebe, as a libation to the future, to all flowering or budding talents in Nigerian creative writing:

You say your hurricane lamp can issue
no more the perfunctory flame
of artistic innocence....
I raise my fist to your guts

But, then, when troubadours become matchets
in the frenzy of storms they must underline,
their finest truths are iron banners
to wrap the corpse of fleeting slogans
And, Compatriot, this is my concern...

I suppose you can break the kernel of these days
better than my poor plastic slab will allow
You know the intricate weave of the barbwire-roost
into which you must plunge

Oh, my concern overpowers me;
I do not know how to escape from
such wind as bear you, now, away
from your, once, unruffled waters.[325]

[325] Odia Ofeimun, "For Chinua Achebe" in *Poems of Black Africa*, ed. Wole Soyinka p. 294. Ofeimun's first published collection is *The Poet Lied* (London: Longmans, 1981).

Stephen Arnold

8. APPENDIX: EMERGENT ENGLISH WRITING IN CAMEROON

A few dates from the past hundred years will help explain Cameroon's special situation and that of its English literature as an appendix to Nigeria's. From 1884 to 1919, Kamerun was a German colony. The Treaty of Versailles mandated the north, south and east to France, and the west to Great Britain, which administered its territory in tandem with bordering Nigeria. In 1960 a plebiscite sent the northern sector of British Cameroons into Nigeria, whereas the southern part (now called the North West and South West Provinces) opted to join French Cameroon. Together they received independence in 1961 under the name of the République Fédérale du Cameroun/Federal Republic of Cameroon. In 1972 the autonomy of the anglophone provinces was withdrawn following a plebiscite which formed the present République Unie du Cameroun/United Republic of Cameroon. The marriage of French and English zones has never been an easy one and it is mainly two factors relating to the neighboring Igbos of Nigeria that have sustained the union. First, resentment of Igbo domination is said by many to have been the primary motivation for the otherwise odd option of two anglophone provinces to run from other anglophone Africans and the Commonwealth into the arms of the French; and second, all thoughts of divorce in the minds of anglophones are suppressed because of the frightening example of Biafra's attempt at separation from Nigeria.

French weight in the new republic seemed at first immovable and was barely challenged. Already in 1964, however, the energetic and eloquent champion of the anglophones, Professor Bernard Fonlon forcefully asserted that:

> unless the East Cameroon [francophone] leader in whose hands cultural initiative lies, is prepared to share this authority with his brother from West of the Mungo [anglophone], unless he is prepared to make the giant effort necessary to break loose from the strait-jacket of his French education, unless he will show proof of his intellectual probity and admit candidly that there are things in the Anglo-Saxon way of life that can do his country good, there is little chance of survival, neither for English influence, nor even for African values in the Federal Republic of Cameroon. With African culture moribund, with John Bullism weak and in danger of being smothered, we will all be French in two generations or three![326]

[326] Bernard Fonlon, "Will We Make or Mar," *Abbia*, 5 (March 1964).

In June 1979 Professor Fonlon raised his voice again to declare:

> Today I am still for bilingualism; but with a significant difference, namely, this, that I no longer believe in the equality of the two languages. My firm conviction now is that English... should increasingly become the first language of instruction in the University; indeed that it should be elected as the first official language of Cameroon (p. 48).[327]

His reasons were economic and scientific: they did not derive from resentment and sentimentality. Indeed it is a fact that forward-looking francophones of the late seventies were making certain their children had a firmer knowledge of English than of French.

When we ask "Where have anglophone writers published?" we must be willing to relax the strict sense of the term "publish." For example a number of these writers have "published" on the radio. From the 1940s the B.B.C. had occasionally featured Cameroonians on the Africa Service cultural programmes, as has the Voice of America (i.a. Vincent Nchami, Mbella Sonne Dipoko, Guillaume Oyônô-Mbia, Buma Kor and Kongnyuy Jumbam). Radio reaches far more people than print, and writers and aspiring writers are obviously avid listeners to such programmes. The earliest evidence is Vincent Nchami's story "Mrs. Dark Samuel," sold to the B.B.C. in 1949. Nchami, inspired by his friend Cyprian Ekwensi to take up writing, has sold nearly twenty stories to the B.B.C. over the years. Although almost none of these seems ever to have reached print he is known as a "writer." Likewise, the composer-lyricist O. E. Elonge (b. 1918)[328] has a substantial reputation based on public and radio performances of his works. For political reasons he switched from composing primarily in Bafaw and Douala to English in 1960, and fan mail from humble and sophisticated alike attests to his stature among anglophones. On the eve of independence, 'Sankie Maimo (b. 1930) had managed to publish at his own cost a 50-page play, *I Am Vindicated* (2nd ed. Kraus reprint, 1970) in which he was inveighing somewhat heavily against tribal witchcraft and championing Western medicine. This was followed by a novelette, *Adventuring with Jaja* (1962) which was first issued in Nigeria before being republished in revised form but again privately (1976). Meanwhile, his second play, *Sov-Mbang the Soothsayer* (1968) had become the only English-language book ever to be published by C.L.E. The uncommonly hyperbolic blurb contended that Maimo had "attempted to do for Cameroon what Wole Soyinka and Ulli Beier had done so successfully for Yoruba society." In fact, this drama is a very rudimentary affair in awkward blank verse, which claims to vindicate black values, otherwise undefined, against white materialism and missionary arrogance. The author makes occasional but rather arbitrary use of pidgin. There is no plot worth mentioning, and the central part is an allegedly mystic vision in which the audience is informed that most whites will henceforth be sent to hell and all blacks to heaven. *Sov-Mbang the Soothsayer* was of some merit as a firstling and as a token that Cameroon might avail itself of its peculiar linguistic status to become a crossroads between the francophone

[327] Id., "To Every African Freshman Ten Years After," *Abbia*, 34/37 (June 1979), 9–55.

[328] See Stephen Arnold, "The Ch-Oral Literature of Sir O. E. Elonge, Anglophone Cameroonian," *Pacific Quarterly Moana* VII (1982), 2, 71–82.

and anglophone trends in African literature. 'Sankie Maimo lived in Nigeria from 1949 to 1962 and like a number of Cameroonian writers who have also published poems in Nigerian and Ghanaian journals without acknowledgement of their nationality, he has more than once been mistaken for a Nigerian writer by cataloguers and critics.

Once the mandate territory had become an independent republic, a number of mostly newly-founded and often ephemeral newspapers and magazines offered occasional outlets for creative work in English. Most important was the foundation of *Abbia* (1963) by Bernard Fonlon (b. 1924), who was to become the country's foremost intellectual. After studying philosophy at the seminary of Enugu (Nigeria), which was in the hands of Irish Catholic fathers, he obtained his Ph.D. at the National University of Ireland (1961) and then returned to Cameroon where he held high office up to ministerial level throughout the first ten years of the new state. He was then appointed to the University of Cameroon in Yaoundé, where he succeeded Thomas Melone as head of the Department of Comparative African Literature in 1974. *Abbia* was intended to be bilingual, but the very first issue also contained French versions of poems composed in Fulani in the northern part of the country. Yet one of its chief merits is to have published works in English by a large number of Cameroonian poets such as L. Kikum, P. Egbe, B. Fonlon, K. wan Jumbam, E. Alima, B. Tanla-Kishani, G.-L. Julie, D. Lantum, 'S. Maimo, G. C. Nchangi, G. E. Ngala, J. N. Ngeh, J. N. Nget, S. Nkwentie, L. Oudenlou, V. Titanji. Sporadic but doggedly tenacious and high in quality, Bernard Fonlon's *Abbia* has since 1963 been the only fully bilingual cultural forum in Cameroon and the outside's only window on the country's English output. As such, it is deceptive, for it is a basic error to regard a literature as made up of only published materials.[329] No one who knows of dissident writers in the Soviet Union who have solid reputations based almost exclusively on the circulation of manuscripts would insist on such a position.

Magazines and newspapers are also occasional outlets for creative work. *Fako,* a glossy pictorial anglophone monthly, started by Obenson Tataw in March 1968, died some time later, only to be resurrected for several issues in 1971 (with the motto "Africa's Leading Magazine" on its cover from the very first issue!); it carried some short stories, such as "Echoes of Power" by Wem Mwambo, "Trial by Ordeal" by Stephen Ndedley, and "The Crime Trial" by Cyprian Agbor. In August 1969, the Victoria magazine *Issue* published Etikang Tabe's "Stories My Brother Told Me." *Contact,* the weekly bulletin of the American Cultural Center in Yaoundé, put out poems by Ernst Alima and Antoine de Padoue Chonang in 1974, and probably others appeared there too. Meanwhile the *Cameroon Yearbook,* an old-established annual produced by Victoria newspapers, had published some minimal but historically interesting attempts at literature.

Informal but by no means insignificant publications by writers' clubs using a mimeographed format have been in existence for years. The Buea Agricultural Fair pamphlet has been a guide to some of these, and the Bamenda group, headed by David Weir, has gained an audience for its seemingly casual yet serious efforts. *The Spark* of the English Club at the University had published some notable items in the early 1970s,

[329] For a significant example, see Patrick Sam-Kubam, "The Paucity of Literary Creativity in Anglophone Cameroon," *Abbia,* 31/33 (February 1978), 205–208.

and its inheritor *The Mould,* inspired by Bole Butake, a promising writer, has managed an annual each year since 1977, with marked improvement in quality. Some day the juvenilia of well-known writers may be found in these unassuming ephemera, and even in secondary-school publications such as *The Herald,* begun in 1960s at Bishop Rogan College, running at least eleven issues up to 1973 or after, and *Saker Speaks,* an annual put out at Saker Baptist College. Without such modest literary playgrounds the muscles of written culture atrophy before getting a chance to develop. Further research will probably unearth interesting material published in other hard-to-get journals of the same type, such as *Citizen* (a "sporadic anglophone review" from Kumba), *Le Tam Tam* (a bilingual cultural review which ran for at least four issues beginning in 1956), and *Black-out* (reported to be published in Dschang). More traditional reviews aside from *Abbia* include: *Ozila* (1970–1971, 14 issues); *Le Cameroun Littéraire* (the A.P.E.C. review, Vol. I, 1964, and 12 issues in 1971–1972) published a few English-language texts by Buma Kor, Maimo, Njoya, Bongjoh, Mwambo, Taku, Mebara, Nyamsaka-ni-Nku. Of the three issues of March—May 1973 of *L' Ecriture (Forum Littéraire Mensuel),* two contained English poems by F. N. Bongjoh. Poems by Kitts Mbeboh (b. 1948), F. N. Bongjoh, and Tunde Agbabiaka were to be found in the only issue of *Cameroon Studies in English and French* (Victoria: Presbook, 1976).

Many works in English have been published in foreign reviews and by foreign presses: G. C. Nchangi published his first story in *St. Joseph's College Magazine* (Gonzaga University, U.S.A.), in December, 1956. From "The Cameroon Students' Association of Arts and Sciences" in the U.S.A. came the *Journal of Cameroon Affairs* (2 issues in 1972, published at Huntington College), in which drama, fiction and poetry by Sammy Kum Buo appeared. K. Jumbam (b. 1950) has been publishing poetry recently in various American reviews such as *Greenfield Review, Nethula,* and the *Pacific Paper.* And there are rumours that three Cameroonian poets did well in a 1978 "3rd World Poetry" Contest put on by an Illinois college. As a number of anglophone Cameroonians study abroad in Britain and North America, several more examples such as these should be expected. Nigeria, however, has been the most frequent publishing outlet. 'Sankie Maimo founded *Cameroons Voice* (Ibadan, 1955?) there, and at least two and probably more of the famous Onitsha novels are by Cameroonians: *Florence in the River of Temptations* (Onitsha: Century Printing Press, 1960), by J. E. A. Ngoh, and *Nancy in Blooming Youth* (Port Harcourt: Eastern City Press, 1961), by R. G. Medou Mvomo (b. 1938). Some of Mbella Sonne Dipoko's poems first appeared in *Black Orpheus* (No. 20, May, 1966), and recently Ba'bila Mutia has been publishing widely in Nigeria. Book-form publication within the country was not achieved until the government, too, became involved in literary production of a predictable kind: an undated, two-volume set of bilingual stories and poems titled *Le Cameroun Chante Son Unité/Cameroon Sings Her Unity* (Ministry of Information and Tourism, 1966?), gave several writers their first appearance in print.[330]

[330] The curious are reduced to *asking,* for there is next to nothing to read on the topic. By 1980, the only "Survey" was "La littérature d'expression anglaïse," pp. 42–45 of Patrice Kayo's *Panorama de la littérature camerounaise* (Bafoussam: Librairie Panafricaine, 1978), in which the names of Bernard Fonlon, Sankie Maimo, and Mbella Sonne Dipoko are attached to cited works, and the names of five others are

When a pantheon is established, history will probably rank Buma Kor (b. 1948) as one of the more significant figures in the promotion of Cameroon's anglophone literature. Although he is mediocre as a poet and only slightly better as a dramatist, he is unquestionably talented as a literary organizer. In 1970 he was one of the main organizers of the "Drama and Speech Performers' Society" in Victoria, which sparked off a love for drama in the country's population. In 1971 Kor became the Provincial Delegate for the Western Cameroon region of the National Association of Cameroon Poets and Writers ("APEC," headed by René Philombe), and toured twenty-one schools that year lecturing on APEC and encouraging young writers. Radio Cameroon (Buea) and the newspapers *Cameroon Outlook* and *Cameroon Times* followed him, and assisted him in establishing a popular radio programme, "Young Writers' Forum," which ran over a hundred shows, and through which he convened the first anglophone writers' conference in the country. His closest collaborators were Michael Kelly (English Language Teaching Adviser on secondment to Cameroon from the British Council, who was later followed by David Weir), and two regional notables, Mrs. Gwendolyn Burnley, M. P., and Dr. A. D. Mengot. Awah Dzenyagha, Kor's ebullient friend, also assisted until the pair left for two-years courses in journalism and publishing in Nigeria between 1973–1975. On his return, Kor worked for several concerns involved in publishing and book promotion, but as a zealous champion of anglophone writing and an entrepreneur willing to take risks on its behalf, he started his own company, the "Buma Kor Publishing House" in Yaoundé, and managed to bring out several titles in the company's first three years.

A standing promoter of English was Obenson Tataw, Victoria newspaper and magazine publisher, who died in 1979. Awah Dzenyagha published a poetic tribute to him in Tataw's own newspaper, *Cameroon Outlook*.[331] Dzenyagha also revived Kor's legacy of radio work, with the assistance of Paul Kode, the Buea Station Director, who is also a writer. Kode was instrumental in mounting the writers' talent search contest sponsored in 1978 by the Guinness Breweries. Dzenyagha is a prolific writer who has some fine passages but seems unable to separate quality wheat from chaff.

At the dawn of the 1980s, nevertheless, only one Cameroonian writer of English had gained recognition abroad, not as a result of the activity that has just been described, but because he happened to have a few of his works issued in London. This was Mbella Sonne Dipoko (b. 1936), who came from Dualla in the French part of Cameroon but was educated in Nigeria. According to Janheinz Jahn, he published his first book of verse

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mentioned without bibliographical notice: Buma Kor, Patrick Sam (-Kubam), Kitts Mbeboh, Victor Musinga, and Martin Njoya. A few more names can be gleaned from René Philombe's cyclostyled *Le livre camerounais et ses auteurs* (1977), which deserves a publisher, and only Fonlon and Oyono-Mbia are mentioned in Thérèse Baratte and Eno Belinga's *Ecrivains, Cinéastes et Artistes Camerounais: Bio-Bibliographie* (Yaoundé: CEPER, 1978). Other bibliographies, such as Jahn and Dressler's *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* and Herdeck's *African Authors: A Companion to Black African writing*, and the Delanceys' *A Bibliography of Cameroon* mention only 4,4 and 2, respectively. Among talking bibliographies, librarians and researchers, I want to offer special thanks to Abioseh Porter, Richard Bjornson, Michael Kelly, Lee Nichols, Eloise Brière, Christiane Keane, Liliane Mirkovié, and Marc and Virginia Delancey. Several publishers who wish to remain anonymous are nevertheless to be thanked for having opened their rejection files to me in order to find names of writers, and I also want to thank personnel in European copyright offices who could not grasp what I was up to but helped me in spite of that, leading me to radio tapes which are bound by the same laws as print.

[331] Awah Dzenyagha, "PTO Is It Really Over?," *Cameroon Outlook* (June 19, 1979).

locally in 1956 and became a Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation news reporter in 1957. After his arrival in Paris in 1960 he left the N.B.C. to live the marginal life of an exiled, vagabond journalist. He produced two novels, *A Few Nights and Days* (1966), and *Because of Women* (1969); a play, *Overseas* (1968) which was printed in *Short African Plays;* a collection of poems, *Black and White in Love* (1972); and numerous articles and poems, many of which have been anthologized. *A Few Nights and Days* returns with a vengeance to the theme of Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris:* it deals with the relationship between an African student and his French mistress, whose father refuses to allow her to marry a black man; the two main differences between this and Socé's story are that Dipoko lays the emphasis on sex rather than sentiment and that his hero triumphs in the end: after persuading his mistress to elope to Africa with him, he simply abandons her in order to avoid the problems of an inter-racial marriage! *Beware of Women* has an African setting; the writer's preoccupation with sex is again in evidence in this story of a young fisherman and farmer who is a womanizer dreaming virtuously of founding a large family.

Bernard Fonlon has tried in vain to persuade Dipoko to return home and take his place among Cameroonian writers, and most anglophone Cameroonians no longer claim him as theirs. A remark by Paul Theroux may explain this further: "*A Few Nights and Days* is a French novel about France by a man who writes like a European woman."[332]

In the course of the seventies, however, there was a considerable increase in the production of English poetry, drama and prose fiction. Published collections are few and usually paid for by the poets themselves. An exception to this, Patrick Sam-Kubam (b. ca 1945), known under the various names Patrick Sam and Patrick Sam Toboh, has placed his poems in *Spark, Abbia,* and with the B.B.C.; his thin volume of five poems, *The Chant of Honour* (Bamenda: Nooremac Press, n.d.), contains work dating back to 1969. Another exception is Buma Kor's flimsy and rather unimpressive *Searchlight Poems* (Victoria: Freshman Books, 1975). Less professional in format, but more satisfying in quality, are *L'Arc-en-ciel de minuit/The Midnight Rainbow* (1975) by Antoine de Padoue Chonang (b. 1947) and *Symphonies of Suffering* (1978) by Dave Kemzeu also known as D. K. Moktoï (b. ca 1950): both are mimeographed but available in a few libraries. Some of Chonang's poems have appeared in the third issue of *Black-out.* Kemzeu-Moktoï is well known as a dramatist and has made his name as a poet through that medium. A favourite poet of radio audiences, who have awarded him three prizes in national competitions, is Emile Nanga-Mebara. Of greatest potential was Martin El Njoya (1944–1970), who was killed in a car accident. Some of his work can be found in *Ozila* and *Le Cameroun Littéraire.* Kenjo wan Jumbam had some poems broadcast on the B. B. C. in 1955, and published in *Abbia,* but he has abandoned lyric poetry except for occasional experiments with verses for children,[333] and also with fiction. His younger

[332] Janheinz Jahn *et al., Who's Who in African Literature,* p. 110.

[333] Kenjo wan Jumbam's method consists in taking vernacular children's verses and translating them carefully and lyrically into English, thus showing the children that English has music that is accessible to them; in this mould he also delivers their traditional mythology to them. The linguistic importance of these writings is not to be underestimated for the future of Anglo-Cameroonian literature: rare is the writer who can express

brother Kongnyuy Jumbam has a poetic talent that promises well. The same can be said of Kitts Mbeboh (b. ca 1948).

B'abila Mutia (b. ca 1957) published some interesting poems which echo Okigbo in various reviews, such as *Akpata*, the literary journal of the Association of English Students, University of Benin, Nigeria (see vol. II, Nov. 1977) and in *Oracle*, a journal of university poetry from Calabar (see vols I, undated, and III, Oct. 1978). His poems have also appeared in *Gong*, *Nigeria Chronicle*, *Quest Magazine* and elsewhere. Other promising poets who emerged in the late 1970s are Mary Norgah, whose as yet unpublished work evinces a sense of the weight and rhythmic qualities of English words, and Bongasu Tanla-Kishani, samples of whose collection *Konglanjo! Spears of Love Without Ill-Fortune* appeared in recent issues of *Abbia*. Ernst Alima is a bilingual poet whose verse, printed in *Abbia*, *Ozila* and *Contact*, deserves attention.

It would be idle to provide an exhaustive list of all the young poets who write in English. Among the dramatists of the generation that followed Maimo and Dipoko, the undisputed master is Victor Elame Musinga (b. 1943), who combines the zany and the deadly serious in his nearly twenty plays to date. Active in drama since 1960, when he produced his first play *Love Wins*, he wrote the script for and acted in what is probably the first film ever made in pidgin, *Groun Dong Change*, shot in Wum with a peasant cast in the summer of 1979. He has published only one play, hardly his best, *The Tragedy of Mr. No Balance*.[334] He and his "M.D.G." (the Musinga Drama Group) are the only anglophone company ever to have won the fiercely contested annual National Drama Competitions in Yaoundé. Musinga's popularity and organizational ability were evidenced by the government's attempt to persuade him to start a National Drama School in the capital, but Musinga wanted to keep it in the anglophone region so as not to be isolated from the audience that had always supported him.

As is often the case in Africa, many dramatists never reach print and have to be appraised on the basis of performances and/or manuscripts. Apart from Buma Kor—with five plays performed on radio and an excerpt from *Idlers' Den* published in *Ozila*—other anglophone Cameroonian playwrights deserving attention are Dave Kemzeu Moktoï and the active Uhuru Drama Group, Paul Kode, who is also a radio dramatist, O. E. Elonge's son, Sona *(Obasi Njon the Witch Hunter)*, Bole Butake (b. 1947) with *Marriage Without Libation*, and Awah Dzenyagha, whose titles—e.g. *The Hero's End*, or *The Beaten Lecherous Doctor*—show a penchant for hard-core melodrama. R. C. Kumengisa (b. 1947) has written three plays, one of which won the first prize in a Cameroon radio contest.

Of Cameroon's many talented anglophone short-story writers, the most unusual is John S. Dinga (b. 1946), a medical officer, whose *The Other Cameroonian: A fictionalized account of some of our nation's endemic diseases* (Buea: Catholic Press, 1974) is an

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himself poetically in a language in which he has not had any childhood literary experience. If Jumbam's humble basic stories and verses were properly distributed, there might be a lyrical explosion in English fifteen years after.

[334] See *African Plays for Playing*, ed. Michael Etherton (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976), vol. 2. On the dramatist, see Etherton, "The Dilemma of the Popular Playwright: The Work of Kabwe Kasoma and V. E. Musinga," *African Literature Today*, 8 (1976), 26–41; Stephen Arnold, "A Comparative View of the Career and Aesthetic of Victor Musinga, Cameroon's Most Popular Playwright" in *Toward Defining the African Aesthetic*, ed. Lemuel A. Johnson et al. (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982), pp. 53–71.

inspiring example of literature serving urgent practical needs by conveying scientific medical knowledge in story form. Dinga needs to take more from traditional folk tales and less from modern European-style writing in order to hit his intended audience more effectively: in 1979 he was setting to this task in a rewriting of his second volume, *Mami Minyondo's Menstruating Boys and Other Stories*. The most artistically successful stories available to international audiences are *"Lukong and the Leopard,"* with *"The White Man of Cattle"* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), an unassuming pair of beautifully told tales in an unobtrusively contrived folk style by Kenjo wan Jumbam. They were intended for secondary-school students, but are a pleasure to readers of all ages, and the writer's international stature should gain recognition in the eighties. Another young author who has published a story on its own is Kate Ngowo Williams (b. ca 1960), whose *The Love Seat* (Yaoundé: CEPER, 1978) is a beginner's soft-core Onitsha-style tale about star-crossed love.

Less well-known but better writers have published in *Abbia*. They are Peter Abeti with two stories and Thomas Atabe with three. Bole Butake's stories in *The Mould* are reminiscent of Achebe and Maupassant. But at the time of writing, the future seems to lie with authors known only in manuscript, such as Emanuel O. K. Kejuo (a Guinness Radio Contest winner), Awah Dzenyagha, Crispus Numfor (b. 1946), who won first prize in a 1971 Buea Radio Contest for "Opening the Box", and two women: Nkuku Nwigwe (b. 1934), who is better known as a journalist writing for *Africa Woman*; and Faustina Yembe (b. 1942), an excellent stylist.

An unsuspected number of Anglo-Cameroonian novels were written, and some were printed locally during the seventies. Apart from the two Onitsha novels already mentioned, five others have been published or are in press. *Promise* (Lagos: African Universities Press, 1969) by Jedida Asheri (the pen name of a modest famous woman) is a lyrical autobiography written with a lovely turn of phrase. *The Little Gringo* (Jericho, N. Y.: Exposition Press, 1973) is the story of a priest's tragedy, which René Simo wrote as an exercise to bring his English up to the level needed to study in an American University. Nsanda Eba, a mathematician with a controlled and economical sense of style, sensitively portrays a child's life on a rubber plantation in *The Good Foot* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977). Linus Asong's fourth novel out of five, *The Last Man to Die,* was scheduled for publication before the end of 1979 by Buma Kor, and Kenjo wan Jumbam, author of several novels said to be of uncommon quality was the first writer since Dipoko to have a book in Heinemann's African Writers Series: *The White Man of God* (1980).

Among the unpublished, the name of Germanus Nchangi comes up frequently in conversation although it is said that political pressures have prevented the publication of his allegedly powerful, sophisticated novel about American imperialism. E. O. K. Kejuo (b. 1948), a polyglot, Brazilian-trained diplomat-journalist (and another Guinness winner) who took up writing at the age of 15, and has had stories broadcast on the B.B.C., the Nigerian B.C., and Radio Cameroon, has written *Widows and Orphans,* the longest African novel I have ever encountered; this sprawling, almost unmanageable but often brilliant piece probably frightens publishers because it is by an African, about an African topic, yet somehow is not "African." Undaunted by rejections, at the turn of

the decade Kejuo was at work on a new *roman fleuve*. Bole Butake's *The Luncheon*, a tale of the trials of bachelorhood, deserves a publisher. Other novelists whose works have not yet found publishers include Awah Dzenyagha, Emile Nanga-Mebara, Munyam Ngwa, B. Ndifontah Nyamndi, Dr. Joseph Ngongwikwo and R. C. Kumengisa, who penned four unpublished novels in English before turning to pidgin.

Pidgin raises considerable problems for the Anglo-Cameroonian writer. While it is of course far more wide-spread than standard English, it intimidates foreign publishers because of their inability to distinguish between what they consider bad English and a very Cameroonian type of English which is infested or enriched, depending on your vantage point, with pidgin. Probably the most popular reading material in the country, sought out even by francophones whose command of English is poor is "Ako Aya," a poisonous, layabout pidgin gossip column which takes its name from the pseudonym of the author. Libellous, rude and raucously irreverent and funny, it is often so heavily censored that the white spaces showing the censor's hand often take up more room than the remaining mutilated text. It appears in almost every issue of the *Cameroon Outlook*. The present recognized master of pidgin prose is "Jetimen", pseudonym of Takum Menget (b. 1943): his comic novel *The Boomerang (or The Adventures of Tita)* is very well known and already influential through circulation in manuscript. His poems in pidgin *(Slices of Life)* are extremely good models for formal emulation, as their rhythms are based on children's rhymes. He writes pidgin plays, too, which deserve to leave the written page for the stage: *The Confession*, in which a hypocritical priest is riotously exposed, is a Chaucerian *Tartuffe* in Africa.

Shu Mfonyam (b. 1951), who advertises himself as "Poet, Writer, Literary Critic" is a James Joyce of pidgin. He has written a five-volume *Great Anthology of Emotions* (privately "printed," i.e. mimeographed), and sits on mountains of manuscripts full of characters such as Mami Foot Cow, the owner of a palm-wine bar where the weirdest of conversations take place, as in the story "Regular Free Wine for A Popular Lunatic in Mankon": another Tutuola may be lurking here.

Despite such creative ebullience, there is an obvious imbalance between the French and the English literary production of Cameroon.

Hangovers from colonial policies help to explain this. The French, with their assimilation policy in education, taught literature, not just language, in their schools, whereas the English taught only language, and for purely utilitarian purposes. The reason why Nigeria, which had the same colonial administration and policies, became the most productive centre for anglophone writing in post-colonial Africa is, according to Bernard Fonlon, that the Nigerians had a university. This is not the whole answer. Nigeria also has a large population, which provides a sufficient market for publishing to be viable; and it has large population centres, always a positive factor in developing a literary culture. This is much less the case in Cameroon where concentrations of anglophone writers have been dispersed since the change from a Federal to a United Republic has decentralized and scattered many, who are often in the Civil Service, including the teaching profession. A crucial inhibiting factor has been the isolation of Cameroonian practitioners of English and of their clientele from the positive benefits that would accrue from association with the Commonwealth; the resulting uniqueness

of perspective gained from enforced self-sufficiency is no compensation, even less so as there are obvious domestic reasons why anglophone culture has been suppressed or, in the best of circumstances, benignly neglected by the francophone majority. Most films shown in cinemas in the anglophone towns are French films, shown in French. Contact with Europeans almost always means contact with French, rather than English, people. Study opportunities abroad are rarer for anglophones than francophones, too, and therefore prodigal sons and "been-tos" are almost non-existent. Finally, because there is still no emphasis on literature in anglophone schools the literary models of style proferred are classical and uninspiring: dead English prevails.

All this accounts for the generally low quality of anglophone poetry: almost without exception the best poets are multilingual and able to translate models from other languages into English; they have often been educated in Nigeria, Britain or North America. Nor does the thematic spread of such writing as the patient and sedulous researcher can lay his hands on, exhibit striking originality: here as elsewhere on the continent the favourite topics are realistic anecdotes and vignettes of city life, Onitsha stuff, patriotism, religion, witchcraft, love, traditional life, childhood, history, family problems, generation conflicts, the plight of women, and tribalism. On the surface this sounds like any other modern African literature, minus the political themes which are avoided except by exiles. On the whole, whoever manages to get hold of a substantial sample of the country's anglophone writing gains the impression that it is more tradition-centred, local and parochial in content than most of the new African literatures.

One element that may lead to improvement in bulk and in quality is that organized literary activity among writers has not been and is not negligible. Anglophone authors have done rather well in national competitions in addition to the many they have organized among themselves. In the 1950s Sona Elonge published a poem in a Ghanaian newspaper; entitled "The Bark," it became exceedingly popular and was, it is claimed, on the tongues of a nation. In 1960, Germanus Nchangi, then a student in the U.S.A., won the prize for student poetry in a contest for "native" speakers sponsored by the Catholic Poetry Society of America based in New York City. In 1966 'Sankie Maimo won the prize for the best poem to promote national unity in Cameroon. Guillaume Oyônô-Mbia, a basically francophone dramatist who sometimes writes in English, won the B.B.C. drama prize in 1967. O. E. Elonge won the National song competition in 1972. Victor Musinga carried the National Drama Festival laurels against a crowd of francophone rivals and a panel of all-francophone judges in 1977. And in 1978 the Guinness talent search radio contest flushed out writers and would-be writers by the hundreds, a significant number of whom were women. For some reason most of the best-known writers did not enter. Quality of entries ranged from the sublime to the grotesque, poetry being the weakest genre, prose the strongest, and radio plays the most difficult medium for most to practise in, as too many authors wrote elaborate stage directions intended for a visual medium. Nevertheless, although radio and television are the Anglo-Cameroonian writer's most accessible outlets and pidgin his most original contribution to literary language, it is clear that this English-based creative writing is there to stay and to develop, thus enhancing and further diversifying the attractive cultural effervescence of the country.

CHAPTER X

ENGLISH: THE OTHER WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES

1. GHANA

The promoters of *Black Orpheus* expected the Gold Coast, which had achieved independence under its new name of Ghana on 6 March 1957, to make a truly outstanding contribution to the growth of the new African literature. The advisory committee of the journal had a determinedly international character but the only country from British West Africa to be represented, apart from Nigeria, was Ghana, with Michael Dei-Anang who in 1957 was already an established writer. In 1958, another Ghanaian joined the committee: Georgmbeeyi Adali-Mortty (b. 1916), a writer and translator of Ewe poetry. This was as it should have been, for the Gold Coast had obviously outstripped Nigeria in creative writing during the colonial period, and one might have legitimately hoped that the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah would foster the swift growth of modern literature in independent Ghana.

However, these expectations were not fulfilled and as late as December 1962, South African critic Lewis Nkosi was able to draw the following comparison between Nigeria and Ghana:

> Whereas Nigeria lacks a strong sense of centralism, and gives the impression of a lively intellectual disorder, Ghana is self-conscious of its position as a small but influential power in African affairs. In the arts, especially in writing, this translates itself into an intense urge to make self-indicatory statements about Africa and its statesmen, especially in support of Ghana and its political leaders. Ghanaians do not, on the whole, seem to be able to stand outside of themselves and achieve the detachment which the young Nigerian writers so readily evince. Apart from a small body of vernacular literature, very little creative writing has been published in Ghana.[1]

This body of vernacular literature was by no means as negligible as Nkosi suggested but it is true that by 1958, when Nigeria had already produced Tutuola, Ekwensi and Achebe, and *Black Orpheus* was on its way to becoming the literary forum of anglophone Africa, the only Ghanaian writer of any reputation was Michael Dei-Anang, and the only imaginative fiction in English published on the spot was the popular novelettes of

[1] Lewis Nkosi, "African Literature: Part II—English-speaking West Africa," *Africa Report*, 7, 11 (1962), 15–17, reprinted in *A Handbook of African Affairs*, ed. Helen Kitchen (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 285–295.

Benibengor Blay and the thrillers of Gilbert A. Sam. Henry Swanzy, the editor of *Voices of Ghana,* was fully aware of this:

> To say that this collection fills a long-felt want is no mere figure of speech. There is nothing at the moment in print, apart from political and biographical writing led by Dr. Nkrumah's autobiography. Here we have no Cyprian Ekwensi, no Camara Laye, no Amos Tutuola.[2]

There were seeds of promise in the poems of Albert Kayper Mensah, Kwesi Brew, Frank Parkes and in a story by Efua Theodora Sutherland. But none of these was to achieve independent publication in book form until several years had elapsed. And while the novel remained at a depressingly low level in quality and in quantity throughout the Nkrumah period (1957–1966)—after which the emergence of Ayi Kwei Armah really opened the way for a truly modern Ghanaian novel—the most significant phenomenon in the years following independence was the creation and rapid growth of Ghanaian stage drama which benefited by considerable official encouragement and help, perhaps on account of its public-relations potentialities.

ANTHONY GRAHAM-WHITE[3]

DRAMA

When independence came, Ghana could already boast a modern dramatic tradition of sorts. Accra, after all, had seen performances of Kobina Sekyi's fine play, *The Blinkards,* in 1915 and 1917. Achimota College, the premier school of the Gold Coast, had a record in the 1920s of student initiative in vernacular and English-language drama which at the time drew as much attention as the similar activity at its francophone counterpart in Senegal, the Ecole William-Ponty, was to receive in the 1930s.[4] The first West African play written and printed in an African language was Emmanuel J. Osew's *Nana Agyeman hwehwe* (In search of Nana Agyeman, 1937), in Twi. The year 1943 had seen the publication of *The Fifth Landing Stage,* freely adapted from F. Kwasi Fiawoo's original Ewe play *Toko atolia* (1937) by the author himself, and of J. B. Danquah's ambitious allegory, *The Third Woman.* But although all this written drama had originated in the Gold Coast, there is a notable discontinuity between these early achievements and the

[2] Introduction to *Voices of Ghana: Literary Contributions to the Ghana Broadcasting System, 1955–1957* (Accra: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958).

[3] For recent general discussions of the subject, see K. N. Bame, "The Influence of Contemporary Traditional Drama on the Attitudes and Behaviour of Ghanaian Play-Goers" *Research Review* (Ghana), 9, 2 (1973), 26–32; Charles Angmor, "Drama in Ghana," in *Theatre in Africa,* ed. Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (Ibadan: University Press, 1978), pp. 55–72.

[4] On theatrical activity in the Gold Coast between the wars, see an anonymous note on "Experimental Drama in the Gold Coast," *Overseas Education,* 5 (April 1934), 113; C. Kingsley Williams, *Achimota* (Accra: Longmans, 1962), p. 63; Anthony Graham-White, *The Drama of Black Africa* (New York: French, 1974), pp. 73–74.

steady development of drama after independence. *The Blinkards,* indeed, had to wait for publication until 1974.

The only area of drama where there has been continuity and development over a long period is in the popular vernacular performances of the Concert Parties or Trios. The first of these groups was founded in 1918; today several dozen are active. Comic and often didactic sketches are presented by small all-male troups working in conjunction with highlife bands. While the most direct literary reflection of this popular drama—Patience Henaku Addo's amusingly exaggerated portrayal of an innocent beauty who comes to the city and takes a job as a bar-girl[5]—is of fairly recent date, the concert parties have been indirectly a challenge to and reference point for writers of English-language drama. The only other kind of drama to have developed continuously, vernacular drama for mass education, first begun in 1948, has turned to the Concert Party even more directly, borrowing not only its format but also its performers.[6]

Despite the lack of continuity in English-language drama, it is not quite possible to begin a history of Ghanaian drama in English *ab ovo* from 1957 because some of the institutional structures that have encouraged it were founded earlier. Radio service began in the Gold Coast in 1935 and by the 1950s broadcasts included plays. Thus, when the new Ministry of Information and Broadcasting celebrated independence by issuing *Voices of Ghana,* three of the contributions were plays, including an amusing satire, *The Literary Club,* by Henry Ofori (b. 1925). In 1956 an Arts Council was set up but, despite its early founding, it has not always been a dynamic promoter of culture. In an interview in 1969, its director said that some of his departments were dead, some of his regional organizers did nothing, and that the Accra headquarters could not help the regions because the regions did not "have the facilities that will call for an expert to go to the site"—and to have an expert show people the right way to do something was, apparently, the only way to encourage artistic creation.[7]

Other institutions have been more important for the early development of Ghanaian drama. In 1958 Efua Theodora Sutherland (b. 1924) founded her Experimental Theatre Group, whose purpose was both to instil greater sophistication into school drama and to experiment with elements drawn from local lore: folk stories, lyrics and dances. Performances in Twi and in English met with great success, and Efua Sutherland was to remain at the centre of Ghana's theatrical activities for a long time. Peter Carpenter noted at the time:

> her work in the small wooden rehearsal hut above the seashore in Accra where the drum rhythms of her group with the beat of the surf below them, attracted the attention not only of the Arts Council of Ghana but also of the Rockefeller Foundation and the American "Fund for Tomorrow". From these two philanthropic bodies and from the Council, the Experimental Theatre received money

[5] Patience Henaku Addo, "Company Pot," in *Nine African Plays for Radio* ed. Gwyneth Henderson and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 163–185.

[6] For an interesting argument for the interdependence of printed literature and oral vernacular theatre, see Alain Ricard. "Between the Oral and the Written: Theatre in Ghana and Nigeria," trans. A. Graham-White, *Educational Theatre Journal,* 28 (May 1976), 229–238.

[7] Jawa Apronti and E. Ofori Akyea, "Interview with Mr. Danso-Manu,...", *Okyeame,* 4 (June 1969), 104–113.

grants. The greater part of this money, plus a Government grant, was devoted to building the Ghana Drama Studio, Ghana's first professional theatre, which cost (without equipment or seating) £ 8,500 and was opened by Dr. Nkrumah in October 1961.[8]

In 1962 the Drama Studio became a part of the newly established School of Music and Drama at the University of Ghana: Efua Sutherland, J. C. de Graft and Haitian author and producer Félix Morisseau-Leroy have all taught at the school. Television service began in 1965 and from November 1966 — when Martin Owusu's *The Sun Shines Bright* was shown—plays were produced regularly.

As is true of theatre everywhere, however, English-language drama in Ghana owes more to individuals than to institutions. And of contemporary Ghanaians, Efua Sutherland was the earliest playwright-director and has been active in the most varied ways. She has always been concerned with the social uses of drama. In the mid-1950s she set up a writers' society whose members were to write for children. She has written children's plays, usually in both an English and a vernacular version. But though one would be fascinated to read her adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland,* of her output designed for children she has chosen to publish only two very brief "rhythm plays", whose simplicity means very little on the page.[9] In addition *Anansegoro: You Swore on Oath,* a traditional tale of a deer-woman skilfully dramatized for presentation by a story-teller, chorus and actors, was printed in *Présence Africaine* without her advance knowledge.[10]

Efua Sutherland's determination to reach the ordinary person lies behind several aspects of her work. She built a courtyard theatre which drew in concept upon traditional performance areas at a time, 1960, when African theatre buildings were usually modelled upon European theatres. A few years later she designed another outdoor performance area for experiments at blending story-telling and drama. From her Ghana Drama Studio, the "Kusum Agoromba" (Kusum Players) go out to tour schools and training colleges with plays in English and in the vernacular. In its repertory has been *Odasani,* an unpublished adaptation of *Everyman.* The Drama Studio also collaborated with the Workers' Brigade Drama Group, founded by Félix Morisseau-Leroy, in tours aimed at the working man, with performances again in English and the vernacular.

Since the mid-sixties, Efua Sutherland has published three full-length plays: *Edufa* (1967), which is a re-working of Euripides' *Alcestis, Foriwa* (1967), and *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), sub-titled "a story-telling drama." They show an increasing concern for the involvement of the spectators: *Edufa* borrows a chorus from Greek drama and was intended for presentation in the Ghana Drama Studio's courtyard theatre, with spectators and actors entering by the same gate; *Foriwa* was written for performance "in a street in any of many small Ghanaian towns" and the hero begins the play by explaining his intentions to the audience; and *The Marriage of Anansewa,* in an attempt

[8] Peter Carpenter, "East and West: A Brief View of Theatre in Ghana and Uganda since 1960," *Makerere Journal,* 8 (1963), 33–39.

[9] Efua Theodora Sutherland, *Vulture! Vulture! Two Rhythm Plays* (Accra: State Publishing Corporation, 1968).

[10] *Présence Africaine,* English Edition, 22 (1964), 231–247.

to catch the atmosphere of traditional story-telling sessions about the trickster Ananse, places all performers on stage for the entire performance not only as singers, dancers and actors, but as an onstage audience with whom the author hopes the real audience will "feel as one."

Of these plays, the most ambitious as literature is undoubtedly *Edufa,* where the author gave a tragic twist to Euripides' earliest surviving play. It will be remembered that *Alcestis* was presented in a dramatic competition in place of a satyric play: it is not the burlesque that the audience would have expected after seeing three tragedies, but while serious it is not tragic but celebratory, being designed to extol the cardinal virtue of hospitality. The Greek writer's eponymous heroine is the wife of Admetus who is renowned for his hospitality. In return for his kindness Apollo had decreed that when facing "imminent death," Admetus should be allowed to seek someone else to take his place. This, long before the play opens, his wife Alcestis had promised to do. At the start of the play Death appears to take her, refusing Apollo's suggestion that he generously refrain. A servant describes how Alcestis has gone through the house to say farewell to each household object that has made her married life happy, and then Alcestis is carried out of the house. She has consented to die to preserve her marriage: her children will fare better with their father living than with him dead. To further their welfare, she makes Admetus promise not to marry again. He goes beyond her wish and promises never to admit another woman to his bed. No sooner is Alcestis dead than a new guest, Heracles, arrives. Torn between rival obligations, Admetus sets aside the role of mourner for that of host. He orders his household to keep silent about his wife's death. An unwelcome visitor next appears, Admetus' father, an aged man who had refused to die for him. He offers his hypocritical condolences and is rebuked by Admetus who will give him what he would have had without Alcestis' generous action: no son and burial by strangers. Meanwhile, Heracles has found out about Alcestis' death: he is embarrassed to have intruded upon sorrow. In compensation, he pursues Death and wrestles Alcestis from him. Returning with the veiled woman, Heracles asks Admetus to keep her for him. Remembering his vow to Alcestis, Admetus again feels caught between the obligations of mourning and hospitality. But when he reluctantly agrees, he discovers that it is his own wife who is returned to him as a reward for his hospitality. Euripides' play has been variously interpreted but the interpretation of the play that makes sense of every component part, as well as of the patterning of events, is one that sees it as a celebration of hospitality.

One recent scholar put forward the view that "*Alcestis* ... is a play about Admetus even more than about Alcestis; ... about a good husband and an admirable marriage which, confronted with a crisis of Necessity, suddenly faces not only the loss and sorrow which are the common human lot, but disgrace and guilt arising from the rare performance of what everyone recognizes as a wife's duty to her husband."[11] It is interesting to observe that the eponymous character in Efua Sutherland's drama is not the wife, but the husband, the Admetus-figure, who is the centre of the play, and that the authoress

[11] Philip Vellacot, *Ironic Drama: A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), pp. 105–106.

is closer to some modern critics who dislike Admetus than to Euripides. Edufa is just a selfish member of the new class of privileged *nouveaux riches*. While the Heracles character is turned into a seedy intellectual, the father, a self-centred hypocritical old man in Euripides, becomes endowed with impressive dignity, wisdom and insight. Sutherland provides a detailed account of the circumstances in which the woman pledges her life for her husband's, an episode on which Euripides had remained tantalizingly silent. And whereas the Greek Alcestis dies a third of the way through the play, the dying of her African equivalent remains the focus of attention throughout the Ghanaian drama, which ends with her death. The whole play is set, with heavy irony, against an annual ceremony in which funeral songs are sung as evil is expelled from the town. While Edufa's wife is not restored to life, what seems to interest Efua Sutherland is the contrast between the husband's façade as an "emancipated", civilized man, who proclaims his disbelief in traditional omens and sacrifices, and his secret resorting to diviners when the coming of death strikes him with terror.

The note of social criticism implicit in Sutherland's reversal of Euripides' character valuations becomes explicit in her second play, *Foriwa,* a dramatized version of her short story "New Life at Kyerefaso", which had been anthologized in *Voices of Ghana.* The hero is Labaran, a university graduate who has come to transform a ragged provincial town. He tells the audience:

> I am keeping vigil here, placing my faith in some daybreak after this long night, when the townsmen shall wake and shake my soul with vibrant talk...
> I was impatient at the beginning: in haste. Seeing the raggedness of my people's homes, I was ashamed, even angry. I heard it screamed: Progress! Development! I wanted it far and everywhere.[12]

But if the play is a plea for change from traditional ways, Efua Sutherland offers us a didactic model of development. The conflict of generations that provides the conflict in many African plays is eschewed: the town's Queen-Mother has been working for change long before Labaran arrived; his ally is the retired postmaster; and the climax is the Queen-Mother's use of a traditional ceremony to win endorsement for change. To complete the theme of unity in progress, Labaran, a Hausa from the distant North, and the Queen-Mother's daughter, Foriwa, take the length of the play to fall in love with each other. Despite the fairly obvious didacticism of its themes *Foriwa* is joyously light in tone as the youth and self-discovery of the eponymous character are central to the feeling of the play.

The Marriage of Anansewa (1975) is, by comparison, a divertissement. It handles the universal comic theme of the rascally father who encourages various wealthy suitors to woo his daughter. When they all threaten to arrive at the same time, Anansewa must "die" to be miraculously revived by the messenger of the Chief-Who-is-Chief, after the other suitors have ended their suits with generous gifts to the "dead" girl. Since the wooing is all by messenger, and since Anansewa is, of course, silent for the last part of

[12] Efua Theodora Sutherland, *Foriwa* (Accra: State Publishing Corporation, 1967), p. 1.

the play, Sutherland can keep her untainted by her father's mercenary schemes, but at the cost of leaving the character undeveloped. What interested her, one supposes, is the traditional story-telling manner of presentation rather than the matter of the play.

Edufa was first produced in 1962 at the Drama Studio, whose director at the time was Joe Coleman de Graft (1924–1978). A graduate of Mfantsipim, Achimota, and the University College of the Gold Coast, he has also written for the stage and, while directing the productions of Nigerian plays by Henshaw and Soyinka in the early sixties, he contributed to the growth of Ghanaian drama with *Sons and Daughters* (performed 1963, published 1964) and *Through a Film Darkly* (performed 1962, under the title *Visitor from the Past*, published 1970), both of them "well-made plays" on stock themes in which coincidence dramatically underlines the playwright's message. *Sons and Daughters* centres upon the right of the young to choose their own careers and of a daughter to choose her own husband. A self-made businessman disapproves of his son's wish to be an artist and of his daughter's wish to be a dancer. A double coincidence—he discovers his daughter fending off the lustful advances of the lawyer in whose office he forced her to work, and he hears a radio announcement of the lucrative sale of an artwork painted by his son's best friend—leads to a generous forgiveness of the younger generation reminiscent in its suddenness of Shakespearean comedy.

Through a Film Darkly is a more interesting play. But we are intrigued in large part because the playwright contrives to withhold more information from us than in *Sons and Daughters*. The key relationship—or, as the play's central character traumatically discovers, non-relationship—has occurred in the past. What de Graft shows us is a highly coincidental set of circumstances that revive that sense of trauma. Instead of character development, we meet a distraught character and, with those around him, slowly learn why he is in so disturbed a state, then watch his final art of self-destruction. Learning of his past involves lengthy exposition, which de Graft has sought to enliven with Pirandellian addresses, one of which defines his work as a "well-made" play and offers as a defence "that this play is about young Ghanaians, some of them educated in England ... all of them articulate and intelligent." This is special pleading: one does not have to write in verse if a play is about a poet, nor in clichés if a play is about a hack journalist. In the world of the "well-made" play the characters are articulate, but this does not mean that because one writes about articulate people one must adopt the conventions of the "well-made" play.

Neither of de Graft's plays is as important to African drama as his work as director, successively, of the Drama Institute of the University of Ghana and of the Chemchemi Creative Centre in Kenya, where he has written acutely of what African playwrights should and should not be doing.[13]

The success of Efua Sutherland's Experimental Theatre Group fostered two other developments in Ghanaian theatrical life in the early 1960s. One was the Ghana Theatre

[13] "Dramatic Questions," in *Writers in East Africa*, ed. Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974), pp. 33–67.

Club, organized and directed by the Haitian playwright Félix Morisseau-Leroy (b. 1912), whose outlook was deliberatedly cosmopolitan. While having some of his own works performed, he also staged a selection from the international repertory ranging from Lorca through Tagore and including even Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. On this last performance, it was observed that the warmth of the equatorial climate and the verve of the Ghanaian cast turned the chilly Scandinavian classic virtually into a rollicking domestic comedy.[14] But Morisseau-Leroy was by no means indifferent to local topics and forms. He staged an adaptation of Paul Hazoumé's novel *Doguicimi* thus combining folk tradition and literary inspiration in a manner not unlike Sutherland's *Edufa*.

In the late summer of 1961, yet a third group emerged in Accra with the performance of Ghana's first musical show, *Obadzeng* by a young musician-author-director who had studied for six years in Philadelphia, Saka Acquaye (b. 1927). Out of the libretto, Acquaye later drew a school play, *Obadzeng Goes to Town* (1965), a tame and flimsy independent-Africa variation on the Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg motif, which had been familiar to South African writers for at least five decades. Obadzeng is a simple country lad who hopes to find easy money, and therefore happiness, in the city; his attempts at becoming a carpenter or a bricklayer fail most lamentably because of his lack of training; city-dwellers treat this "bush man," who has never been to school, with utmost contempt, and Obadzeng, undeceived, travels back to the friendliness and security of his native village.

The printed play, in all evidence, is but a pale reflection of the original musical show, which made considerable use of traditional songs, of modern dance music of the type called "highlife" and of mime—this last a legacy from native African entertainment and a most useful device when addressing a multilingual audience. In an interview published in *Africa Report* (1971) Acquaye explained the rationale behind the hybrid character of the most daring endeavours in African art of the present day. His major point is how basic art in its various forms is to the very fabric of pre-colonial, pre-literate African society:

> Lacking writing, [the African] carried his mythology and literature in his head, transmitting his legends orally from generation to generation. The other art forms, sculpture, dance, etc., were the media through which he communicated to others. Art is therefore a basic means of communication and no one can communicate their own cultural values more faithfully and truthfully than the people themselves through their own artists.

The blending of various art forms which features so prominently in modern drama in Africa is a carry-over from the past:

> When our traditions and values of life were taught through traditional institutions, it was inconceivable that they should be taught without music, dance, chant and the other arts. Everybody's life was guided and directed by religion and religion employed the arts for this purpose.

[14] Arnold Zeitlin, "Ghana's Young Theatre," *Theatre Arts*, 47 (1963), 65–67, 71.

Ghanaian authors of musical shows, like the promoters of the Yoruba folk opera, try to preserve this total impact formerly produced by religious rituals. But the traditional artist, in expressing, conveying and teaching the values of his society, was working within a communal religious framework which has been eroded by the gnawing effect of Western materialism and individualism. Modern Ghanaian artists, therefore, are "not motivated by the religious demands of [the] past": they reflect "what is going on in [present day] society." Whereas the Yoruba playwright re-interpreted old beliefs and legends into myths that have universal—including, therefore, contemporary—relevance, the Ghanaian musical show chose to follow the lines set by much modern vernacular fiction and dealt with the problems of the new culture in a more direct, albeit still essentially imaginative, way. In either case, there is an unbroken continuity from traditional rituals to modern folk opera and musical show, and from this to literary drama, in African or European languages; but at the same time there is an increasing loss of immediacy and integration which is illustrated in an example provided by Acquaye himself:

> In Ghana—apart from the role of religious institutions as sources for education —Ananse stories were used to teach social values and morals. Today the Government Social Welfare Department is using drama to teach modern social values and even hygiene and sanitation.

Indeed, many African governments are quite aware of the public-relations potentialities of the theatre which is the oldest of the mass media, as was recognized by the Church in the Middle Ages and by the monarchs in the seventeenth century. More recent totalitarian governments in Europe and elsewhere have availed themselves of this fact with often remarkable skill. In Black Africa, it is well-known that the Mali authorities set up drama competitions with a view to fostering national unity. And Nkrumah sent Acquaye's *Obadzeng* to Moscow as a demonstration of African culture.

It was also in the mid-sixties that literary drama (as distinct from the musical shows of the early sixties) made a promising beginning with Christina Ama Ata Aidoo (b. 1940), a University of Ghana graduate, whose stories and poems had appeared in *Black Orpheus* and in the literary magazine that had been hopefully launched in 1961 as its Ghanaian equivalent, *Okyeame*. Her first play, *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), had been performed at the Students' Theatre of the University of Ghana in Legon in March 1964. It brought to the Ghanaian stage a form of wit and humour which is all too often lacking in African drama, handling a stock situation in such a way that the usual treatment is unobtrusively shown to be shallow and conventional. Her plays go beyond the commonplace opposition of European and African modes of life, of the modern and the traditional.

The theme of the been-to who comes back with a Western wife is of lasting topical interest and had been treated several times since Sembène Ousmane's *O pays, mon beau peuple!* But in her first play, Christina Aidoo gave it an ingeniously ironic twist: her hero, Ato Yawson, returns to his village with his wife, Eulalie Rush, who is an Afro-American

graduate. The same problems of adjustment arise as if she were a white woman. Ato's family object to her manners, her smoking, her drinking cocktails, the devilish electric machinery in her house; they blame her for being a foreigner, a girl without a tribe and, as a black American, undeniably a descendant of slaves. Eulalie is unable to adapt to her in-laws' superstitious beliefs, their irrational customs, and their disgusting habit of regarding snails as a rare gastronomic delicacy. The quarrel that erupts between husband and wife is not resolved by a plot device, such as her bearing him a son or his abandoning her to marry a village girl; rather, Eulalie's increasingly serious misgivings produce in the end a wave of sympathy for and acceptance of her by his family. While the fact that. Ato has married a black, rather than a white, girl allows the author to keep the focus of attention upon cultural differences, neither of the two central characters is altogether successfully drawn: Eulalie's Americanisms are unconvincing and her lines too bright and brittle; Ato is a mostly passive character. Yet his passivity is not an awkwardness in the material which a fledgling playwright has failed to overcome, but a deliberate choice which few beginning playwrights would have made, to focus on a weak central figure. Ato's habit of excusing each person's actions to the other instead of explaining them is firmly condemned in the end; it is the perception of his failure that transfers his family's sympathies to Eulalie.

Although Ama Aidoo uses a chorus of villagers in *The Dilemma of a Ghost,* and again in *Anowa* (1970), she does not seem to share Efua Sutherland's central concern with modes of theatrical presentation; she is primarily interested in the psychology of her characters. *Anowa* is perhaps the first African historical play in which history is relegated to the background and made to serve the examination of a character. The play is set in the early days of legitimate European trade on the Guinea coast in the middle of the nineteenth century. Anowa is one of those unruly girls for whom Akan society used to find a function as priestesses; but she refuses even this, and marries a man who will gratify her strange passion for working, trading and travelling. Anowa's restlessness is traced to a dream she had when a child, which also provides the key to the play's symbolic meaning:

> I dreamt that I was a big, big woman. And from my insides were huge holes out of which poured men, women, and children. And the sea was boiling hot and steaming. And as it boiled, it threw out many giant lobsters, boiled lobsters, each of whom as it fell turned into a man or woman but keeping its lobster head and claws. And they rushed to where I sat and seized the men and women as they poured out of me, and they tore them apart, and dashed them to the ground and stamped upon them.[15]

Anowa is of course Mother Africa; the predatory lobster creatures are the white men; and her purpose in life is to capture the secret and the power of the new way of life. But while she remains true to her ideal of independent work and self-reliance, her husband, Kofi Ako, is soon spoiled by wealth. Much to her dismay, he buys slaves to do his work for him and lives in opulent idleness, a striking image of the type of native

[15] Ama Ata Aidoo, *Anowa* (London: Longmans, 1970), p. 46.

exploitation fostered by trade and the new money economy. In the words of two weird old people who act as a chorus:

> Money-making is like a god possessing a priest. He never will leave you, until he has occupied you, wholly changed the order of your being, and seared you through and up and down ... Besides, there must be something unwholesome about making slaves of other men, something that is against the natural state of man and the purity of the worship of the gods. Those who have observed have remarked that every house is ruined when they take in slaves. (p. 39)

The tragic climax begins when the aging Anowa, living in solitude in her husband's glorious palace, indomitably clinging to the rags of her active early life, blames her childlessness on Kofi, who has exhausted his manhood acquiring slaves and wealth. They both commit suicide while the chorus futilely discusses whether ultimate responsibility rests with Anowa, who "ate Kofi Ako up" or with her own people who were unable to understand her and to give her self-fulfilment in their own society.

African dramatists have often criticized the low status of women in traditional society, but in a contemporary setting their indignation usually delivers dramatic tension and subtlety over to righteousness. In the context of the late nineteenth century however, the modern woman (Anowa) appears as an eccentric and so a dramatic balance is restored, for the audience sees the character not only from the viewpoint of today, but from the viewpoint of the nineteenth-century characters and from the viewpoint (which Ama Aidoo takes pains to keep before us) of the traditional tale of the headstrong girl who insists on marrying a stranger rather than a suitor of her parent's choice.

The early growth of Ghanaian drama was largely the result of the considerable support received, during the Nkrumah period, from the Ghana Institute of Arts and Culture, the School of Music and Drama of the University of Ghana, the Drama Studio and the Arts Centre; in 1965, Félix Morisseau-Leroy noted that in Accra alone, no fewer than eleven "people's drama companies" with a total of some 370 members actively engaged in stage work, were affiliated with the Institute of Arts and Culture. That state help was readily available is exemplified in the Drama Group set up within the state organization of the Workers' Brigade. Although modern-type formal drama was launched by Western-educated authors, it was deeply rooted in the rich dramatic traditions of the people. Actors drew much of their inspiration from old legends and from such folk tales as the Ananse cycle. Not only did they resort to the familiar technique of fusing stage action, dance, drumming and song, but the new companies integrated some at least of the "concert parties" which had arisen after World War I and became increasingly popular after World War II.[16]

The historical evolution of Ghanaian society after the eviction of Nkrumah, the military coups, the deep economic crisis of the seventies did not prove conducive to the flowering of literary drama. Already before the fall of Nkrumah Joe de Graft had left for East Africa; he became most successfully integrated in the ebullient intellectual life

[16] Félix Morisseau-Leroy, "Ghanaian Theatre Movement," *World Theatre*, 14 (1965), 75, 77.

of Kenya as an actor and a producer for the Kenya National Theatre and a teacher at the University of Nairobi. After his collection of poetry *Beneath the Jazz and Brass* (1975), he returned to play-writing with *Muntu* (1977), an allegory of African history which had been commissioned by the All-Africa Conference of Churches and which was printed in Nairobi. As to Ama Ata Aidoo, she gave up writing plays after *Anowa,* and while teaching at the University of Cape Coast, published such prose fiction as the short stories in *No Sweetness Here* (1970) and her first novel, *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977). It is highly significant that throughout the seventies, although there is no reason for thinking that traditional theatre and the semi-traditional stage activity of the concert-parties were on the decrease, the contribution of Ghanaian authors to written drama, whether published at home or abroad, was quite negligible.

DANIEL S. IZEVBAYE

POETRY

Poetry writing has a special historical importance in Ghana because Ghanaian writers have been more closely associated than other West Africans with the beginnings of English language poetry in West Africa, and because poetry was an important genre in which Ghanaian writers before independence chose to express their response to the political issues of their time. The importance of race and politics in the poetry of this period not only reflects the main concerns of the day, but also accounts for the fact that in the works of Michael Dei-Anang (1909–1978) and R. E. G. Armattoe (1913–1953), the main poets of the time, political statement was of greater importance than any concern with originality of poetic language and form.

The need for greater attention to the language and form of poetry came with independence, which was commemorated in 1958 by Henry Swanzy's *Voices of Ghana, Literary Contributions to the Ghana Broadcasting System, 1955–1957.* Many of the poets in the collection were still to serve their literary apprenticeship, though some of the poems, notably Kwesi Brew's "Ancestral Faces" and "The Executioner's Dream," have remained among the most popular in African anthologies. The volume however gave an important indication of the formal and thematic resources available to the Ghanaian poets at independence. The contributions by Kwabena Nketia (b. 1921)[17] and Israel Kafu Hoh (b. 1912)[18] emphasized the importance of the oral tradition. It was evident from Nketia's two contributions on drum poetry that the Ghanaian poet would soon consider it as important for him to understand the beat of the drum and the dirge as it was for him to master the rhythm of English iambic verse. Soon after independence two of the main literary organs available to the Ghanaian poets, first Nigeria's *Black Orpheus,* followed in 1961 by Ghana's *Okyeame,* both began to stimulate this develop-

[17] J. H. K. Nketia, "Poetry of the Akan Drums" and "Drum Proverbs" in *Voices of Ghana: Literary Contributions to the Ghana Broadcasting System: 1955–57* (Accra: Ministry of Information, 1958), pp. 17–23, 49–53.

[18] I. K. Hoh, "Ewe Poetry" and "Fifteen Poems from Eweland," ibid., pp. 86–93, 98–104.

ment by publishing articles by Nketia[19] and by Geormbeeyi Adali-Mortty[20] (b. 1916), which encouraged the concept of a new Ghanaian poetry whose content and form would be based mainly on those of the ceremonial drum and the traditional oral poem.

Only three poets achieved book-form publication during the first decade of independent Ghana. In 1964, Mbari issued *Rediscovery*, a 36-page collection by George Awoonor Williams (b. 1936) who later reverted to his African name of Kofi Awoonor. Next came *Songs from the Wilderness* (1965) by Frank Kobina Parkes (b. 1932), which was published by the University of London Press, and finally *The Shadows of Laughter* (Longmans, 1968) by Kwesi Brew (b. 1928).

In *Rediscovery* (1964), by Kofi Awoonor, six of whose poems had first appeared in *Black Orpheus* in 1963, a true voice of Ghana's independence could be heard as the verse was adapted from, or based on the structure of, the imagery and rhythm of the traditional dirge. The awareness of the poetic riches of the oral tradition was not new. What was new was the realization of its possibilities in English verse. Awoonor was sustained by the belief that the "new strong songs" that he sang with his god of songs were inspired by the rediscovery of his father's gods.

A comparison of Awoonor's work with poems written by earlier poets will show how the use of the imagery and form of traditional art distinguish his poetry from that of writers who concentrate on the content of traditional culture. *Songs from the Wilderness* by Frank Korbina Parkes, a slightly older poet, was published one year after *Rediscovery*. We find in Parkes a difference between his intention "to sing the songs/Of *Homowo* and *Adae*/Of *Aboakyer*, *Odwira* and *Bakatue*"[21] and his actual performance in "Conformity":

> First
> A soul
> Which at its birth
> Must welcomed be
> With early drink
> To greet the gods.[22]

The whole poem is an unpretentious but conventional observation on the four stages of the life of man in urban society. Its pronounced iambic movement does not sufficiently compensate for the lack of reference to a specific cultural tradition. Even the allusion to the custom of celebrating a birth with a libation does not have the concreteness of specific cultural reference and local imagery of a poem like Kwesi Brew's "Childbirth."[23]

Brew is an older poet who makes more skilful use of English rhythms, and who

[19] Kwabena Nketia, "Akan Poetry," *Black Orpheus*, No. 3 (1958), 5–27; reprinted in *Introduction to African Literature*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 23–33.

[20] Geormbeeyi Adali-Mortty, "Ewe Poetry," *Black Orpheus*, No. 4 (1958), 36–45; reprinted in Beier, op. cit., pp. 3–11. Another article of the same title appeared in *Okyeame*, I, 1 (1961), 49–52.

[21] Parkes, "The Critics" in *Songs from the Wilderness*, p. 7. This first stanza had first appeared as an epigraph in Swanzy's *Voices of Ghana*, p. 11.

[22] Parkes, ibid., p. 11.

[23] Kwesi Brew, *The Shadows of Laughter*, p. 5.

sustains interest in his poems by his preoccupation with local landscape and cultural traditions. Parkes relies to a greater extent than his compatriots on biblical references. The Bible is also an important influence in Awoonor's *Rediscovery,* but it is not the basis of image and setting as it is in Parkes. The "songs" and the "wilderness" in the latter's title hint at the Old Testament idiom on which the syntax and sense of his verse are based. His themes do not differ too sharply from those of the younger Awoonor, whose laments are those of an educated African inhabiting a particular corner of the wilderness of colonial Africa. But because Parkes relies so much on a biblical idiom, we are not able to relate his "songs" and his "wilderness" to a specifically Ghanaian reality. The "dirge" and the "desert" are the equivalent images in Awoonor; but these are present as emblematic items borrowed from the history and culture of his own people, and they help to reinforce the themes of the desecrated shrine and the ruined landscape which we encounter also in Parkes and occasionally in Brew. In spite of a certain sense of spiritual anguish and cultural desolation in these first collections by the three poets, there is a pastoral element in both *Songs from the Wilderness* and *Shadows of Laughter* which we do not find in the more uniformly sad *Rediscovery:* Awoonor's model is the traditional dirge, which became the focus of much interest following Nketia's pioneering work.[24]

Rediscovery is the work of Awoonor's apprenticeship. The collection is uneven, and Awoonor himself realized this in selecting only about two thirds of its poems for inclusion in his *Night of My Blood* (1971), a work of more enduring value. The poetry of *Rediscovery* is limited not only in its language but also in its range of themes and its consistently dark mood. But the volume is a seminal work both for Ghanaian poetry and for Awoonor's own development. He realized quite early that the devices of oral poetry, including repetition and parallelism, can sustain a long poem, as shown by "I heard a Bird Cry" (1964) which, he says, was first written in Ewe in 1961 and then translated into English.[25] The extended rhythms prepared the ground for later long poems like "Hymn to My Dumb Earth" and "Lament of the Silent Sister" and the concept of a lament was employed in a short piece like "The Cathedral." The traditional dirge is thus not just a poetic model for Awoonor. It is a whole poetic tradition within which to operate. He had to go beyond the work of Nketia on the Akan dirge and of Adali-Mortty on Ewe poetry—though both were apparently of some importance in sustaining his interest in the form and in giving direction to his development as poet—to explore more fully for himself the poetic tradition of the Ewe-Anlo. The result was his publication, ten years after *Rediscovery,* of *Guardians of the Sacred Word* (1974).

It is perhaps the lack of a continuing exploration of the formal and thematic possibilities of oral poetry which limited the development of Kwesi Brew as poet, so that

[24] Nketia, *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People* (Achimota, 1955; re-issued New York: Negro Universities Press, 1962). Regarding Nketia's influence on Awoonor, see the poet's own testimony in *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor and Soyinka at the University of Washington,* ed. Karen L. Morell (Seattle: University of Washington African Studies Center, 1975), p. 153. See also Rosemary Colmer, "The Restorative Cycle: Kofi Awoonor's Theory of African Literature," *New Literature Review,* 3 (1977), 23–28, and "Kofi Awoonor: Critical Prescriptions and Creative Practice," *ACLALS Bulletin,* 5, 1 (1978), 22–31.

[25] "I heard a Bird Cry" in *Black Orpheus,* No. 15 (1964), 23–31. See Awoonor's interview in *Palaver: Interviews with Five African Writers in Texas,* ed. Bernth Lindfors *et al.* (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972), pp. 47–64.

he has hardly risen above the stature which he attained quite early in his poetic career. Brew is aware of the poetic value of his own culture. The theme of Awoonor's "My God of Songs was Ill" is developed along the same lines in Brew's "Through the Forest," in which the poet is "Crippled by a god/I do not know," and learns that the creative impulse comes to the poet who responds to the appeal of ancestral traditions.

Although the traditional element in Brew's early poems like "Ancestral Faces" and "The Executioner's Dream" was valuable in developing themes that were to become central in Ghanaian poetry, the appeal of his poetry lies not in his use of themes from traditional life but in his quiet lyricism, in the care with which he employs metrical movement and sketches out the landscape of his poems. The reader who, on coming upon the association of star, rose and sun with eyes and lips, is dismayed at the courtly-love treatment of the theme of "Love's Immortality," will be delighted at the domestication of a trite romantic nature image in the keenly observed landscape in which mortals are "scattered like gold-dust/Before the fierce Sahara winds" in what was formerly the Gold Coast. Brew's work is not technically adventurous and although his treatment of the themes of love and the return of the ancestors is popular, its thematic range is limited.

A year after *Shadows of Laughter* a new technical development in verse occurred with the mimeographed publication in London of *Flowerfall* (1969), a selection of five poems by John Okai (b. 1941), who was later to revert to his African first name Atukwei. The poems are important in showing how technique may make a theme seem contemporary and urgent. The collection has all the essential characteristics of Okai's poetry, especially the delight in alliteration and repetition. The title poem is about the coming of age of two young lovers after their sexual initiation, and the theme is developed through nature imagery, especially that of plant growth and flowering. Nature, which provides the basic imagery in Okai's work, is seen through cosmopolitan eyes. For example, the animal imagery in "Oblogo Concerto" has the crowded richness and variety of a zoo. One may contrast the reception awarded to the work of Okai, whose foreign education—he had lived in the Soviet Union for six years and had obtained his M. A. (Litt.) degree in 1967 from the Gorky Literary Institute—apparently influenced the cosmopolitan character of his work, with that of the American-educated Kojo Gyinaye Kyei (b. 1932), whose first collection, *The Lone Voice* (1969), was also the first volume of anglophone poetry to be published in Ghana. Kyei's poems clearly portrayed the two societies of Ghana and America, and they—unlike Okai's work—found a place in such anthologies as *Messages* (1970) and *Ghanaian Writing* (1972), even though the latter appeared the year after Okai's second collection, *The Oath of the Fontonfrom* (1971).

The lack of interest in Okai might have been caused by the fact that none of his books was published in Ghana. However by 1968 his poems had appeared in the Ghanaian journals *The Legon Observer* and *Okyeame*. And from the controversy that at first surrounded his work, one can infer that perhaps his intentions and performance as a poet were either not understood or not much appreciated. However his themes and the sources of his techniques are important enough to attract other kinds of attention. At least one of the younger poets, Nana Odei Ofei, has been drawn to his style of writing.

But his prodigal use of words and his disregard for the concentration of meaning normally associated with poetry have provoked attack, following Jawa Apronti's reviews in *Universitas* and *Okyeame*.[26] Okai's profuse verse might have benefited from occasional pruning, but is was clear from the publication of his third volume, *Lorgorligi Logarithms* (Tema, 1974), that the first outburst of his poetic vigour was yet to spend itself. The inclusion of the early poems from *Flowerfall* in his two other volumes suggested that in his own view the style of *Flowerfall* was still a satisfactory vehicle for his poetic intentions after five years. The process of winnowing and rearrangement can be of value to a growing poet who is exploring and developing the possibilities of a style which he formulated early and which he is not likely to outgrow soon. In this respect, *Flowerfall* stands in relation to Okai's other volumes, as Awoonor's *Rediscovery* does to *Night of My Blood.*

To appreciate Okai's poetry one must note from his titles that his poems are "fugues," "concertos" and "symphonies," and therefore that the surreal effect is produced by his preference for harmony of sound over verbal precision. Okai himself feels that his poems should not be entrusted to the silent page, but should be performed in full voice in a crowded auditorium, as he himself has often done. They should be read not as printed verse, but as texts-for-performance. Their paraphrasable meaning has significance in proportion to the importance given to the theatrical effect, as in the operatic convention in which music compensates for the poverty of the story. What matters is that Okai's style can cope effectively with an important theme, as in "Elavanyo Concerto", in which he achieves one of his more powerful effects. "Odododiodio Concerto," a poem which Okai favours for performance with drum accompaniment, is modelled on the "battle cry of the Ga people."

It is by no means an uncommon practice for Ghanaians to adapt such traditional verse forms to contemporary situations. Long before independence, a Ghanaian, S. O. Djan, had attempted to adapt the Akan war chant to "Hearten the British Empire" during the Second World War.[27] This practice was later put to quite different use in Awoonor's "Songs of War," in which the warriors chant defiance of the white man's guns: "We are fighting them to die."[28]

War is important in Ghanaian poetry not only as a theme but also as a metaphor for the poet's reaction to the colonial experience. This is not unexpected in poetry about a people for whom warfare and the contest for spiritual and territorial mastery is of such historical importance as for Ghana, where the Ashanti encounters with other Coastal peoples and the clashes with the British since the eighteenth century culminated in the colonization of the Ashanti in 1901. From the point of view of the ancestors in Awoo-

[26] See *The Legon Observer*, VI, 24 (Nov.—Dec. 1971), p. 20, and *Okyeame*, 5 (Nov. 1972), 122–125. See also K. K. Dei-Anang's response in *Universitas*, 2, 1 (1972), 102–106, and Atta Britwum's comments in *Asemka*, 1, 1 (1974), 99–110.

[27] Ohenaba Sakyi Djan, "Drums and Victory: Africa's Call to Empire," *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal Society*, 41, No. 142 (1942), 29–41.

[28] "Songs of War" in *Okyeame* I, 1 (1961), p. 61. On the new use of war songs for hunting, sport and communal labour, see Awoonor's interview in *African Writers Talking*, ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), pp. 37–50.

nor's poetry for the modern Ghanaian to ignore this aspect of his history is to endanger his culture. In "I heard a Bird Cry" he asserts that "There is war in the land of the dead" and the ghosts march on the living to help bring about a "resurrection of the living" and an awareness of the need to fight. The poet who discovers this wish of the ancestors assumes the role of the ritual leader of his people, in the tradition of the widows who "beat the funeral drums/And put tears in the eyes of the orphans by/the roadside."

Poems in which the imagery of war is used to develop the theme of the lingering effects of colonialism belong in spirit mainly to the political consciousness of the period between independence and the fall of Nkrumah. The effect of the coup was to contribute a minor subject to Ghanaian poetry between 1966 and 1968. Kwesi Brew's "A Sandal on the Head," the most popular of such poems, is a meditation from a safe emotional distance made possible by an interpretation which presents the event as a fulfilment of the will of Fate executed according to traditional custom.[29] The presentation and conclusion are less urgent and disturbing than the cynicism and disquiet of "When All Is Said and Done," a poem written in March 1966 soon after the event, by Joe de Graft (1924–1978).[30] De Graft's poem inspired a less disturbing though equally cynical response in Adali-Mortty's "The Spent Scare" (1967).[31]

Much of the poetry published after 1968 was concerned with the predicament of the Ghanaian abroad and the problems of national development. One of the earliest indicators of this new emphasis was the publication of *The Dark Wanderer* (Tübingen, 1970) where A. W. Kayper-Mensah, celebrating Africa and Germany, described the experience of the cosmopolitan Ghanaian and gave new expression to an old Ghana–Germany relationship more clearly represented in the publication of *Ghanaian Writing* (Tübingen: 1972) by Kayper-Mensah and Horst Wolff.

Kofi Awoonor's *Ride me, Memory* (1973) is the major poetic statement on the theme of the Ghanaian abroad. In contrast to the mood of tragedy and communal loss and world weariness of Awoonor's earlier work, the character sketches in this collection are executed with gusto. The satire and the new element of humour derive from his new poetic model, the traditional *halo* or "songs of abuse" which he studied at the time he was working on *Guardians of the Sacred Word*. The landscapes in the American half of the book are sketched with a Pound-like clarity. The images are full of colour and sensual descriptions which appear to cushion the unpleasantness of exile. In the "African Memories" section, temporary self-exile is seen as a necessary experience and the poet emerges from the section almost like a fugitive. In "When My New Passport Came and I was Given Another Year," written at the end of 1971 and first published in 1973, the poet seeks to renew his passport to stay abroad "in alien lands" as a form of regeneration:

[29] Kwesi Brew, *The Shadows of Laughter* (1968), p. 63. The title refers to "the customary practice of touching the chief's head with his sandals to declare him deposed." The poem was written in February 1966.
[30] *The Legon Observer*, I, 7 (30 Sept. 1966), 20; reprinted in Joe de Graft, *Beneath the Jazz and Brass* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), p. 52.
[31] *The Legon Observer*, II, 5 (3 Mar. 1967), 21–22.

I renew myself here
In winter's beginning day
awaiting the coming of the sun
so that your son will be ready
for the snake-shrouds of homecoming.

Such homecomings can bring unforeseen results. Atukwei Okai—whose poetry Awoonor did not much like, suggesting that future poems might benefit by homecoming[32]—announced a union of the foreign and the indigenous in the title of his collection *Lorgorligi Logarithms* (Tema, 1974) as "Lorgorligi" is a Ga word meaning "meandering". Awoonor's own physical return in 1975 was not a happy one. It resulted in a ten-month detention in an Accra prison where "they crushed/the petals of our being/against a long row of ancient walls," as he was to record in his next volume of poems, *The House by the Sea* (1978). His experience brought back to Ghanaian poetry the bitter realism of national history, and characters like prisoner and executioner reappear in his verse as they once appeared in Kwesi Brew's historical poem, "The Executioner's Dream."[33] The stillness of Awoonor's prison is crammed "full of bits/of history executioners heroes condemned men."

Ten years earlier, Joe de Graft had seen the link between the present and the history of slavery, imprisonment and execution in "The Rock Behind the Fort" (1968), which was included in his first collection, *Beneath the Jazz and Brass* (1975). Best-known as a playwright, in his earlier poems (he had been writing publishable poems since 1952) he employed conventional themes—love, childhood, domestic issues—and larger racial issues like the slave trade in "The Old Sea Chain" and the physical suffering of the working man in "The Avenue: N. Y. City." 1965 was the year he emerged as a serious poet, acquiring greater skill for handling new political themes, though occasionally faltering by being too elliptical in an ambitious poem like "To Poets." By 1968 he had come into his most productive phase when he wrote some of his best work.

Joe de Graft's coeval, Albert William Kayper-Mensah is another of Ghana's more experienced writers. A strong visual element and the nationalism which characterizes a poem like "Nation Feeling" help to tide his poems across the barriers of response when language fails. The source of his poetic weakness is evident in the title poem of *The Drummer in Our Time* (1975), which introduces the artist in his role of giving relevance to the past—a role which has become a literary commonplace:

When you drum our ancient bravery
Do not miss our present history.

When Kayper-Mensah succeeds in resisting the platitudes generated by the jingle of didactic poetry, he can show his genuine trade mark as poet—the metaphor turned concrete image. His metaphors are often vital enough to give an almost allegorical character to his verse. Interest in Ghanaian culture also sustains his work. His successful

[32] See *In Person*, ed. Karen L. Morell (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975), p. 156.
[33] Kwesi Brew, *The Shadows of Laughter*, p. 11.

adaptation of a praise poem, "Libation a Nsona Shrine," in *The Dark Wanderer* (Tübingen, 1970) shows what he can do with traditional material. His recent work seeks to relate poetry to traditional art designs, as in *Sankofa: Adinkra Poems* (Tema, 1976), a series of poetic exercises from which a Ghanaian poet might profit. Such profit is not yet to be found in Kayper-Mensah's *Akwaaba* (1976), a collection which does not add much to the development of his earlier work. His best work is still to be found in a poem like "Mirror of Terror" from *The Drummer in Our Time,* in which the theme of order is given both domestic meaning and political relevance. The traditional material used in this poem does not provide the basis of poetic structure and mood as in Awoonor's work. But a poet can also be attracted by the content rather than the form of his traditional material. All that is required of him is that his technique be adequate for containing the mellow wine of traditional tale and ceremony to be served up to the connoisseurs of his poetry. As the eighties were dawning, it was nevertheless significant, and perhaps slightly disquieting, that of the mere half-dozen Ghanaian authors that had gained recognition as poets, only Atukwei Okai had been born after 1940.

RICHARD PRIEBE

THE NOVEL

It might at first appear that any study of the Ghanaian novel would have to pale beside the history of the novel in countries like Nigeria and South Africa. There is nothing to approach the sheer number of novels that have come out of those two African countries, no literary event as dramatic as the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) or Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), no development of the novel to be traced as clearly in its continuity as the development in South Africa, nor any great subject matter to sustain the development as the subject of race has done in South Africa. Two Ghanaian novelists, Kofi Awoonor and Ayi Kwei Armah, are among the most important writers in all of Africa, but their novels, and the major part of all Ghanaian fiction, have only been published since 1966.

However obvious all these points are, they do not add up to a compelling argument to ignore the history of Ghanaian literature.[34] The novels of Armah and Awoonor did not come out of a vacuum. There are social, historical and aesthetic factors which connect these writers and a number of others who are less well known. Thinking just in rather crude quantitative terms, Ghana might be expected to have fewer novelists than either Nigeria or South Africa, as it has roughly one-seventh the population of the former and one-third the population of the latter. Nevertheless, two pioneering works came out of Ghana (then the Gold Coast), which anticipated the general themes of West African fiction and the specific shape of the Ghanaian novel. J. E. Casely-Hayford's

[34] See K. E. Senanu, "Creative Writing in Ghana" and Janheinz Jahn, "Ghana's Written Literature" in *Ghanaian Writing*, ed. A. W. Kayper-Mensah and Horst Wolff (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972). Senanu decries "the scarcity of imaginative and creative output" (p. 13) and Jahn, though generally more positive, notes "a striking lack of fiction" (p. 235).

Ethiopia Unbound (1911) was a rather loosely structured prose narrative that set the stage for other works about the African torn between two cultures, yet fighting for his cultural and political independence. Thirty years later, R. E. Obeng published the first true West African novel in English, *Eighteenpence* (1943), a very moralistic study of a man trying to live a good life in a traditional society.

Despite numerous artistic flaws, both works are informed by a deep sense of *gravitas*: a serious concern with the political well-being of the state in *Ethiopia Unbound* and the moral well-being of the individual in *Eighteenpence*. Every Ghanaian novelist since Obeng and Casely-Hayford has shown a concern with political or personal morality and in some cases both. Additionally, the professions of these two pioneer writers anticipate not only the professions of the post-colonial novelists, but also the most important subjects and main characteristics of this newer generation of writers. Casely-Hayford was a journalist and a lawyer; Obeng a teacher and a catechist. Most post-colonial novelists are journalists or teachers who write about students and lawyers or about schools, religion, the legal process (or its failure) and traditional culture. It was a long time, however, before another Ghanaian novel followed *Eighteenpence*.

Prior to independence a large amount of excellent writing was being produced in Ghana, but it was mainly in the area of journalism. There is a long and significant history of serious journalism in the Gold Coast, and many of the journalists of the thirties went on to become major political figures in West Africa. In the forties and fifties, journalistic writing became an increasingly important tool in the independence movement, but when independence was achieved, the situation changed very suddenly. Nkrumah did not tolerate political dissent, and the consequences, namely political detention, were made quite clear. On the eve of independence Peter Abrahams from South Africa, published a novel that was a thinly disguised attack on Nkrumah: *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956) was an important work, but it would be another ten years before a Ghanaian could, or would even dare to make such a statement in print.

In 1960 Nkrumah shut down the Ghanaian edition of *Drum* magazine after raising objections to some of the material Henry Ofori (b. 1925), the editor, was publishing. A few years later a private publishing house withdrew the publication of a collection of Ofori's short stories. Printed in 1965, it was not released until after the coup, because the company was afraid of political repercussions.[35]

Censorship and fear of censorship were not, however, the most important factors contributing to the literary silence of the Nkrumah years. It would, in fact, be a distortion of history to dwell on this. Many writers and potential writers were engaged in the task of nation-building in a very practical and immediate manner. They were involved in the massive literacy and adult education programme initiated by Nkrumah.[36] Moreover, private investment was very strictly controlled and limited by the state, so that little money was available for the type of popular press that developed in Nigeria in Onitsha. Nevertheless, political, economic, and social conditions during the

[35] Personal communication from Henry Ofori, June 1974. See his *Tales from Dodora Forest* (Accra: Waterville, 1965).

[36] One Ewe poet, G. Adali-Mortty, played a key role in this campaign. As he saw it, teaching was at the time a much higher priority than writing. Personal communication, June 1974.

Nkrumah years set the stage for the very rapid development of the Ghanaian novel following the coup in 1966, a year which, in fact, marked the birth of the modern Ghanaian novel. During a five-year period (1965–1969), no fewer than eight novels were printed, that is, about three fourths of all the prose fiction produced in the country during the first two decades of independence.

Individually, these novels are flawed, but collectively they constitute a body of significant apprentice writing. With one very notable exception, Bediako Asare's *Rebel*, they all very effectively, though at times self-consciously, reflect Ghanaian life. All of these novels take up a didactic stance on the traditional and Western influences on Ghanaian culture. Again with the exception of Asare's novel, they all are written in a very realistic style. In fact, the slice-of-life effect seems to result from a combination of the best and worst efforts of journalistic reportage as applied to the novel. Though in all these novels plot and incident are developed with more skill than character, several of them might loosely be classified as *Bildungsromane*. Finally, these novels do not seem to be very politically committed, at least not in the sense of reflecting a distinct and coherent political ideology. *Rebel* and Cameron Duodu's *The Gab Boys* may be regarded as exceptions as they deal with political situations, but even there the political element is handled in quite general terms and with some naïveté.

The first novel—aside from popular novelettes—to be published by a Ghanaian writer following independence, over twenty years after Obeng's *Eighteenpence*, was *The Catechist* (1965) by Joseph Abruquah (b. 1921). Despite the lack of political commitment, it rather neatly fits the patterns set by *Ethiopia Unbound* and *Eighteenpence*, but is much more successful aesthetically than those earlier works. The story is essentially a fictionalized biography of Abruquah's father, whom we follow from his early years in a small village to his death as an old catechist. A bright and ambitious individual who is often abrasively vain, arrogant and stubborn, he nevertheless recognizes the value and significance of a Western education as his culture begins to undergo changes he cannot entirely comprehend. Abruquah, himself a teacher for many years, very effectively avoids making any direct authorial assertions, letting the narrative carry the impact of the developing conflicts.

The novel opens in the mid-part of this century with the old man on his death bed. An omniscient narrator describes the activities of his family as they come to visit him for the last time. The point of view then shifts to the Catechist, who narrates his life's story and takes us back to the turn of the century in the Gold Coast. From the outset we see his firm belief in the gods and traditions of his people, a belief which conflicts with the Christianity he has come to accept. The richness of this work is in its simplicity and subtlety. There is no great clash, no dramatic climax where we see this man fall victim to his own weaknesses or external forces, yet gradually he is worn down by, and suffers through, both. He never fully comprehends his own limitations and is continually moved from village to village by his Christian superiors who extract more from him than they give in return. Abruquah, however, does not entirely succeed in transforming the chronological sequence of a man's life into art. Situations are not fully developed, transitions are rough, and in places we are simply given gratuitous detail.

In his second novel, *The Torrent* (1968), Abruquah deals with the same themes, but in an artistically more mature and successful manner. Distinctly a *Bildungsroman,* it focuses on the elementary and secondary school education of a Gold Coast boy in the 1930s. Abruquah carefully depicts the positive and negative effects of the British educational system as it was transplanted to West Africa. Josiah, the central figure, develops into a bright and sensitive individual, but the process also results in his being unwittingly alienated from his traditions and his kin.

The Torrent should become a minor classic, for Abruquah has limited himself to one small corner of a larger canvas and drawn it in fine detail. As in a Jane Austen novel his square inch of ivory comes alive with and through small situations, large and small characters, and detailed descriptions that gently nudge us into thinking about the major issues of life. Fortunately, Abruquah does not force any simple solution regarding the specific conflict between tradition and westernization, but herein also lies the major flaw in the novel. He leaves the reader with the distinct feeling he does not know what to do with that conflict, and the work ends abruptly without a satisfying artistic conclusion. The loose ends are disturbing only because we feel that the writer is fully aware of having left the work unfinished.

Immediately following the fall of Nkrumah, Asare Konadu (b. 1932), an enterprising young journalist, set up his publishing company and published his first novel.[37] He had already attracted some local notice with two popular novelettes that were published a few years earlier by another firm in Accra. *Comè Back Dora!* (1966) sold 50,000 copies in its first year and brought Konadu international as well as national recognition. Though Obeng and Abruquah had already made extensive use of traditional life in developing their novels, Konadu was the first writer in Ghana to draw on it as thoroughly and accurately as Chinua Achebe had done in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). *Come Back Dora!* is the story of Boateng, a Ghanaian trader who has had little formal Western education, but has done rather well financially in his community. He has, partly as a result of his prosperity, become rather alienated from the traditional customs of his people and has come to see them as impediments to progress. When his wife dies, he finds himself forced against his will to observe the customary funeral rites, and the experience

[37] Janheinz Jahn and Claus Peter Dressler in their *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* (Nendeln: Kraus-Thomson, 1971) have confused Bediako Asare with Kwabena Asare Bediako, the pseudonym of Asare Konadu (see pp. 90, 95). Both men happen to be journalists as well as novelists, but the similarity ends there. Konadu's novelettes—*The Wizard of Asamang* (1964) and *The Lawyer Who Bungled His Life* (1965)—were issued in Accra by the Waterville Publishing House. His own publishing company, the Anowuo Educational Publications, was highly successful and in the late seventies he was running a large private corporation in Accra, while Asare, who had left Ghana for East Africa in 1963, was working for a newspaper in Nairobi. In the mid-sixties, Anowuo published not only more of Konadu's works (under his own name or under a pseudonym), such as *Don't Leave Me Mercy* (1966), *Shadow of Wealth* (1966), *A Husband for Esi Ellua* (1967) and *Night Watchers of Korlebu* (1968), but also *Painful Road to Kadjebi* (1966), in which an Ewe writer from Togo, Robert Koffi Hihetah (b. 1930) tells the story of a carpenter who is falsely accused and jailed: though bristling with loose ends, this clumsy tale makes two significant points: it portrays the ordinary man's confusion and sufferings in the maze of laws and regulations inherited from the colonial period, and it emphasizes the golden opportunities for bribery which the complexity of the law, combined with the ignorant naïveté of the common man, offers to self-styled lawyers and greedy politicians. Konadu did not publish any new works after 1971, but popular writing was taken up by other authors and publishers who will be mentioned later. For a more extensive discussion, see Richard Priebe, "Popular Writing in Ghana: A Sociology and a Rhetoric", *Research in African Literatures,* 9 (1978), 385–432. [Ed.]

re-orients him toward the meaning and value of traditional life. Konadu is quite skilled at observing and recording detail, but he never fully succeeds in relating his central character to the details of the situation. The forty days of ritual are developed as an interesting set piece and not as an integral part of the novel. The book was later re-issued in Heinemann's African Writers Series under the title *Ordained by the Oracle* (1969).

A Woman in Her Prime (1967), Konadu's second novel, is about a middle-aged woman, Pokuwaa, and the anguish she suffers in trying to have a child. For many years it seems that she is barren. She marries and divorces two husbands and it is not until she has been married for several years to her third husband that she finally succeeds in becoming pregnant. Though Konadu reveals much about traditional marriage and the psychological significance of having children to a Ghanaian couple, he exerts far more artistic control over cultural details than he had done in his earlier novel. The story has its touching moments, but still there is little depth to it. Konadu's forte seems to lie in reportage, in the recording of cultural details and not in developing a story.

Perhaps the finest of those early novels is *The Narrow Path* (1966) by Francis Selormey (b. 1927). Like Abruquah, Selormey is an educator and his own knowledge of teaching also clearly informs and shapes his writing. *The Narrow Path,* like *The Torrent,* is the *Bildungsroman* of a Ghanaian school boy, though it is somewhat more limited in scope as it focuses solely on the boy's elementary education. In fact, it is not a very ambitious work, and yet it succeeds admirably because of the modest boundaries Selormey has set himself. Kofi, the young boy, grows up along the coast of Ghana in the 1920s. The son of a catechist-teacher and the grandson of a prosperous fisherman, he must learn how to balance his two educations and live with them both: his formal Christian and Western classroom training which is reinforced in the home by his father, and the informal, traditional education he receives from his other relatives and friends. At times he suffers cruelly and unjustly in the process, and we see these injustices reflected in what happens to those around him. His father, like Abruquah's catechist, is shuffled from village to village to serve the best interests of the Christian faith, but without regard to the economic and psychological cost to himself and his family. At one point the family is literally broken up as the result of one such move imposed upon them. The references to traditional culture are effectively woven into the fabric of the novel, and one of the most beautifully written sections deals with Kofi's observations of a village's response to a witch. For the most part, Selormey develops his thematic assertions about culture conflict through the narrative action, but there are a few passages, especially in the first half of the novel, where one becomes aware of the intrusion of some rather stuffy moralizing of the kind indicated by the rather infelicitous title.

The first novel of Amu Djoleto (b. 1929), another Ghanaian educator, is both intriguing and disappointing. In a very loose manner, *The Strange Man* (1967) might also be considered a *Bildungsroman* for the focus in much of the work is on the development of an individual character, Mensa. By the end, however, it is not entirely clear what, if anything, serves to hold the novel together. Going beyond Mensa's formative years in his home, as an indentured servant and as a school boy, the novel takes us all the way into his later years as a successful civil servant. There are passages of outstanding prose fiction such as the description of the protagonist as a wild and mischievous young boy

leading all his friends into trouble, a hilarious confrontation with some of the pompous elders in his community, poignant scenes describing the hard work he has to do in a relative's home in order to go to school (similar to the period of indenture Kofi has to serve in *The Narrow Path*) and his humorous first confrontations with the opposite sex as he moves into puberty. Unfortunately, too much of the work is larded with discursive passages on the value of a progressive approach to education. Even Mensa's father sounds more like an advocate of Summerhill than a traditional villager. Mensa himself seems to be a vehicle for putting forward John Stuart Mill's argument on the need to have eccentrics in society. Despite the success of some of the parts, the didactic purpose of the many statements on education is all too clear while the overall pattern of the work as a novel is vague. Moreover, framing the opening story with the death of Mensa's daughter, so obviously reminiscent of the opening of *The Catechist,* and moving to a flashback that leads to a fuller explication of her death at the end, seems a clumsy, gratuitous attempt at artistry.

The Gab Boys (1967) by Cameron Duodu (b. 1937) is in some ways the most overtly political of these novels. Certainly, not one of the other novels deals so explicitly and fully with the political, cultural and economic impact of the West on post-colonial Ghana. The form of the narrative falls somewhere between that of a picaresque novel and a *Bildungsroman.* Kwasi Asamoa, the protagonist, is one of a group of young men who have just completed their formal education. All of them are in their late teens and are discovering that their education has not prepared them for any employment open to them. They cannot, moreover, get the education that would equip them for jobs in business or the civil service as they neither qualify for scholarships nor have the resources to put themselves through secondary school. They have nothing to do; so they try to imitate the language and dress of Hollywood Western heroes and loaf around town like American "drugstore cowboys." Kwasi finds himself in an absurd predicament when he is arrested and tried for not paying a tax he has no means to pay. He runs away to Accra where he does find a job, begins to learn about sex, the corruption in the government, and finally about his own cultural heritage.

Duodu's long experience as a journalist is reflected in his ability to render carefully the details of his scenes. There are humorous incidents and passages that could effectively stand alone as well-structured short stories. The novel as a whole, however, has a number of weak points. Kwasi is at times far too knowledgeable for a naïve figure, the political commentary is often contradictory and even out of place and the latter part of the novel comes to resemble more and more a straightforward essay.

The last work of the group is undoubtedly the weakest, but it is worthy of note for the ways in which it, along with *The Gab Boys,* begins to break away from the repetitive patterns of the others. Bediako Asare's *Rebel* (1969) is a rather self-conscious and wooden allegory about progress and tradition. It is set on a fictional lost island off the coast of Africa where a small village has remained completely cut off from contact with the rest of the world. A ruthless and conservative African priest rules with an iron hand over a people who are slowly starving due to the fact that their lands have been overworked. One individual finds new, fertile land not far away, but the priest refuses to allow the people to move. An African from another, more "progressive" part of the

continent arrives as a *deus ex machina* and explains to the people the benefits of democracy and modern technology.

The novel is the first example in post-colonial fiction of a movement away from a strictly naturalistic rendering of character, situation and detail. Virtually everything that happens, however, is extremely implausible even in terms of the fictional world Asare attempts to create. Moreover, though the novel is overtly concerned with Africa's political and cultural orientation, there is no clear or coherent ideology to hold the work together. It is generally anti-traditional and pro-Western, but specifically little else. It fails, therefore, as an essay and as fiction as well.

Admittedly, the extent to which any of this first group of post-colonial novels can be said to have succeeded depends on the critical perspective which we adopt. As élite, or high literature, that is, literature directed toward an academic audience, these works all have weaknesses. If we look at them as popular literature, or literature for the masses, an evaluation may not be quite so simple. In general terms, this group of eight novels possesses the qualities of popular fiction: simple characters and plot, naturalistic detail and implausible situations, conclusions that satisfy the demands of poetic justice, lack of moral ambiguity, a central focus on personal relationships as the keys to personal success. In places, every one of these novels falls below some of these criteria, but for the most part they adhere rather closely to them. With the exception of *Come Back Dora!* they may all be novels in search of an audience, as only Konadu's novel was originally printed in Ghana at a price that made it available to the mass market there: its local sales attest to its popular success.

Apart from Konadu's novels and novelettes, the fruit of this first flowering of Ghanaian prose fiction appeared under the imprint of British publishers. But Konadu's Anowuo Publications, following in the wake of the Waterville Publishing House and of the Benibengor Blay Book Agency, were heralding a phenomenon similar to the appearance of the Onitsha Chapbooks in Nigeria over a decade earlier: the emergence of large-scale publication of popular fiction. As in the Onitsha chapbooks the plots of these novelettes were often modelled on European love stories and mysteries, but the writing and production were a good deal more sophisticated. The Ghanaian popular writers generally had more formal education than their Onitsha counterparts. A good number had studied journalism and most were either working in journalism or in the government civil service.

J. Benibengor Blay might well be considered the father of popular writing in Ghana. His model of the one-man operation (writer, publisher and distributor) became a prototype for most of the younger generation of popular writers. In the forties he wrote some novelettes and had them printed in England. He then sold them in Ghana hawking them from door to door. He has continued to write and publish right up to the present but it is to be noted that he issued a number of reprints and new works following the ouster of Nkrumah. In the late sixties he was quite successful in selling his novelettes despite the fact that his works were somewhat dated.

Others were even more successful. There was a large audience for romantic literature, but the younger writers and their audience were beginning to reject the cloying

Victorian sentiment that pervades Blay's works. In 1970 Blay tried a more ambitious work than his earlier chapbooks. The result was an autobiographical novel, *Coconut Boy,* apparently modelled on the *Bildungsromane* of Abruquah and Selormey. The general public, however, was not interested in the form, the sentimental personal note, the length or the price. The work never sold nearly as well as his novelettes.

There was clearly a market for indigenous literature, and people bought Blay's works even while calling them "old-fashioned." Nkrumah's literacy campaigns had set the stage for the development of popular novels by establishing an audience. His tenure in office as independent Ghana's first leader provided psychological motivation behind the development of the novel and the audience's interest in it. More significantly, perhaps, that tenure provided the thematic basis of the first great Ghanaian novels. Finally, as indicated earlier, Nkrumah's fall created political and economic conditions in which the novel could develop.

By 1971 the writing and publication of popular novels in Ghana had virtually come to a stop. The severe inflation of the 1970s hit Ghana very hard; the average literate worker simply did not have money to spare for books. The cost of printing materials tripled in the space of a few years, and this inflation was coupled with a severe world shortage of paper in the early seventies. Given the very real material limitations of a five-year span, it is amazing how well the popular novel actually fared. Asare Konadu became a millionaire from the profits of the publishing house he established for his own work and the writings of a few other individuals. Willie Donkor (4 novelettes), E. K. Mickson (5 novelettes), Skot (pseudonym of Seth K. Osae, 3 novelettes), and other writers did quite well following the Blay model on a smaller scale. One young writer, Cofie Quaye, was very successful with two thrillers of the James Bond type.

Much more thoroughly than the literary novels of the late sixties, the popular novelettes of this period seem to ignore the political realities of Ghana. Simple mysteries and romances, they would appear to be nothing more than light entertainment, escape literature. Nevertheless, many of them very subtly provided simple personal solutions to the complex political problems of the times. They were not just a means of escape from the uncertainty and anxiety of the post-Nkrumah years; they have an underlying philosophy capable of helping the reader come to terms with that disquietude.

E. K. Mickson's *Woman is Poison* (1968), for example, is a murder mystery informed by an extremely puritanical morality. A woman poisons her wealthy husband so she can get his money and marry one of his employees. The young employee has to stand trial for her crime. He is found innocent and does not know the full circumstances of his employer's death until the woman declares her love in a letter to him. He acts like a Mr. Clean and dutifully puts his obligations to the state before the more immediate physical urgings of his body. In short, he conspires with the Ghanaian C.I.D. (Central Intelligence Division) to have his would-be lover arrested. Given the social reality of the coup that ousted Nkrumah two years before the appearance of this novelette, it is reasonable to see the story as an allegorical statement in fact if not in intention. Contextually this is quite clear with respect to the murdered husband, who can be seen as an allegorical impersonation of Nkrumah. The woman may be taken as representing the bad citizen and her would-be lover as the good citizen. The victim is portrayed as a great business-

man loved by the whole community. When he dies, all of Kumasi mourns for him, and the young man cannot be assured of a fair trial, so great is the public outrage.

Throughout the popular literature of this period the assertion is made continuously, directly or indirectly, that personal morality will lead to an improvement in public reality. As in all popular literature an illusion of reality is set up, for reality is never made up of such improbable situations as we find here. In the Ghanaian novelette, however, the illusion is complex. The authors appear to ignore the real political malaise as they guide us through the formulaic narrative structure of order followed by disorder followed by renewed order. In *Woman is Poison* the "bad" woman disrupts the work-a-day world, chaos ensues for a time and social order is re-established when the "good" man does his public duty.

In complexity and subject matter, the popular novelettes appear to bear no relation to the novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, which started to appear in the late sixties, but if we consider them all structurally, in their rhetorical relationships to social context, they have a very close, albeit complementary, relationship. In Armah's first novels (and later in Kofi Awoonor's novel) there is a rather direct fictionalized rendering of the social and political reality in post-Nkrumah Ghana. Political malaise pervades the novels, and Armah's heroes are individuals who are weighed down by the moral burden of a need to maintain and assert their humanity in the midst of that malaise. Armah's typical narrative starts with the "good" man immersed in social disorder and psychologically crippled by the chaos. By the end of the novel, the protagonist gains at least a conception of potential order as his experience teaches him the causes of, and alternatives to, the present social reality.

All this confirms that the Ghanaian novel is informed by a deep sense of *gravitas*, of serious commitment to the welfare of the *polis*, the people of the state. The early "literary" writers, as well as the authors of the less ambiguously popular novelettes and élite novels, all explore or provide answers to the problems that interfere with the welfare of the *polis*. The central answer of the "literary" novel is education, either of the formal kind as gained by the protagonists of *The Torrent* and *The Narrow Path*, or the informal education by which the protagonists of *The Gab Boys* and *Come Back Dora!* learn about their culture. In popular literature the answer is to be found in the allegiance to a strict code of personal morality. In the élite literature more questions are raised than answers given, but the authors persist in examining the need for political as well as cultural vision.

There is a certain sense in which such novels of Ayi Kwei Armah (b. 1939) as *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and *Fragments* (1969), as well as the only novel of Kofi Awoonor (b. 1936), *This Earth, My Brother* (1971), are similar to the earlier *Bildungsromane*. The protagonists are somewhat older, but they are still relatively young individuals who are learning what it means to be grown ups in their particular environments. The affinities of these novels, however, are now as much with world literature as with local works. Local colour is no longer just gratuitous detail or tied to specific issues only. The protagonists develop a mythic sensitivity to their environment, a sensitivity that is at once specific and universal. To paraphrase the narrator in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, these three individuals are encountering

the reality of experience and are forging in the smithies of their souls the uncreated conscience of their race.[38]

Great works of art are almost always controversial when they first appear, and controversy has certainly surrounded *The Beautyful Ones*. It was a bombshell, and its appearance caused as great an explosion in Ghana as Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* had caused in Nigeria. Armah was a literary embarrassment. Grudgingly, his fellow-countrymen recognized his abilities as a writer, but at the same time attacked him for being negative and over-explicit in his physical description of Ghana and for being a prophet of despair.[39] Scatological imagery is extremely profuse in the book, and if we look at the work on the purely literal level, it does indeed seem filled with despair. But the literal in this work is not the same as the actual social reality any more than it is in any of the pieces of popular fiction. We are simply deceived by the illusion of art when we confuse any fictionalized reality with social reality. Armah's Ghana is, in short, a fictionalized, symbolic Ghana—an inferno and purgatory through which his central figure must pass to achieve a fuller sense of his humanity. His despair should not necessarily be taken for the author's vision. (Awoonor, we shall see, is quite similar to Armah in this respect.)

Dante says we must go down if we are ultimately to go up on another stair. And if we can talk of Dante's descent into hell as being lyrical, we can say no less of the protagonist's journey in *The Beautyful Ones*. It is a journey born in a cry of anguish. Certainly on a "literal" level, that anguish is a response to a broken dream. Independence came with the promise of a brighter future, but twenty years and one coup later, little has changed. The rulers are now African, but the poor are still poor. On another level, the anguish is the response of one human being to the suffering of others and a recognition of the human condition.

The hero of *The Beautyful Ones* is never given a specific name. He is simply referred to as "the man". We follow him on a journey through a scatological nightmare. He is involved in apparently simple day-to-day activity—going to work, doing his job, meeting people, returning home to his family—but everywhere he goes he is surrounded by physical decay that is an objective correlative to the moral corruption of the people he meets. The price he must pay for keeping his purity is the loss of his own humanity. At one point, his wife refers to him as the "chichidodo" bird, a bird that enjoys the worms that grow in dunghills, but cannot tolerate the filth. In a particularly poignant scene, we see the man desiring to be physically close to his wife, but feeling repelled as he touches a scar on her belly.

Toward the end of the novel, a political coup takes place, and the man finds himself helping with the escape of a businessman who is threatened by the change of government. The businessman is a rather unpleasant individual and the man helps him, not out

[38] Rev. ed. (1916; repr. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 253.

[39] See, for example, Ama Ata Aidoo's introduction to the American paperback edition of the *Beautyful Ones* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. vii-xii. Recent studies of Armah include: Shelby Steele, "Existentialism in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah," *Obsidian*, 3, 1 (1977), 5–13; Kathleen Staudt, "The Characterization of Women in Soyinka and Armah," *Ba Shiru*, 6, 2 (1977), 63–69; Robert Fraser, "The American Background in *Why Are We So Blest?*", *African Literature Today*, 9 (1978), 39–46. See especially Robert Fraser, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah: A Study in Polemical Fiction* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1980).

of any personal feelings for him, but simply because he is a fellow human being in distress. The only way they can escape, however, is to descend into filth literally as the man leads the businessman to freedom through a sewer. Having seen him safely off in a boat, the man dives into the sea to emerge literally and ritually purified of the corruption through which he has recently passed. He swims to a beach where he observes some soldiers of the new government taking a bribe from a lorry driver. Ironically commenting on this scene is the motto on the back of the lorry: "The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born." One, however, has just been born.

The man has a friend who is also referred to simply by a generic name, "the teacher." The teacher counsels him that isolation is the only way he can save his own soul from the corroding effects of the social reality. But the man cannot envisage an individual salvation that would cut him off from the welfare of the group. He is haunted by a recurrent dream of a place and time where he and others can be "happy in the present and happy in the image of the future in the present,"[40] and of a powerful threat to that vision. An enigmatic female figure appears as one who can help him circumvent that threat. The novel does not allow us to be neatly reductionist, but the circumstances of her appearance in this vision, and elsewhere in the novel lead us to see her as a symbolic repository of traditional and communal values (she is almost destroyed, or at least deranged, by Western values and an individualistic ethic). In disregarding the advice of the teacher, and following his own vision the man, in effect, earns his generic title for he emerges at the end as the only man who has retained his humanity. His relation with the enigmatic woman of the vision is thus reciprocal—she saves him by providing a sense of direction and he saves her by moving in that direction. It is, of course, a reciprocity which is at the base of West African religion and culture.

In his first novel, Armah formulated the central question he was to continue to explore in the four that followed, namely the role of the individual in ensuring the continuing existence and development of a viable African community. In *The Beautyful Ones* and *Fragments* (1968), his second novel, he limited his examination to West Africa, specifically Ghana. In the next two novels, *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) Armah moved into the wider geographical setting of the entire continent. His most recent work, *The Healers* (1978), is set again in Ghana. Regardless of where or when his novels are set, Armah shows a concern with how and why visions of Panafrican unity have failed, and ultimately with the nature of the responsibility, of the individual toward ending the recurrence of failures. He scans the continent, present and past, microcosmic and macrocosmic units, individual behavioural patterns and institutional structures, to find what is needed to make a fragmented and sick society whole and well.

More than any of his other novels, *Fragments* explores a specific and realistically detailed microcosm—the world of family and the Ghanaian community to which a young writer returns after several years' study abroad. The story seems to be almost an inversion of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a portrait of the artist as a young African. The protagonist, Baako, rejects the very Joycean and European

[40] *The Beautyful Ones*, p. 99.

notion that the artist must isolate himself from friends, religion and state. Joyce's work ends with the central figure, Stephen Daedalus, leaving home and going off to Paris to become an artist. The main narrative of *Fragments* is framed at the beginning and end by a very Joycean internal monologue. An old woman, Baako's grandmother, discusses the potential dangers and advantages of Baako's journey abroad. Her perspective is the traditional one of someone close to the ancestors, of a visionary who sees hope for the future in the links her grandson can forge with the past. Shortly after the narrative itself opens we see Baako passing through Paris on his way home. He was going to stay for a short visit, but changes his mind, feeling compelled to return home immediately. For Baako there can be no life as an artist outside of a close involvement in the lives of his people. A friend and mentor, a painter named Ocran, warns Baako that if he wishes to survive as an artist he must stay away from those who are close to him, otherwise they will destroy him. There are echoes here of the teacher in *The Beautyful Ones,* but also of Daedalus' remark that "Ireland is the old sow who eats her farrow."[41]

Baako disregards his mentor's advice and does survive but just barely. Colleagues at work, his friends, his family all close in in a series of constricting concentric circles. Those individuals closest to him indeed prove to be the most threatening. His mother and sister see him as a "been-to", a person who has been abroad and should have returned with signs of material wealth—at the very least, a large car. He has returned with only a vision which no one except his grandmother can understand. His isolation drives him to a mental breakdown. At the end of the novel he is just beginning to put together the pieces of his fragmented self. He has a better understanding of the material and spiritual way Western values have altered his society, but he is not willing to accept a westernized vision of the artist's role in that society.

Armah's concern with the artist moving from ineffectual to effective healer of a sick society is expressed most strongly in his third novel, *Why Are We So Blest?* One of the three main characters, Solo, an artist who has been through an experience similar to Baako's, comes to the following conclusion:

> Why not simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a Western seer, close my eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration my vocation? Impossible. The Western artist is blest with that atrophy of vision that can see beauty in deliberately broken-off pieces of a world sickened with oppression's ugliness. I hear the call of that art too. But in the world of my people that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to falseness, remains to be done. Europe hurled itself against us—not for creation, but to destroy us, to use us for creating itself. America, a growth out of Europe, now deepens that destruction. In this wreckage there is no creative art outside the destruction of the destroyers. In my people's world, revolution would be the only art, revolutionaries the only creators. All else is part of Africa's destruction.[42]

[41] Joyce, op. cit. p. 203.
[42] *Why Are We So Blest?* (Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, 1972), p. 231.

The logic of the philosophy of Frantz Fanon, already discernible in the first novels, clearly led to this conclusion. But it is a conclusion, of course, that argues against the very act Armah is engaged in, and it is not at all clear that it is one he is comfortable with.

Stylistically, *Why Are We So Blest?*, with its shifts in points of view, is Armah's most interesting work, but taken as a whole, it is also his greatest failure. The authorial presence, calm enough while we are led through the troubled mind of Modin, becomes rather shrill as we follow the lives of the other two characters. Solo, a young Ghanaian who is studying at Harvard, decides he must take part in revolutionary activity in Africa. He goes to North Africa to the headquarters of a resistance movement in Southern Africa. He is accompanied by Aimée, a frustrated American woman who has an insatiable sexual appetite for African men. The narrator proceeds through alternating chapters devoted to Aimée, Solo, and Modin and their specific perspectives on events. None of them ever really succeeds in taking part in the revolution, and the novel ends with Aimée being raped and Modin brutally murdered in the desert of North Africa. The brutality is described in such full and graphic detail it becomes gratuitous, losing whatever artistic impact Armah intended it to have.

The central figures in *Why Are We So Blest?* are individuals crippled by their knowledge of the West. Modin's trip into the desert is essentially suicidal, his blood spilt there leads to nothing. *Two Thousand Seasons* symbolically starts where the previous novel ends: "Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration..., people headed after the setting sun, in that direction even the possibility of regeneration is dead."[43] The novel moves toward the very explicit assertion that regeneration is possible once Africans obtain knowledge of the historical fragmentation of Africa. We are then given a panoramic view of the effects of two thousand years of slavery in Africa.

Two Thousand Seasons is thus epic in the scope of its subject. It is also epic in its manner of presentation. The bardic voice of the narrator continually interrupts the historical narration to raise questions, make assertions and offer extensive commentary. The style, in fact, is reminiscent of a traditional epic presentation such as we find in the epic of old Mali, *Sundiata,* and the voice of the narrator is very much like the voice of a traditional story-teller or *griot.*

The result is another work that is stylistically rich, but substantively flat. As in a weak essay, far more is asserted than is shown. The refrains and epithets with words such as "healer," "destroyer," and "the way" all have an arresting incantatory effect, but, without any substantive narrative structure to support them, they ultimately sound flat. Nor is this a problem that Armah entirely escapes in his most recent novel, *The Healers.*

The larger subject here is still African disunity, but the narrative is once again restricted geographically to Ghana, specifically to the period of the Asante wars in the late nineteenth century and the defeat of the Asante by the British in 1874. Armah's criticism in *The Healers* is directed for the most part, not outward against Europe, but inward toward leadership in Africa. The thesis of the novel is that the Asante Empire

[43] *Two Thousand Seasons* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1973), p. ix.

collapsed, not simply because of European incursion, but because of exploitative complicity on the part of African royalty. The local kings, he argues, were more concerned with maintaining their power than with ensuring the survival of their people.

Themes, images and techniques developed by Armah in his earlier works are brought together in *The Healers* in a simpler, more direct way. There is his concern with rituals that are performed in a corrupted form, the original meaning having been lost, there are the images of regenerated rivers, and there is a *griot* narrator who tells the story. Yet it is the least complicated of all Armah's narratives. A young man grows up with an intuitive apprehension about life turning sour for his people. He feels they are being destroyed by an increasingly competitive attitude. After he refused to become involved with the political aspirations of a powerful individual in the community, he finds he must flee to save his own life. He then learns about a group of individuals called "the healers" who are dedicated not to individual power but to community well-being. They are, in effect, a secret society of traditional physicians and mind-healers. The young man joins the group and becomes involved in a long-lasting effort to pull together the various warring villages of Ghana.

Such a summary, however, is as unfair as it is accurate. Armah is a consummate artist when it comes to telling a story well. There is the tension here of a finely wrought drama as we are taken in and out of a network of intrigues. Armah appears to be aiming for the rich simplicity of an oral tale, but he fails to capture that richness in the written word. Instead, all the issues and all the characters are too black and white. An epic may successfully pit the forces of evil against the forces of good, but it is necessary that types and not just stereotypes should emerge. Armah continually asserts there are only two sorts of people in the world, "healers" and "manipulators." This recurring assertion however, is not developed in any depth and thus becomes tedious. The manipulators are all predictably and uninterestingly treacherous; the white Europeans who appear are all vain, incompetent or alcoholic (and never all three at the same time); the healers are all as spiritually pure as saints in their knowledge and understanding.

Armah was not the first Ghanaian writer to produce a historical novel, but despite the above criticism, his attempt is clearly the best. D. K. Kwarteng (b. 1946) wrote a novel about the nineteenth century wars between the Asante and the Fantis, *My Sword Is My Life* (1972), and Yaw M. Boateng (b. 1950) wrote one on the early nineteenth century involvement of the Asante kingdom in the slave trade, *The Return* (1977). Both of these works, however, are awkwardly written and deal with situations which are extremely contrived. Armah never lacks style, but he is at his best when he is rendering the internal reality of his characters' worlds. He attempts to present a coherent vision which transcends the temporary and the temporal, and infuses old myths with a new vitality. He succeeded admirably in *The Beautyful Ones* and *Fragments* but has not yet found a successful way of achieving the fusion in a historical/realistic mode. When he finally does achieve this, he may well prove to be the most successful of all African writers in terms of utilizing African tradition to shape style as well as content in the novel.

Kofi Awoonor, however, has been just as successful as Armah. He is best known as a poet, writing in English but shaping his verse by the conventions of his Ewe language and culture. He writes of culture conflict, of being caught between two worlds, and

utilizes Ewe forms, especially the lament and Ewe metrical patterning. His only novel, *This Earth, My Brother* (1971) has also established him as a significant novelist. It is a very lyrical work, and could even be considered a prose poem with a narrative thread running through it. The chapters alternate between ones relating a few days in the life of Amamu, an Accra lawyer, and ones offering a poetic commentary on the narrative.

There are few contemporary African novels that so thoroughly defy analysis along the lines of conventional Western criticism. The work is subtitled "An Allegorical Tale of Africa", and indeed Amamu is a good, but troubled everyman who is attempting to hold fast to his integrity, despite the cultural and political turmoil that surrounds him. At this level the similarities with *The Beautyful Ones* are quite evident. Yet the novel is significantly different in overall design and detail; it is much more expressionistic, much more an internalized expression of reality and ultimately more a celebration of life than the anguished cry of *The Beautyful Ones*.

The scatological imagery is again profuse, and we see Amamu driven mad by the conflicts he faces in the work-a-day world of Accra. But his madness is a symbol of redemption, not destruction—even his death at the end is a positive symbol of change. He has the visionary madness of a poet and of one who is in touch with the ancestors as potentially powerful guiding forces through the "real" madness of the corrupt external world.

This Earth is an extremely difficult novel. At the very least, the reader should have some knowledge of the traditional Ghanaian dirge or lament.[44] The images and structure of the work in general, and the poetic interludes in particular, are those of a traditional dirge. Once the reader begins to see this, he can appreciate the dramatic force of the work. The dirge is always a statement of communal grief over the loss of an individual, in this case, Amamu. But the dirge-like statements which show how his life has been shaped by a colonial system of education, a foreign religion, a government that allowed a few to be free while locking the masses in poverty, and all the aspects of colonial and post-colonial society, make up a lament for the loss of a culture as well as an individual. Only on the most literal level, however, is the dirge a statement of grief. It is a statement of faith, in fact a celebration of an individual's completion of his final rite of passage. It is also a reaffirmation of the central traditional values of the group. The statement is visionary, even apocalyptic, for it is an assertion that the troubled present is as much a transition period for the group as it is for Amamu. As in Armah's *The Beautyful Ones*, there is an enigmatic female figure, here much more fully developed, who serves as a symbolic link between the past and the future. Amamu's "woman of the sea" is the repository of the communal values in the dirge and an embodiment of the future as shaped by the best of the past.

The social milieu of the post-Nkrumah period was, at first, clearly conducive to the rapid growth of the novel as a significant literary form in Ghana. Other coups, however, followed the one that toppled the Nkrumah government, and the quality of life may very well have deteriorated for the average Ghanaian. The general feeling of exhaustion and

[44] On this point see Richard Priebe, "Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* as an African Dirge," *The Benin Review*, 1 (1975), 95–106.

malaise that has resulted from the political instability has affected the Ghanaian novelists as much as the other citizens. In *This Earth,* Awoonor writes of his protagonist "dashing through traffic across a senseless roundabout which used to be [named] for the man they threw out, now for the abstraction for which they threw him out" (p. 196). For the protagonists of Armah and Awoonor, history is, in the Joycean sense, a nightmare from which they are trying to escape. The best of the past, in myth and ritual, is presented by both writers as a source of positive vision which will enable their society to transcend the nightmare. But Armah is the only Ghanaian novelist who has continued to write and publish with any consistency through the seventies, and it may be significant that he has remained in exile teaching and writing in Tanzania, Lesotho and, most recently, in the United States.

In 1975, after living abroad for almost a decade, Awoonor returned to Ghana to take up a teaching position as chairman of the Department of English at Cape Coast University. Shortly before returning, he finished the manuscript of a second novel and published an excerpt from it in a journal.[45] He had little opportunity to do anything else with the manuscript, however, as he was arrested in February 1976 and detained by the military government for over nine months on a charge of alleged conspiracy against the regime. In the spring of 1974 an Accra newspaper, the *Graphic,* attempted to serialize Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons,* which had been printed in East Africa; only a few chapters were ever published as the military government forced the paper to stop the serialization.

Aside from those of Boateng and Armah very few Ghanaian novels appeared in the mid and late seventies. In 1974 Abruquah said he had finished a manuscript, but was not going to revise it or even attempt to have it published. He wanted to give up writing and devote all his energy to his position in the Ghanaian Ministry of Education. He said he was pleased with the international reputation he had achieved, had particularly enjoyed the experience a few years earlier of participating in a writers' workshop in the United States at the University of Iowa, but was discouraged by the problems he faced in establishing a reputation as a writer in his own country.[46] Abruquah's feelings may very well reflect the feelings of most Ghanaian writers today. The last work by one of the early novelists was published in 1969. Djoleto is the only one to have produced anything since then. His novel, *Money Galore* (1975), is an entertaining satire on political corruption in Ghana. Djoleto has bitten off more than he can chew, but the novel is still interesting, more because of what is left unsaid than because of anything that is stated. None of the satire is clearly directed against any specific individuals or institutions, but the military, mentioned only a few times, looms like an ominous shadow behind the scenes.

Ama Ata Aidoo, best known for her plays and short fiction, published her first novel, *Our Sister Killjoy,* in 1977. It is essentially an attack on the culture and politics of the West, but the writing lacks the strength and subtlety of her short stories in *No*

[45] Personal communication, June 1975. See "From *Comes the Voyager at Last*," *Okike,* 7 (April 1975), 31–56.

[46] Personal communication, June 1974.

Sweetness Here (1967). The novel has a 1966 copyright, so it was apparently written over a decade before it was published, possibly even before she completed her collection of stories.

The point here is that the seventies have proved as barren for the Ghanaian novel as the late sixties had been fertile. The social, political and economic reasons for this are not, as we have seen, very difficult to find. It might be argued that writing a novel is ultimately an individual act, yet the Ghanaian novelist has effectively demonstrated through his art that the act must be grounded in a serious commitment to society. There is, then, a profound eloquence in the present literary silence. Abruquah and Awoonor have, in effect, said that the times are such that the writer can do more by educating others or going to jail than by seeing a novel through to publication. In one sense this is a sad comment on the present state of affairs, but such commitment to society will surely make possible a renaissance of the Ghanaian novel.

EUSTACE PALMER[47]

2. SIERRA LEONE AND THE GAMBIA

The history of modern literature in Sierra Leone could be regarded as the story of a search for cultural identity. Sierra Leone's unique historical situation resulted in a lack of cultural self-confidence, which severely affected the production of creative literature.[48] Until quite recently the educated classes, who should normally have produced the country's imaginative writers, were Creoles, descendants of a mixed bunch of liberated Africans, freed slaves from Nova Scotia and the Caribbean, and the "Black Poor" from London. Inevitably, the long sojourn in the Western world had resulted in the detribalization of their ancestors and their alienation from the rich source of African tradition, which has been one of the props of modern African creative writing. The Creoles had Western names and customs, and although their rituals retained some African flavour, they had been partly adulterated by contact with the West. Far from demonstrating that African consciousness and pride in African culture which were some of the motive forces behind the upsurge of African creative writing in the second half of this century, the Creoles, with a language greatly influenced by English, had a profound veneration for English culture and institutions. Britain was still regarded with affection, almost as a second home, the place where one went for one's biennial "home" leave. The summit of aspiration was the coveted K.B.E., C.M.G., M.B.E. and O.B.E. Such an élite could not be expected to show that awareness of the disruption of African society and traditions by the intrusion of an alien civilisation, which stimulated the work of men like Achebe, Laye or Senghor. Therefore, although the Creoles were the nearest in anglophone Africa to the 'assimilés' of the francophone territories, they were far from showing the same reaction, the need to rediscover a lost identity, which led to the negritude movement.

The nature of the Sierra Leonean educational system, geared towards the demands

[47] This is a revised, extended and updated version of Dr. Palmer's essay, "The Development of Sierra Leone Writing," in *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, ed. Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan (Zaria and London: Ahmadu Bello and Oxford University Presses, 1975), pp. 245–257. [Ed.]

[48] For the peculiar concentration on didactic writing in nineteenth-century Sierra Leone, see Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought* (London: Faber, 1968). For a sketchy historical survey of Sierra Leonean writing (creative and otherwise) in English, see Albert Gérard, "Contribution de la Sierra Leone à la littérature ouest-africaine de langue anglaise," *Etudes anglaises*, 75 (1980), 345–357; this essay had first been published in a Portuguese translation in *Africa*, I, 1 (1978), 89–94. Some useful bibliographical information is available in Greta M. K. Avery, "Bibliography of Literature in Sierra Leone", *Africana Research Bulletin*, I, 1 (1970), 46–55. [Ed.]

of the professions and the civil service and based firmly on the classics, the Bible and the outstanding achievements of English literature, reinforced this lack of cultural self-confidence. It was, in a sense, a religiously inspired education which affected the quality of poetry in Sierra Leone at its apprenticeship stage in the early fifties. The Bible, the hymnal and the Book of Common Prayer exerted a determining influence on the slight collection which Crispin George (1902–1971) published privately in 1952,[49] as well as on the poems which Jacob Stanley Davies (1879–1957) had composed for the enjoyment of his family: these latter were never issued in book form although a few managed to find their way into anthologies.[50] Both poets emerge as profoundly religious men with a great faith in a divinely and justly ordered universe, reflecting in this the attitudes of their generation and milieu. They both see the realities of life as a revelation of God's love and an assurance of heaven. Both advocate the virtues of tolerance, patience, love, honesty, humility and gratitude. But as their verse forms show the influence of hymns, particularly of metrical psalms, they often sound conventional, archaic and awkward. The striving after acceptable rhymes, even at the expense of the sense, often impedes the flow of the thought and has a cramping effect. Occasionally, however, when they write in blank verse and are liberated from the constricting effects of rhyme, they achieve a refreshing lucidity.

Despite the predominance of religious and moral themes their work illustrates the beginnings of an African consciousness. In "Homage to Mother Africa" George asserts his pride in and love for the continent although he still contrives somehow to bring in the religious theme. Davies also reveals a tremendous pride in and concern for the moral purity of his race. In fact, one of his most successful poems, "Even There," which reminds the reader of Soyinka's "Telephone Conversation" and must surely rank as one of the most brilliant satirical pieces written in Africa before Soyinka, is about the absurdity of racial discrimination. The white skeletons, like the white angels, white ghosts and white devils, refuse to mingle with their black counterparts:

> There was a great commotion in the cemet'ry last night
> Skeletons in altercation! 'twas a grisly sight!
> Said one, 'I'll have you know, Sir, though in this
> lev'lin' place,
> You're not my equal here, Sir, you're of a different race.
> Prevent your nigger worms man, from capering round my bones
> I'll never fester with you here, man, our skins were
> different tones.[51]

The exact economical choice of words and the splendid control of tone and verse structure make this a most delightful poem. Jacob Stanley Davies is less sentimental and facile than Crispin George, but taken together their work gives an impressive poetic expression to the corporate attitudes of their class and generation.

Even stronger African consciousness appeared in the belated works of Adelaide

[49] Crispin George, *Precious Gems Unearthed* (Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1952).
[50] See *Our Poets Speak*, ed. Donald St. John-Parsons (London: London University Press, 1960).
[51] Ibid. pp. 36–37.

Smith (1868–1959), who was born of mixed Fanti-English parentage, attended local schools before studying in England and Germany, and established a girls' vocational school in Freetown before she married the distinguished Gold Coast lawyer and writer, Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford (1866–1930). While he was responsible for the first piece of Ghanaian, indeed West African, prose fiction in English, *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), Adelaide Casely-Hayford's writings were not published until late in her life—like her autobiographical narrative *Reminiscences* (1953)—or posthumously, like the story "Mista Courifer" which was anthologized by Langston Hughes in 1960.[52] Both are compelling critical portraits of Freetown creole society: though a privileged member of the creole élite, the authoress spares no pains in exposing the readiness with which some members of that élite ape the Western way of life. Both works are shot through with the writer's awareness of herself as being first and foremost an African.

Of all these pioneer Sierra Leonean writers, it is Adelaide's daughter, Gladys Casely-Hayford (1904–1950), who evinces the most clearly marked African consciousness. Although she was educated, like her mother, largely in the British tradition, and was a member of the privileged creole élite, her work is noteworthy for its demonstration of the beauty and dignity of the black race. Some of her English poems appeared under the pen-name Aquah Laluah in African and American journals from the thirties on; yet they had never been collected and did not gain any sort of fame until they were included, more than ten years after her death, in several anthologies of the sixties. One of her best known is "Rejoice" in which she calls rousingly to her fellow Africans to rejoice in their blackness. The poem is infused with a rather naive optimism and the author sometimes mixes her metaphors, but the sense of rejoicing is accurately captured by the rhythm. Perhaps her most remarkable poem from the point of view of African consciousness is "Nativity," which is about the birth of Christ. The author sets the Christmas story in a purely African setting: the babe himself is a black child born in a native hut to a black mother and father, he is wrapped in blue lappah and laid on his father's "deer-skin" hide. Given her rather conservative religious and social background, this was a bold stroke.[53] Gladys Casely-Hayford also has the unique distinction of being perhaps the first Sierra Leonean to write poetry in Krio.[54] Many of these poems are not only charming and meaningful, but also demonstrate a remarkable artistic control. It is another index of her determination, in spite of her British-type upbringing and education, to identify with Africa.

These four pioneer writers lived in an age that was understandably unruffled by the undercurrents of tribalism, nationalism and all those other turbulent forces characteristic of Africa in the fifties and sixties. These forces begin to be reflected in the work of the succeeding generation of writers which for convenience I shall call the middle generation.

[52] Adelaide Casely-Hayford, "Mista Courifer" in *An African Treasury* ed. Langston Hughes, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), pp. 134–143.

[53] Some of Gladys Casely-Hayford's poems have been anthologized in *West African Verse*, ed. Donatus Nwoga (London: Longmans, 1967).

[54] Three of Gladys Casely-Hayford's Krio poems appeared in a seven-page pamphlet, *Take Um So* (Freetown: New Era Press, 1948).

Both artistically and thematically Delphine King stands as a transitional figure between the pioneer generation and the middle generation of writers. Her collection *Dreams of Twilight* (1962) was aptly described by Chinua Achebe as "intensely personal without being private."[55] Although her early poems reveal the same kind of archaism and sentimentality of tone which we have noticed in the works of Stanley Davies and Crispin George, in later ones, such as "Reunion Sweet," "What is this Thing Called Love" and "Destiny" she permits herself greater freedom and fluency. Many of these poems, like the brilliant "Lost Innocence" which describes the loss of virginity, are powerful evocations of intensely personal experiences. She has written poems on a variety of subjects such as betrayal, the failure of love, despair, isolation, restless unfulfilled searching, acceptance, resignation, recovery, faith and optimism, as in "I Will Laugh Again":

I will laugh again,
The hand of time will wipe away my tears
And in the distant days ahead
I know I'll laugh again.

Many of Delphine King's poems are about racial consciousness. "The Child," for instance, is about pride in being black. The poem denounces the futility and hypocrisy of Africans trying to behave like white men; it also denounces misguided nationalism and upholds Panafricanism as the hope for Africa's future. Some of the others like "The Elite" consist of social satire in which she cleverly ridicules the corrupt and the snobbish, status-conscious social climbers. The African consciousness, social conscience, metrical fluency and lyricism which Delphine King demonstrates in most of her work point directly to the same effects in Abioseh Nicol, thus linking her with the middle generation of Sierra Leonean writers.

The three figures who belong to this middle period were all born during the first quarter of the century and have several factors in common. They are all brilliant, highly qualified professional men. Robert Wellesley Cole (b. 1907) had a distinguished university career as a medical undergraduate, walking off with several gold medals and becoming the first African to be elected a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. The academic career of Raymond Sarif Easmon (b. 1913) was equally brilliant: he qualified early as a doctor in Britain and returned to set up a highly successful practice at home. The most impressive of the three figures, however, is also the youngest, Abioseh Nicol (b. 1924), whose real name is Dr. Davidson Nicol; a product of Christ's College, Cambridge, he took first class honours in biochemistry, later qualifying as a doctor of medicine and becoming the first African to be appointed a Fellow of a Cambridge College. He has served as Principal of Fourah Bay College, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone, Sierra Leonean Ambassador to the United Nations and later became United Nations Director of Training.

These men, who were somewhat older than other African writers whose works

[55] Chinua Achebe's Foreword to Delphine King, *Dreams of Twilight* (Apapa: Nigerian National Press, 1962).

appeared at about the same time as theirs—Camara Laye, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe—were the cream of the intelligentsia, but in addition, they were the cream of the social élite. Unlike their Nigerian counterparts, they had all spent their undergraduate and post-graduate years in Britain and were perfectly at home in English culture. They were not men of the people and could not, perhaps, be expected to convey in their writings the feelings of ordinary people. With the possible exception of Abioseh Nicol their work does not reflect that cultural conflict, that sense of individuals torn between acceptance of alien values and loyalty to their own traditions, which was the mainspring of African writing in the fifties and sixties. With such a background and training, it is understandable that they should regard British values and standards as perfectly acceptable and reflect this acceptance in their work.

This is not to say that an African consciousness is entirely absent from the work of the middle generation of writers. It is significant that the first and only book of Gladys Casely-Hayford's near contemporary Robert Wellesley Cole was an autobiographical novel, *Kossoh Town Boy* (1960), following in the wake of her mother's *Reminiscences*. It is usual for a country's fiction writing to begin as a report of facts—history, pseudohistory, chronicle, biography, etc.—and Sierra Leone was no exception. Sierra Leoneans had for a long time been adept at forms of non-fiction like history, autobiography, anthropology, theology and of course, journalism, while lagging behind in the production of creative literature. Indeed, of the five or so Sierra Leonean novels so far written, only one—Sarif Easmon's *The Burnt-Out Marriage*—does not seem to be wholly or partly autobiographical in form. *Kossoh Town Boy*'s main significance is sociological since it presents an unaffected picture of Freetown society in the early twenties as seen through the eyes of a growing boy. And yet it does not raise cultural and sociological issues of the kind so starkly presented during the preceding half decade in such works as Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir* or Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall apart*. The image that Cole offers of his family and childhood is almost unbelievably Victorian: their puritan Christian ethic, their uncompromising sense of bourgeois gentility, the stern yet loving parents, everything conspires to turn the characters into tawny Britishers of the most conventional type. While there is no reason to doubt that Cole's is an honest, realistic depiction of the mores of a large section of the Creole middle class, a Nigerian reviewer perceptively observed at the time that "it does not seem typical of the highly sophisticated and cultured urbanity that one usually associates with intellectual Krios."[56]

Ten years before *Kossoh Town Boy* was published, this sophistication had become apparent in a few short stories by Abioseh Nicol, later to be collected in *The Truly Married Woman and Other Stories* (1965). A man of uncommonly diversified talents, Nicol wrote his first and most memorable story, "The Devil at Yolahun Bridge," in 1951 while studying medicine at Cambridge; it won a prize in the Margaret Wrong competition for 1952 and was printed in *Blackwood's* in 1953. In its subtle exploitation of the overlapping spheres of understanding and misunderstanding between an English colonial officer, a white trader from Kenya and an African engineer, the story shows with considerable skill and insight that personal friendliness and mutual esteem do not

[56] S. Akanji in *Black Orpheus*, 9 (1961), 66.

necessarily make for easy communication at the deeper levels. It was one of the earliest pieces of truly good prose fiction to be written in British West Africa; as late as 1971, Adrian A. Roscoe could claim that Nicol was still "in the very forefront of African short story writers" and that even in Nigeria's abundant output there were as yet no short stories that deserved to be compared with his.[57] "The Devil at Yolahun Bridge" was meant to be the opening chapter of a novel that was unfortunately never completed, as the writer has since been mainly engaged in medical and educational activities.

Both Cole and Nicol manifest their sense of African identity, presumably because they spent long periods of their lives in Britain and had therefore better reason for nostalgia. But we do not find in their work the glorification of Africa and the African personality so obvious in the works of Senghor and other exponents of negritude. In Nicol's poem "The Continent that Lies Within Us", the idealization of African life with which the poem starts is soon dismissed as the unrealistic day-dreaming of a homesick student looking at Africa through rose-tinted spectacles. The second half of the poem presents a picture of the real Africa that meets the young graduate on his return and the portrait is far from flattering:

> Is this all you are?
> This long, uneven red road, this occasional succession
> Of huddled heaps of four mud walls
> And thatched falling grass roofs....[58]

The contrast between the imagined splendour and the actual drabness is effectively shown in the poem. There is no glamorization here, no feel for the majesty and dignity of traditional African life, such as we get in the pages of Senghor, Achebe and others. Another poem, "African Easter," is a well-known presentation of the themes of culture conflict and the alienated individual. It seeks to dramatize the dilemma of the African intellectual torn between the traditional religion he has abandoned and the white man's brand of Christianity which he has accepted. But the reader misses the sense of a compelling and genuine feeling for traditional religion. However, in a number of stories[59] with a distinctly sociological bias such as "The Truly Married Woman" and "Love's Own Tears" Abioseh Nicol tries to convey the feel of life in Freetown Creole society. And in "The Leopard Hunt" he gives, as in "The Devil at Yolahun Bridge," a penetrating account of relations between the colonial administrators and their Sierra Leonean subordinates. All the stories are wittily and graciously written with good characterization and accurate observation.

Of the three writers who illustrate the middle period of Sierra Leonean literature it is probably Raymond Sarif Easmon who displays the least African consciousness, even though he touches on more of the themes that are relevant to the African situation, such

[57] Arthur A. Roscoe, *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), p. 86.

[58] Abioseh Nicol, "The Continent that Lies Within Us," in *The African Assertion*, ed. Austin Shelton (New York: Odyssey Press, 1968), p. 58.

[59] Abioseh Nicol, *The Truly Married Woman and Other Stories* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

as tribalism and corruption. Sarif Easmon's own personal Western life-style is reflected both in the style of his works and the overall attitudes of his characters. His own approval goes to those who show a predilection for Western cultural forms as exemplified in the music of Bach and the poetry of Byron; they must also have a fondness for champagne and Rolls Royce cars; they must be at home in the Western capitals which they visit often; their own individual homes have a Western ambience. It is clear that when Sarif Easmon talks of someone being civilized and cultivated he means that he or she has been exposed to the main elements of Western culture. To this type belong Dauda in *Dear Parent and Ogre* (1964), the Hayfords in *The New Patriots* (1965) and V. K. Brantley in *The Burnt-out Marriage* (1967). Where other African writers have idealized traditional African village life, Sarif Easmon seems to have no time for rural culture or for the villager unless he or she comes under the influence of some city-bred person for "improvement."

Inevitably, however, the theme of tribalism was bound to be central to Easmon's work. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the westernized Creoles, using a Western yardstick for their evaluation, had tended to regard the interior of the country as inferior and most provincial peoples as uncivilized. The provincial peoples—that is, the inhabitants of the former Protectorate, Temne in the North, Mende in the South—naturally resented this patronizing attitude and their hostility towards the Creoles, who lived in the original Colony, was hardened by the feeling that the latter wielded political power. This was, of course, a mistaken assumption, for political power was entirely in the hands of the British administrators. Because of the nature of the educational system to which they had been exposed the Creoles were extremely able teachers and civil servants; in fact, they were used to man the various cadres of the civil service both in Sierra Leone and other West African territories. They thus wielded administrative influence, though not political power. Even when they became members of the legislature they had a purely advisory role and at times led the opposition to British rule. The hostility between Creoles and the provincial peoples reached a peak in the fifties, the decade before Easmon's most important work, with the granting of universal adult suffrage and the resulting transfer of power to the provincial majority.

Sarif Easmon is partly Creole and partly Susu. It might therefore be expected that he was well placed to make a thorough objective analysis of the tribal question. His first play *Dear Parent and Ogre*—which won the Independence Celebrations Drama competition (1961) and was also the first local play to reach publication in book form,—deals precisely with snobbery, class-consciousness and tribalism. The early sections of the play, in which Siata, the daughter of an aristocratic and highly westernised politician, wishes to marry a young singer from the lower classes in opposition to her father's wishes, might seem to suggest that Sarif Easmon is putting forward an effective meritocracy as against an effete tribal aristocracy as Africa's hope for the future. But in the event he seems to throw his weight behind the westernised aristocracy, for although Siata marries the singer of her dreams, he is received into the aristocracy and acquires their taste for champagne, expensive cars, Western capitals and the works of Byron. Furthermore Siata has the most scathing things to say about the tribal origins and the relative "uncouthness" of Mahmoud, the Trade Union official who is as

deserving a meritocrat as ever there was. The truth is that Easmon and most of his major characters are attracted to the values of the westernized aristocracy. A *Black Orpheus* reviewer contemptuously dismissed *Dear Parent and Ogre* as „the first West African drawing-room play,"[60] and there is indeed something incongruously Edwardian in the African dramatist's slick word-play.

It was perhaps in order to counter such objections that Easmon's second play, *The New Patriots*, set out to attack the corruption, tribalism and incompetence so rampant in the Sierra Leone of the sixties. The play was justly popular since it accurately reflected a situation in which ministers were corrupt and materialistic, supreme court judges were pressured into giving verdicts favourable to the government of the day, civil servants were victimized and ministers were openly tribalistic in their outlook. Here again, however, Easmon offered a Sierra Leonean variation of a theme with much wider appeal. It is significant that the "new patriots," "these new men grubbing to grasp money, and cheerfully cutting their country's throat to get at it," who "could so easily be taken for their country's worst enemies," are all tribal people, intoxicated with their newly won power and opulence, whereas the creole characters in the play are uniformly described as civilized, compassionate, tolerant and understanding. It may be that Easmon sincerely believes that the Creoles are a superior tribe, and there may be a lot of people who share his view. It may even be true that the Mende in their heyday were as openly tribalistic as the Creoles. But to say all this openly is bad literary tactics, especially as the reader is likely to build up a considerable fund of sympathy for the Mende Chief Byeloh, the embodiment of traditional values, whom Easmon tries to present as a rabid tribalist.

The greatest weakness of Easmon's plays resides not so much in their moral and social outlook as in their artistry. Action quite often seems to issue, not from the interaction of characters and situation, but from melodramatic incidents suddenly sprung upon the audience. The plays abound in stage directions which would almost certainly have a cramping effect on the actors if they took them seriously; fortunately they are not so much genuine stage directions as authorial comments on the characters and situations. Sarif Easmon does not seem to believe in the dictum that the essence of drama is the self-effacement of the author, and he himself is the most pervasive character in his plays. But it is probably the language in particular which shows how un-African his plays essentially are. His characters speak not so much in modern standard English as in a rather stilted nineteenth-century idiom, and he makes little attempt to impart an African flavour to the language.

The same features loom conspicuously in Sarif Easmon's only novel, *The Burnt-out Marriage* (1967), which seeks to demonstrate the destructive potential of tribalism but ends up throwing its weight behind another, equally questionable, form of tribalism. The novel concerns the relations between the progressive Mende Chief Francis Briwa and his Susu-Creole bride Makallay who is so conscious of her tribal superiority that she refuses to adjust herself to her traditional role as junior wife, and fails to appreciate her husband's great love for her. The novel is redolent with Makallay's contempt for all the people and customs in this traditional chiefdom, the sole exception being her very

[60] Elow Gabonal, "The Colonial Aristocrat," *Black Orpheus*, 11 (1962), 65–66.

traditional co-wife Mahta, whom she tries to groom into a "cultured" woman fit to be received into sophisticated creole society. At the end of the novel, Mahta marries a pseudo-Western husband thus completing the process of her detribalization. The author thoroughly idealized Makallay, blinding himself to her conceit, pride, snobbery and immorality. It is her values that are endorsed at the end. Although Easmon gives a very vivid description of traditional rites, he ultimately blackens the progressive Mende chief Francis Briwa and his first wife Mah Mahtoe, who are the embodiment of traditional customs, while advocating the Western values of the Susu-Creole Makallay, who is so highly conscious of her social and cultural superiority.

For all these criticisms there is no doubt that Sarif Easmon is an important writer for Sierra Leone. He has been courageous in highlighting the country's social and political evils, and though his plays are essentially undramatic, it is possible to bring them to life on the stage and entertain the audience with their wit and topicality. In his novel he has also created some vivid and memorable scenes. But his works are generally marred by the "archaic" language, the prevailing un-African atmosphere, his rather unattractive social and moral vision, and a general mawkishness in their fairy-tale conclusions.

It is with the work of the younger generation born in the thirties and early forties that Sierra Leonean literature began to move into the mainstream of African and modern literature, and to express that sense of cultural and racial confidence which was all but absent in the work of their elders. In poetry the fluency and clarity of Abioseh Nicol were replaced by the almost deliberate obscurity, the concentration of thought and personal symbolism of Gaston Bart-Williams (b. 1938), Lemuel Johnson (b. 1940), Mukhtarr Mustapha (b. 1943), Syl Cheyney-Coker (b. 1945) and Dominic Ofori (b. 1950). In the novel the melodramatic romanticism and sentimentality of Easmon made way for the earthy realism of Yulisa Amadu Maddy (b. 1936), and in drama the former's theatrical innocence and reliance on melodrama were replaced by the latter's more professional knowledge of the stage and his greater awareness of the interaction of characters and setting.

Like those of the previous generation almost all these young writers were Creoles who spent considerable periods of their young manhood in Britain, the United States or Germany, but in contrast to their elders they were not privileged scholarship boys living a rather cushioned existence in Britain, and therefore eager to accommodate themselves to the demands of British cultural life. They were exposed to the rigours of racial discrimination in the post-war period, or at best to the indifference towards people from the colonial territories which followed on the breakdown of empire. They were thus constrained to re-examine the implications of their creole ancestry, the role of the black race in general and the plight of developing countries. Unlike the writers of the middle period they became as acutely aware as most other modern African writers, of the impact of every aspect of colonialism on traditional African society and culture, and they showed a marked sense of cultural alienation.

Yulisa Amadu Maddy's decision to change his name from Pat Maddy was a sign of this. His first book, published under his Western name, was a collection of plays,

Obasai and Other Plays (1971), which thrive on social satire and are technically more sophisticated than Easmon's. They incorporate traditional songs and dances and reveal the playwright as a man of the people. Typical is *Allah Gbah*[61] which concentrates on a condemned man's last twenty-four hours and deals with freedom from the laws and conventions of a hypocritical creole society.

Both as a dramatist and as a novelist, Maddy is the exact antithesis of Sarif Easmon. Where the latter revels in his membership of the social élite, Maddy glories in his acquaintance with low life. Unlike Easmon, the clever scholarship winner, Maddy fought his way through school and supported himself in Britain, eventually entering and qualifying from drama school. To a certain extent his novel *No Past, No Present, No Future* (1973) is an autobiographical account of his experiences as a drama student in Britain. Whereas Sarif Easmon idealizes the creole aristocracy, Maddy goes to great lengths to expose their snobbery, their contempt for the provincial peoples, their religious hypocrisy, their sterile striving after respectability and their slavish regard for British culture. Far from celebrating the mores of the champagne-drinking creole élite, Maddy takes his characters from low life—school drop-outs, underprivileged orphans, prostitutes and pimps—and he sets his scenes in brothels or in the squalor of a railway goods shed. Where Easmon's characters speak like nineteenth-century Englishmen, the language of Maddy's characters is earthy, realistic, almost crude: they have no hesitation in using four-letter words and quite often make use of Krio as it would be spoken among the fleshpots of Freetown. While Easmon's characters are apt to play the piano and sing Byron's songs, Maddy's are more likely to indulge in a near-obscene song and dance sequence of the kind that would be relished by Freetown's street-corner boys entertaining their English friends.

Maddy is at his best when presenting glimpses of creole life in Freetown. His scenes here are vivid and unforgettable. But once the story moves to Britain and then to Sweden in the second and third sections of the novel, the rather unconvincing and muddled episodes suggest that he is out of his depth. The book also seems to be slightly marred by an attitude towards tribalism which is just as strident and shows as great a lack of proportion as Easmon's, though from the opposite viewpoint. He attributes the disasters which overtake his protagonists and the break-down in their relationships with each other and with the world at large to the snobbery and narrow-mindedness of creole society, thus blinding himself to their personal weaknesses and their responsibility for their own catastrophe. The novelist identifies too much with these rebellious young men, particularly with the Mende Joe Bengoh, as he takes them with great gusto through their rake's progress of drinking, whoring and corruption. Like Easmon, he allows his anger and prejudice to cloud his objectivity in the analysis of such complex social issues.

Recent Sierra Leonean poetry, like much modern African poetry, is characterized by a concentration of thought, linguistic dexterity, densely packed encapsulated images, private symbols leading occasionally to obscurity and liberties with syntax and vocabu-

[61] Yulisa Amadu Maddy, *Obasai and Other Plays* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971), pp. 41–76. For the writer's views on drama and the stage, see "Creating a Black Theatre in Britain: An Interview," in *White Media and Black Britain: A Critical Look at the Role of the Media in Race Relations Today*, ed. Charles Husband (London: Arrow, 1975), pp. 52–65.

lary. Unlike much modern African poetry, however, Sierra Leonean poetry makes few concessions to the African tradition. Our poets have so far shown little interest in images or techniques drawn from indigenous traditional poetry and none of them can be said to have discovered an African poetic medium. The practice of poets like Okot p'Bitek has demonstrated that it is possible to write modern African poetry in English using traditional forms; and yet most of our poets continue to ape the forms and techniques of modern Western poetry. Some of them give the very plausible explanation that the conventional educational process exposed them only to English and American poetry and it was therefore natural for them to turn to these models when they commenced their writing careers. However, the problem is that in their search for the most abstruse images, in their almost deliberate obscurity and in their verbal gymnastics, modern Sierra Leonean poets outdo modern Western poets, who quite often affect a touching simplicity. Because of the cosmopolitan origin of its techniques, Sierra Leonean poetry ranks among the most difficult in the whole corpus of African poetry. Given the poets' background, it is inevitable that themes such as racial discrimination, cultural puzzlement, the influence of tradition on the individual, religious disenchantment and other themes dear to the hearts of modern African writers, should feature prominently in their works.

In a way, then, there is something refreshingly exceptional in the simplicity, unpretentiousness and complete absence of affectation in Gaston Bart-Williams's poetry which, perhaps because it may sound old-fashioned in its clarity, has never been published in book form. Yet, the simplicity should not blind us to the author's artistry. He is a versatile poet with a remarkable control of his medium. Without rising to the stridency of Cheyney-Cocker his comments can be just as devastating. His poetry depends for its effectiveness not on verbal density or concentrated images, but on subtle irony, humour and sarcasm while maintaining the quietest of tones. All these features are discernible in the poem "God Bless Us."[62] The title itself suggests not just silly punning, but real intelligence. The effortless simplicity of the first two lines—

> dreaming
> I saw a butterfly in the night
> yellow bright and beautiful—

is quite deceptive, for it leads to the violence of the next line: "I watched you call it red and watched you crush it." The echoes of the hymnal in "yellow bright and beautiful" suggest that the butterfly is one of God's creatures, an image of a human being, an Asian it will soon appear, who has been branded as a Communist by the Americans and must therefore be destroyed. The ironic implications of the title are now revealed and the poem emerges as an indictment of America's irrational anti-communism and murderous destruction in South East Asia. But the most savage criticism is reserved for the black American who, oblivious of the racial discrimination to which he himself is subjected at home, massacres his fellow coloured people—the Vietcong—in the name of America

[62] Gaston Bart-Williams, "God Bless Us," in *Poetry from Africa*, ed. Howard Sergeant (London: Pergamon Press, 1968), p. 34.

and is proud to call himself an American. It is the black American's total lack of comprehension of his own indentity that is startlingly conveyed. The satire is all the more devastating because of the quietness of its tone.

Bart-Williams is obsessed with the predicament of the black race—with racial discrimination, oppression, black hypocrisy, the possibility of harmony between white and black and, inevitably, with American brutality not just to the blacks in America, but to other coloured people throughout the world. "Letter To Mother From Her Black Son in Vietnam" is a companion piece to "God Bless Us," in which the author exposes the simple-mindedness, hypocrisy and lack of self-knowledge of the black American G.I. speaker with brilliant irony.[63] The nonchalance with which he starts—

> Dearest Mother
> I've just finished off a few Vietcongs
> thank god
> the white captain
> told me I was brave
> in fact heroic—

says much more than Cheyney-Coker can get into a whole page of much more concentrated writing. In "Piano Keys" Bart-Williams uses the symbolism of the relationship between the black and white keys of the piano to convey the experience of black and white in love; he suggests the necessity, possibility and beauty of such harmony and therefore the hypocrisy of racial discrimination.[64] In "Despondence Blues" he effectively imitates the rhythm and language of gospel blues to portray suffering, despondence and loss of faith in God.[65]

Within his limits, Bart-Williams shows greater mastery of technique and more competent control than does Syl Cheyney-Coker who can boast a wider range of themes and was the first of the younger poets to achieve prominence, with two collections of poems: *The Road to Jamaica* (1969) and *Concerto for an Exile* (1973). As the title of the latter might suggest, the slave trade with its consequences for his people, is the poet's dominant theme. Far from glorying, like Sarif Easmon, in his creole ancestry, Cheyney-Coker sees the slave trade as the prime cause of his estrangement from his real ancestral roots. In poems like "The Traveller" and "Hydropathy" he explores this theme using appropriately violent images to bring out the devastation and the cultural and spiritual alienation it caused. In "Hydropathy", one of his most successful poems, he views the transplantation of his people as a monstrous rape resulting in pollution, corruption and a complete distortion of the African personality. Throughout the poem Cheyney-Coker continues to talk of his "foul genealogy," his "polluted streams" and "negralised head," and he piles on filthy images of rape and pollution, cumulatively suggesting disgust and disillusionment.

Where Sarif Easmon and his contemporaries take pride in their creole ancestry,

[63] Ibid., p. 29.
[64] Ibid., p. 28.
[65] Ibid., pp. 36–37.

Cheyney-Coker's mood is one of disenchantment leading inevitably to self-loathing. This is obvious in poems such as "The Masochist," "Horoscope," "Monologue," "Absurdity" and "The Cancer." In "Horoscope" the poet's disgust with himself and his ancestry leads to a longing for self-abasement and self-punishment; he is "a paradigm of sorrow"—the quintessence of the pathetic implications of his shameful ancestry. In "Monologue" which has even more violent images of self-castigation, he talks of his "alcoholic head" and the mucus which comes gushing out; the disgust eventually leads to a longing for death and annihilation. In "Absurdity" he sees himself as the curse of his people, the foul progeny of his race, an absurdity so vile that even the vultures will shy away from his corpse.

Where earlier Sierra Leonean poets like Crispin George and Stanley Davies derive assurance from their Christian faith, Syl Cheyney-Coker's analysis of the plight of black people in general and of his own ancestry in particular, broadens out to include an attack on Christianity. He can hardly mention Christianity and Christ without a touch of abuse. Addressing Christ as "a eunuch", he exclaims in indignation:

> you lied to me at Calvary
> you did not die to save the world
> but to make it a plantation where my people sweat.[66]

He sneeringly refers to the Sacrament of Holy Communion as a sumptuous feast cooked with the blood of his creole ancestors. But it is "Misery of the Convert" which most forcefully demonstrates his fierce antagonism to Christianity. The poem is a passionate tirade playing around with the ideas of chastity, rape and sex. The poet sets the Church's endorsement of the doctrine of chastity and its adulation of Mary the virgin against his own spiritual rape, which has left him spiritually sterile and dispossessed. He sees the Church as a wealthy landowner largely indifferent to the suffering of the black peoples. Under the pretext of containing the so-called Communist threat the Church has allied herself with the imperialist oppressors of his race.

A dominant motif in his poetry—which he claims was largely influenced by the Congolese poet Tchicaya U Tam'si—is the figure of the Argentinian woman with whom he fell disastrously in love. Since he sees the history and present predicament of Sierra Leone and those of Argentina as basically similar, he had hoped, through his love, to bring the two continents together in a common cause. The betrayal of his love therefore has a profound effect and the woman becomes the symbol not only of love betrayed and of personal despair but also of the loss of the poet's hope for the regeneration of an ailing Third World.

Paradoxically, the intensity of emotion that might have been expected in Cheyney-Coker's love poems is more perceptible in his poetry of social comment. Here his profound sympathy with the toiling masses drives him to expose their exploitation by their new rulers. This is the theme of several poems like "Myopia," "Peasants," "Storm"

[66] Syl Cheyney-Coker, "Obelisk" in *Concerto for an Exile* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 26–27.

and "Toilers." This last one is arguably his most impressive piece: it moves from a demonstration of the arduous but hopeless endeavour of the farmer and his wife as they battle against aridity and sterility, to a vicious denunciation of the government and the bourgeoisie who wallow in opulence and luxury and remain insensitive to the people's plight. Cheyney-Coker emerges as a prophet of doom forecasting the storm when the peasants, no longer able to bear oppression, will rise against their oppressors.

If his poetry does not always achieve the desired effect and sometimes leaves an impression of artificiality, of a man consciously adopting a pose, or even of insincerity, this is probably due to his technique. His images, most of which run like recurring motifs throughout his poetry, are drawn for the most part from the repulsive aspects of nature. His poems largely depend on the cumulative effect of these images which are not so much encapsulated as piled on top of each other. Where the images are relevant and related to each other as in "Hydropathy" and "Toilers" this technique succeeds, since the cumulative effect is part of the meaning. But when they are not, as in "Nodal", the poet merely seems to be piling on obscure images for their own sake, and the whole exercise lacks spontaneity and raises the question of sincerity. In some of the love poems, for instance, the dominant impression is not one of deep feeling suggesting naturally the images that will convey it, but of an author deliberately choosing a set of ready-made images to convey what he thinks is the right feeling. Cheyney-Coker also experiences difficulty in keeping proper control over his longer poems like "Misery of the Convert". A multiplicity of themes appear, and though these are in a sense inter-related, the inter-relationship is not demonstrated in the context of the poem. The poet merely seems to add one idea to another. Following his Latin-American models Cheyney-Coker ignores punctuation. This, together with his disregard for syntax and word order, renders obscure the units of meaning in his poetry, as in

> Twenty-five drops of my blood Pedro da Cinta
> 1462 means nothing to me the sea to rock the belly.[67]

Although it is obviously uneven and marred at times by an almost deliberate modishness, this poet's achievement is nevertheless significant of the development that changed Sierra Leonean poetry in the course of the seventies.[68]

Perhaps the most interesting, but possibly also the most difficult poet of the new generation is Lemuel Johnson who was born of Sierra Leonean parents in Nigeria. A critic and a literary historian as well as a creative writer, by the late seventies when he was teaching at the University of Michigan he had published a number of short stories in various periodicals, an English translation of one of Raphael Alberti's Spanish plays, an important study of the negro as metaphor in Western literature, and two collections of poems.[69] Like Cheyney-Coker's, his first volume of poetry, *Highlife for Caliban* (1973), is preoccupied with the creole predicament, or more generally, the consequences

[67] "The Traveller," ibid., p. 1.

[68] The phenomenon is also exemplified in the as yet admittedly slender output of two other poets of the same generation: Mukhtarr Mustapha, *Thorns and Thistles* (London: Breman, 1971) and Dominic K. Ofori, *The Poetry of Dominic K. Ofori* (n.d., n.p. [Freetown: Fourah Bay College, 1972; cyclostyled]).

[69] See especially Lemuel Johnson, *The Devil, the Gargoyle and the Buffoon: The Negro as Metaphor in*

of the enslavement of the black peoples and their alienation from their ancestral roots. Caliban, the savage subjugated and tamed by Prospero, becomes the symbol of the oppressed slave/negro, and by implication Prospero is the symbol of the white imperialist tormentor; but the Caliban of Lemuel Johnson's poems is one who, once liberated by Prospero, assumes the latter's dictatorial powers; forgetting his former thraldom and the implications of his colour and cultural background, he tries to adopt his erstwhile tormentor's life-style. In Sylvia Wynter's words, in the first cycle of poems Johnson "gives us Caliban Agonistes, blinded by the white bone of instant power, tossed to him when he had once snapped and growled".[70] The poems are therefore not just a scathing exposure of the atrocities of the imperialist powers, but a satirical revelation of the conditions of life under the maniacal dictators who have now replaced the imperialists.

The series of Excellency poems (I—VI) are typical of the collection. At the start (in "His Excellency at Fort Thornton") His Excellency is the white Governor, who is almost venerated like a God in command of the sky:

> at the top (they say)
> a telescope swept the sky
> for exploding stars
> and their promises of cold gases
> distilled in rain. (p. 19)

But he soon becomes the new black President, the modern Caliban who adopts the life-style of the white Governor and plunges his people into chaos, uncertainty, fear and disillusionment:

> What does this man want?...
> this man, *ecce homo*. for love
> of whom some took kerosene lamps
> to the water's edge. (p. 21)

The people are enslaved just as securely now as they were under Prospero the white imperialist:

> The shapes of our skulls are now no different
> than they were, yesterday. the day before yesterday? (p. 22)

In "His Excellency: IV, V and VI" Lemuel Johnson tries to put this brutality into a world-wide context using an appropriately wide geographical frame of reference. Thus in Brazil, the Kreen-Akrore tribe view with the utmost apprehension the intrusion of the new men of power—the anthropologists and other scientists. And in "His Excellency: V" there is a vignette of an even more monstrous form of imperialism and brutality with

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Western Literature (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1971); *Highlife for Caliban* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973) and *Hand on the Navel* (Ibid., 1978).

[70] Sylvia Wynter, Afterword to *Highlife for Caliban*, p. 136. Page references are to this edition.

the mowing down of Czech citizens by Russian tanks. In "Excellency: VI" we see the ugly nationalism of the French extremists, who give a hero's reburial to the traitor Marshal Pétain.

The Excellency sequence demonstrates a fundamental quality of Lemuel Johnson's poetry: like T. S. Eliot's, it thrives on allusions. It is from this that Johnson's poetry derives both its exoticism and its obscurity. Where Soyinka's images, though difficult, are related to each other and have a cumulative effect, Johnson's allusions seem widely disparate. To understand his poetry the reader must be extremely well-read. Apart from the geographical, historical and anthropological references, there are others to Picasso, Modigliani, Ingmar Bergman's "Wild Strawberries", the Pope, Genesis, and various Shakespearean characters, besides renderings from a number of languages. Some of these are plainly necessary in order to demonstrate the cultural influences to which the poet, like other Creoles of his generation, has been subjected in the process of his assimilation. Lemuel Johnson's artistry, concentration of thought and range of references make him the most significant Sierra Leonean poet writing on the threshold of the eighties.

The quality and originality of this new generation are evidence that Sierra Leonean literature in English is at last beginning to flourish. Future developments along the same lines are to be expected, as young writers emerge from the non-creole sections of the population, enriching the national literature with the abundant store of their traditional lore and experience. Furthermore, the recent appearance of plays in Krio brings intimations that vernacular languages are likely to contribute, alongside English, to the growth and diversification of the country's literary patrimony.

One of the more unlikely territorial freaks of imperialism, the tiny Gambia with its population of some 300,000, is an elongated English-language enclave inside French-speaking Senegal. As a British colony until 1963, its closest links have been with Sierra Leone, and what little writing has been produced in the Gambia can easily be viewed as an appendix of Sierra Leone literature: the two leading writers—William Conton (b. 1925) and Lenrie Peters (b. 1932)—have connections with Sierra Leone, as their names imply.

Though born in the Gambia, Conton has spent most of his life in Sierra Leone and is considered a Sierra Leonean by many. His literary affinities are with the middle group of Sierra Leone writers with whom he shares a common background and common interests. Educated partly in the United Kingdom, where he obtained an honours degree in history, he lectured in history at Fourah Bay College, was Principal of schools in Freetown and Accra, Chief Education Officer in Sierra Leone, and joined U.N.E.S.C.O. in the 1970s.

His only novel, *The African* (1960), is in part a record of Conton's own experiences as a student in Britain and in part the fictional career of Kisimi Kamara, a poor but bright Sierra Leonean boy (Sierra Leone is referred to in the novel as Songhai), who after a primary education in his village, gains a scholarship to a secondary school in Freetown (Sagressa) and subsequently another to pursue a university course in Britain. He returns home to teach, establishes a political party and becomes his country's Prime Minister.

This fairly straightforward stereotyped story of the rise of a successful politician is given added interest by the hero's brief affair with a South African girl; the latter's murder prompts the hero foolishly to give up his political career and travel overland, incognito, to South Africa, ostensibly to help the freedom fighters, but in reality to seek out the girl's murderer. This conclusion is sentimental, romantic and most unrealistic. The whole novel amounts to nothing but wish-fulfilment. It is a sociologist's, historian's or anthropologist's novel, packed with reflections and reminiscences. This gives the author an opportunity to express his ideas on many subjects, as well as on political organization and African Unity, but the work is sadly deficient in any vivid presentation of character or situation, in acuteness of psychological understanding, as well as in good dialogue. Most unfortunately, Conton's style is as archaic, formal, ornate and "English" as Easmon's. He does little to bend the language to reflect an authentic African setting. Furthermore, his point of view and attitude, as has been rather devastatingly pointed out by Wole Soyinka, remain embarrassingly Western, as when his hero rhapsodizes on the architecture of Durham Cathedral or the grandeur of Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*.[71] Although the protagonist becomes a successful politician canvassing for the people's votes, neither he nor his creator are able to enter into the people's feelings, even though Kamara is supposed to have been brought up in a rural environment as a young boy.

Lenrie Peters, who had part of his secondary education in Freetown, is a surgeon by profession and images from the world of surgery and medicine run throughout his creative work. His first book was a slender collection of *Poems* (1964), which was one of the last of the Mbari publications; some of the poems in this pamphlet were later incorporated into *Satellites* (1967). This was followed by *Katchikali* (1971) which established his poetic identity. His one novel, *The Second Round* (1965), records the experiences of a young doctor who struggles in vain with the complexities of life in Sierra Leone; the book is marred by melodramatics and utterly inadequate psychological exploration. The introduction of some aspects of Jungian psychology in order to explain and define some of the characters, does not really work and in the final analysis fails to carry conviction. *The Second Round* does convey some vivid impressions of life in Sierra Leone but it does not rank as one of Africa's leading novels.

Lenrie Peters is more in his element as a poet. He is very conscious of himself as an artist working through words and seeking for the perfect style—for a complete fusion of matter and style. He claims in one of his poems to "focus through words" so as to perceive "what lies behind the truth with infinite clarity." A good number of his poems in *Satellites* are concerned with the role and function of poetry and with the actual creative process of writing poetry. However, Peters' performance is uneven. Such theoretical poems fail to stimulate the reader, since they convey the impression of a man too consciously wrestling with ideas, and do not communicate much urgency, power or feeling. In much the same way, his poems about Africa fail, for the most part, to come alive. The writer's background would seem to suggest that he could not possibly have

[71] Wole Soyinka. *Myth Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), pp. 67–70.

felt a great sense of involvement with the African theme, and what he does is simply to register stock responses and adopt stock attitudes, as in poem 45 of *Satellites,* which is about the conditions of life in independent Africa, or poem 45 of *Katchikali* ("Plea to Mobutu") which is about political realities in Mobutu's Zaïre. As Edwin Thumboo puts it:

> Compared to the best, as a group, the poems on Africa are inferior. Somehow his perceptions fall negligent, his intelligence and vigour are withheld from the poetry. That capacity to simplify and retain the essentials, loses its force.[72]

Much more successful are his poems about nature and those about life in the city. The latter effectively communicate the mechanization, impersonality, artificiality and speed which characterize nightmarish city life. This emerges both in poem 11 of *Satellites,* where he refers rather sneeringly to

> masked highways fleeing past
> adverts, lights, cables
> Noise, squeaking, breaking
> grinding heaving, swearing whining
> fleeing confusedly into darkness, deep night.

and again in poem 36 of *Katchikali*:

> They way to nowhere lies all around
> through supermarket cut-throat human warrens
> you hoot, you loot your way into the current
> plump females, plastic-bagged red sides of beef
> haul pram-loads of progeny across the street
> brake-cylinders weep; they stand in stupid stare
> beyong the rambling rootlets of suburbia
> sign-posted; "Demented villain once lived here!"

Taken as a whole Peters' poetry is concerned with the conditions of man's life. He registers his disgust for and irritation towards all those artificial and mechanical forces which seek to destroy natural energy and vitality. His poetry presents the despair, isolation, poverty, decadence, desolation and aridity that characterize modern living; above all we recognize the poet's tolerance and compassion; but with a few exceptions his verse fail to communicate power and vitality.

[72] Edwin Thumboo, "The Universe is My Book: Lenrie Peters," *African Literature Today,* 6 (1973), 100. See also Armando Pajalich, "Africa e Africanità nella poesia di Lenrie Peters", *Africa* (Rome), 33 (1978), 68–96.

CHAPTER XI

ENGLISH: EASTERN AFRICA

MOHAMED BAKARI AND ALI A. MAZRUI

1. THE EARLY PHASE

The term "early" is of course relative. The history of the English language itself in East Africa is primarily a legacy of the imperial experience. And literature written by Africans in that language is almost entirely a twentieth-century phenomenon. Our account will begin with the general cultural context of African literature in English. We shall then turn our attention to the *history* of that literature in East Africa. Finally we shall proceed to an examination of some of the *themes* which had concerned East African writers in the years before independence.

In the ultimate analysis, the story is about a quest for authenticity in conditions of deepening cultural estrangement. The East African writers themselves were at the centre of this process of estrangement: they were specimens of the new breed of westernized Africans. First, they were writing while their societies were politically under foreign rule. Second, they were also writing while a new foreign civilization was gradually eroding indigenous cultures and traditions and creating widespread psychic bewilderment and confusion. Third, the East African writers under review chose to use a foreign medium, the English language, and it must always be remembered that language is the most important tool for a writer. Fourth, the written word was itself an innovation for many (though by no means all) societies of East Africa: through their very involvement in written rather than oral expression local creative artists were by definition engaged in what was at the time an alien technique. Fifth, there was the foreignness of some of the art-forms: poetry is almost as old as language itself in East Africa; the short story—at least in the form of folk tales—is also of considerable antiquity. But a play structured in acts and scenes, and the novel as an art-form engaged in individual characterization, are major departures from traditional African literary genres.

The East African writers we shall examine were caught up in these five levels of alienation. They were victims of political domination, specimens of alien acculturation, initiates into a foreign language, converts to a new written tradition, and enthusiasts for foreign-derived art-forms. Under the burden of this multiple alienation, they groped for some kind of authenticity. Some lamented the passing of the old order, some rebelled against the dictates of the new order, while all betrayed a strange combination of optimism and a sense of insecurity.

At this point, it will perhaps not be entirely otiose briefly to review the fundamental

features of the cultural predicament which was common to early creative writers using European languages in East Africa as well as in other parts of former colonial Africa.

One central problem for creative literature arises from what one might call "aesthetic dualism." This is the co-existence of two artistic universes drawn from vastly different cultures, which have yet to coalesce or merge into a distinct new phenomenon. In reality each African country possesses more than two aesthetic worlds since each consists of several ethnic groups, each with its own civilisation. But there is enough common ground between those ethnic cultures for Africans to perceive the dualism that relates to the foreign against the indigenous or the modern against the traditional. The dualism which is most pertinent to the crisis of identity within the arts in Africa is the dualism between the pull of Western artistic influences and the stability of the older modes of creativity. Of course this kind of problem pervades other areas of life in Africa, and is central to the whole process of transitional acculturation. But there is something about the arts which puts them in a special category even if there are points of similarity with other sectors of the African experience. In order to grasp the uniqueness of the arts in this regard, it is useful to recall some of the lessons taught by the history of acculturation as a general phenomenon.

Let us take as given a conquering civilization and a conquered people. Let us accept as given that the conquered people is in the process of assimilating at least part of the new civilization. Experience so far seems to have established beyond any doubt that it is quicker for a conquered people to learn new techniques than new values. And where new techniques are proving difficult to master, the chances are that they have come into conflict with native values which are not compatible with them. The whole problem of economic development in much of Africa is one major illustration that certain techniques and skills presuppose certain values. The techniques may be compatible with a great variety of different mixtures of values from the values of the Japanese to those of the Swedes. But there are certain mixtures which are simply not congruent with the demands of the new skills. In such cases there is a slowing-down in the whole process of change.

But acculturation is not reducible simply to a dialectic between techniques and values. Subdivisions can be made within those two categories themselves. For our present purpose we need only note that aesthetic values are often the most conservative of all values in their response to foreign influence. It is often far easier to be converted to the ethics of a conquering power than to its aesthetics. An African is often more easily converted to Western Christianity than to Western classical music. And it is likely that even formal monogamy will become part of African life sooner than we can expect Western grand opera or ballet to enter the lives of African peoples. As between societies which are otherwise very different, agreement on the differences between right and wrong, good and bad, is often easier to achieve than agreement on what is beautiful and what is ugly. That may perhaps be one reason, among many, as to why "pure" black people have already produced four winners of the Nobel Prize for Peace, and not a single Miss World.[1]

[1] The black winners of the Nobel Prize for Peace are of course Dr. Ralph Bunche (U.S.A.), the late Chief Albert Luthuli (South Africa), the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (U.S.A.), and Bishop Desmond Tutu (South Africa).

The central point involved here is the simple but fundamental proposition that the acquisition of a new literary culture is not simply a matter of education but also of resocialization or reformed upbringing. Education in our sense is the exposure to formalized training and disciplined dissemination of knowledge, usually in designated institutions like schools. Socialization or upbringing, on the other hand, is the acquisition of the values and mental habits of one's society through a process which is much more haphazard than that of education, though it often includes education itself. The process of socializing a child into a new culture within his own society would embrace both the school and the home, the playground and the family holiday. How Mother and Father talk to each other or how adults greet each other or express sympathy are of course all part of the socialization process. So indeed—and this is the most pertinent issue in this discussion—are the nursery rhymes in English that young British children, for example, are exposed to even before they can speak. In a sense, it might indeed be said that the English nursery line is the foundation of Milton's *Paradise Lost!* The difficulty of East African literature in the English language as of most African literature in any European language, is that it remains for the time being a child of education and not of socialization. This simple fact helps to determine who are the writers of literature, and who are the readers; whether the writing is addressed to an international audience or to a domestic one; whether the writing comes out of an impulse to intellectualize rather than out of a fund of emotive sensibility. In that respect and to that extent it is probably true to say that the literature has not even entered the gates of aesthetic maturation for, as T. R. M. Creighton put it at the epoch-making Freetown conference of April 1963:

> Whatever else classics is or was, it provides a technique, a tool which anyone can learn to use... [But] English [literature] is a subject in which no technique or tool or discipline ever becomes apparent to you, unless you possess certain unteachable and not particularly common faculties.[2]

In contrasting the learning of a language with the learning of literature Creighton was suggesting that learning a language—even a classical language like Latin or Greek or Sanskrit—was something that could be undertaken by almost anyone provided he was intelligent enough. But responding to the artistic code of Latin or Greek or Sanskrit would be different from the discipline of acquiring the more functional codes of these languages. Like many other commentators, however, he did not push the implications of this statement to their logical conclusion for the future of academic and cultural life in Africa.

It can be legitimately asserted that an African who, at the age of twenty, goes to a Western university, might indeed develop into an accomplished historian, or a great student of linguistics or a perceptive sociologist, or an innovative political scientist or even a profound philosopher using a Western idiom. But it is much more difficult for an African student to evolve into a major musical composer in the Western idiom or

[2] T. R. M. Creighton, "The Teaching of Literature," in *African Literature and the Universities*, ed. Gerald Moore (Ibadan: University Press, 1965), p. 118.

even a great pianist interpreting Beethoven with innovative gusto. An average East African student still comes from a family of which he is the first literate generation. Within such a family there could be little exposure to the universe of Western classical music. Why is it easier to get a great African historian or sociologist than a great African composer in the Western tradition? The answer is that creativity in art is more intimately culture-bound than creativity in thought and scholarship. Although it is supposed to be profoundly individualistic, creativity is so circumscribed by the culture of the artist that an African student studying Western music finds it harder to excel than if he were studying Western anthropology or even Western philosophy.

Fortunately literature as an art form, though sharing certain attributes with music, painting and sculpture, also happens to share other attributes with anthropology, philosophy and other verbalized forms of creativity. To that extent it is easier to produce a great African writer in a Western idiom than a great African composer. Africa has already produced important writers of both French and English expression. Nevertheless, to the extent that literature is an art, it does suffer in Africa from the lag between education and general upbringing. The first major point to note is the simple fact that the leading African creative writers are disproportionately well educated. They have had more formal education than Shakespeare ever had, or Dickens, Browning, Hardy or Orwell. The fact that the language the modern African writers use is a foreign language has tended to delay serious literary experiments until the writer has entered a university and mastered an alien tongue.

Arising out of the preponderance of well-educated people among African writers is the tendency for African writing to be highly intellectualized. The intellectualist tendency sometimes takes the form of sociological analysis and philosophical interpretation of traditional Africa. In itself there is nothing wrong with intellectualized literature. Some of the best works of literature the world over have been consciously intellectual. But there may be cause for concern in Africa if there is very little else. A balance has somehow to be sought between a literature of social analysis and a literature of emotive confession.

Closely related to this intellectualism of African literature is the tendency towards didacticism. Professor Martin Tucker, writing in the London weekly magazine *West Africa*, once complained of a tendency towards propaganda at the expense of art in much of African writing.[3] There were strong reactions to Tucker's article, not least from African writers themselves. The Society of Nigerian Authors—which includes among its members Achebe, Ekwensi, Nzekwu and others—accused him of seeking to "impose a false pattern on the West African novel." Nevertheless, Chinua Achebe views himself as, in part, a teacher. He regards teaching as a continuation of the artist's function in traditional society:

> Perhaps what I write is applied art rather than pure. But who cares? Art is important, but so is education. The kind I have in mind. And I don't see why the two need be mutually exclusive.[4]

[3] Martin Tucker, "The Headline Novels of Africa," *West Africa*, 28 July 1962.
[4] Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher," *New Statesman*, 29 January 1965.

And the Kenyan novelist [James] Ngugi, in a lecture given at Makerere in October 1968, made a renewed plea for a literature of social conscience in East Africa, prepared to proscribe and to protest. Ngugi himself resigned in February 1969 from his lectureship at the University College of Nairobi in protest against the college's mishandling of a crisis in student-government relations[5]: as an artist he was perhaps living up to his belief that writers, in their writings as well as in their more general commitments, should be involved. In Uganda, [Joseph] Okello Oculi, author of a long poem entitled *Orphan* and of a novel, *Prostitute,* has been called the "George Orwell" of Uganda in his identification with victims of social deception.

While the African writer's commitment to intellectual causes, a commitment which is itself intellectualized, might be part of the effects of a literature born out of the womb of academic education without adequate support in general domestic socialization, the readership of African literature, too, is affected by the fact that African literature is a child of education. Achebe has cited figures that demonstrate that far more copies of his books are sold within Africa than in Britain and elsewhere in the outside world. Yet it is probably true that Achebe is read more widely *for pleasure* outside Africa than within. Within Africa the reading is very much tied to *education,* and a large proportion of his books sold within the Black continent are copies used by secondary-school children as part of their curriculum.

Although the literary tradition in English in East Africa was born and developed against this common background of African acculturation, it emerged at a later date than in many other areas of the continent because colonialism in East Africa has been a very recent phenomenon compared to West, Central and Southern Africa. Western institutions were more of a reality in those areas that fell early under the political jurisdiction of either English or French colonialists than they were in most of East Africa. Though there was a British Resident in Zanzibar, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the British attempted to open up the bulk of East Africa, at a time when vast portions of West Africa were already an integral part of the British or French empires. As is well known, imported educational and religious belief systems or to be precise, a semblance of those systems, took root much earlier there than in East Africa. West Africans had already adapted themselves to the various alien systems when the first schools were established in the formative years of colonialism in East Africa. Indeed, of special significance is the fact that some of the individuals who were among the earliest recipients of Western education were still alive twenty years after independence and continued to wield power at the commanding heights of government and other institutions.

Actually, intellectual development, indeed literary trends, in East Africa under colonialism coincided with the gradual rise of modern nationalism whose instrument was

[5] The students had gone on strike because of the government's attitude in preventing Mr. Oginga Odinga, the Opposition Leader, from speaking to a students' club at the College. The Minister of Education ordered the students to return to their classes. When they failed to do so, the College was forcibly closed and the students evicted from their dormitories. As they were returning a few weeks later five of the ring-leaders were suspended pending further investigation.

the English language. Not only did the colonial baggage contain carbon-copies of the European institutions, but also the seeds of its own destruction in the form of the imperial tongue. Africans passing through the Western educational system strove to master the imperial tongue to perfection, even if such perfection was sometimes achieved outside the confines of the school walls. That the first graduates of the mission schools were not destined to devote themselves to creative literature was due largely to the nature of the education imparted by the missionary institutions. The Victorian ethic of self-discipline was taken to its extremity when translated into the African environment, and thus a strict disciplinarian, vocational rather than academic, content was emphasized in the school syllabi. In a system that required no more than a maximum of five years of elementary school, and whose basic purpose was to supply the infant colonial administration with minor functionaries, it was not to be expected that its graduates would be inclined towards the more intellectual and academic pursuit of literary production. The paradox was that some of these graduates were to benefit from external exposure to Western school systems long after leaving school. More important, the traditional African background did not always act as an impediment to their assimilation of Western categories of thought. This cultural heritage was to become the nucleus of their dissent against both colonialism and total assimilation into Western culture.

It was the generation of the fifties in the twentieth century which was to lead the way towards establishing a legacy of literature in the English language, and Makerere College in Uganda was to become the most eminent centre of literary activity. The destiny of Makerere as the most significant educational institution in East Africa became closely tied to the destiny of creative writing in this part of the Continent. It was the alma mater of the future soldier or politician as well as of many an academic. The articulate and brooding philosopher-politician Julius K. Nyerere, first Commander of the then Tanganyika Defence Forces, Major-General Sarakiya, a mathematician, and the radical Socialist and East Africa's best known novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, are alumni of Makerere. It was there that the first examples of literature in English drawing on the East African experience were created.

The creative writings of fictional nature that will be examined here will be assumed to have been thought out and articulated within the once obscure and unsure student journals at Makerere—devoted to English. The biographical and autobiographical writings would appear to have been less often of Makerere origin than works of fiction. The early political tracts and autobiographies were written by individuals who owed little to Makerere and more to the turbulent political climate of East Africa in the thirties, forties and fifties.

The English language as a medium of communication was disseminated by the school system, and this accounts largely for the formal nature of English usage in East Africa. Until the return of students who had gone to the West for their studies, some accompanied by American or British wives, English remained, at best, a second language to many. It was the language of the master and the classroom, and the neglectful indifference of the British settlers was partly responsible for the circumscribed circumstances in which it found itself. To redress this imbalance the school system was

gradually overhauled and revolutionized to accommodate the syllabus that was taught in England. By the nineteen-fifties, African, Asian and European students sat the same examinations as those in England for the School Certificate. And in 1953, the only institution of higher learning in East Africa, Makerere, which had been founded in 1939 as an interterritorial school, was elevated to the status of a University College affiliated to the University of London: Makerere undergraduates were prepared (drilled) for the latter's external degrees.

Meanwhile, however, the first African graduates with university degrees had been educated in America. The first Kenyan to hold a university degree was Mbiyu Koinange, later a Minister of State in the Office of the President in Kenyatta's government: he attended New York's Columbia University from 1927 until his departure for St. John's College, Cambridge in the autumn of 1936. About the same time, one of East Africa's earliest writers in English, Akiki K. Nyabongo (b. 1907), the Toro prince, was pursuing his education in various American universities including Yale and Harvard. As a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University he obtained his B. Litt. in 1939 and went on to earn his D. Phil. in 1940. His *Story of an African Chief* (1935) is basically an indictment of the high-handedness with which the missionaries and Europeans in general conducted themselves among Africans. It recounts the story of an African chief who sends his son, Mujungu, to be educated by a missionary and who refuses to reduce his three hundred and seventy wives to one as a precondition for his son's christening. It succeeds in portraying Mujungu, renamed Stanley, as a dignified figure at school, who, while remaining polite, stands up to the missionary. Another contemporary of Mbiyu Koinange was the less well-known Parmenas Githendu Mockerie, whose *An African Speaks for His People* (1934) was published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf on their newly founded Hogarth Press with a foreword by Julian Huxley.[6] One of the earliest students at Makerere, Mockerie later played a minor role with Jomo Kenyatta in London as a political petitioner on behalf of the Kikuyu Central Association.

Perhaps the most fascinating and enigmatic figure in the early history of English writing in East Africa is Jomo Kenyatta (1891–1979), first renowned as the author of the famous anthropological treatise, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938). Kenyatta's development as a writer is a classic commentary on the quality of African education during colonial times. Driven by a passionate desire to do battle against British colonialism and settler dominance in Kenya, Kenyatta went on to equip himself with the political weapons to be found in the academic rigour of social anthropology under Bronislaw Malinowski; but only after polishing his English. Enrolled at Thogoto Mission School in 1901, he stayed over for four years until he was disillusioned by the inferior technical skills imparted there. In the words of Dr. Atieno-Odhiambo, "with some knowledge of masonry, and a smattering of English, Kenyatta hit town as a very educated African."[7]

The sort of English that Kenyatta picked up at Thogoto was inadequate to enable him to embark on a political career that could thrust him face to face with the colonial

[6] See also "The Story of Parmenas Mockerie of the Kikuyu Tribe, written by himself," in *Ten Africans*, ed. Margery Perham (London: Faber, 1936).

[7] E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, "Kenyatta: A Full Biography," Kenyatta Day Supplement of *Viva* Magazine (October, 1977).

administrators, for whom English was their mother-tongue. It was here that he realized the necessity of grounding himself in the King's English. London provided the cure for Kenyatta's inarticulate and faulty command of the language. As his biographer later pointed out, it was there, in the early thirties, that

> for the first time Kenyatta met Africans of higher intellectual attainments than could be dreamed of in his own part of the continent. Amont these barristers and writers from Nigeria and the Gold Coast he was at a disadvantage. They had no common experience except their black skins and no common language except English which he spoke slowly, whereas they had picked up the latest idiom of debate.[8]

To make up for this linguistic handicap, Kenyatta enrolled in a course in English at University College, London, where he found himself a part-time job as an informant in Kikuyu phonetics. About this time too, he succeeded in joining Malinowski's classes. Professor Malinowski, already an established anthropologist and a celebrity in his field with several original contributions, was an advocate of "functionalism" in anthropology.[9] Put simply, functionalism was interested in establishing the systematic uniqueness of each culture by emphasizing the specific functions of its institutions and focusing on the differences between cultures rather than their similarities. The functionalist approach to anthropology demanded that the researcher learn the language of the community he was studying as a key towards a full understanding of the social dynamics of the society and its customs. At the London School of Economics, Kenyatta as a native speaker of Kikuyu fascinated Malinowski as a describer of a society which he understood and was qualified to give seminars on. In this way, Kenyatta found himself among Malinowski's students, who

> included names subsequently famous in the field of anthropology, like Audrey Richards and Lucy Mair, as well as African specialists like Elspeth Huxley, who wrote later that Kenyatta "was one of Dr. Malinowski's brightest pupils... A showman to his finger tips, jovial, a good companion, shrewd, fluent, quick, devious, subtle, flesh-pot loving"[10]

The source of Kenyatta's material for *Facing Mount Kenya* was himself since he was familiar with the culture and mythology of the Kikuyu. Moreover, the white missionaries in Kenya had alienated the bulk of the Kikuyu because of their militancy bordering on cultural arrogance against traditional tribal customs. Especially repulsive to the missionaries was the Kikuyu practice of female circumcision. Kenyatta's pent-up political feelings were vented in his seminar papers which covered various aspects of Kikuyu society, ranging from minutiae of ethnographic details on the various *rites de passage* to education and sexual practices among the young. The defence of tribal values and

[8] Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York: Dutton, 1973).

[9] See notably Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Language of Magic and Gardening" in his *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935).

[10] Murray-Brown, p. 218.

political protest intertwined to provide the *raison d'être* for an onslaught on the colonial administrators. In the words of Jeremy Murray-Brown:

> Kenyatta's purpose in writing *Facing Mount Kenya* was to challenge the white man's view of history. He was incensed by the European assumptions of superiority he had met throughout his life in Kenya, and he used the language of anthropology to propound a different philosophy—that of the golden African past. He described the principle of order, self-sufficiency and virtue underlying the Kikuyu way of life before the arrival of the white man. He tried to show in scientific terms, as George Padmore and Nancy Cunard had tried to do in literary and artistic terms, that the negro was not a benighted savage groping towards European enlightenment, but a man who inherited his social and cultural ideals from a different, and equally worthy, past. Taken by themselves, the factual and descriptive parts of his book were a contribution towards his chosen science, but *Facing Mount Kenya* as a whole was masterly propaganda.[11]

A view at variance with that of Jeremy Murray-Brown on Kenyatta's book, and an equally valid one, perhaps even more to the point, is propounded by Ngugi wa Thiong'o:

> Jomo Kenyatta's book *Facing Mount Kenya* stands in a rather equivocal position.... It is not a work of literary imagination, certainly not a creative biography like Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* or Peter Abraham's *[sic] Tell Freedom,* yet it is not pure anthropology. It has energy, passion, and a real tension between the objective needs of his descriptive case-study of an African culture and his subjective commitment to the African struggle for freedom and self-identity: he skilfully exploits myth to drive home his message.

And Ngugi adds: "More important ... the book presages Mau Mau, the one historical trauma that has left an indelible mark on the quality of life and literature in Kenya."[12]

The prolonged lull that followed those early writings from Kenya and Uganda was not interrupted until the early sixties, when two distinct trends appeared independently of each other. While a tremendous upsurge of imaginative writing was in the making at the English Department of Makerere College, in Kenya the awakening of national self-awareness prompted by the Mau Mau rebellion against colonial exploitation and by the cruelty of the ensuing repression took the form of several autobiographical works which were halfway between the earlier didactic and polemical writings and genuine fictional narrative. Three of these were published in London during the years when Kenya gained its independence (1963) and became a republic (1964) with Kenyatta as president. Two were written by eminent Kenyan politicians who were later assassinated; they had been closely associated with the political leadership in Kenya and at the time of their deaths were considered by many as possible successors to political leadership in the future.

[11] Ibid., p. 221.

[12] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Okot p'Bitek and Writing in East Africa" in his *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 70.

Mau Mau Detainee (1963) details the early struggles of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki (1929–1975), his eventual incarceration at the height of the Mau Mau rebellion in 1953 and his experiences and general suffering at various concentration camps until his release in 1960. Kariuki recounts his involvement with the early underground political party, the Kenya African Union and his work as private secretary to Jomo Kenyatta. Like Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya,* this book sought to justify the traditional Kikuyu practice of oath-taking as legitimate in a period of urgency on account of its appeal to tribal cohesion, thus contradicting the various colonial reports and accounts in which the settler community denounced the Mau Mau oath as both barbaric and pagan. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, himself a Kikuyu, describes the work as "really a praise song, in restrained prose edged with humour, to the courage and the dogged determination of those detained in various concentration camps."[13] After his release, Kariuki spent some time at Oxford writing the book. It was probably edited by Dame Margery Perham who contributed a preface.

A Child of Two Worlds (1964) by Mugo Gatheru (b. 1925) is a straightforward autobiography sketching the author's thirst for education which led him to set out for America via India and England. Most of the narrative dwells on the description of the structure of Kikuyu society before the arrival of the Europeans and the eventual impact of settler immigration. Gatheru provides a panoramic view of the colonial situation as he encountered it as a medical trainee. He recalls his early involvement in the politics of the Kenya African Union as a journalist for *Sauti ya Mwafrika.* He left for India in 1949, and he recounts his Indian experiences as an African student with restrained humour. The section on America provides a sample of the problems that have been experienced by many an African student who set out on his own to find education there. The shadow of the Mau Mau rebellion loomed large over his studies and the climax is reached when Gatheru reports in painstaking detail the aftermath of his brush with the colonial authorities in Kenya and its implications in America. The value of the book, however, rests on its contribution toward Kikuyu ethnography, especially its vivid and unabashed description of the various *rites de passage* as they affected the writer personally.

Freedom and After (1963), by Tom Mboya (1930–1969) is written in the same spirit as the other autobiographical works. It describes the meteoric rise of one of the most articulate, controversial and flamboyant personalities in African politics in East Africa. The son of a Luo sisal-estate worker, Mboya had received minimal education at Catholic mission schools, but strove tirelessly to cultivate his mind. The autobiography describes how he became involved as a trade unionist in Kenya politics then largely dominated by the Kikuyu. It reports his election as Secretary General of the Kenya African National Union (formed in 1960), and his appointment to a variety of ministerial posts. The story of Tom Mboya as narrated in *Freedom and After* is a tragic example of the absurdity of the colonial system, which inevitably thwarts man's realization of his potentialities. There is no doubt that he was endowed with a brilliant mind which could easily have taken him through the educational system to the highest accolade that could

[13] Ibid., pp. 70–71.

be bestowed on a young East African at the time, admittance to Makerere College. Yet it was the irony of fate that Mboya's schooling came to be cut short before this dream, which he shared with many an East African boy, materialized. His craving for academic education, as proclaimed in his autobiography, was to some extent gratified in 1955 when he was awarded a scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford, where he spoke for the Movement for Colonial Freedom and the Fabian Society. Indeed, Mboya's intellectual development, like that of a number of his important contemporaries, owed little to either formal schooling or the school system itself. It was despite these established institutions that he became articulate in English and reached success in his chosen vocation, politics. Mboya's sharp intellect established him as a writer of limpid prose and placed him in the first rank of authors in the political and polemical genre.

It will now be apparent that until the early fifties, East Africa had produced only a handful of books in English, whose authors used the language mainly with a view to articulating their political grievances. This does not mean that the area had no imaginative writing alongside its oral art: written Swahili poetry had been in existence for several centuries,[14] and in Uganda, the Ganda language had been reduced to writing so that the royal house of the Kingdom of Buganda could keep diaries and record local history.[15] But the cradle of creative writing in English was Makerere College.

The College had been set up in 1939 as an autonomous institution of higher learning to serve the whole of British East Africa, that is, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. There were also students from other African colonies such as Nyasaland, and the college population was markedly inter-racial, including Asians and Europeans as well. Affiliation with the University of London in 1953 paved the way for spectacular improvement in the quality of teaching and significant widening of the syllabus. One reason for the excellence of Makerere in the late fifties was that it had established itself as an academic community whose staff, backed by serious academic credentials, was drawn from universities in Europe and America. These academics were supplemented by the trickling of African scholars newly arrived from Europe and America, who were eventually to form the solid nucleus of an East African intellectual élite responsible for the future reputation of what was to become the University of East Africa, with its constituent colleges at Makerere, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The facilities at Makerere, with its magnificent library, assured a suitable scholarly atmosphere. Academic debate dominated the learned journals published by the College. And the English department organized and ran a student literary magazine, *Penpoint*, which was to carry stories, poems and plays by the university undergraduates, several of whom were to join the ranks of East Africa's best-known writers. *Penpoint* was born in 1958 and among its most illustrious former editors were Jonathan Kariara and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, then James Ngugi. The spirit behind the journal was the English lecturer David Cook, who was appointed at Makerere in 1962.

[14] See for example Jan Knappert, *Four Centuries of Swahili Verse* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979).

[15] Little attention has hitherto been paid to Ganda writing. See R. A. Snoxall, "Ganda Literature," *African Studies*, 1 (1942), 55–63, and Albert S. Gérard, *African-Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1981), pp. 299–303.

The parallel with Ibadan is obvious. The *Penpoint* contributors—Jonathan Kariara, Rebecca Njau, David Rubadiri, James Ngugi—were near-contemporaries of the new generation of Nigerian writers: Achebe, Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka. David Cook's role was not unlike that of Ulli Beier. In the history of East African literature, *Penpoint* itself came to fill the same function as *The Horn* in Nigeria. Nor was the general situation very different as Makerere students, living in the comparative quietness of Uganda, could reflect and write, as did their Nigerian opposite numbers, in the certainty that independence was round the corner. What one of *Penpoint*'s early editors, Jonathan Kariara (b. 1935) said of his generation in a newspaper interview of the late seventies might equally well apply to the Ibadan undergraduates of the late fifties:

> When asked what factors he felt went into the creation of his generation of African writers, Kariara had much to say. First he felt that all these people had grown up at the turning point in history, between the era of colonialism and post independence. "They were the children of the colonized," he said, "in the sense that they were not the generation who had borne the initial brunt of colonial oppression. It was their parents who had been subdued."[16]

Against the similarity of historical background, however, budding Makerere writers seem to have been more powerfully exposed than were their Nigerian contemporaries to the type of rigid English courses which greatly helped toward the development of the so-called "Makerere and Ibadan English." English usage became formalized, demanding grammatical correctness, even if not stylishness. At Makerere, the students' use of English was confined to the College's formal intellectual atmosphere: back home the students withdrew to their various ethnic languages. It is precisely because of this almost sanctified approach to English that East Africa failed to produce its own Tutuola. The limited usage of the other registers of English led to absurd inflexibility in the creation of near-life characters and even the semi-educated protagonists in Ngugi's novels speak formal, grammatical English. Makerere writers were not favoured with West Africa's luck in having an English-based creole and pidgin on whose resources they could draw.

While Chaucer, Shakespeare and other writers totally alien to the East African experience dominated the syllabus, although the bias for British English and at best American writings may have prevented the flowering of a crop of writers that could have been of greater local relevance, the fact remains that, as David Cook once observed, many English department students at the turn of the decade had come to read English more with a view to writing themselves than to immersing themselves in English literature. The language was a tool, not an end in itself. As to the purpose towards which the means were to be directed, Ngugi's later reminiscences provide a graphic picture of the dilemma with which he and other undergraduates with a gift for writing were faced:

> I too must have changed since I started writing in 1960. I was then a student at Makerere University College. I remember sending a shy little note to the Warden

[16] Jonathan Kariara, Interview in *The Nairobi Times*, 9 April 1978.

> of my then Hall of Residence saying I wanted to be a writer. No doubt the note was a little hasty and rather self-conscious, because I had not then written anything. I had read a number of writers, African and West Indian, and I knew that what they told, the song they sang, was different from what I had heard from the British writers who had been crammed down my throat in schools and at the University. The African writers spoke to me, they spoke about my situation.[17]

Discussing George Lamming's novel *In the Castle of My Skin* in the late sixties—"a tremendous picture of the awakening social consciousness of a small village", "an unforgettable picture of a peasant revolt in a white-dominated world"—Ngugi could legitimately complain of "our utter neglect of Caribbean studies in our Departments of Literature:"

> We forget, or have been made to forget by our literary mid-wives from Britain, that the West Indies has been very formative in Africa's political and literary consciousness: Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon: these are some of the most familiar names in Africa. Yet we ignore their work.[18]

In spite of such shortcomings, the English Department at Makerere became the fountainhead, and its little magazine *Penpoint* the main channel, of the early contribution of East Africa to modern literature in English. The central feature which made them different from their Ibadan equivalents was the multiracial character which the students shared with the academic community. Among those who appeared in its pages at one time or other have been David Rubadiri from Malawi, Peter Nazareth, the eminent Ugandan writer of Goan origin, the poet Richard Ntiru from the Ankole district of Uganda, N. G. Ngulukulu from Tanganyika, and Bahadur Tejani, a Ugandan of Indian extraction. When David Cook edited the very first East African anthology of English prose and poetry, *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology* (1965), it was entirely made up of contributions from the first sixteen issues of *Penpoint*. The authorship was not only inter-territorial, but also international and inter-racial; of the twenty-five contributors, all of them Makerere students, two were whites, one American and one Briton; one was an Indian; one came from Nigeria, one from Rwanda and three from Malawi; only four were natives of Uganda, while there were five from Tanganyika, one from Zanzibar and eight from Kenya. As Taban lo Liyong pointed out at the time in an *Africa Report* review, these were "new and inexperienced writers of obvious potential." Only a very few of them became established in the ensuing five years, but the anthology evinces a distinctive outlook, which Taban accurately defined as follows:

[17] Ngugi, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

[18] Ngugi, op. cit., p. 81. It was to react against such neglect that Ngugi completely revolutionized the teaching of literature at the University College of Nairobi, whose English Department syllabus was said to make it "the whitest Department north of Pretoria" (quoted in Adrian A. Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire*, p. 88). In 1964, together with Henry Owuor Anyumba and the colourful Taban lo Liyong, he succeeded in changing the Department of English into a Department of Literature, with the centre of gravity shifting to the study of African and Caribbean writing. See Taban lo Liyong, "Language and Literature Studies at University College, Nairobi," *Research in African Literatures*, 2, 1 (1971), 168–176.

> Most of the contributions in the Cook collection fall into the categories of "an incident which took place in my village" or "a story my grandmother once told me." Some deal with clashes between tradition and superstition on the one hand and Christianity and modern pragmatism on the other. But when these writers deal with the passing of the old ways, they do not adopt the sentimentality and nostalgia so characteristic of the negritude school.[19]

In the eye of the Ugandan critic, however, one of the important features of the book was its tolerant, cosmopolitan approach:

> The editor does not define what he regards as "East African Literature." If he had adhered to the academic definition of African literature—"Creative writing in which an African setting is authentically handled or to which experiences originating in Africa are integral"—some of the best works in the volume would have been disqualified because they are written by Americans, Fortunately, David Cook recognized the cosmopolitan and international character of Makerere, and gave us works written in East Africa.[20]

While *Penpoint* had provided Makerere students with an opportunity for getting into print, *Origin East Africa,* being issued in Heinemann's African Writers Series, made it possible for a number of them to become known internationally. And three among these did become, at some time or other, acknowledged mature writers: Ngugi wa Thiong'o (b. 1938), who at the time signed himself James Ngugi, and whose *Weep not, Child* had already been published in London in 1964, David Rubadiri (b. 1930), whose novel *No Bride Price* was to appear in Nairobi in 1967, and Peter Nazareth (b. 1940), later to become one of the more prolific of Uganda's writers.

In the meantime, *Penpoint* had been supplemented in 1960 by *Transition,* a much more ambitious journal-cum-magazine, which was edited in Kampala until 1969 by a journalist of Indian origin, Rajat Neogi. The editorial board included white scholars as well as representatives from other parts of East and West Africa. The journal soon became a focus for articles on literature, politics and culture in general. Many well-known writers from East and West Africa appeared in its pages. It was later partly subsidized by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, then based in Paris, which also sponsored the epoch-making conference of African writers of English expression that was held at Makerere in June 1962.

This gathering was probably the most important single event that acted as a catalyst for emergent East African authors.[21] It was sponsored not only by the Congress for Cultural Freedom but also by Makerere's Extra-Mural Division whose director at the time was Gerald Moore, and by the Mbari Club of Nigeria. It was unprecedented in its representativeness, drawing participants from all over English-speaking Africa, the

[19] This *Africa Report* review of November 1965 was reprinted in Taban lo Liyong, *The Last Word* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), pp. 183–186.

[20] Taban lo Liyong, op. cit., p. 183.

[21] As an undergraduate correspondent at Makerere, Ngugi hailed the Conference as a great event for East Africa and conveyed his ecstasy in the Nairobi *Sunday Nation* of 1st July 1962.

Caribbean, and the United States of America. Publishers were also represented: André Deutsch, Heinemann and Northwestern University Press were present.

Ezekiel Mphahlele, a representative of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and an important writer in his own right, Langston Hughes, the black American poet of note, Sanders Redding, who taught literature at the Hampton Institute, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo—all read papers or led discussions or talked about their own writings. Participants also included other prominent writers from South and West Africa, such as George Awoonor-Williams (later Kofi Awoonor) from Ghana, Bloke Modisane from South Africa, Sarif Easmon from Sierra Leone, and others, who provided welcome help and encouragement to young would-be writers in East Africa. Much discussion was devoted to the linguistic problem involved in using an alien language as literary medium. As Mphahlele reported,

> It was generally agreed that it is better for an African writer to think and feel in his own language and then look for an English transliteration approximating the original. In any case, we concluded that the richness of English goes a long way to compensate for any difficulties. But a writer should not fear to do violence to standard English if he finds it cumbersome.[22]

The after-effects, often original and stylistically valuable, of this attitude were felt in much East African writing of later years.

While negritude was a fairly popular topic and the speakers also grappled with the issue of definition—is African literature the body of literature written by Africans of African descent or is it any literature written on or about Africa? Who is an African writer?—the mood of the conference, and one of the reasons for its exceptional fruitfulness were probably best conveyed in Bloke Modisane's *Transition* report:

> The real meaning, the excitement of the Conference was the bringing together of writers working in isolation and knowing each other only in names on the cold page. Nigeria's Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, exchanged jokes with South Africa's Arthur Maimane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and others. In discussion, they examined each other's works with precision and at times with asperity. There were critical comments on specific novels, short-stories and poems, and then the workshops on the novel, poem, short story.[23]

The Conference can truly be said to have opened to East Africa new horizons of literary activity and 1962 became the turning point in serious literature in English. Publication in *Penpoint* or in *Transition* was by no means the only manifestation of this by the time Uganda became independent in 1962. For Ngugi's play *The Black Hermit*, which was performed at the National Theatre in Kampala to mark the occasion although it did not reach print until 1968, was only one example, albeit a major one, of the lively theatrical activity that had developed at Makerere and on which Peter Carpenter was reporting at the time in the following terms:

[22] Ezekiel Mphahlele, "The Makerere Writers' Conference," *Nigeria Magazine*, 76 (1963), 74–76.
[23] B. Modisane, "African Writers' Summit," *Transition*, 5 (1962), 5–6.

> The students of Makerere are very much in the vanguard of African drama, although they have still a long way to go. Nevertheless it seems to be mainly at Makerere that the plays are being written, the actors are gathering, the interest is being encouraged. There are two annual drama festivals in Uganda. The senior of these is the Uganda Drama Festival, now approaching its tenth year, in which African, Asian and European groups from all over the country compete on equal terms ... . The other is the Student Drama Festival wherein plays are entered by schools and training colleges, performed in English and Vernacular languages. There is also an annual playwriting competition. Whereas in West Africa there was very little European theatre, in Uganda there is a good deal. There are four racial communities here, African, Indian, Goan and European, and each has its own dramatic contribution. Fortunately, in the National Theatre we have a beautiful and well equipped theatre for performances, which is a great encouragement.[24]

Makerere College, then, was the institutional womb where creative writing in English was first conceived and out of which it began to grow forth in the whole of British East Africa. It is important to isolate and define the prevailing themes in this inter-territorial literary output that was produced in Uganda before independence was gained by Kenya in 1963 and before Tanganyika, which had been independent since 1961, fused with Zanzibar to form Tanzania in 1964. As we survey this inter-territorial writing, we note that it gives expression to seven inter-related conflicts of values. One is the conflict between the African past and the African present, often betraying a deep nostalgia, an idealization of what once was, or might have been. Related to this is the clash between tradition and modernity, which is not quite the same as the first conflict, since the dialectic between tradition and modernity can be taking place in the same historical period and certainly continues to be heard in the Africa of today. The third dialectic, again intimately related but by no means identical, results from the antinomy between the indigenous and the foreign: indigenous traditions may struggle for supremacy against imported traditions. Linked to this was the debate as to whether there could be a distinctly African approach to modernization which did not at the same time involve westernization. A fourth theme, which has proved of lasting interest is the apparent antagonism between the individual and society, between private rights and public duty. The fifth topic, which did not really gain weight in East Africa until the 1960s, was the grand dilemma between socialism and capitalism, between the pursuit of equity and the quest for affluence. But intimately related to this is the apparent dilemma between development and self-reliance, between rapid economic change with foreign help on the one hand and slower but autonomous progress, on the other. The seventh and final dialectic is the even more fundamental one between Africanity and humanity, between the rights of Africans as members of a particular race or inhabitants of a particular continent and the duties of Africans as members of the human race.

The first theme of nostalgia for the past has points in common with the whole movement of negritude in parts of French-speaking Africa: an idealization of ancestry, and sometimes an obsession with dance and rhythm as aspects of ancestral culture. Jomo

[24] Peter Carpenter, "East and West: A Brief View of Theatre in Ghana und Uganda since 1960," *Makerere Journal*, 8 (1963), 33–39.

Kenyatta belonged to this mood not only as a writer but also as President of Kenya. Literally to his last day of life he was a patron of traditional dancers, spending many hours in the course of his presidency watching dancers from different cultural backgrounds, and sometimes participating in the dancing. This obsession with dance was a musical and artistic manifestation of cultural nostalgia. In Kenyatta's view, "It is the culture which he inherits that gives a man his human dignity."[25] Kenyatta's ethnic compatriot, Joe Mutiga, addresses the fig tree in a similar mood:

Holy huge tree, you tax my memory:
Over you boys awaiting circumcision
Proudly threw *'ndorothi'* to show ability
To shoulder social responsibility,
While all dance in heartful joy,
Bearing proudly the tribal decorum:
....
A memory of olden days
When the Agikuyu were a tribe,
Though now but part of a nation,
... the beauty of old is gone.[26]

Sometimes nostalgia for the past is like mourning for the dead, a sense of anguish about what can never be again. "When There is a Hush Across the Sky" by John Nagenda (b. 1938) is at once a deeply personal statement and an epitaph of an Africa long dead.

When there is a hush across the sky,
And a small cold breeze among the trees,
And a whisp of song like smoke,
And a lone silent leaf
Like a thought
Loosens hold
Turns over and falls,
You become for me an evermore,
My dearly-mourned.[27]

A longing for the past in Africa is interwoven with a recognition of the values of tradition as against modernity. Some of the writers and poets of that period were all too aware that a rain-dance was a less efficient way of increasing productivity than learning how to use a tractor. But the more romantic still longed for those rhythms of rural incantation, the music of supplication rather than the noise of an exhaust pipe:

But now the ground,
On which the dancers once trod
Is laden with the green of crops,

[25] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1939; first published 1938).
[26] Joe Mutiga, "To the Ceremonial Mugumo (Fig-Tree)," in *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*, ed. David Cook (London and Ibadan: Heinemann Educational, 1965) pp. 132–133.
[27] John Nagenda, "When there is a hush across the sky," *ibid.*, p. 23.

The holy ground no more holy;
No decorum but hoe and soil,
No dancing on the gorund,
The lonely digger sweats alone.[28]

Joseph Waiguru (b. 1939), another Kenyan Makerere graduate, wrote a kind of ode to the "Round Mud Hut," a poem which was broadcast on the B.B.C. African Service and on the old Radio Uganda. He sees the mud hut as a shared refuge for humans and their animals, for adults and their children. But the round mud hut is threatened by the demand for modernized accommodation, separating parents from children in their different rooms, humans from their animals in stables, segregating the inhabitants of the otherwise shared earth:

The round warm hut
Proud to the last
Of her noble sons
And daughters
Stands besieged.

Of late, stones,
In tripartite agreement
Guarded a fire.
And then a pot,
A large hot pot
Which nurtured
Black, black children
....
The bleating sheep
And the horned goat,
Calves cud-chewing
At that end penned,
Share the warmth
Of the round mud hut.

All this and much more,
Slowly and slowly disappears:
Slowly and slowly iron appears
Lays a siege on the roof
And takes prisoner the pot and the gourd.
The plate, the cup, the lamp,
What's this but a change
To the new oblong house?
The round mud hut is no more.[29]

But modernity in Africa is not only contrasted with tradition; it is also substantially identified with westernization. That is why the second dialectic (between modernity and

[28] Joe Mutiga, "To the Ceremonial Mugumo (Fig-Tree)," ibid. pp. 132–133.
[29] Joseph Waiguru, "The Round Mud Hut," ibid., pp. 4–6.

tradition) is so intimately linked with the third (between the indigenous and the foreign). The very situation of those African writers using the English language was a dramatization of the basic tension between what was native and what was alien. Three forces were at work in facilitating this alien penetration of African societies. One was precisely Western-style education, whose pinnacle in East Africa was Makerere University, rising proudly on Makerere Hill. The second medium of penetration was Western Christianity, importing new paradigms of both ethics and cosmology. The third medium of penetration was technology, especially those aspects which were of relevance to economic change and material production.

The writers of this period were much more conscious of the implications of Western education and Western Christianity than they seemed to be of the implications of Western technology and science. On the educational front there was some recognition that these new processes of instruction and socialization created forms of cultural dependency. New Africans were in the process of being manufactured—somewhat less African than their parents had been. Jonathan Kariara (b. 1935), writing in English and at a Western-style university institution, wondered if he were being encased in clay, stifled by an alien structure:

> I lay the other night and dreamt
> That we were all being glazed
> With a white clay of foreign education,
> And it was stifling, stifling the sleeping blackman
> Inside there.
> ....
> Will it be the pearl in the oyster shell,
> Or mere rottenness?[30]

In his comedy, "Brave New Cosmos," Peter Nazareth relates this new cultural dependency to a growing social distance between parents in the villages and their children in universities, between the countryside and the city, between the westernized and the non-westernized. The student Kaggwa is a caricature of the arrogance and social ostentation of the newly anglicized African: he likes to display his command of the English language, and uses quotations from English literature with flamboyant ostentation. But the more absurd element is the expanding social distance between him and his parents. When his friend Kiwanuka asks him if he should not write to his family now and then, Kaggwa answers:

> Yes but look here, Kiwanuka, what can I write to them? They've got hardly any education while I will soon be a graduate. They wouldn't be able to understand me. They know nothing of the great writers. What have my parents in common with me?[31]

[30] Jonathan Kariara, "The Dream of Africa," ibid., p. 100.
[31] Peter Nazareth, "Brave New Cosmos," ibid., p. 175.

Another student character in the play, Karanja, seems to be on the verge of starting a discussion illustrating precisely the dilemmas that C. P. Snow discusses in *Two Cultures*. But yet he disappoints us, for it is not the explanatory power of science that fascinates him, nor the productive power of technology: it is the extent to which science makes available consumer products in Karanja's simple-minded world:

> I don't believe in wasting my time like my friend here—reading *(contemptuously)* Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Aristotle—phooey! What does it matter if Shakespeare said stupid things like, 'To be or not to be'?... 'Let nature teach you!' Ugh! Wordsworth! How has this world progressed? By means of what Shakespeare said? There weren't any motor cars in his day, no record-players, no radios. He had no cinemas; I go to see at least three pictures a week. How has the world progressed? By science—science is the all-powerful god![32]

Both Kaggwa, the humanist, and Karanja, the scientist-in-the-making, are caricatures of cultural aping: Western education was generating new forms of arrogance in Africa.

As for the impact of Christianity, it was to receive extensive treatment in East African literature because it made itself felt at many levels, affecting conceptions of knowledge, methods of rearing children, rituals of initiation and *rites de passage*, concepts of right and wrong, and paradigms of explaining natural phenomena, as well as the broader interpretation of metaphysical and supernatural concerns. Western Christianity was thus a fundamental factor in the broader westernization of Eastern Africa, and Ngugi's novels were at times to appear obsessed with this clash, a perfectly understandable preoccupation for a Kikuyu writer who grew up in the course of the Mau Mau emergency. But it was Okot p'Bitek who was to analyse most lucidly the power of the new religion, which prompted even African scholars to recreate their own gods in the image of the Christian God:

> When students of African religions describe African deities as eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, etc., they intimate that African deities have identical attributes with those of the Christian God. In other words, they suggest that Africans hellenized their deities, but before coming into contact with Greek metaphysical thinking... African peoples may describe their deities as 'strong', but not 'omnipotent'; 'wise', not 'omniscient'; 'old', not 'eternal'; 'great', not 'omnipresent'. Like Danquah, Mbiti, Idowu, Busia, Abrham, Kenyatta, Senghor and the missionaries, modern Western Christian anthropologists are intellectual smugglers. They are busy introducing Greek metaphysical conceptions into African religious thought. The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God, are, in the main, creations of the students of the religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary African in the countryside.[33]

Okot p'Bitek later became Uganda's most eloquent rebel against Western cultural

[32] Ibid., p. 172.

[33] Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), pp. 80, 88.

imperialism. His poem, *Song of Lawino,* is one of the strongest statements on cultural authenticity to have emerged out of Eastern Africa.

The theme of the clash between individual and society was linked to some extent with the impact of Christianity and the Protestant idea of personal accountability before God, although individualism in Africa was also fostered by the notion of private property which came with Western capitalism. In his contribution to *East African Childhood* (1967) Joseph A. Lijembe refers to his discovery of the principle of property after he left home and went to a Western-style school.

> At home I had not been given a chance to care for and look after a bit of property that I could really call 'mine'. At school I found I possessed a set of articles which, for a period, were mine. I had to begin afresh learning how to respect not only my things, but those that belonged to my class-mates and the school as a whole.[34]

The third major promoter of individualism was the new liberal ethos which came with Western political ideologies. The special premium which liberalism placed on individualism helped to transform the political horizons of East African writers, as well as of other East African intellectuals. As Jonathan Kariara said of one of his short-story characters, "He had inherited two things from the white man, a new religion and the desire to decide for himself."[35] In politics, Western liberalism helped to inspire demands for one man, one vote and liberal forms of self-determination. In literature, individualism produced the new writers. After all, traditional oral art was in some sense authorless, a collective and cumulative heritage without individual attribution. But the new novels and poems, the new plays and short stories were works by specific artists, bearing their names or their pen-names. The very birth of written literature in English constituted an important departure from the collective traditions of an orally transmitted heritage. With the new trend came personalized copyright, royalties for individual authors and rules against plagiarism.

In addition some of the art forms which the writers were exploring themselves required a capacity on the part of the writer to create believable individual characters. As indicated earlier, the short story in Africa has its antecedents in folk tales, modern verse can be a continuation of ancestral poetry, but the novel as normally understood is clearly a foreign art form being now developed for African purposes. And the history of the novel is intimately connected with the rise of individualism in the West. Molly Mazrui in her Makerere thesis on the individual and society in some African fiction, takes us back to that first English novel, *Robinson Crusoe,* concerning which Ian Watt had commented that

> the terms of the problem of the novel and of modern thought alike were established when the old order of moral and social relationships was shipwrecked, with Robinson Crusoe, by the rising tide of individualism.[36]

[34] Lijembe, "The Valley Between," in *East African Childhood,* ed. Lorene K. Fox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 25–26.

[35] Kariara, "The Initiation," in David Cook, op. cit., p. 95.

[36] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 92.

Relating this observation to African societies, Molly Mazrui argues that they had to some extent been shipwrecked by colonialism, so that in many areas of life individualism was rapidly becoming the new order:

> Many African novelists, including Achebe and Ngugi, have explored what caused the shipwreck and tried to understand whether it was avoidable or not. They have shown us the anguish and conflict both for the individual and for his community as fluidity of values and rapidly changing standards have become the order of the day... There are many reasons why this growth of individualism in Africa may be lamented, but among its more positive aspects must be counted the birth of the African novel.[37]

The fifth dialectic handled by early East African writers concerned the dilemma of capitalism and socialism. The initial East African enthusiasm for at least socialist rhetoric was connected with the degree to which capitalism had been an ally of imperialism. Since socialism was opposed to capitalism, and African nationalism was opposed to imperialism, nationalistic ideas in Africa found a comradeship-in-arms with socialistic ideas from elsewhere. On the eve of independence, opposition to exploitation, whether by domestic capitalists or foreign imperialists, was just beginning to inspire East African intellectuals. Solomon Kagwe (b. 1939) in his short essay about a farm in the White Highlands of Kenya, even managed to combine a critique of racial exploitation with a criticism of the Christian work ethic as propagated in the colonies: the white farmer, Mr. Brown, knows that his workers are "simple and religious people"; that is why Mr. Brown "works them from 6 am to 9 pm":

> Since you erred, Adam,
> We've got to sweat
> And like tractors work
> For all our lives
> To earn our living.[38]

And Ngugi wa Thiong'o later evolved into a Marxist, combining more fully this rebellion against imperialism with a disgust for domestic African capitalists. But that in itself was a transition from the preoccupation of colonized Africans before independence with their quest for indigenous authenticity to a new dedication concerned with social transformation and the pursuit of greater equity.

Deeply related to this transition from colonial obsessions to independent commitments is the sixth antinomy, between the attractions of rapid economic development and the disciplines of self-reliance and even self-denial. The literary aspect of this concern was to be most elaborately explored in Tanzania, especially in the later period of the Arusha Declaration (1967) and much of this debate about self-reliance has been carried out in the Swahili language. Indeed, the very vigour of Swahili literature in Tanzania

[37] Molly Mazrui, *Aspects of the Relationship between the Individual and Society in Some African Fiction, with Special Reference to the Works of Achebe and Ngugi* (A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts, Makerere University, Kampala, 1972), p. 407.

[38] Solomon Kagwe, "To a Farm in the White Highlands," in David Cook, op. cit., pp. 119–122.

accounts in part for the dearth of English writing from Tanganyika in *Penpoint*: to use a language more widely understood by the national society was itself a sign of cultural self-reliance and a tribute to authenticity. For while Africa may have attained some level of political independence, the struggle for economic autonomy and cultural authenticity has only just begun. The economies of Eastern Africa are still penetrated by foreign capital, and members of the new black bourgeoisie are mainly allies of external foreign interests. The cultural penetration includes the prevalence of a consumer culture, the persistence of a colonial educational structure, the infiltration of African societies by alien information media and electronic services, and the survival of language policies which serve the interests of the élite and ruling classes and are inadequately sensitive to the needs of the masses. The continuing domination of élite culture in Africa by foreign languages becomes symptomatic of this deep-seated cultural dependency.

The problem of self-reliance v. dependency has thus given rise to a school of writing which has affinities with the literature of *dependencia* of Latin America. While a number of political writers—including Isa Shivji of Tanzania, Dan Nabudere of Uganda and Atieno-Odhambo of Kenya—are concerned with economic dependency, cultural dependency is the main preoccupation of others like President Julius K. Nyerere (b. 1922) of Tanzania, Okot p'Bitek (1931—1982) of Uganda, and Ali A. Mazrui (b. 1933) of Kenya, all of whom had some connection with Makerere. Much of the writing in this area is either academic or polemical: only a little has so far taken the form of poetry or fiction. But the basic dilemma between dependent development on one side and self-reliant stagnation on the other is in any case the latest incarnation of such older dilemmas as those between tradition and modernity, and between the indigenous and the foreign. What the writers of the earlier decades grappled with in terms of the tensions of modernization and freedom is now being explored in terms of the tensions of development and dependency.

Finally, the most fundamental polarity is that dialectic between African distinctiveness and the idea of universalism, between the uniqueness of the African man and the catholicity of mankind. In the days before independence our writers did indeed often use the language of humanity, but mostly to demand rights for Africans. Referring to "the black writer's burden," Achebe pointed out that in colonial Africa it was the African writer's job to attack colonial injustice; in independent Africa, he went on, the writer must still accept the duty to challenge injustice wherever he sees it, even if it is injustice committed by Africans against Africans:

> We must never agree to bargain for the right to be treated like full members of the human family. We must seek the freedom to express thought and feeling, even against ourselves, without the anxiety that what we might say might be taken as evidence against our race.[39]

Political independence has contributed towards expanding the moral horizons of African intellectuals generally. To experience tyranny by Africans against Africans after experiencing the domination of Africans by white people is to learn about the universal-

[39] Chinua Achebe, "The Black Writer's Burden," *Présence Africaine*, 59 (1966), 135–140.

ity of rights and duties, of sin and redemption. The radicalization of a number of East African writers since independence has been part of this adventure into new categorical imperatives. Some have gone beyond demanding rights for Africans, or for black people, they have transcended even Panafricanism as a specialized solidarity, and have instead sought to identify with the oppressed generally. For this seventh dialectic, whose poles are the parochial and the universal, Africanity and humanity, is perhaps the most central issue of authenticity. The tension between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, are ultimately agonies of epochs across time. The tensions between the indigenous and the foreign are concerned with a dialectic across space. The confrontation between socialism and capitalism is a confrontation across values. The dilemma between rapid development and stagnant self-reliance is also about values, but taking the form of priorities in policy. But in the final analysis it is the relationship between the individuals and society, on one side, and between society and universalism on the other, that lies at the heart of art itself. How the individual human relates to the immediate social group, and how that social group relates to humanity itself, together constitute the ultimate universe of aesthetic exploration.

The early East African writers of English have most decidedly been part of that exploration. Caught up in the agonies of multiple estrangement—political, educational, linguistic, aesthetic and technical—they did their share in setting the pace in the struggle to recover their memory, in the quest for ultimate renewal.

ELIZABETH KNIGHT*

2. KENYA

In 1962 Ngugi wa Thiong'o attended the African Writers' Conference at Makerere and found himself in something of a literary vacuum as far as East Africa was concerned. Nonetheless he wrote hopefully in *Transition* that year:

> What may be born here and grow as a result is yet too early to predict. I have no doubt that writers from East Africa will rise. The few that I met at Kampala were very enthusiastic and eager to push ahead.[40]

Ngugi himself contributed to that literary genesis when his play, *The Black Hermit*, was performed as a part of Uganda's independence celebrations in that same year. This fact was a consequence of the inter-territorial outlook which had been part and parcel of British colonial policy in East Africa and which was reflected in the status of Makerere College and in the diversified authorship of the writing in *Penpoint*, in *Transition* and in Cook's *Origin: East Africa*.

Yet already during the last few years of the colonial period there was a lack of balance in the literary output. On the one hand, Tanganyika's contribution was minimal as writers from this former German colony preferred to use the Swahili language, which already had a long tradition of creative writing. On the other hand, the pre-eminence of Kenya was obvious in Cook's anthology: it had been compiled with the help of Ngugi; it included a story of his, whose theme of the returned detainee was to recur in his novel *A Grain of Wheat*;[41] furthermore, the upsurge of nationalist feeling in the country had resulted in the production of autobiographical writings independent of the Makerere group.[42]

Effective decentralization became institutionalized in 1963 when Makerere College

* The research for this paper has been made possible thanks to a grant from the Leverhulme Trust Fund and to the help of the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi.

[40] James T. Ngugi, "A Kenyan at the Conference", *Transition*, 2 (1962), 7–9.

[41] Id., "The Return" in *Origin East Africa* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1965), ed. David Cook pp. 53–59.

[42] To the writings of Kariuki and Gatheru should be added *Mau Mau General* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), in which W. Itote (b. 1922) has his narrator, "General China," detail the actualities of the struggle in the forest, his experiences in detention and his disillusion after independence. For background information, see C. G. Rosberg, Jr. and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

was turned into the University of East Africa with associate colleges in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. From then on, the literary life of East Africa was characterized by a tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces, as the three successor states followed their own divergent paths while retaining a measure of nostalgia for some sort of federal unity. The basic preoccupation with the encouragement of creative writing and literary criticism which had been the main feature of *Penpoint* was maintained in new journals that were launched locally: *Darlite* (1966) in Tanzania, and *Nexus* (1967), soon superseded by *Busara* (1968) in Kenya; their pages were open to African writers of English, whatever their nationality. In the years following independence, equally valuable efforts were made to promote book publication on an East African scale. 1965 saw the foundation of the East African Publishing House, which printed its first works of fiction in 1966, and launched *Ghala,* a regular special literary issue of the *East Africa Journal,* in 1968. In 1967, the Oxford University Press in Nairobi launched *Zuka,* "a journal of East African creative writing." As to the East African Literature Bureau which had been founded after World War II for the purpose of stimulating vernacular writing, its Nairobi and Kampala branches started publishing original imaginative work in English in 1970 under their "Student Book-writing Scheme"; the Bureau was dissolved in the late seventies and replaced by the Kenya Literature Bureau.

David Rubadiri has cogently observed that "basically it is politics which has excited the creative spirit in East Africa."[43] Even before independence, there was a definite connection between literary development and the growth of national consciousness in Kenya, and there were indications that the literary centre of gravity was shifting from Makerere to Nairobi. There it was that Ezekiel Mphahlele founded the Chemchemi Cultural Centre in 1963. Sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, this was intended as an East African equivalent of the Nigerian Mbari clubs and aimed at introducing the creative arts to a wider popular audience than Makerere College could hope to reach. The specific cultural situation in Kenya and its problems were described as follows by Mphahlele:

> In West African countries and South Africa, activities in "high culture" began as a diversion for the élite or highly educated, the university customers, and had to come to terms with the entertainment culture that goes on at the level of "ordinary folk." The night clubs, indigenous plays and operas in West Africa, festivals of jazz and indigenous music in South Africa draw an interesting mixture of the élite and simple folk. But in Kenya, creative and entertainment activities attract not the élite but those at lower levels of education. Can it be perhaps that the élite feel they have arrived and that those who still feel the need to improve or entertain themselves find centres like Maendeleo ya Wanawake and other women's clubs and Chemchemi give them a sense of purpose?[44]

Chemchemi invited established writers like Peter Abrahams. It founded its own Theatre Company, which performed such plays as J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* in and

[43] David Rubadiri, "The Development of Writing in East Africa", in *Perspectives on African Literature,* ed. Christopher Heywood (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971), pp. 148–156.

[44] In Mphahlele's newsletter *Chemchemi News,* 2, 5 (1965), 2.

outside Nairobi. Mphahlele conducted writers' workshops among university students and workers in Nairobi, and in secondary schools in the provinces of Kenya. Some of the work thus produced was published in *Nexus* and in the literary issues of the *East Africa Journal*. But when Mphahlele left in 1965, the centre closed down because, as he said, "there was no ready leadership to keep it going and it was obvious that the Kenyan élite had not caught on to the idea. Most of our patrons were people in lower ranks, but enlightened, and wanting to get ahead, but not ripe to run such a centre."[45] In a way, then Chemchemi was a failure. Yet it did something to fulfil a need which later events proved really existed: the need to stimulate cultural life in Kenya and to provide a forum for writers who were not necessarily part of the university-educated establishment. Later developments demonstrated that Mphahlele's efforts, however premature, had been in the right direction.

Throughout the sixties, the Kenyan literary scene was dominated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o's first three novels: *Weep not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), which had been written first, and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967); their concern with the divisions which Western interference had wrought into Kikuyu society was soon taken up by many younger Kikuyu writers.[46]

There is a cyclical motion in Ngugi's writing: themes are returned to, reworked and a definite development of ideas can be seen. Often this process seems a difficult one, a reliving of painful experiences. The role of the man of education is a case in point. It had already been central to *The Black Hermit*, the first full-length play known to have been written in English by an East African although it was not printed until 1968. It deals with an apparently all too familiar hero, an educated young man named Remi who has left his village to live in the city. But Ngugi managed to give this trite motif a new twist: Remi is not attracted by the glitter of city life so much as repelled by the narrow tribalism and the backwardness of his people; his purpose is to help the government in building up a modern state with a genuine national consciousness. For a variety of reasons, the village people want him to come back: the elders in the hope that he will enter politics and defend the interests of his tribe; the pastor in the hope that he will give up politics and return to the "paths of holiness"; his mother, in the hope that he will return to Thoni, his brother's young widow, who, by customary law, is now his wife. When Remi finally yields to their entreaties, it is in the stubborn determination that he will "no longer be led by woman, priest or tribe." His speeches convince the elders that they must stop asking from government what government cannot do, that they must turn to self-help, till the soil, build schools, give up tribalism; they convince the pastor that Christians must no live in isolation from pagans; but they also convince Thoni that he will never accept her, and she commits suicide. In his mother's view, "Education and big learning

[45] Letter to Albert Gérard, 20 June 1970.

[46] For a recent discussion of Ngugi's fiction, see Barry Andrews, "The Novelist and History: The Development of Ngugi wa Thiong'o," *New Literature Review*, 1 (1977), 36–43; Eddah Gachukia, "The Novels of James Ngugi," In *Teaching of African Literature in Schools*, ed. Eddah Gachukia and S. Kichamu Akiviga (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), I, pp. 102–113, and especially Clifford B. Robson, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

has taught him nothing." Remi himself ultimately recognizes that his political theories, however well-meant and forward-looking, have made him blind to sheer human feeling; kneeling beside the body of his wife he exclaims:

> I never gave you a chance
> Nor even tried to understand you.
> I came back to break Tribe and Custom,
> Instead, I've broken you and me.

Though Ngugi was as yet unable to exploit the dramatic possibilities of his plot and his characters are far from fully worked out, the underlying thought illustrates his insight into the perplexing ambiguities of private life and political action and into the dubious benefits of Western-type education.

Education was to remain central to Ngugi's preoccupations as it had been to Kikuyu people for several decades. The title of the first novel he wrote, *The River Between,* refers to the Honia river, which runs between two ridges in the "valley of life", keeping them apart, and at the same time providing life-giving water for both. Each ridge is the abode of a representative community: the inhabitants of Makuyi are "progressive" Christians, while the denizens of Kamena maintain all their customs and traditions. But a generation gap cuts across this division: the hero's father, Chege, represents the tribe's stern loyalty to the past, and is thus opposed to his contemporary, the convert Joshua, who has fully accepted the white man's creed; yet, both men are linked together in an unyielding rigidity which is reminiscent of Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart.* Ngugi's hero, Waiyaki, falls in love with Joshua's daughter Muthoni, who is disowned by her father because, in her refusal to become estranged from the standards of the tribe, she runs away to undergo circumcision. Thus poised, in his turn, between two worlds, Waiyaki impersonates the symbolism of the river: after Muthoni dies as a result of an infection brought about by her circumcision, the missionary school is closed to those who take part in the rite, and Waiyaki starts an independent school, where the young will be allowed to observe tribal customs while benefiting from a modern education.[47]

Education was still central to Ngugi's second novel, *Weep Not, Child,* which had been published first, presumably because it was more ambitious in scope, less systematic in its design and more subtle in narrative technique. The story takes place at the beginning of the Mau Mau period and centres on the fate of three typical families: Howlands, the white landowner, who represents the decaying imperial order, Ngotho, who passively accepts the spoliation of which his family has been victim, and Jacobo, who impersonates the new class of black profiteers, stooges of the colonial system. As in the previous novel, generations represent chronological gradations in the destruction

[47] These events reflect the aftermath of the agitation carried out in the twenties by the Kikuyu Central Association for the creation of native schools independent of the missions, and of the success achieved in this respect by Jomo Kenyatta in 1929 when he was sent to London as a delegate of the Association: by the end of World War II, more than three hundred such schools were in existence, attended by some sixty thousand pupils. On the novel, see A. N. Parasuram, *Guide to James Ngugi: The River Between* (Madras: Minerva, 1975) and Jane C. Chesaina, "East Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* and the African Oral tradition," in Gachukia and Akiviga op. cit., pp. 62–76.

of this evil order. Ngotho's older sons stand for and participate in violent action in the Mau Mau movement: they kill both Howlands and Jacobo, and become indirectly responsible for the death of their father, who selflessly assumes their guilt, thus atoning for his earlier slavish acquiescence in oppression.

The story is told from the point of view of Ngotho's youngest child, Njoroge, whose personality is determined by his love for his "two mothers," his father's two wives, personifying the female principle of tenderness and understanding, and by the school education which he has been privileged to receive and which gives him the elements of rational enlightenment. Njoroge is immune from the hatred and the need for violence characteristic of his brothers: he is able to strike a friendship with Howlands' son and to fall in love with Jacobo's daughter, Mwihaki. Shattered by the outbreak of insane cruelty inherent in rebellion and repression, he is prevented from fleeing the country by Mwihaki, and from committing suicide by his mother, both of whom thus keep him from evading the challenge of history. But whereas the teacher Waiyaki in *The River Between* had dominated the novel as a saviour figure, Njoroge, another educated boy, is no hero. The Emergency comes not as a clarification of the conflict, but a clouding of the issues. Ngugi indicates as much by calling the second part "Darkness Falls." Faced with the collapse of his family as a result of the Emergency, Njoroge contemplates flight and suicide, not the salvation of his country. For all the education he has received, he shares in the general puzzlement characteristic, as one critic put it, of "what a simple village community felt, caught between forces which they could not quite understand."[48] *Weep Not, Child* leaves the struggle in the heart of darkness.

It was perhaps a sign of immaturity that Ngugi did not attempt to show how his youthful heroes faced up to their responsibilities. A mood of tender sensitiveness, a shrinking away from the harsh necessities of revolutionary action seemed to lead him to a utopian, misty form of optimism concerning the future of his suffering country. By the time he wrote *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), independence had come; its attending corruption was becoming glaringly apparent, generating disillusionment and heart-rending reappraisals. Since independence, Ngugi had moved geographically further away from the influence of colonial establishments such as Alliance High School and Makerere towards the University of Leeds in 1964 with its political debates and the personal influence of the British Socialist Arnold Kettle; he began to get a sense of perspective on his own education. By 1969, he came to the conclusion that "the colonial system produced the kind of education which nurtured subservience, self-hatred, and mutual suspicion. It produced a people uprooted from the masses."[49] Accordingly, by the time of *A Grain of Wheat*, the educated figure has receded right to the periphery of the novel: Kariuki is significantly absent at Makerere during the Emergency. He is depicted as largely irrelevant to the struggle of the masses for independence. The diminishing role of the intellectual reflects the growth of Ngugi's political awareness.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, then, Ngugi gave up the world of youth and the conflict of

[48] W. J. Howard, "Themes and Developments in the Novels of Ngugi", in *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*, ed. Edgar Wright (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 95–119.

[49] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Towards a National Culture," in *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 14.

cultures. All the main characters are former warriors who once took the sacred oath to fight for freedom. Yet, none of them is without guilt, and the theme of the novel is betrayal, open or secret, in the spheres of political action and private feelings. This is true of Karaga, who not only forsook the struggle and actively joined the colonial enemy, but also seduced Mumbi while her husband, Gikonyo, was in detention. It is also true of others, whose fault has remained secret: although Mugo has won esteem and admiration for his boldness in the fighting, and has been chosen to be the village speaker during the coming *uhuru* celebrations, he had joined the struggle reluctantly, and under pressure from his friend Kihiga, whom he later betrayed to the white man out of resentment and greed. Gikonyo too, although he is hailed as a hero, once betrayed the secrets of the movement in order to be released from prison and go back to Mumbi.

But amidst the tares, there is a grain of wheat growing. As it appears that Kahiga is to be publicly accused and punished for the crime which Mugo himself committed, the latter is overwhelmed by his guilty conscience and during his independence oration he makes a full confession to his dumb-founded audience. Nor is this *anagnorisis,* this acknowledgment of guilt, this restoration of inner integrity, the only gleam of hope in the novel. On being informed of Mumbi's betrayal, Gikonyo had decided to punish her by refraining from sexual relationships. But towards the end of the novel, his mind reverts to the early days of their acquaintance, when he had intended, as a wedding gift, to carve a stool with the figures of a man, a woman and a child. He now changes his mind:

> He thought about the wedding gift, a stool carved from Muiri wood. "I'll change the woman's figure. I shall carve a woman big—big with child."

As the book comes to a close, guilt and despair give way to inner salvation through contrition and pardon, and more hopeful perspectives open up under the double aegis of womanly love and the unknown potentialities of generations yet to be born.

The story is set during the four days preceding the formal declaration of independence. Skilful use of flashback techniques enables the writer to probe the motivations of his characters and to assess their deeds. But he cannot and obviously does not wish to remain blind to the unpalatable realities of the present. Independence is shown to have precipitously turned sour when an old nationalist comments: "It is not what I had waited for these many years" (p. 273). Or when Gikonyo, a small-time trader who has been through the concentration camps, discovers that his newly elected but already opulent M.P. has acquired the white settler's farm that he and a few friends had formed a co-operative to buy. Or again when people utter their awareness that power has fallen into the hands of clever, often "educated", and generally undeserving profiteers:

> But now, whom do we see riding in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes? It is those who did not take part in the movement, the same who ran to the shelter of schools and universities and administration. At political meetings you hear them shout: Uhuru, Uhuru, we fought for. Fought where? They are mere uncircumcised boys. They knew suffering as a word.

The Kenyan writer was bound to share in the general disillusionment, frustration and revulsion, which were aroused in idealistic intellectuals by the realities of black power in a number of the new African states. Like many of his contemporaries in Nigeria, in Ghana and elsewhere, he was beginning to recognize that there can be no real independence for the masses, the peasants and the workers, as long as the colonial economic system prevails—the only difference being that the economic and political élites are of a slightly darker hue. The nationalist struggle to eradicate colonial oppression was turning into a embryonic socialist struggle. As a token of his rupture with his own past, when E.A.L.B. issued three of his plays under the title *This Time Tomorrow* around 1970, he gave up his Christian European first name and began to sign himself Ngugi wa Thiong'o. These were minor works apparently dating from different periods in his career. But the title piece deals in a tragic-sardonic manner with the hardships inflicted on the slum dwellers of Nairobi a few years after independence, when the authorities ruthlessly decide to erase the area because "tourists from America, Britain, and West Germany are disgusted with the dirt that is slowly creeping into a city that used to be the pearl of Africa." But no provision is made for resettling the displaced persons!

It was clear that Ngugi's restless mind and sensitive imagination were undergoing a deep change, the results of which were not to become manifest in his creative writing until a few years had elapsed. Meanwhile, wide-ranging developments had taken place in Kenyan literature.

The first novel to be published by E.A.P.H., *The Promised Land* (1966) by Grace Ogot (b. 1930), was also the first imaginative work in English by a Luo writer, who was at the same time the first female novelist in East Africa. The book was a disappointment to those who had appreciated Grace Ogot's short stories first printed in East African journals and in anthologies. One of these, "The Rain Came" (1964)[50] is a traditional tale about a chief's daughter who is sacrificed to the water-god to bring rain. Oganda is beautiful and regal in true negritude tradition as she walks all night to the Lake, never hesitating. But the story has an ironic, humanitarian twist to it as the gods are cheated of their sacrifice and it rains nevertheless. Grace Ogot's novel focuses on a conflict between family ties and personal interest. A young married couple move from Nyanza to Tanzania to escape poverty, taxation and over-used soil. The move is entirely successful and Ochola's abundant harvest allows the writer full opportunity to praise Luo customs and generosity. This spirit of well-being is, however, short-lived, for Ochola's prosperity earns him the enmity of the local witch doctor, who casts a powerful spell on the household, their health and their cattle. The second part of the novel is taken up with a tedious succession of quacks and traditional doctors who vainly attempt to cure Ochola's repulsive illness. The end is anti-climactic with the couple leaving with only what they can carry and Ochola lamenting his lost wealth but even more his lost dog.

As an East African reviewer perceptively observed at the time in *Nexus*, which had

[50] Grace Ogot, "The Rain Came," in *Modern African Stories*, ed. Ellis A. Comey and Ezekiel Mphahlele (London: Faber, 1964).

just been started, *The Promised Land* "comes out not as an exploration of human relationships within an eventful setting but as a set of events which drag the characters."[51] Clearly, the short story was a more suitable medium for Grace Ogot's talent, and she wisely concentrated on this allegedly minor genre in her later volumes, *Land Without Thunder* (1968) and *The Other Woman* (1976). But both her novel and her first collection heralded a trend characterized by widespread interest in collecting traditional folk tales and in perpetuating the memory of past history, which came to include, among Kikuyu writers, reminiscences of the Emergency.

The year of *The Promised Land* also witnessed the publication of two significant collections by Oxford University Press: *Akamba Stories* by the Rev. John S. Mbiti (b. 1931), who was to become better known as a foremost African theologian, and *Agikuyu Folktales* by Ngumba Njururi (b. 1930). Many further stories were published by the E.A.P.H., sometimes on an inter-territorial scale. Admittedly, such collections as *Popular Culture of East Africa* (1972) by Taban lo Liyong (b. 1939) from Uganda, or *Keep My Words* (1974) by Onyango Ogutu and Adrian Roscoe are of dubious scientific value because of the lack of data about informants, methods of collection, and selection and presentation of material. In the first book of literary criticism ever to have been printed in East Africa, Taban lo Liyong, who was then doing research at the University of Nairobi, had claimed that "the fable as a literary and educational means has a great future", adding:

> It only needs modernization. Tortoise must rent an apartment even on a third floor. We need not take Rabbit to the taxidermist or zoo when we bequeath bow and arrow to the trustees of museums. For Rabbit needs to resume his inter-stellar movements as some stories informed us. In other words we should cast modern conditions in the moulds which are in our traditions, if possible.

But few writers were creative enough to "give to literature its central position of education" by dealing with

> tales which interest us, which can best explain modern dilemmas and teach us preferences, which instil wisdom, which cause laughter, which unmask modern economic and political tricksters, which create beautiful maidens for enticing the modern rogues, and which can best establish new codes of behaviour in conformity with our changing situations.[52]

Among the few attempts to follow along the lines suggested and exemplified by Taban lo Liyong, mention should be made of *The Exodus* (1968), a play which T. Omara based on the Labongo and Gipir myth,[53] and of *So They Say* (1970), a verse rendition of Luo folk-tales by L. G. Oguda K'Okoro (b. 1922), printed by what was still the East African Literature Bureau.

As to the other trend initiated by Grace Ogot, concern with the African past, it

[51] Shiraz Dossa, review in *Nexus*, 1 (1967), ii, 47.
[52] Taban lo Liyong, *The Last Word* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), pp. 78–79.
[53] T. Omara, "The Exodus," in *Short East African Plays in English*, ed. D. Cook and M. Lee (London: Heinemann Educational, 1968).

proved extremely fruitful in the sixties, partly as a way of refuting Hugh Trevor-Roper's oft-quoted remark that Africa has no history.[54] An early example is *A Calabash of Life* (1967) by Khadambi Asalache (b. 1935). This ethnographical novel set among the Luhya of Northern Kenya focuses on internecine intrigue and on fighting for chieftainship in pre-colonial days, but the theme of usurpation and redress is adorned with a tale of youthful love which does not do much to enliven the work. For, as Lennard Okola pointed out in his review,

> the trouble with most of the novels set in precolonial Africa is that very often they tend to degenerate into sociological or anthropological tracts, depending for their success on the picture they give of old Africa rather than on their artistic qualities.[55]

Certainly *A Calabash of Life* is rich in details about the structure of old Luhya society. As with any other historical romance such details are an intrinsic part of its appeal, not to say essential to the reader's understanding of the characters' motivations and values. But verisimilitude does not entail accuracy. The society depicted by Asalache is highly centralized, and this is not in agreement with the observations of such a renowned scientist as Lucy Mair, according to whom leadership among the Luhya is informal and largely based on wealth.[56] Asalache, on the contrary, ascribes the position of the chief to lineage: his hero, Shiyuka, opposes the current ruler, Dembla, not solely because he is a tyrant but because he has usurped power. This picture of the political structure should be seen as a formal literary device. Likewise, it is known that although internecine conflicts did exist among the Luhya, there was no standing army of the type described in *A Calabash of Life:* this degree of militarization is a formalization of actual Luhya practice. And the story of Shiyuka and Ayako's courtship is an idealization of traditional practice in that the eventual marriage is a romantic love-match between two people of noble blood. Five years later Miriam Were (b. 1940) writing of another Luhya community in *The Eighth Wife* (1971) showed a less idealized state of affairs. She records the problem of Murugi, the chief's sixth wife, who does not enjoy her position in a polygamous household:

> She was a mere showpiece. She sometimes tasted bitter loneliness and frustration at not being the centre of the homestead; this made her hate the old man and the wobbling old hyenas that he doted on.[57]

However Miriam Were's own modern views perhaps cloud her depiction of the polygamous household with its infighting as much as Asalache's desire to portray a noble past colours his.

In order to counter the widespread prejudice expressed by Trevor-Roper, Asalache and the various Kenyan writers who followed in his wake resorted to a strategy that has been cogently described by Thomas Hodgkin in a wider context:

[54] H. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 9.
[55] *East Africa Journal*, 5, 3 (1968), 39–40.
[56] Lucy Mair, *Primitive Government* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 66.
[57] Miriam Were, *The Eighth Wife* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), p. 35.

> Perhaps the most important, and deeply felt, aspect of the nationalist answer to the myth of African barbarism is the new stress placed on the qualities of pre-European African societies: their achievements in such fields as the plastic arts, work in gold and bronze and ivory, music and dancing, folk story and folk poetry; the complexity and depth of their religious beliefs and metaphysics; their conception of the community—as "consisting of the dead, the living and the unborn."[58]

Asalache's determination to create such a picture of a "cultured" society is exemplified in the decorous language employed by Ayako and Shiyuka during their courtship. The writer offers a very stylized picture of traditional life rather in the manner of an Anglo-Saxon epic though, in fact, the heroic tale is a common form among the Luhya.

This epic tradition and its techniques are apt to produce stereotyped characters. Shiyuka in *A Calabash of Life*, Shalimba in Miriam Were's novel and Kigaruri in L. M. Nguya's *The First Seed* (1975) are all leaders of their respective groups, brave, of high moral standing, victorious in battle, fair-minded and socially gifted. On the other hand, the appeal to a past that is significant, that does have achievements and evidence of civilization and sophistication is essential to both national and personal self-esteem. As if to lend credence to the veracity of their pictures of traditional life the narratives are interspersed with historical details, A. M. M'Imanyara in *Agony on a Hide* (1973) notes the arrival of the first missionaries and the growth of Nairobi. L. M. Nguya's novel refers to Maasai–Kikuyu wars which preceded the carve-up of Africa by the colonial powers and the demarcation and policing of new national and tribal borders. *A Calabash of Life* and *Agony on a Hide* seek to portray a firmly established community, and therefore provide a more detailed, if rather imaginative, account of social structure. But this is not always the case in what might be called the novel of pre-colonial days and J. C. Onyango-Abuje (b. 1941) in *Fire and Vengeance* (1975) provides only a partial picture of Luo society: the book relates the life story of Ojuok, a night-runner, who is the ultimate anti-hero, and since the author's concern is with this asocial protagonist's actions and beliefs, he can hardly be expected to care very much for a realistic portrayal of the tribal community: here as elsewhere, political and historical realities are subordinate to literary preoccupations. This is also apparent in certain anachronistic attitudes: in Asalache's emphasis on romantic love and the nuclear family as in Nguya's scepticism about traditional medicine and the usefulness of sacrifices, one can trace reflections of the writers' own twentieth-century perspective.[59]

It is not surprising that the most important form of this historical inspiration among the Kikuyu writers of Kenya should have been based on memories of the uprising that had led to such bloodshed in the fifties. Writing in 1971, Bernth Lindfors asserted that "the favourite subject of new Kenyan novelists is still the Mau Mau revolt".[60] In fact,

[58] Thomas Hodgkin, "Nationalism in Colonial Africa: Theories and Myths," in *Black Africa. Its People and Their Cultures Today*, ed. J. Middleton (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 372–380.

[59] L. M. Nguya, *The First Seed* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975): see especially pp. 212 and 231.

[60] Bernth Lindfors, "New Trends in West and East African Fiction," *Review of National Literatures*, 2, 2 (1971), 15–37. For background material see G. Arnold, *Kenyatta and the Politics of Kenya* (London: Dent, 1974) and B. Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1975).

the Emergency, which had first been a topic for autobiographical writing and had stirred the creative imagination of Ngugi, became an inordinately prolific source of inspiration in the late sixties when Godwin Wachira (b. 1936) published *Ordeal in the Forest* (1968); over nearly ten years, it provided material for the short stories in *Potent Ash* (1968) by Leonard Kibera (b. 1942) and his brother Samuel Kahiga (b. 1946) and for several novels: Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi* (1969), *The Land is Ours* by John Karoki (b. 1941) and *A Curse from God* (1970) by Stephen N. Ngubiah (b. 1936); the subject remained popular, for these were followed by Charles Mangua's (b. 1939) novel *A Tail in the Mouth* (1972), *My Son for My Freedom* (1973), a play by Kenneth Watene (b. 1944), *Carcase for Hounds* (1974), a novel by Meja Mwangi (b. 1948),[61] and the short stories in Ngugi's *Secret Lives*, not forgetting two plays on a hero of the anticolonial struggle: Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* (1974), and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) jointly written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo (b. 1942), now Micere Githae-Mugo.

Already in 1971, Lindfors noted that each Kikuyu novelist handled the Mau Mau motif "in a slightly different manner." The treatment of the subject became even more diversified as the corpus increased in numbers. Kenyan scholar Bethwell A. Ogot recalled that according to colonial historians, Mau Mau was largely "a conspiracy hatched out by a few power-hungry individuals, most of them Kikuyu."[62] Ironically Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* falls partly into this category, for the motivation of the protagonist, Nundu, is power, greed and bloodlust. The book recounts the fate of a group of freedom fighters who, after some initial successes, are compelled to withdraw into the mountain forests, and end up in detention. The hardships they suffer and also their own personal ambitions and weaknesses drive them either to power-seeking self-assertion or to desertion and betrayal, until they realize that the rebellion's failure should be viewed as a prelude to action of a different kind, political rather than military which will achieve independence through other, more efficient means.

Bernth Lindfors' claim that those Kenyan novels "tend to stereotype freedom fighters as courageous martyrs and Europeans as monstrous villains, thereby turning the old colonial myth of Mau Mau inside out" somewhat oversimplifies the matter. What is most striking in Wachira's novel, as in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, is the deep ambiguity in their presentation of the freedom fighters. Both exhibit frank awareness of the mixed motives underlying political action, and Wachira does not refrain from depicting the savagery to which the rebels in their desperate need were often driven towards their own people. More important, perhaps, the frightening events of the fifties seem to have cast a lasting dark shadow upon the general outlook of those Kikuyu writers who were adolescent youths when the disturbances broke out. In Ngubiah's *A Curse from God*, the Emergency is but one incident in a long chain of events which lead the hero, Karugu, to squalid poverty, near-madness, the murder of his own child, and finally to suicide. It has been preceded by other afflictions—the division of Kikuyu society into Christians and non-Christians, the introduction of a money economy, a drought followed by heavy

[61] For a discussion of Mwangi's first three novels, see Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979), pp. 307–321.

[62] B. A. Ogot, "Kenya under the British, 1895 to 1963," in *Zamani. A Survey of East African History*, ed. B. A. Ogot (Nairobi: East African Publishing House and Longman, 1968), pp. 249–294.

floods—all of which contribute to his impoverishment and his consequent failure to maintain his authority and any semblance of order in his polygamous family. For Ngubiah—as also for Mangua in *A Tail in the Mouth*—the Emergency appears to be simply requisite background material for any book with a Kikuyu setting. For Kibera it is too complex a subject to be labelled a nationalist struggle, a mental aberration, a civil war or a peasant uprising. While Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi* is the autobiographical story of a sensitive little girl recounting her response to those harsh events, in *The Land is Ours* John Karoki deals in very shaky English with the life of a government stooge whose greed and lust for power prompt him to betray his people, bringing about ultimately the disintegration of his own family. Whereas in his earlier work Ngugi had been aware of the complexities of the conflict and had noted its casualties, by the time he wrote *Petals of Blood* (1977) he had come to see it as a nationalist struggle for independence. As to Meja Mwangi, his naturalistic approach focuses on a few days in the lives of General Haraka and his men in the later stages of the war; the author makes no attempt to judge his characters whose actions take place in a confined, claustrophobic environment as cut off from usual norms of behaviour —Kikuyu or Western—as it is from the outside world.

In any work on the Emergency the key figures are the freedom fighters, the guerrillas, the terrorists. In keeping with his concentration on Nundu as a leader, Wachira presents the image of a well-organized movement. The move to the forest is part of an overall plan engineered from Nairobi. In contrast, the only connection Mwangi's General Haraka has with any headquarters is through a reluctant spy whose predecessor had spoken of an organization in Nairobi and of "the cause," but his knowledge died with him. Wachira is at pains to show Mau Mau as part of a larger historical struggle for independence from Britain and in so doing he shows it to be "a highly selective, elite organisation"—a phrase used by Barnett of the proscribed Kikuyu Central Association.[63]

Barnett describes the Mau Mau as a mass underground movement. He makes the point that with the arrest of the leaders in October 1952 leadership passed to unlinked districts. He explains that the important *Batuni* oath, administered to warriors and involving commitment to violence, was brought to Kiambu by the dispossessed from the Rift Valley. General Haraka and his group fit into this schema. *Ordeal in the Forest* and *Carcase for Hounds* show different stages of the fight—the initial individual initiation into a nationalist movement organized from Nairobi, a later stage of mass oath-takings and a spontaneous uprising in the face of growing British oppression. The oaths in *Ordeal in the Forest* are designed to build up the movement; those administered by Haraka are defensive. Both novels and the short stories of *Potent Ash* show initial "successes" of the freedom fighters—Haraka's raid on Timau, the destruction of the homeguard post in "Esther" and Nundu's attack on the police post and Cook's house. Towards the end of 1954, though, they are depicted as suffering from heavy losses, demoralized and depressed by forest life.

When Haraka is wounded the men have reached a state of impotence and hopeless-

[63] D. Barnett and K. Njama, *Mau Mau from Within* (New York: Monthly Review, 1966), p. 55.

ness. With the increase in British troop activities, saturation bombing and cuts in the links with the villages, the freedom fighters become less disciplined as Wachira's account of the break-up of Nundu's group shows. Meja Mwangi captures the inexorability of the defeat in his depiction of Haraka and his men holed up in a cave without much ammunition and bombarded by trained professional soldiers with sophisticated military equipment. Wachira, who presents a fair picture of the forest fighters, noting selfish motivation as well as individual acts of bravery, shows no such balance in his treatment of the British soldiers. Ngugi, too, has come in for similar criticism for his portrayal of Howlands. In contrast, Meja Mwangi in his more naturalistic novel individualizes the white soldiers and offers a more balanced assessment.

Ngugi and Kibera are both champions of the casualties of the war, the men who confessed to the oath, the traitors and the civilian population. In *Potent Ash* the villagers are victims. Their freedom is curtailed by identity cards and the curfew, village life is ruined by suspicion and fear, and children grow up with their feelings brutalized. Villages and families are divided by the Movement. Mburu's parents in "Esther" take opposite sides, Ngotho is at odds with Boro in *Weep Not, Child* and the civilians in *Carcase for Hounds* appear totally bewildered.

The one group universally hated are the homeguards, the collaborators, the loyalists. They are portrayed as cowards, buffoons, petty tyrants with a subservient attitude to the British and traitors to the people. The death of Haraka and the statement of Mrefu in *Ordeal in the Forest*—"We'll have to do it differently this time. Yes. Find a loftier, better, gentler way" (p. 286)—would seem to indicate that neither writer regards Mau Mau as the key factor in the struggle for independence. Meja Mwangi's detailed narrative and "slice of life" technique offer no place for a narrator who could draw back from the action and attempt to put it in perspective. Rather he follows the tone of the *Julius Caesar* quotation in the title of his novel and shows the actuality of the struggle and not the ideology. Wachira's ending, though seeming to contradict the fervour of his depiction of a righteous struggle, is, in fact, complementary to it. He ascribes the movement's failure to bickering among the leadership. It is still leadership that holds the key to the future with Mrefu's paternalistic attitude to this "confused generation."

The variety of approaches to the literary exorcism of the Mau Mau experience is exemplified in the two Kimathi plays. In their foreword, Ngugi and Micere Mugo make it clear that the play is not a naturalistic rendering of historical events but

> an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.[64]

In his four trials, Kimathi becomes a mouth-piece for, if not a symbol of, the authors' views on the various forms of oppression—imperialist, neo-colonialist, cultural,

[64] Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1977). See Chris Wanjala's review in *Kenya Historical Review*, 5, 2 (1977), 389–395.

physical—suffered by the peoples of Kenya under British rule; they portray their protagonist as confident of victory. In Watene's play the focus is on Kimathi as an individual. This rather self-consciously literary drama, with more than the odd echo of Shakespeare, explores the mind of a man beset by fears of betrayal; a man becoming more and more isolated. His is a personal, psychological drama, to which any ideology concerning the origins of Mau Mau is largely irrelevant.

Parallel with what might be called the Kenyan "historical novel"—whether dealing with the pre-colonial past or with the fighting for independence—other significant developments were taking place during the late sixties and early seventies.

With the vanishing of Makerere's educational monopoly in 1963 and the resulting decline in the influence of *Penpoint*, new literary journals were launched, which provided various outlets for creative writing and fostered the emergence of literary criticism throughout East Africa. In Kenya, *Zuka* was started in 1971 under the imprint of the Oxford University Press with the aid of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. But it was *Busara*—which had superseded *Nexus* in 1968 as the journal of the Department of English of the then University College in Nairobi—which was probably the most influential of the literary journals. Some of the poems featured in Lennard Okola's collection *Drum Beat* (1967) had previously appeared in *Nexus*. Okola writes in the introduction that "there is hardly any protest in the poems although, in many ways, East African writers have as much to protest against as anybody else." In fact the majority of the efforts are run-of-the-mill and sometimes self-consciously literary in a very Western way. The poet Jared Angira was appointed *Busara*'s editor-in-chief in 1969.

A change came with the arrival of Taban lo Liyong from Uganda on the Nairobi scene. Ezekiel Mphahlele, who had established the Chemchemi Cultural Centre some years previously, encouraged Taban who, fresh from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, put forward the idea of a University of Nairobi Writers' Workshop. Much of the work produced there went into *Busara* and into the fortnightly magazine *Currents*. Chris Wanjala took over as Chairman of the Writers' Workshop in 1969 and then gathered together two years' work from *Currents* for publication as *Faces at Crossroads* (1971). The title aptly conveys the mood of the literary world at the end of the 1960s in East Africa: on the brink of establishing itself as a distinct entity, where national differences were felt to be somewhat artificial and unimportant. The position of Nairobi as the new centre of gravity was of course strengthened as Ugandan writers, reacting to the intellectual consequences of Amin Dada's seizure of power in 1971, became attracted to the Kenyan capital in increasing numbers.

This was by no means new. The inter-territorial sense of cultural kinship which had linked anglophone writers, especially from Kenya and Uganda, during the Makerere period had been largely maintained, even though the successor states were rapidly drawing apart. In 1965, during the seminar on East Africa's cultural heritage held in Nairobi, the local literary world had been set alight by the discovery of the as yet unpublished *Song of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek from Uganda; Chris Wanjala was later to emphasize the significance and fruitfulness of such conferences as forums for critical

debate.[65] It was Okot's fellow-countryman, Taban lo Liyong who, in 1965, had raised the explosive question: "Can We Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa?"[66] This article was followed up in March 1966 with a round-table discussion in the *East Africa Journal*.[67] This debate on the alleged literary drought involved Ezekiel Mphahlele, Gerald Moore from the Extra-Mural Department of Makerere, Okot p'Bitek, then also at the same establishment, and Rajat Neogy, editor of *Transition*. While Moore pointed to the lack of published material by East Africans—only two novels by Ngugi being available at the time—Okot noted the wealth of vernacular literature in the countryside and Neogy declared that he at *Transition* was inundated with material from both aspiring and accomplished young writers, including some very experimental work by a young Ugandan: Taban lo Liyong!

Taban returned to East Africa in 1968 and, together with Ngugi and Henry Owuor Anyumba, began to agitate for change in the English Department of the University of Nairobi. In an open letter "On the Abolition of the English Department" they argued that:

> Just because for reasons of political expediency we have kept English as our official language, there is no need to substitute a study of English culture for our own. We reject the primacy of English literature and culture.
> 7. The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation, and their contribution towards understanding ourselves.
> 8. We therefore suggest:
> A. That the English Department be abolished;
> B. That a Department of African Literature and Languages be set up in its place.
> The primary duty of any literature department is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets new challenges and to investigate possible areas of development and involvement.[68]

The changes which they called for resulted in the formation of a Department of Literature with Ngugi as Chairman and a separate Department of Linguistics and African Languages. Oral and written East African literature are at the very core of the first-year syllabus of the Literature Department, together with literary criticism and Black Aesthetics. Second- and third-year study includes South and West African, European, Afro-American, Caribbean, Swahili and recently Indian Literature. The examination allows for one paper to be replaced by a piece of creative writing and there is, in addition, a very active and productive Theatre Arts course and Writers' Workshop. Nearly ten years later, Adrian Roscoe was to comment:

[65] Chris Wanjala, *The Season of Harvest* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), p. 13.
[66] Taban lo Liyong, "Can we Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa?", *East Africa Journal*, 2, 8 (1965), 5–13.
[67] E. Mphahlele *et al.*, "The Literary Drought: A Round-table Discussion," *East Africa Journal*, 2, 2 (1966), 11–15.
[68] Ngugi, *Homecoming*, p. 146.

> Whatever one's views of the debates, few would deny that Nairobi is now firmly established as the most dynamic and productive Department of Literature in East, Central and South Africa.[69]

These institutional developments stimulated an outburst of imaginative writing in English, and the new climate turned the year 1968 into something of a watershed for Kenyan and East African Literature. Chris Wanjala was later to note that "the presence of the three East African writers at the University of Nairobi's Literature Department, Ngugi, Okot and Taban lo Liyong had indirectly boosted creativity not only at the campus but in the whole country."[70] The local publishing houses,—the Government-sponsored East African Literature Bureau and the East African Publishing House under John Nottingham—were particularly keen to snap up any budding literary talent to the extent that they often laid themselves open to criticism for publishing some very undistinguished material. At the Festival of African Writing held in Nairobi in 1971 Angus Calder complained that easy publication of mediocre work in East Africa would give the area a bad literary reputation, a sentiment which was endorsed by Bahadur Tejani from Uganda in "Culture versus Literature."[71]

It is a fact that the standard of critical appraisal lagged far behind some of the imaginative work and that most books of criticism that appeared in the seventies were not written by Kenyan scholars. The first such work to be published by an East African was Taban lo Liyong's *The Last Word* (1969). This virtuoso performance is more like an autobiography or a piece of creative writing than an analysis of African literature. As the last word of which he speaks is "cultural synthesism" the author's task is not to detail but to generalize, to propound the view that the highest aim of all cultures is universal manifestation. G. A. Heron described the book as "too idiosyncratic to contribute much towards the emergence of a tradition of criticism."[72]

In 1971, a colloquium on Black Aesthetics was held at Nairobi. It resulted in the publication of two volumes by the East African Literature Bureau: *Black Aesthetics* (1973) edited by Pio Zirimu and Andrew Gurr, and *Writers in East Africa* (1974) edited by Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder. The main preoccupations of the participants did not focus on detailed criticism of already published work, but on the direction in which East African literature was going, the existence or establishment of a distinct East African voice, the nature of the writer's audience and the choice of language. Okot p'Bitek went so far as to attack any suggestion that there was a need for critical analysis, stating that

> the creative and most enjoyable human activity has been reduced by interested professors into a game played by professionals according to professional rules, for which they are paid the highest salaries in East Africa.[73]

[69] A. Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), p. 91.
[70] Wanjala, *Season of Harvest*, p. 98.
[71] Bahadur Tejani, "Culture Versus Literature," in *Writers in East Africa*, ed. Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974), pp. 132–148.
[72] George A. Heron, "Socialist Literary Criticism?," *Joliso*, 1, 1 (1973), 67–73.
[73] Okot p'Bitek, "The Crisis in the Teaching of Literature in East African Universities," in Gurr and Calder, op. cit., pp. 122–130.

Okot's view did not gain unanimous acceptance. In addition to Tejani and Calder, Ugandan poet R. C. Ntiru, writing in the *East Africa Journal* in October 1971, complained of the "glaring lack of critical writing."[74]

Two attempts were made in 1972 towards remedying this deficiency, with the publication of Ngugi's *Homecoming* and of *Literature and Society in Modern Africa* by Peter Nazareth (b. 1940), a Ugandan of Asian origin. In his collection of miscellaneous essays, speeches and reviews written at various periods during the sixties, Ngugi examines the historical and social realities that are essential to any understanding of East African literature and he looks briefly at the emergence of East African literature as well as providing more detailed studies of West African and Caribbean writers. Nazareth takes up a loose thread in the literary debate in East Africa, the notion of commitment, but like most of the participants in the debate he rather fudges the issue because of a naïve and undefined idea of commitment that shows no awareness of post-Lukacs Marxist literary criticism. Nonetheless in dealing with Ngugi he is illuminating particularly in revealing the critical set-up of which both were part. He outlines the discussions he and Ime Ikiddeh from Nigeria had with Ngugi in Leeds in 1965 and how they ruthlessly scrutinized each other's work.

However good the individual essays—and some, like that on Okello Oculi, are important—*Literature and Society*, like *Homecoming* and *The Last Word*, is a piecemeal collection and we have to wait for Adrian Roscoe's *Uhuru's Fire* (1977) for a more organic, sustained critical insight into the development of East African literature. In the meantime *Standpoints on African Literature* (1973), edited by Chris Wanjala (b. 1944), offered some interesting new angles on the subject. Of special value are Wanjala's own essay on Taban lo Liyong, a serious, though never too solemn, attempt at assessing Taban's strengths and weaknesses as a writer and a critic, and Samuel Ngugi's article on the popular lyric, in which he regards modern records as a truly popular art form, a development of the oral song tradition. David Cook's *African Literature. A Critical View* (1977) is largely a collection of earlier essays but there is an important linking factor in his analysis of the hero in modern African literature: he views him as an individualist and therefore an outsider rather than a spokesman for society. Cook does not really take into account the more recent, and increasingly common, urban-based novels which reflect a fundamental change in East African society.

Roscoe's work, *Uhuru's Fire*, being concerned with Central and Southern African literature as well, rather crams the East African section so that at times it becomes a mere list of significant writers. Roscoe carefully and sensitively analyses the development of a Song School dating from Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and draws the conclusion that "the song has been a truly seminal development and its success stems in part from its relationship to oral tradition" (p. 32). He shows its importance as a genuine East African literary phenomenon. Roscoe is particularly adept at bringing out the different styles of poets who had so far appeared in anthologies only. As regards prose writers his selection, though valuable, is far from representative. He focuses on Ngugi, Kibera and Palangyo

[74] R. C. Ntiru, "The Notion of Modernity in African Creative Writing," *East Africa Journal*, 8 (1971), 25–33.

but unfortunately, as *Uhuru's Fire* went to press before the publication of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood,* Roscoe contributes little more to our understanding of the first three novels than had already been stated by critics like Palmer, Howard and Cook.[75]

The importance of Roscoe's contribution to the establishment of a critical tradition lies in his ability to isolate trends and especially to explore the poetic mode with uncommon sensitiveness. He touches on the language debate but stands aside from that on commitment. The same is not true of Chris Wanjala's *The Season of Harvest* (1978), a "literary discussion." Here, the critic addresses himself seriously to the question, "Is African literature to be approached as a testimony of social change or is it worth publishing and studying for intellectual satisfaction?." In the works of Ngugi and the South African Alex La Guma he seems to see this conflict resolved. Of the latter he writes that he "has balanced the efficiency of his art with his intellectual and social engagement" (p. 157). Wanjala's book fires a few broadsides at critics of African literature—inevitably paternalist Western critics—but his acumen is best directed towards an analysis of the formative effect of historical and social events on the development of East African writers and writing. As a product of Nairobi University himself and an associate of Ngugi, Okot, Taban *et al.,* he is in a unique position to offer insights, particularly into the growth of literary ideas and ideology within the Literature Department and so into the constitution of a genuinely East African literature.

It was also in 1978 that a number of papers presented at an important conference on African literature held in Nairobi in 1974 reached print under the editorship of Eddah Gachukia and S. Kichamu Akivaga as the first volume of *Teaching of African Literature in Schools.* In spite of that title, the papers are far more often concerned with literature than with the methods of teaching it. Chris Wanjala features again, discussing East African poetry very briefly. While Ngugi's first three novels come in for much critical appraisal, his own introductory contribution is a significant analysis of the history of cultural imperialism in East Africa; from there he goes on to examine the role of literature in the struggle against neo-colonialism and states:

> for the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist political and economic struggle to be complete, it must also be a cultural struggle since the aim is to restore the African personality to its true human creative potentialities in history, so as to enhance the quality of life and of life-based values.[76]

Seen in this light, the teaching of African literature in schools was obviously important, since this literature largely aimed at making its readers conscious of the significance of their own past and of the realities of their present predicament. The fact that Ngugi linked in the same breath the "anti-colonial" struggle and the "anti-capitalist" struggle

[75] See notably David Cook, "A New Earth: A Study of James Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*," *East Africa Journal,* 5, 12 (1969), 13–20; the Ngugi chapter in Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), pp. 1–47; and W. J. Howard, "Themes and Development in the Novels of Ngugi", in *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature,* ed. Edgar Wright (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 95–119.

[76] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Literature and Society," in *Teaching of African Literature in Schools,* ed. E. Gachukia and S. K. Akivaga (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), p. 23.

was not solely significant of his own personal commitment: it was also emblematic of the deep connection between the Mau Mau theme which had almost become traditional in Kenyan fiction of the sixties and well into the seventies, and the new preoccupations which, at the time Ngugi was speaking, had already begun to stimulate creative writers in Kenya as they were doing in many parts of anglophone Africa.

The achievement of political independence did not bring true *Uhuru* (freedom). In *Petals of Blood* Ngugi was to interpret the nationalist struggle as only a preliminary to a more radical class struggle if the peasants and workers were to achieve true independence and control over their own lives. The disillusionment that came after the euphoria of independence produced three distinct trends in writers of the 1970s. Some preserved and indeed intensified the traditionalistic orientations of the preceding decade, contrasting, implicitly or explicitly, the fragmentation of modern Kenyan society with the cohesion of earlier tribal life. Others, taking an individualistic and intellectual stance, concentrated on the depiction of modern city life, thus creating the urban novel. Yet others, not content with a mere description of the inequalities and miseries of the new society followed the lead given by Ngugi and opted for social and political commitment.

The British administration, while it did not intend to solidify ethnic groups, did heighten tribal consciousness. P. H. Gulliver has remarked that

> Reaction against the colonial power and common defence against it, and against other new threats (e.g. European settlement, or the growth of pressures from neighbouring African people) also encouraged and sustained new tribal consciousness and alignment.[77]

This is the reaction to be found in a number of novels about contemporary ethnic communities. White settlement of the Kenya Highlands united the various subtribes of the Kikuyu through an increased feeling of solidarity which led to concerted action, culminating in Mau Mau. Such factors account not only for the peculiarities and the early emergence of the "Mau Mau novel", but also for the aggressive stance of a Charity Waciuma, whose *Daughter of Mumbi* dwells on the very foundations of Kikuyu society: its myths of creation, its conception of God, the nature of its religious practices, its social organization and its heroes.

One of the East African societies most noted for its resistance to Western values is that of the Maasai, which is depicted in *To Become a Man* (1972) by Henry Ole Kulet (b. 1946) and in Kikuyu writer Kenneth Watene's *Sunset of the Manyatta* (1974). As an outsider, the latter says little about Maasai social structure: he deals rather with a boy who "gets education" and moves out into the wider world; his description of his protagonist, Ole Kantai, tends to be cliché-ridden. Ole Kulet is more concerned with the practical day-to-day life of Leshao, who is also an educated boy. Central to his story is the concept of "moranship," but he does not simply portray romantic, ochre-smeared,

[77] *Tradition and Transition in East Africa*, ed. P. H. Gulliver (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 15.

noble warriors. He shows them intimidating the young Leshao and acting brashly as the community's police. Leshao is reluctantly circumcised to become a "moran" and Ole Kulet avoids the temptation to idealize the ceremony itself. Leshao bears the operation with fortitude but the solemn atmosphere is destroyed by the clumsiness of the circumcisor who appears to have no sense of the importance of the occasion.

Western value systems are often used to provide a contrast to traditional modes of thought and behaviour. This contrast is very pointedly brought out in Hazel Mugot's *Black Night of Quiloa* (1971), where the heroine, a girl from the coast named Hima, finds herself alone in a cold British winter, suffocating in the smog. A similar comparison is set up by the equally poetic Watene in *Sunset on the Manyatta,* where the cold of the German climate symbolizes the isolation which Ole Kantai feels. Watene's dilemma is that he wants to exalt Ole Kantai's innate Maasai nobility and at the same time illustrate his adoption of European ways without making him unsympathetic. His final weak solution is to make Ole Kantai a success in Western materialist terms while retaining such trappings of Maasai life as his name and a few token artefacts.

The decay of village mores in contemporary society is a frequent topic for younger Kenyan novelists. Ole Kulet's protagonist and his father live in a ramshackle house with a leaking roof and have to beg for food. Among the divisions in Kikuyu life presented in Ngubiah's *A Curse from God* is the family conflict resulting from the disintegration of the polygamous household. The set-up is doomed from the outset because Karugu's first wife, Wanjiru, is a Christian and cannot countenance another wife, while Muthoni, beautiful and young, resents being a second wife and objects to the hard work involved in charcoal burning. The husband cannot help being more attracted to Muthoni and so he tends to favour her. A special beer party of polygamists is convened to discuss the decline of the institution and the ensuing problems. In *Sky is the Limit* (1974) by Joshua N. Mwaura (b. 1941), wives are beaten as a matter of course and the polygamous family comes in for severe criticism. The very structure of this novel shows the utter contrast between traditional and modern life: Mwaura juxtaposes the two worlds, keeping them separate, although his protagonist, Mwangi, crosses between them. In many novels of this type, the changes are largely ascribed to Christianity (which gave women a more equal role and led to a questioning of traditional values) and to education (which changed the concept of authority and led to increased material expectations).

Alongside Christianity and Western-type education, the colonial regime also brought a money economy, which destroyed for ever the traditional subsistence economy based on agricultural village self-sufficiency, barter and occasional cattle-raiding. To the African, the obligation to pay taxes—another aspect of historical progress on which there is no putting the clock back—was a major factor underlying the need to earn money. Independence brought little change in this respect, and many novels dealing with traditional life emphasize its present-day inability to cater for the needs of men. Africans are depicted earning money by picking coffee, working as shamba and kitchen boys, selling milk, brewing and selling beer, and selling land. Ole Kulet's Leshao is forced back into tribal life by his failure to get paid employment despite some education; traditional modes of behaviour, however, are already *passé,* as he finds out when he finally takes part in a cattle raid which is intercepted by the police and ends in disaster. Mahagama,

the hero of B.P. Chahilu's *The Herdsman's Daughter* (1974) is another victim of the changing economic situation. He is fined for selling *chang'aa*, tries his luck unsuccessfully in Nairobi and then becomes a political "heavy" before ending up in prison.

Many Kenyan writers soon came to realize that Africa would never revert to pre-colonial tradition. Noting that their major focus is the modern environment, S. A. Gakwandi commented that they

> are beginning to see the limitations of seeking an understanding of modern African life through a dialogue between "ancestral" and Western values. Recent novels are tending to portray the African present as an autonomous experience, without dwelling on the conflicting elements of culture within it.[78]

Leonard Kibera was the first writer in East African to abandon such well-tried themes as traditional life, the culture clash or anti-colonial fighting, in order to concentrate on "the African present as an autonomous experience," that is to say on a realistic picture of the present-day city-dweller's condition, in *Voices in the Dark* (1970). Kibera's protagonist, Gerald Timundi, is a talkative, embittered, wise-cracking radical playwright, who is in love with the daughter of a wealthy African businessman. The novel, however, can hardly be said to exploit the possibilities of this "plot"; using Gerald as a mouthpiece, it is a vehement, sardonic denunciation of the new era, when "independence is won from the English and the French and the populace have the privilege of being bashed over the head by their own government for a change." Its structure is built on the thematic contrast between the new profiteers—wealthy black capitalists in their powerful German cars, politicians ineffectually parading their tribal fly-whisks, and cynical white expatriate experts—and the beggars who appear as a chorus in the novel and are the chief characters of Gerald's plays: the maimed, humiliated creatures, who used to be valiant forest fighters. But despite the subject matter of his plays, Gerald remains aloof from the people's plight. He, his girl friend and two of the beggars indulge in quick-witted wordplay of a Beckett-like quality, the beggars in their hopeless friendship bringing to mind Vladimir and Estragon. The attitudes and actions of the people of Etisarap (Parasite) Road are the main butt of Kibera's satire but with Gerald as the only true alternative voice—the beggars being creatures of some half-world between Gerald's imagination and brutal reality—the cutting edge of Kibera's satire is decidedly blunted. He offers no solution to the urban chaos, corruption and disparity in wealth that he portrays. He writes of the show of development and modernity in Nairobi's streets but remarks that

> One was aware, however, that even as the commercials bubbled on the surface, underneath their material struggling the streets were dark and the empty bellies did not need to reconsider. For somewhere below the progressive growth of those neon lights some ant struggled to shake the ant hill from the bottom. (p. 62)

[78] S. A. Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1977), p. 10.

But those at the top of the economic pyramid remain unmoved by this dissenting voice.

Voices in the Dark is a seminal work in Kenyan literature. In some ways it is complementary to Ngugi's novels. In the words of Adrian Roscoe, "while Ngugi still sees himself as part of a rural world, Kibera has really packed his loads and moved to the city."[79] While Ngugi employs techniques from oral tradition, centres his work on the countryside and exhibits a commitment to a socialist society, Kibera's work makes use of modern Western literary techniques such as impressionism, stream of consciousness and features associated with the Absurd. It is urban-based and individualistic in outlook. It complies with the requirements of "modernism," where in the words of George Lukacs, "lack of objectivity in the description of the outer world finds its complement in the reduction of reality to a nightmare." The book heralded many later novels and other creative works with an urban setting and an individualistic style of writing in a Western liberal intellectual tradition.

One aspect of this interest in modern life for its own sake is the unexpected flowering of what might be called the university novel, the first example of which was *Hand of Chance* (1970) published by Billy Ogana Wandera under the East African Literature Bureau's Student Book-Writing Scheme. This flimsy story of student love, whose more than two hundred pages are filled with inconsequential chatter between the characters involved, started a vogue for novels dealing with the formal, Western-style education of the hero. Their success is largely accounted for by the fact that secondary schools are a major market for prose fiction, either direct or through school sales. As a result, Wandera's story of academic and sexual success and eventual marriage was followed by a spate of similar works: *Son of Kabira* (1972) by D. Sebukima is a story of academic success and self-indulgence; Miriam Were's *The High School Gent* (1972), of academic success and gentlemanly conduct; O. Mwambungu's *Veneer of Love* (1975), of academic and sexual success.

While such "educational" novels have but slight connections with genuine intellectual problems, mention must here be made of *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (1971), a play by Ali A. Mazrui (b. 1933), who is better known as a sociologist, a critic and especially as a political scientist; in this, his only piece of creative writing, a very private and highly intellectualized discussion of Okigbo as an artist takes precedence over the larger issues raised by the Nigerian civil war.

By the late seventies, Mazrui's play was still much of an oddity on the Kenyan literary scene, and apart from the university novels, the preoccupation with modern urban life which had been initiated by Kibera was chiefly represented in novels produced by Meja Mwangi, the author of *Carcase for Hounds*. Mwangi is less sophisticated than Kibera and makes no attempt at explicit satire. His style is straight reportage. In *Kill Me Quick* (1973) and *Going Down River Road* (1976), he describes the dangers of city life for two jobless boys who go to the bad and become respectively a low-grade gangster and a low-paid manual worker. In the latter book especially, Mwangi neatly contrasts the façade of development with the reality of stagnation and even regression in the living

[79] Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire*, p. 192.

standards of the majority of the population. The story is set on a construction site where Development House is being built. As the building proceeds the author provides glimpses of the lives of the workers. He reveals the other side of development: the racial tensions, the separation of families, the pressures that lead to dependence on illicit or legal drink, on drugs and prostitutes. He reveals real poverty even among the lucky ones with jobs and he discloses the Rachman-like nature of private and council landlords. As a final irony, the next job, after Development House, is to be a tourist hotel. It is as though the first priority in the country's development is the foreign tourist. Indeed with rather heavy-handed symbolism the workers' eating-houses are razed to the ground to make way for the hotel.

These serious urban novels—to which substantial sections of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* might be linked—present a universally appalling picture of police brutality, corruption of public officials, bribery and nepotism as a way of life, pilfering, exploitation of consumers by shopkeepers who create artificial shortages, use of strong-arm tactics by politicians, large-scale drug addiction and alcoholism. The whole sordid mess is crystallized in "The City," a poem by Sam Mbure (b. 1949):

> The City like a syphilistic *[sic]* whore
> hunting madly for a beast
> to share her pains
> paints her lips and nails
> and wears make up.
>
> So men and women boast
> sons and daughters
> of a famous mother
> but they all her slaves.
>
> The stones cry not
> when walls tumble
> but men and women shake
> like reeds in the wind
> and mourn like owls.[80]

The city is depicted as a bright façade which is dangerously attractive but the people of the city are insubstantial like reeds and seem to resemble owls, the birds of death.

The shallowness of city people and life was taken up in 1971 by Charles Mangua (b. 1939) whose *Son of Woman* inaugurated a positive flood of popular literature often printed in the form of series designed to cater for the low-brow taste of the recently literate urban reader. According to Henry Chakava of Heinemann,

> the sudden upsurge in the publication of popular paperbacks in the last few years in Kenya is of a kind akin to the Nigerian Onitsha market literature of the 1950s,

[80] Sam Mbure, "The City," in *Singing with the Night*, ed. C. Wanjala (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974), p. 42.

except that the Kenyan novels are larger, maturer, more elitist and better produced.[81]

The books are much dearer than their Nigerian equivalents and so the term "popular" is somewhat inaccurate. Charles Mangua sold 10,000 copies of *Son of Woman* (1971) in six months and the follow-up, *A Tail in the Mouth* (1972), sold 15,000 copies in two months. However, only the *What a Life* series produced by Mwangi Ruheni (b. 1934) and some of the Comb Books series launched by David Maillu (b. 1939) with *Unfit for Human Consumption* (1973), achieved comparable sales figures. Neither Heinemann's "Spear" series nor Longman's "Crime series" sold either so well or so quickly. In fact, such figures compared unfavourably with those of popular fiction in Nigeria or in Ghana. The costs of book production in Kenya rose sharply during the late seventies due in large part to the doubling,—according to some estimates trebling—of the price of paper: imported books of the James Hadley Chase and Harold Robbins type were often cheaper than local works of a similar nature. Some publishers pointed to the lack of a book-buying tradition among the general public and to the unwelcoming, often tourist-orientated, image of the Nairobi bookshops to explain the disappointing sales of popular literature. It is also true that many of these pieces are not bought for keeps and so one copy tends to circulate among many people. Sales figures in this case can only give a very rough idea as to the popularity of an author or a book.

In spite of such difficulties, the popular series grew and multiplied at a remarkably fast rate in the mid-seventies. The Oxford University Press "New Fiction from Africa" series began with *Murder in Majengo* (1972), a thriller whose author Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (b. 1928), was a British woman who had married a Luo doctor. In 1973, the year when Maillu created the Comb Books before introducing such innovations as pocket-sized pamphlets, Foundation Books started its "African Leisure Library" with a collection of articles entitled *Bless the Wicked* by the editor of *Drum* magazine, P. G. Malimoto; Foundation also publish in Swahili and other vernaculars. Another local publisher, Transafrica, under its director John Nottingham, launched its "Afroromance series" with *Love and Learn* (1974) by Mary Kise; they were later to issue Grace Ogot's collection of short stories, *The Other Woman* (1976) and to start "New Writing" with *The Day the Music Died* (1978) by C. Mwagiru (b. 1952). Heinemann launched its "Spear" series in 1975 with four titles; they produced a further four in 1976,[82] when the "Longman Crime Series" published an exciting piece of fiction, *The Men from Pretoria* (1976), by Hilary Ng'weno (b. 1938), editor of the influential *Weekly Review*.

This boom, however, proved short-lived, even though at the end of the decade Macmillan were thinking of setting up a popular series aimed at the lower secondary school level: it was to be a Kenyan equivalent of their Nigerian "Pacemakers," which were on sale in Nairobi on a trial basis. But by that time there was a decided slump in the popular literature industry: Heinemann had only produced two more "Spear" books

[81] H. Chakava, "Publishing in a Multilingual Situation: the Kenya Case," *African Book Publishing Record*, 3, 2 (1977), 83–90.

[82] Examples: Magaga Alot, *A Girl Cannot Go On Laughing All the Time* (Nairobi: Spear Books, 1975) or Mwangi Gicheru, *The Ivory Merchant* (Nairobi: Spear Books, 1976).

since 1976, "Afroromance" had collapsed and "Comb Books" had virtually closed down, due in part to the banning of Maillu's works in Tanzania. While the reasons for this decline have yet to be fully investigated, they must include the comparatively high cost of books and the prejudices of a reading public that holds African writers in low esteem. A survey carried out at the time by David Maillu attempted to provide a much needed analysis of the nature and taste of the potential Kenyan readership, but the responses he received were too few to be statistically significant.

All the same, this popular literature managed to create its own distinctive idiom, colloquial, confident, resembling the journalese of *Drum* and its sister magazine *Trust*. The style is usually conversational and intimate. Dialogue plays an important part; as in Mangua's *Son of Woman*, it is frequently an amalgam of predominantly American with some British slang and a number of archaisms. The language and register are often uneven, with a tendency to sentimentality and melodrama.

Characters tend to be stereotypes. The protagonist is usually a sex-loving, beer-drinking, often broke, civil servant graduate. Other recurring types are the hypocritical Christian, the prostitute-secretary and the racist white. There are occasional exceptions such as Mwangi Gicheru's *The Ivory Merchant* (1976), which avails itself of the peculiarly East African, not to say Kenyan, problem of ivory poaching for a story with an impressive potential for adventure. Ng'weno's *The Men from Pretoria* similarly makes use of local material, in this case the South African situation and the world of a Nairobi newspaper, for an exciting story with credible, sometimes memorable characters such as Scoop, the none too efficient ace reporter.

While plot (generally of the multiple climax variety) is as a rule more important than character, traditional communal values are usually rejected if mentioned at all. None of the protagonists is upright or fired with moral convictions. Most are cynical or superficial anti-heroes like Dodge in *Son of Woman* or Dave in Magaga Alot's *A Girl Cannot Go On Laughing All the Time* (1975). They live in a hedonistic society in which drinking, having sex and accumulating wealth are the major preoccupations. The heroes are aggressively masculine, their virility being judged by a high sperm count, a large penis and the number of women they can lay and how often. There is an irresponsible attitude to sex: all the contraceptive precautions are supposed to be the woman's business. The novels are littered with unwanted pregnancies; and venereal disease is very much an occupational hazard in the pursuit of happiness.

Yet few of these novels are really pornographic. Many are curiously moral. Their sexual content is ambiguous. Maillu, for example, has many serious points to make about the state of society and *The Kommon Man*, an 850-page narrative poem whose three parts were issued as separate Comb Books (1975–1976), is at times intellectually demanding. Is the sexual content then the carrot to entice the ordinary reader to serious thought on the problems of urban life or is the philosophy an afterthought or a conscience saver? Maillu's stand is not unequivocal. He himself would say that he presents human life and relationships in their entirety and that as such the sexual element is simply a reflection of reality.

While the heroes are bent on asserting their manhood, the heroines are happily not passive, submissive creatures despite some vestiges of a Western-style romance literature

of the woman's magazine type. Though these writers are Kenyan they are, in the main, agents of a kind of cultural imperialism. They put forward a way of life, a concept of beauty and of love that are essentially Western. Obiechina in his study of popular literature in West Africa has remarked that

> in pre-colonial Africa, romantic love, whether as an autonomous experience or as a stepping-stone to marriage, was played down and subordinated to familial and community interests.[83]

In many Kenyan works romantic love becomes the main ingredient. In *Troubles* (1974) D. G. Maillu pulls out all the romantic clichés in the description of the relationship between Maiko and Delila: he is attracted to her by a mysterious force (p. 52) and "by degrees he was becoming involved in her personality" (p. 69), "but being a woman, she was too weak for a determined man" (p. 78) and so, after he has made a woman of her, "Delila lay there and hers was a new world" (p. 81).

The urban ethos as presented in the popular literature is highly westernized and individualistic. Although often gregarious, the main characters are isolated individuals for the best part of their lives, never developing permanent relationships with other human beings. The successful characters follow Western fashions. The passport to success is not always education and hard work, though. More often than not it is bribery. This, and petty crimes from pilfering office typewriters to using government vehicles on private visits, are an accepted way of life. While the corruption of high officials is stated often enough to become a commonplace, the popular writers cover up many social and political ills in that they refrain from looking into their causes or dwelling on their results. Unemployment, police brutality and poor housing conditions are mentioned in most of the novels but only as the background from which the protagonists seek to escape.

The pursuit of happiness is the over-riding theme and purpose of popular literature and much of what is described in the novels is done just for fun. Often materialism is tinged with a high degree of cynicism but this trait is never traced to its source or allowed to interfere with the protagonist's advancement. Primarily these books are for relaxation and enjoyment, and various subsidiaries of European publishers as well as local firms tried to cash in on this expanding market. On the eve of the eighties, it seemed that the local product was not as popular as foreign imports by Alistair MacLean and Harold Robbins.

The lull in popular literature was a symptom of a general literary malaise in Kenya, the most striking manifestation of which was undoubtedly Ngugi's arrest on 31 December, 1977. For while most of the writers who emerged after independence remained satisfied with nostalgic portrayals of traditional village life in its idyllic past or decaying present, or again with depicting the realities of the new westernizing, urban society, a few felt the urge to remedy the injustices and glaring inequalities that characterized independent Kenya as they did a majority of the new African states. And while this trend

[83] E. Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p. 34.

of commitment was best illustrated in Ngugi's gradual radicalization, it is of interest to note that it also inspired the country's first truly significant poet, Jared Angira (b. 1947).

In East Africa, publication of English-language poetry usually took the form of inter-territorial anthologies, beginning with David Cook's *Origin East Africa* (1965) which also contained plays and prose fiction, and with *Drum Beat: East African Poems* (1967), edited by Lennard Okola. Further anthologies appeared in the seventies,[84] but the first published collection by a single poet was Jared Angira's *Juices* (1970). The author had contributed to the first issue of *Busara* (1968), of which he had been appointed editor-in-chief in 1969. He also founded the Kenya Writers' Association. In a paper read at the Nairobi Festival of African Writing in 1971, voicing his admiration for Wole Soyinka's satirical wit at the expense of "power seekers" of all sorts, he quoted approvingly Ayi Kwei Armah's dictum to the effect that

> The main political characteristic of African leadership (and artists) since the European invasion is its inability and unwillingness to connect organically with the African people because it always wants first of all to connect with Europe and Europeans,[85]

and he stated his personal creed that

> Every artist is a dreamer, but we seek to communicate our dreams, and attempt to transform them into reality. We do not want to get lost in abstraction and ideation.[86]

Ironically his own work developing from *Juices* to *Silent Voices* (1972) and *Soft Corals* (1973) exhibits just such a direction from personal, often dream-like, poems towards a debate of ideas.

Dedicated to "the common man," *Juices* testifies to Angira's compassion and love for ordinary people. He begins with a horrific image of inhumanity:

> an eight hour old baby shouted from the
> pit latrine ... freedom of soul is foetal (p. 8)

and then draws some comfort from Marx, believing that man can change his economic and therefore social conditions. But that is not to say that the volume is unduly theoretical or didactic. It is the human aspect that Angira puts forward. He presents

[84] With the exception of David Cook and David Rubadiri (eds), *Poems from East Africa* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971), most of them appeared under the imprint of the East African Literature Bureau. They include: *Pulsations: An East African Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Arthur Kemoli (1971), *Just a Moment, God! An Anthology of Prose and Verse from East Africa*, ed. Robert Green (1970), *Faces at Crossroads: A "Currents" Anthology* (1971) and *Singing with the Night*, ed. Chris Wanjala (1974). It is significant of East African writers' indifference to political boundaries that such anthologies were all compiled, without a single exception, on an inter-territorial basis, with Kenya and Uganda supplying the greater part of the material. They are often multiracial as well, incorporating contributions by European and Asian writers.

[85] Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974, p. 173). Angira quotes from the American edition of 1972, p. 221.

[86] Jared Othieno Angira, "Experimental Writing" in Gurr and Calder, *Writers in East Africa* (1974), pp. 68–78.

vignettes of village and town life and his own feelings of deracination. He has a light touch and can deftly turn a poem on its head. In "On Market Day at Ugunja" he gives a conventional description of the delights of a village market but then in the final stanza writes:

> Cast one more look
> at the grass-walled banda
> where old men squat in usual creed
> with "otia" and "mbare"
> "kwete" and "busa"
> the "moralising" spirits of Nyanza. (p. 22)

The sideways glance reveals the current degradation of village life that turns the elders, the traditional depositaries of wisdom, into impotent drunkards.

Silent Voices also pictures struggling humanity. Angira's style has changed, though, and has become more complex, denser and more consciously literary. This fact is reflected to some degree in the number of references to and quotations from Christopher Okigbo, the poet's poet. This second collection retains a strong local, descriptive element, as in the Ramogi poems, but there is a more private concern with matters of poetry, inspiration and death. The two strains coalesce in the haunting figure of Penninah Aloo, with whom the poet cannot come to grips: whereas she used to sing

> to the rhythm
> of the millstone
> to the temperate heat
> of the fish cooking fire

she has now

> just left the bay
> where for long we stood
> and hillwards paced
> to the call of piano
> and tho' I warmed the drum
> and played with skill
> I only saw on the façade
> her footprints facing the hill (pp. 11–12)

In the manner of Okigbo, whom he admires, Angira introduces into his poetry private symbols from his own (Luo) culture and the elusiveness of Penninah Aloo stands for the poet's awareness that he is losing his foothold on a traditional way of life which is changing under the impact of Western economic, political and cultural forces.

The influence of the Nigerian poet can be felt in *Soft Corals,* too, which begins with a conscious imitation, "Singing along the palmbeach road." Like Okigbo, the Kenyan poet has built up his own private symbolism; central to this private world is Penninah Aloo, who appears in various guises, generally as an image of some sort of personal or cultural initiation. Angira's style becomes more adventurous in *Soft Corals,* with the

short line giving way to an antiphonal approach, as in "at this time." He experiments with the layout of words on the page and often relies for effect on the single word and its associations in the reader's mind.

In a poem in *Silent Voices*, "To Taban," Angira had slyly criticized the Ugandan writer Taban lo Liyong in the following terms:

> Let us talk no prose around
> For our sages talked in better lyrics
> And if no better flutes can play
> For heaven's sake lie down and sleep. (p. 53)

Yet in his next collection, *Soft Corals*, a poem ironically entitled "revelations" reproduces the Tabanic philosophy and poetic idiom:

> These poems are not solid because one can knead them
> into some shape although the ambition in them is quite
> fibrous and the dovetail is in the mind and not in the
> words though it is also in the beat and the song
>
> So let us bray on and on to whichever distance we can and
> where we come to a standstill we will lie down and sleep (p. 117)

There is surely an element of self-parody in this. Indeed *Soft Corals* does not possess the strong poetic faith and line of the previous volumes. Angira appears lost, though occasionally his intense fellow-feeling for life's casualties comes through as in "factors," a poem juxtaposing intellectual revolutionaries with the real masses, fighting, wounded and hungry, and in "the poem":

> Sex without feelings:
> What a dry poem, for even the concrete poem
> Has feelings enshrined. Sex used to be
> The most beautiful poem, opening with a vigorous
> Beat, rising on a steady crescendo
> And in the octave, cooling down on a soft lyrical note
> With adequate sentimentality for the lullaby
> But last night they were busy dismembering the poem (p. 66)

"The poem" itself deals with the human personality, as expressed in that most intimate of human acts, sexual intercourse, and with its "transmutation" and degradation into prostitution.

At the time *Soft Corals* was published in Nairobi, Angira was living in Tanzania and it was in Dar es Salaam during 1974 and 1975 that he composed the poems in his fourth collection, *Cascades* (1979), which was to appear in London. These, the writer himself warned, were

> poems about man as an individual first, who yearns to be understood before he is lumped on to the conveyor belt, the group on whose behalf philosophies are

propounded, the guinea pig in the laboratory who seeks to be heard, at least before the experiments start.

This echoed Angira's pronouncement of 1971, but with a difference. The need to communicate was still there, and so was the social commitment to man as an individual. But the mood of determination and hope seemed to have dissolved into a sense of impotence and meaninglessness. As the poet recalls in "Concerto for the Concorde" how

> Kwame asserted the dignity
> And they killed him.
> Fanon awoke the sleeping
> And Africa killed him.
> Allende tried and died
> The Americans rejoiced,

the recital of these and many other unpalatable recent events can only confirm how right and prophetic it was that

> We all wept
> At the passing of Camus
> Because like him
> We too are outsiders
> Floating in the absurd (pp. 113–118)

That such negativity was not likely to be final, but merely a passing mood, a long fit of despair, was suggested by the fact that for all his modern-type erudition, Angira remained loyal to his Luo background, even attempting, in the course of the late seventies, to write in his own mother tongue. In this, there was a striking parallel with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, with a consideration of whose evolution it is fitting that this brief account of the first two decades of Kenyan creative writing should conclude, for it is a fact that the history of Kenyan literature since independence can largely be summarized by reference to his career. Ngugi led the way in the 1960s with novels grounded in the local environment, he faced up to the issues involved in the struggle for independence and he engaged in the debate on cultural nationalism. His high level of education is typical of the majority of writers in English and in the late 1960s his writing—with its Conradian overtones—and thought—as evidenced by the essays in *Homecoming*—reflected this intellectual background. Both *A Grain of Wheat* and the papers on culture showed a growing disillusionment with the fruits of independence. In the 1970s, then, the title play in *This Time Tomorrow,* some of the stories in *Secret Lives* (1975), and especially *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), brought evidence that his ruminative exploration of the recent past and his concern with the perplexities of the inner life were giving way to increasing absorption in the acute economic and social problems with which ordinary men and women were faced in present-day Kenya and to a growing determination to place his considerable talent in the service of the social change which he felt was needed. The culmination was *Petals of Blood* (1977), where the class conflict which is the central societal pattern of post-colonial Kenya is clarified in terms of the

history of a small derelict drought-ridden community, Ilmorog, and of the developing political awareness of an individual character, Karega.

Ilmorog comes to national prominence when, driven by drought and famine, its peasant farmers and small traders make an epic trek to the capital to see their absentee M.P. He it was who initiated K.C.O., a cultural organization ostensibly aimed at keeping the tribe pure and protecting its members from the Lake people. In fact K.C.O. is a cloak for the M.P.'s business interests which, after the journey, will include Ilmorog (K.C.O.) Holdings Ltd., a company set up to develop the tourist potential of the area. On their return to Ilmorog the peasants experience a brief spell of luck with a good harvest and the fame of the local brew, Theng'eta, spreading. However, within five years the land has been split up and sold mainly to big businessmen; a tourist centre and game park have been established, preventing the herdsmen from reaching their traditional grazing grounds, and the Theng'eta brewery has been taken over by an Anglo-American multinational corporation, much to the immediate profit of black politicians and their henchmen. In the process, Ilmorog, as Eustace Palmer put it in his perceptive essay, has been transformed

> into a capitalist complex with all the attendant problems of prostitution, social inequalities and inadequate housing for the poor.[87]

It thus becomes apparent to all that the great divide is not, as had been thought, between white and black, but between those who wield power, whether white or black, and those who are subjected to it.

It is difficult to agree with Dr. Palmer that "the hero of the novel is Munira, the teacher who decides to settle in Ilmorog": he certainly belongs to the same lineage as Ngugi's earlier teacher-protagonist; he is also one of the voices through which this polyphonic epic conveys its complex message; he plays a decisive part in the action when, in a fit of religious fanaticism, he manages to have the three African directors of the brewery burnt to death, but this seems to be only his own clumsy way of breaking out of his assigned role as a passive onlooker. In the dialectic of the novel, his function is to make explicit the more negative aspects of the situation: he knows that the mainspring of power is the "monster-god," "the molten god," money; he is aware of "the gigantic deception being played on a whole people by a few who had made it, often in alliance with foreigners" (p. 106). Thinking of the moral degradation of youth, he is the one who wonders whether there was "no way of using their energies and dreams to a purpose higher than the bottle, the juke-box and sickness on a cement floor" (p. 103).

But Munira's is only one possible response to the present stage of the historical process as it affects Kenyan society. The real hero of the novel is the collective entity of Ilmorog, whose spontaneous grass-roots resistance is shaped into definite action by Karega. Like Munira, Karega is a drop-out from Siriana school, who has come to teach at Ilmorog. His activity is intellectual as well: through books and through questioning the elders, he seriously tries to understand not only how it is that independence merely

[87] Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979), p. 294.

shifted the sources of oppression into black hands, but also how the economics of the society functioned in pre-colonial, pre-industrial, pre-urban days. As Palmer mildly explains, Karega "confirms one's impression that Ngugi has been gradually leaning over to socialism as the solution to Africa's problems" (p. 302). Karega who becomes a trade union organizer, is also evidence that Ngugi is seeking self-reconciliation by re-integrating the educated man, the teacher, into the actual struggle for an egalitarian society. The attempt to save Ilmorog from the claws of capitalistic exploitation may have failed although those responsible for the forfeiture have been duly destroyed. But at the end of the book, Ngugi offers fresh hope as Joseph, the adopted brother of a crippled ex-freedom fighter, attends Siriana school as Munira and Kariga had done, and becomes involved in proposing a student-teacher-worker co-operative to run the place; further it is rumoured, as a symbol of hope and expectation, that Stanley Mathenge, a prominent Mau Mau leader, is returning from Ethiopia "to complete the war he and Kimathi started" (p. 344)—obviously not the war against whites only, but against any form of exploitation.

Symbol, emblem and image have always had a significant place in Ngugi's writings, from the splitting brought by Christianity to the two ridges of Kameno and Mukuyu in *The River Between* to the girl Wanja's having to prostitute herself, which is the nadir in the degradation of Ilmorog in *Petals of Blood.* Through the symbol of the two ridges the author could present the clash of values embodied in Kameno and Makuyu, and in Honia River the ambiguities of this conflict. In the river throbbing through the valleys were captured the creative, coherent qualities of traditional life and in Waiyaki's nightmarish vision of Nyambura being sacrificed to the river were seen the divisive, destructive, uncaring aspects of the traditionalist viewpoint. But the use of symbol and image in order to avoid the misconceptions inherent in a language belonging to a different culture has its limitations. While it was ideal for the mythic nature of *The River Between* it was unsuited to the more realistic *Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat.* In *The River Between* Ngugi aimed at an overall pattern of some clarity and not at psychological exploration of character. Consequently Waiyaki is drawn as a traditional tragic hero of mythic proportions with largeness of spirit, charismatic appeal and carefully delineated faults. The scale of *Weep Not, Child* is much smaller since the novel deals with the disintegration of a family, not an entire community. The descriptions are realistic rather than symbolic and the characterization shows greater subtlety. The uncompromising Chege and Joshua give way to the rather pathetic Ngotho and the ambiguous Jacobo. The portraits are essentially external, and Ngugi's use of italics to indicate thought shows that he is concerned about this. However, this convention is soon dropped as too cumbersome and only reappears briefly at the end of the novel as the voice of Njoroge's conscience pitilessly reminds him that he is a coward.

The problem of conveying psychological insight was resolved in *A Grain of Wheat* by confronting the reader immediately with Mugo's feelings, thoughts and dreams. The reader's opinion of Mugo is pieced together from descriptions of him by the author and by fellow-villagers as well as from his own actions, conversations and thoughts. The impression that the characters in *A Grain of Wheat* are far fuller than those of the first two novels is mostly due to the variety and number of people presented; they are largely

static, however, their personalities and ideas set with only flashbacks to indicate how they were formed. In *Petals of Blood* the characters reveal themselves in what amounts to a series of confessions; the reader also witnesses the formative events that change a person like Wanja from a giver to a taker, whose philosophy is, eat or be eaten.

The River Between and *Weep Not, Child* developed chronologically along a strong story line. *A Grain of Wheat* progressed organically by means of associated ideas. With *Petals of Blood* Ngugi returns to the technique of *Weep Not, Child* in that, although the history of Ilmorog is told with hindsight, the narration is basically chronological. It is with the effect of historical forces on the development of Ilmorog and on the four main characters that Ngugi is concerned here. The development towards *A Grain of Wheat* from the first two novels, as seen in the light of Ngugi's statement in *Homecoming*, is somewhat paradoxical. While strengthening the Kikuyu content of his language he has also developed a more Western, literary style of writing, rich in allusions and tones. While seeking to convey an African communal consciousness he uses a structure and a method of characterization that emphasise individuation. *In Petals of Blood* great heed is paid to tradition, and oral accounts of the history of Ilmorog and of Kenya are interpolated throughout the work together with songs, proverbs and fables. The story is told from the viewpoint of various inhabitants of the village thus creating a strong sense of the organic unity characteristic of the community. Its structure works through flashbacks and reminiscences which give the work true epic proportions as they embrace Africa's past as well as her present: while the time of the murder and the ensuing trial is the mid-seventies, the story of the drought, the temporary renaissance and the capitalist take-over brings us to the late sixties; the crippled ex-Mau Mau fighter's reminiscences take the reader back to the fifties, the uprising and the Emergency; this was also the time when the two teachers were at their studies; and Karega's sketchy historical research conjures up the area's pre-colonial past and somewhat idyllic prosperity.

But it is perhaps chiefly in the matter of language that *Petals of Blood* is significant for Ngugi's evolution in the late seventies. As early as 1969, addressing a UNESCO conference on a cultural policy for Africa at a time when his first three novels in English had earned him deserved recognition, Ngugi had pointed out:

> We have already seen what any colonial system does: impose its tongue on the subject races, and then downgrade the vernacular tongues of the people. By so doing they make the acquisition of their tongue a status symbol; anyone who learns it begins to despise the peasant majority and their barbaric tongues. By acquiring the thought-processes and values of his adopted tongue, he becomes alienated from the values of his mother tongue, or from the language of the masses. Language after all is a carrier of values fashioned by a people over a period of time.[88]

A desire to avoid such alienation probably accounts for the clipped, terse language of the greater part of *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*. Certainly the style of the former is not just a reflection of Njoroge's consciousness as Eustace Palmer seems to

[88] "Towards a National Culture" in *Homecoming*, p. 16.

think[89]: the same basic language is found throughout the narrative and not simply in passages written from Njoroge's viewpoint. But when dealing with the traditional Kikuyu arts of story-telling and speech-making, Ngugi's language is markedly different. This is conspicuous in *Petals of Blood,* in the various animal fables narrated by the maimed ex-freedom fighter Abdulla and in the mannered speeches of the elders of Ilmorog. In such situations the risk of contamination by foreign values is greatly reduced for the stories are told within a well-defined framework of oral tradition.[90]

In his first two novels Ngugi had reduced the English language to its basics and so achieved great clarity of expression. Later he enriched it with Kikuyu words, allusions and ideas. Sometimes he translates vernacular expressions which occasionally lose their connotations in the process. "Old man", for instance, does not convey the respect contained in Swahili *mzee* or in Kikuyu *gethuuri.* In *A Grain of Wheat* Ngugi tends to let expressions stand in the original Kikuyu and this is even more frequent in *Petals of Blood,* whose Kikuyu flavour is further strengthened by the many interpolated songs, modern and traditional. This sometimes results in bewilderment for the native English speaker who cannot always deduce the meaning from the context. Munira recalls:

> you might say that our petty lives and their fears and crises took place against a background of tremendous changes and troubles, as can be seen by the names given to the age-sets between Nyabani and Hitira: Mwomboko ... Karanji, Boti, Ngunga, Muthuu, Ng'aragu Ya Mianga, Bamiti, Gicina Bangi, Cugini—Mburaki. (p. 27)

The passage evinces Ngugi's increased confidence and his refusal to pander to a Western readership, but the significance of these remembrances of colonial Kenya's history is inevitably lost on most of his readers outside East Africa.

Conversely, it might be argued that Ngugi's intended reader is the hybrid creature whom Ali Mazrui wittily called the "Afro-Saxon": the existence of a popular literature offers ample evidence that Kenya can now boast a large, commercially significant readership for books in the English language. The facts, however, point in an entirely different direction. For after he had finished *Petals of Blood* at Yalta in 1975, Ngugi embarked on a new venture and undertook to contribute to the creation of a modern literature in his own language, Kikuyu, with *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I choose), a vernacular play which he wrote and staged in the late seventies, in cooperation with peasants and workers at the Kamitiithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre at Limuru. If the play was banned, although its criticism of Kenyan society was, if anything, less outspoken than in the writer's English works, and if Ngugi himself was detained for one year and afterwards victimized in various ways including the loss of his post as Professor of Literature at the University of Nairobi, this could only be because communicating with the ordinary citizens in their own language made him considerably more subversive and dangerous than he could have been with the sole help of the alien élite language. After being released, he declared that the play had "showed me the way along which I should have been travelling on these past seventeen years of

[89] Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972) p. 4.
[90] See also *Weep Not, Child,* p. 27.

my writing career."[91] He also conveyed his intention to write his next novel, *Devil on the Cross,* which he had started before his detention, in Kikuyu and to have it published in his own language before Heinemann issued an English translation.

Like Angira's as yet unpublished experiments in Dholuo, Ngugi's resorting to the theatre and to the Kikuyu language is emblematic of a quandary that was deeply felt by many writers throughout black Africa after two decades of independence. This was the dilemma of either using the colonizers' language, with its potentialities for international fame and substantial royalties, but also with the attending failure to convey their message to the majority of their own countrymen, or resorting to their own mother-tongue, thus remaining unknown to the outside world, but integrating with what is conventionally called "the masses", that is the ordinary men and women, the semi-literate peasants and urban workers, voicing their hopes and expectations, their frustration and disillusionment, above all helping them to become fully aware of their own predicament and the reasons behind it, and so, perhaps, to unite and organize and act more efficiently for more justice and humaneness.

In April 1980, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's new novel, *Caitaani mutharaba-ini* was published in his native Kikuyu as he had adapted it while in prison from the English original. But it was still uncertain when—or indeed whether—the writer himself would be reinstated in his University post.

[91] Interview in *The Weekly Review,* (5 January 1979), 30–32.

George Heron

3. UGANDA

In a conflict-ridden continent perhaps no other country has undergone the degree of sudden disruption of intellectual life that Uganda suffered in the seventies. In the early 1960s, Uganda appeared to have many advantages for the development of a stable intellectual community. In Makerere it had one of the two oldest University institutions in the new anglophone African countries, and there was a sound educational system with a good administration to support and feed it. Its Ganda heartland, home of the largest ethnic group in the country, had managed to keep its traditional political system largely intact during the colonial period. Regrettably, this continuity of authority in the centre was not reflected at the periphery. The northern regions in particular had suffered a period of slave-raiding, ivory trading and cattle theft on an enormous scale in the nineteenth century and the colonial period witnessed the gradual displacement of traditional forms of authority which were already weakened by the chaos that had gone before. The independence settlement did not succeed in controlling this imbalance: the *Kabaka* (king) of Buganda was President and Milton Obote, a northerner and leader of a radical political party was Prime Minister, but that alliance was unstable and broke down in 1964 when Obote used the predominantly northern army to arrest the *Kabaka*. The army cowed the Ganda opposition with considerable brutality, thus providing one pretext for Idi Amin Dada's coup of 1971 and some of the means for Amin's far more comprehensive reign of terror. Though that coup was initially non-violent, it was later followed by arrests and massacres of potential opponents, at first within the army, but later encompassing prominent people from all walks of life. As this wave of terror gained momentum very many educated people fled the country and the educational system suffered enormously. Many Ugandan writers, like other prominent Ugandans, have spent years in exile.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Makerere was the only University institution in the East African Community area and was therefore open equally to students from all three countries. This multinational character was reflected in the English Departement's creative writing magazine *Penpoint* launched in 1958, and in the anthology of writing, *Origin East Africa* (1965),[92] which was largely based on *Penpoint*. Kikuyu students from Kenya were the most numerous among the contributors to this anthology. In the mid-

[92] *Origin East Africa*, ed. David Cook (London: Heinemann Educational, 1965).

1960s the Colleges in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam became University institutions, and *Penpoint* and its successor *Dhana*, launched in 1971, soon became more specifically Ugandan in character. Makerere's prominence was recognized by the fact that a writers' conference was held there in 1962, and was attended by many West and South African anglophone writers whose presence stimulated their less experienced East African counterparts. Similarly, by 1965, the Makerere Travelling Theatre was presenting original short plays in a number of languages in many parts of Kenya and Uganda.[93] Parallel to these activities at Makerere was the development of traditional dance performances particularly by the Heartbeat of Africa troupe in Kampala, but also in dance festivals at provincial centres, including Gulu in northern Uganda, where Okot p'Bitek was working. In 1966, these activities reached some kind of fruition in that *Song of Lawino* was published and Okot p'Bitek moved to Kampala to direct the Uganda Cultural Centre; movements for the development of a Ugandan theatre combining traditional dance and the new University tradition began to gather momentum. However, at the end of 1967 Okot was dismissed, presumably because of his rudeness to politicians in *Song of Lawino* and elsewhere, and went into exile in Kenya.

Ganda writers and directors continued to produce excellent work in the theatre in both Luganda and English.[94] There was a flourishing popular theatre in the vernacular language, whose leader was Byron Kawadwa, a dynamic writer, director, producer and administrator, who was brutally murdered by Amin's soldiery in 1977; the most prominent playwright in English was Robert Serumaga and in 1972, Margaret Macpherson could talk of them "moving towards a synthesis" of élite and popular traditions and "developing a particularly Ugandan approach which could be very exciting."[95] After Kawadwa's "disappearance," Serumaga persisted doggedly in experimenting with a number of semi-professional groups to try to create a viable Ugandan theatrical tradition. Until the mid 1970s Makerere and its Literature Department remained a significant centre for the stimulation of creative writing, but in the ensuing years many people like David Cook and David Rubadiri, who had helped to stimulate creative writing, left the place. Some writers like the Goan Peter Nazareth and the Lang'o Okello Oculi left under evident political pressure, whilst others like Seruma, Ntiru or Ruganda, sought work in Nairobi for less obvious reasons, which may involve personal or political considerations.[96] A number of writers continued to live and work in Uganda.

In the mid-1960s the gap between the experiences of the northern communities and the Ganda experience was reflected in the contrast between Acoli poet Okot p'Bitek's impassioned defence of threatened traditions in *Song of Lawino* and Barbara Kimenye's tranquil description of the continuity of Ganda village life in the stories she collected

[93] Many of them were collected in *Short East African Plays in English*, ed. David Cook and Miles Lee (London: Heinemann Educational, 1968).

[94] On the history of theatrical activity in Uganda, see Andrew Horn, "*Uhuru* to Amin: The Golden Age of Theatre in Uganda," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 19, 1 (1978), 22–49.

[95] Margaret Macpherson, "Plays and People; An Examination of Three Ugandan Dramatists: Byron Kawadwa, John Ruganda and Robert Serumaga," paper presented to the Makerere Golden Jubilee Writers' Workshop, University of Nairobi, December, 1972, p. 4. Ironically, this Makerere Jubilee was celebrated in Nairobi because of political difficulties in holding it in Kampala.

[96] In the late seventies, all three of them were working for publishing companies.

in *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966).[97] Okot's poem inspired imitation by other northern Ugandan writers in tone and subject matter as well as form, and other Baganda, like Kimenye, reflected the stability of village life in their works. Writers who responded to the political violence of either Obote's regime or Amin's tended to come closer together in theme and tone whichever part of Uganda they came from. In the 1970s a largely apolitical tradition of slick urban fiction writing grew up, closely linked to the similar tradition in Kenya but perhaps reflecting an even greater interest in sexual themes than its Kenyan counterpart. The prolific Taban lo Liyong remained isolated from most of these trends, commenting usually on general African ills (or personal ones) rather than relating his work specifically to Uganda. At the close of the decade, the fate of Ugandan writing was as uncertain as every other aspect of Ugandan life, as all were awaiting the opportunity to come together again and rebuild.

The most obvious innovations in the poems of Okot p'Bitek (1931—1982) are formal ones. His four long poems *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* (1970) "Song of Prisoner" and "Song of Malaya" (published as *Two Songs,* 1971) are clearly distinct from prose narratives or lyric poetry, the basic forms used by earlier East African writers. They are extended discursive dramatic monologues based on a shallow and inconsistent fiction, which have no close analogies in contemporary European poetry. Though there are no poetic forms longer than a brief song in Acoli oral literature, Okot's "Songs" derive many of their techniques from Acoli oral poetry, especially their systematic structural use of apostrophe. This rhetorical framework also controls the tone of the poems, modulating it between the gentle persuasion of parts of *Song of Lawino,* the hysterical abuse of *Song of Ocol* and the sarcastic mockery of "Song of Malaya". *Song of Lawino* was written originally in Acoli, and the creation of the peculiar blend of fictional and rhetorical elements of the "Song" form appears to have been an unplanned consequence of its repeated revision and extension and ultimate translation. Although the later poems were written only in English, the rhetorical framework of the "Song" form was retained, though the associated use of traditional epithets in *Song of Lawino* disappeared and the proverbial language of that poem was replaced by the use of colloquial urban East African English. The shallow and conventional fictional outlines that lie behind each of the "Songs" provide an opportunity for a literature overtly concerned with conflicting ideas, which appears to have appealed more to an East African audience than the fuller fictional disguises for ideas of the conventional Western novel.

Song of Lawino is the complaint of an Acoli peasant woman with no schooling against her University-educated husband, Ocol, who has abandoned Acoli traditions for Western ways, keeps a westernized mistress and is seeking by neglect and verbal abuse to persuade Lawino to change her ways of doing everything from decorating her body and dancing to cooking and coping with disease. Lawino is the fullest and most complex

[97] These first pieces of Ugandan creative writing to reach book form were issued by the Nairobi branch of the Oxford University Press. Actually, this set a pattern: almost the entirety of the Ugandan literary output has been printed in Nairobi, either by the local branches of O. U. P., Heinemann and, to a small extent, Longmans, or under the imprint of local firms, especially the East African Literature Bureau and the East African Publishing House.

of Okot's characters in the mixture of jealousy and outraged respect for tradition that motivates her "Song," but over-concentration on her marital problems distracts from Okot's essential concern with ideas in conflict. Ngugi wa Thiong'o explains this:

> A few critics have reacted against what they see as [Lawino's] jealousy-motivated defence of every aspect of tradition. They thus turn the fundamental opposition between two value-systems into a mere personal quarrel between Lawino and her husband. We must in fact see the class basis of her attack: Lawino is the voice of the peasantry and her ridicule and scorn is aimed at the class basis of Ocol's behaviour.[98]

The period of rewriting and expansion of *Song of Lawino* (1956—1966) coincided with the period of rapid growth and accession to power of the Acoli Western-educated élite. Murmurs against the odd behaviour and growing status of this group are reflected in Okot's Acoli-language novel *Lak Tar* (1953)[99] and in the early Acoli version of *Song of Lawino*. The published poem reflects the far more strident sense of grievance of the peasantry in the mid-1960s after the political ineptitude of the élite had become clear.

In the published poem, Lawino repeats the grievances expressed in the earlier poem about food and cooking, dances, clothes and hair-styles. But these matters are now placed next to an attack on the weaknesses of Ocol as a politician and thereby become a part of a diagnosis of the roots of Uganda's political malaise. The gulf of understanding between Ocol and Lawino reflects the gulf of understanding between Ocol and his peasant constituents; he harangues them in much the way he harangues Lawino and they understand less of what he says. It is he rather than Lawino who is concerned with the superficial. He recognizes his duty to transform Ugandan society, but not by making it produce more wealth. Instead he wants to make it into an exact replica of Western society: identical in eating habits, fashions, games, dances, etc. In all these matters, Lawino's "Song" is defensive, complaining not of Ocol's manners, but of his intolerance of hers, and patiently explaining how her own ways are perfectly workable. Because of this intolerance Ocol has not earned the respect of those he is supposed to lead, indeed he has not sought their respect, but is frankly contemptuous of them. On the other hand he is frantic to earn the recognition of his mentors, his political superiors. Since they equally lack any strategy to increase Uganda's wealth, and share his obsession with the material surface of the Western way of life, this makes him, in effect, "a dog of the white man."[100] Lawino links this behaviour with the resentment of earlier generations against militant new missionary converts and, through her description of the Catholic Evening Speakers' Class, suggests how missionary education alienated the likes of Ocol from his fellow-villagers and thereby made him impotent as their leader:

> ... all our young men
> Were finished in the forest,

[98] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 75.

[99] Okot p'Bitek, *Lak tar miyo kinyero wi lobo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1953). The title is an Acoli proverb meaning "Our teeth are white, that's why we laugh at the sorrows of the world."

[100] *Song of Lawino*, p. 204.

Their manhood was finished
In the class-rooms,
Their testicles
Were smashed
With large books![101]

Okot makes no attempt to be fair to Ocol: sufficient praise-songs for the new leadership or balanced and sympathetic accounts of their dilemma exist; the writer is more concerned to disturb their complacency and make them think again. *Song of Ocol* therefore serves chiefly to confirm Lawino's account of Ocol, though one or two of Ocol's attacks on African traditions are disturbing enough to be an effective reply to Lawino. The fiction of the marriage relationship between Lawino and Ocol is of little significance in this poem; Ocol seems to be facing many other accusers as well as Lawino. The strongest impression we have of him is that he is a man of power: early in the poem he assumes the authority to destroy all the paraphernalia of Lawino's way of life and near the end of the poem the image of Ocol the politician becomes the dominant one. His political manifesto confirms Lawino's view of him. It is concerned with culture, not with the use of resources; it involves the wholesale destruction of all that he considers "primitive" and its replacement with the modern European. Ocol also tries to justify his position of privilege and authority against the whispering and muttering of the common people: they should not begrudge him his "token reward", a town house, a large farm and a Mercedes car. They must accept the distance he has placed between them:

Have lions
Begun to eat grass,
To lie down with lambs
And to play games with antelopes?
Can a leopardess
Suckle a piglet?[102]

There is a slight shift of emphasis here in the concentration on the misappropriation of wealth rather than the contempt for local culture, and in the hints of a violent threat to Ocol's continuation in power. Okot's hopes for the redemption of the leadership by persuasion were lower in 1969 than in 1966.[103]

According to David Rubadiri an "explosion" in East African writing "came with Okot p'Bitek's publication of *Song of Lawino*". Okot read parts of the unpublished poem at a conference in Nairobi and received an immediate offer of publication. Other people

[101] Ibid., p. 208.
[102] *Song of Ocol*, p. 63.
[103] All issues connected with Okot p'Bitek's poems are more fully discussed in G. A. Heron, *The Poetry of Okot p'Bitek* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976). For later scholarship, however, see Dominic Masaru, "Okot p'Bitek and Religion," *Afer*, 17 (1975), 281–289; three informative articles contributed to *World Literature Written in English* 16 (1977): Samuel O. Asein, "Okot p'Bitek, Literature and the Cultural Revolution in East Africa" 7–24; Bernth Lindfors, "An Interview with Okot p'Bitek" 281–299 and „A Checklist of Works by and about Okot p'Bitek" 300–303; Laura Tanna, "Notes towards a Reading of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*," *African Studies Association of the West Indies Bulletin*, 8 (1977), 18–31; and George Heron, "Okot p'Bitek and the Elite in African Writing," *Literary Half-Yearly* 19, 1 (1978), 66–93.

"realised they had been sitting on important literary material...which...could now easily be used to express something bigger...than what had traditionally been encouraged."[104] The most pregnant result of the success of *Song of Lawino* was the fact that it encouraged a variety of later experiments in both poetry and prose. However, the two writers who have been most obviously influenced by Okot's work are Okello Oculi (b. 1942) from the neighbouring Lang'o community, and Joseph Buruga (b. 1942) a Kakwa, also from northern Uganda. Okello Oculi has called himself "a disciple of Okot"[105] and Buruga would presumably also accept that label, since his poem *The Abandoned Hut* (1969) is an extremely close copy of *Song of Lawino* in form, language and subject matter. Buruga has reversed the roles of the partners: an uneducated peasant man, Mediye, complains against an educated former girl-friend, Basia. This reversal of roles makes for a far less plausible situation since the relationship between the two lovers had been a juvenile one, and it is difficult to see why Basia now bothers to argue with Mediye since she has so many new urban men friends and all her other activities take place in town. Mediye's complaint is not about the political behaviour of the new élite in general, but specifically about the manners and beliefs of liberated urban women. He is an unbending opponent of women's liberation in any form, even fearing that electricity may make women lazy. Because of the imitativeness of form and narrowness in the scope of the argument, *The Abandoned Hut* did not repeat the popular success of *Song of Lawino*.[106]

Okello Oculi has published two book-length works, one long poem *Orphan* (1968) and one novel *Prostitute* (1968). Both of them have been influenced by the "Song" form, but Okello Oculi was far more inventive in the innovations he introduced than was Buruga. His works also include comments on at least as wide a range of social issues as Okot's. However, they lack the simple central dramatic confrontations between strong personalities that tie together the ideas in Okot's poems, and his clumsy use of language also drastically reduces their impact. There are eleven monologues in *Orphan*. The first is that of the orphan himself, sitting alone at a crossroads in the centre of his village and lamenting the death of his mother and his subsequent loneliness, the other ten are the commentaries on the orphan's plight by those who pass by and see him. The characters say little about each other, and the few accounts of the orphan's life that they give, though not contradictory, do not readily tie together. As he has explained,[107] Okello is more concerned with the symbolic implications of the orphan's plight than with fictional detail. The child represents Africa, betrayed and abandoned by the generation who were seduced by the false delights of Western capitalism. The poem is a bitter catalogue of the evils of that system and an appeal to Africans to "resurrect the manness worship cult/Of your Ancestors" (p. 101).

Rosa, the prostitute in Okello's other novel, is similarly a combination of individualised character and symbol, but the fiction of her life is much fuller and far more

[104] David Rubadiri, "The Development of Writing in East Africa" in *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. C. Heywood (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971), pp. 150–151.

[105] Laura Tanna and Marti Mueller, "Interview with Okello Oculi" in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed. G. D. Killam (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), p. 130.

[106] For a more detailed discussion see G. A. Heron, "The Spear That I Trust," unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1976.

[107] Tanna and Mueller in Killam (ed.), op. cit., pp. 134–135.

important to the meaning of the novel. The evils of capitalist urbanization in Africa are represented by the plight of this young girl who was offered as a bribe by a village politician to a political leader and then abandoned in the town where prostitution is the only occupation open to her. Though the novel begins in the third person, most of it is an internal monologue, in prose and verse, by Rosa. She recounts incidents of both her life as a prostitute and her life as a village girl and comments on the things she sees around her in the town, from her customers to cars and the way they influence people's behaviour. Okello's strongest asset as a writer is his sensitivity to pain and suffering in all living things, his biggest problem is the unalleviated gloom and pessimism that this sensitiveness induces. Both Okello and Rosa are passive victims, defeated before their first appearance before us and lacking even the fruitless defiant energy of Okot's vagrant prisoner (in his poem "Song of Prisoner"). Memories of a happier past and evocations of a better future both equally lack conviction: all Okello's characters inhabit a blighted wasteland of unlimited selfishness which he tells us is a law of capitalism but makes us feel is a law of nature.[108]

One refreshing fact about the "Song" school of poets, in contrast with their immediate predecessors in West Africa, is that, although they all have a University background, they are not the products of the training of an English Department, as most of the West Africans were. They do not show the results of strong influences of twentieth-century English poets, nor an awareness of the particular ambience of the craft of poetry in contemporary English literary circles. An interesting exception is Richard Ntiru (b. 1946). This poet from Kigezi in South West Uganda has not tried to follow the "Song" tradition. His first published collection of poetry, *Tensions* (1971), received considerable critical acclaim. He *is* the product of a Literature Department education and his work shows many signs of it.[109] Like Okigbo, Ntiru consciously echoes a variety of English poets from Blake to Eliot; he also echoes his immediate predecessors amongst African poets, like Okigbo himself and Okello Oculi. Ntiru does not always absorb these literary echoes into his own individual style as well as Okigbo does; they sometimes appear to be literary exercices rather than mature poems. Nevertheless, the accuracy with which he assumes others' styles shows remarkable control of register, and in the best of these imitative poems, he does express his own emotions effectively. Probably because the intellectual climate in Uganda after Obote's "Common Man's Charter" was much more politically aware than it had been in Nigeria a decade earlier, Ntiru's poetry has always been far more public than, for example, Okigbo's "chamber" works. Ntiru's poem "at the crossroads" makes considerable use of allusion to Okigbo's "Heavens-gate", but Ntiru's persona assumes a somewhat different attitude from that of Okigbo's returning prodigal, who identifies and glorifies the roles of poet and priest of a village cult. In this poem, Ntiru seeks the help of a "Virgin Watchmaid" to restore to him his lost innocence. He wishes he had the courage to throw off the hypocrisies of public life so as to pursue that private vision, but he does not, in fact, pursue it:

[108] For a more detailed discussion see Heron, "The Spear That I Trust."

[109] Roscoe very fully illustrates this, though I think he misses the increasing command exhibited in some of the later poems in *Tensions* and therefore dismisses Ntiru's potential too readily. See Adrian Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature: East to South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 107–113.

Had I the nerve
to peel off my public skin
and silently slough off the premeditated phrase

I'd desert my desert boots
and on barefoot, on forgotten path
retrace the milk drops of my leaked vessel
along the call of the rousing bird (p. 63).

This poem is not a prelude to a prolonged search for perfection to win acceptance from the "Watchmaid". In many poems, as in this one, Ntiru attacks the masquerade of public life, but rarely does he even consider the specific role of the poet.

Nevertheless, there is something "poetic" in his sensibility, something borrowed in the quality of his angst. He and Okello Oculi both write about the corruption of contemporary Ugandan life and the grotesque situations it engenders, but whereas Okello involves us closely in the sufferings of the participants, Ntiru detaches us from them and makes us observers. What he communicates is not the pain of those who suffer, but the poet's pain that these things are so. He is at his most detached when he generalizes about the contemporary human condition as in many of the longer poems.[110] He communicates experience far more directly when he dramatizes a particular confrontation, as in "at the old homestead."[111] The ironic mockery of the defeat of genuine human feeling by the veils of convention is Ntiru's most common theme, but some of his best poems are more positive. The poem "morning arrows," addressed to Okello Oculi, asks Okello to teach not only the "realities" of the hard urban present, but also "the art of renewal" (pp. 69–71). "Ojukwu's prayer" expresses forcefully the defiance of the human spirit in face of the destruction of its identity: "We are better dead than living without a shadow" (p. 57) "first rains" and "the happiness of a mother" both celebrate the snatching of new life from the drought of death:

At the secret hour when beans germinate
the familiar walls watched her face
poised between a smile and a grimace
and heard her scream, half commanding, half requesting:
let me hear his cry and so die! (pp. 87–89)

If Ntiru can "slough off the premeditated phrase" of fashionable gloom he will make an even better poet. He has much of the technical equipment to become a very good one indeed.

The remarkable continuity of Ganda social and political traditions into the 1960s in contrast with those of other regions of Uganda and Kenya is reflected in the relatively peaceful resolution of social conflicts in the villages described in much Ganda writing.

[110] For example "whispers of the wind," ibid., pp. 11–14; "chorus of public men," pp. 19–22; "the secret of the skeleton," pp. 43–50.

[111] *Tensions*, p. 27. See also "the function," p. 23; "introduction," pp. 25–26; "Virgin Madre," pp. 29–30; "modena," pp. 31–32; "the latest defector," p. 32.

The two contributions of Elvania Zirimu (b. 1938) to *Origin East Africa*, her story "The Hen and the Groundnuts" and her play "Keeping up with the Mukasas,"[112] with their domestic concerns are in marked contrast to the Kikuyu contributors' tense awareness of the disruption of rural life by missionary activity and land alienation. Her later play, "Family Spear,"[113] describes the conflicts arising from defiance of tradition by the young, but again contains these conflicts within the family. The hero, Muweesi, is determined to bring his new bride home and have her respect his family. Once home, however, he is jealous of the attentions she pays to others, particularly his father, who, according to tradition, should "break the ground" for his son. He regretfully decides to take his bride away. Elvania Zirimu's ability to write natural, apparently inconsequential, dialogue which yet carries a complex dramatic situation is remarkable in Ugandan theatre. "Family Spear" is a well constructed play which implies much more than it explicitly says about the slow erosion of family ties, which has emptied the homestead of all members of the younger generation.

Barbara Kimenye in her two collections of stories *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966) and Davis Sebukima (b. 1943) in *A Son of Kabira* (1969) both describe isolated, self-sufficient and conservative Ganda villages that have absorbed the slow social changes of the colonial period without the kind of traumas described by Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the one hand or Okot p'Bitek on the other. Most of the women of Kalasanda are sufficiently isolated from contemporary fashions to be deceived by a wig,[114] yet many of the men travel fairly regularly to Mengo and Kampala, and some eventually go to England.[115] The religious and political conflicts that are described are shown to be containable. The snobs of the pitifully small Kalasanda Mothers' Union determine to destroy the village's sacred tree, but they are on their own; their husbands, the village headmaster and the Ggombolola Chief all prefer to let Christianity and traditional religion continue their sleepy compromise.[116] The Ggombolola Chief is suspect in many people's eyes because he was given his position on the strength of his Oxford education rather than his family background, and the village gossip, Nnantondo, challenges him when he attempts to deal with a case of witchcraft.[117] In the sharpness of her tongue and her love of tradition, Nnantondo has a lot in common with Lawino, but the Ggombolola Chief has a big advantage over his Acoli counterpart, the local politician Ocol. Ocol's authority comes from treaties signed in faraway Kampala or London, but the Ggombolola Chief derives his from the unquestionably legitimate Kabaka in nearby Mengo. An offer of a visit to the palace silences Nnantondo.[118] Barbara Kimenye sustains our interest not only by her excellent sense of character but also by her ability to create lively comic situations and to keep a story's ending unpredictable to the very last minute. The limitation of her work as a contribution to the nascent

[112] *Origin East Africa*, pp. 137–151.
[113] *African Theatre*, ed. Gwyneth Henderson (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 109–129.
[114] See the story "Private Enterprise," *Kalasanda Revisited*, p. 25.
[115] See the story "Licensed to Drive," ibid., pp. 96–110.
[116] See the story "The Battle of the Sacred Tree," ibid., pp. 39–52.
[117] *Kalasanda*, p. 9.
[118] Ibid., pp. 26–27.

national literature is that it is so clearly written for outsiders.[119] She also manifests a slight sense of condescension: this mild comedy directed almost exclusively at the pretension of rural folk tends in the end to belittle them, however lovable they may be.

The novels and stories of Davis Sebukima between them cover a wide range of experience from the quietness of a Ganda village to political violence in the 1960s, but it is as a chronicler of rural life that he has been most successful. His description of village life in *A Son of Kabira* is strongly reminiscent of Barbara Kimenye: there is the same gentle satire and the same slightly patronizing affection, and Kabira village comes to life just as fully as does Kalasanda. Most of the episodes that recreate village life occur as flash-backs from the time the villagers await the return of the Chief's son, Lukuza, from his studies in Britain. The gradual unfolding of the new relationship between the contemptuous Lukuza and the suspicious villagers, which follows his triumphal return is abruptly interrupted when Sebukima reveals Lukuza's plan for a co-operative farm. Thereafter a different level of satire is introduced in the implied condemnation of government jobs which do not help development and in Lukuza's wastefulness in spending the co-operative's profits in a night club. These parts of the novel are much less clearly realized, as Sebukima gallops with evident haste through the two or three years till the co-operative collapses. He was perhaps aiming at a much more serious satirical novel hinted at in these later episodes, but was distracted by his delight in recreating Ganda village life. The result is the best novel of that type in Ugandan writing.

The Outcasts (1971) by Bonnie Lubega (b. 1930) is perhaps equally successful in some of its vignettes of village life, but is a slighter work and therefore gives a less concrete impression of the community it describes. Karekyezi and his family look after the herds of the men of the Baganda village of Kayonga in return for a share of the milk. Villagers and herdsmen are mutually contemptuous of each other and Karekyezi cheats his oppressors by taking new-born calves for his own private herd until, at the end of the novel, he triumphantly departs. In recreating the atmosphere of everyday life the novel is successful, though the excessive emphasis on the filth in Karekyezi's compound projects a rather distant view of the main character. A beer party and a village council evoke the status-consciousness of the villagers; the myth he retells and the conversations between Karekyezi and his cows show how cattle are the kernel of the herders' culture. However, the novel is very static. Karekyezi's private herd has already been built up when the novel begins and the villagers' argument on how to treat the herders comes to nothing in the end. More episodes from Karekyezi's life or a more complex plot would have increased the impact of the novel.

But the portrayal of village life was not a preserve for Ganda writers only. It inspired at least two novelists who, like Ntiru, originated in the south-western part of the country. Whereas Lubega's *The Outcasts* suffered from spare episodes and rudimentary plot, Tumusiime-Rushedge's *The Bull's Horn* (1972) tends to the opposite extreme of describing too many episodes because of his use of the archetypal "Golden Fleece" plot. Paul Mugi eats up learning with consummate ease and progresses inevitably from village school via secondary school, Makerere, Oxford and Indiana towards a pros-

[119] As the introduction to the second collection so frankly indicates; see *Kalasanda Revisited*, pp. 9–14.

perous future. Family and village life are described in full and these episodes are the most memorable since too many different friendships at school are briefly reported for any sense of a community of Paul's peers to be created. Paul's experiences of racism in Britain embitter him a little, but these events are hastily covered and certainly do not lead him to question the validity of the "Golden Fleece" or the rightness of the prosperity it brings. The novel is vigorously written and bursting with incident, but would have benefited from a more careful selection of episodes.

Godfrey Kalimugogo is a very prolific novelist who has taken some time to find a fictional mode that he can master. His foreword to his third novel, *Trials and Tribulations in Sandu's Home,* implies his own awareness of the weaknesses of his earlier work[120] when he talks of "the affliction of arcadian romances" from which he has escaped. His two earlier novels have themes which are potentially of epic proportions. *The Pulse of the Woods* (1974), for example, describes the migration of a village and its resettlement in virgin forest. An early white settler sets up an experimental farm nearby and attempts to take over the lands of the natives to enlarge his experiment but is rebuffed. Here is, potentially, the Ugandan version of White's *Tree of Man,* but it is a total failure because the hero is actually shown to overcome far too few obstacles. Instead of describing a prolonged succession of battles against wild nature, Kalimugogo narrates very few incidents and attempts to magnify them by highly repetitive dialogue or internal monologue. Thus little real action is made to occupy a lot of space, and the result is tedious and unconvincing. His work also lacks the virtues of a far less ambitious novel of rural life like *The Outcasts* because the dialogue is abstract and there is insufficient detail in both visual description and the portrayal of social relationship. *Trials and Tribulations in Sandu's Home* (1976) is an urban domestic comedy dealing with the three-cornered contest for more beer and more liver and kidney pie between small shop-keeper Sandu, his wife and their teenage son. Each steals food and drink from the shop and takes it to his own private cubby-hole for consumption. In this novel we have a clear sense of place, of the layout of both house and town, and the dialogue is less repetitive and solemn and far more convincing. The successive episodes are sufficiently varied to maintain our interest and the arrest of the son provides a suitable comic climax. The novel is less ambitious, but more successful than Kalimugogo's earlier fiction.

The shock that Obote's treatment of the *Kabaka* and the Ganda opposition administered to Ganda life was felt very deeply by the novelist and dramatist Robert Serumaga (b. 1939). His first three works, *A Play*[121] (first performance, 1967), the novel *Return to the Shadows* (1969) and the play *The Elephants* (1971), all describe characters in a twilight world on the verge of insanity as a result of violence done to their loved ones. According to Margaret Macpherson *A Play* is "an attempt at symbolic drama arising out of [Serumaga's] own perturbation at the 1966 crisis"[122] but, as she also noted, the symbolism is unclear and the play is closer to the grotesques of absurd drama. *Return*

[120] The stories *Dare to Die,* (1972) and the novels *The Pulse of the Woods* and *Pilgrimage to Nowhere* (both 1974), all published in Nairobi, by the East African Literature Bureau.
[121] Published in *Majangwa and a Play* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974).
[122] Macpherson, op. cit., p. 14.

to the Shadows also makes use of absurd situations in a manner more familiar on stage. In both works a supernatural apparition charges a cynical, middle-class man with evasion of reality and starts him on a quest to understand the truth about himself. The hero suffers a succession of grotesque experiences which interrupt and confuse his efforts to explain to himself his place in life. *A Play* is set in Mutimukulu's bedroom on the first anniversary of his wife's death. A disembodied head arouses him and calls him to account for himself, and two other mysterious characters stay with him for most of the night compelling him to discuss the morality of his past conduct. This discussion is repeatedly interrupted by the appearance of his wife and two friends, both of whom have also been dead a year. Mutimukulu's efforts to understand their presence eventually lead him to compel them to die again, leaving him mourning the new death of his wife as dawn breaks. The eerie nature of some of the action is likely to be theatrically effective, and the dialogue administers some of the shocks to conventional vision that are the aim of Absurdist Theatre, but the vagueness of the situation means that the play's political context is lost, though it may have been clear to the audience at its first production.

Return to the Shadows is more specific about the context of the hero's sufferings. It is set in a country in which a succession of aimless coups have released so much arbitrary violence that no citizen can feel secure. The lawyer and businessman, Joe Musizi, had the illusion of security with his practised "coup drill" of escape to his country house, but in the latest coup his town house is broken into and he is beaten up. While unconscious he sees "the shadows" from beyond the grave, who challenge him to emulate their frankness and achieve "the concurrence of the interior and exterior of man" (p. 93). The next day his escape to his country house is interrupted by soldiers who commandeer his car and he goes instead to his mother's home where he finds that soldiers have killed his cousins and raped his mother. On the way back to town his servant, who has travelled with him, is taken away for "interrogation." Parallel to Musizi's experience is that of Katende, once a swaggering bully in Joe's school and now the small-time gangster who leads the invasion of Joe's home, disguised as a sergeant. His wife is shot in the market place by genuine soldiers and a member of his gang lynched by the mob on the spot because of his fake military uniform. Joe Musizi wanders through this nightmare landscape trying to puzzle out, with the aid of quotations from Spinoza and Kant, how these things came to be. After his servant's disappearance, Joe falls into argument with a fellow-intellectual, Moses; the two of them tear each other's cynical disguises to shreds; they arrive at a new understanding of their common failings, but remain as impotent as ever. The novel is unnecessarily obscure: Serumaga plays about with the sequence of time in the early chapters in an arbitrarily complex way, and the intellectualism of Joe's internal monologue is very irritating. Also Joe has far too high an opinion of the extra sensitivity his intellectual ability is supposed to give him; we could take his talk with Moses about revolution more seriously if he were not so evidently contemptuous of the common man. On the other hand, *Return to the Shadows* gives concrete cause for the fears vaguely expressed in *A Play*. Its numerous illustrations of arbitrary violence are the most memorable parts of the novel and recreate as nothing else does the insecurity of daily life under a regime which makes use of the terrorizing power of an ill-disciplined soldiery.

In its evocation of mindless brutality and of the complete helplessness of victims of political instability, Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Prisoner" has much in common with *Return to the Shadows*, reflecting a growing sense of fear and anguish as the sixties wore on. The main character in the poem is a vagrant who has been bodyguard to a politician, is under arrest following a political assassination and is being tortured. The true assassin and a disgraced Government Minister are in nearby cells and he overhears them. Unlike the other "Songs," the poem does not reverberate conflicting sets of ideas since the vagrant, uprooted from the village home he remembers, has no clear world-view but lives from moment to moment, a victim of the social change that created the urban poor and led to violent squabbles between those in power. Those he shouts at most are his guards and torturers and they are characterized by silence and violent action, not by argument. Nevertheless, by introducing us to the prison through the vagrant and not a character like Joe Musizi, Okot maintains the same focus of sympathy on the underprivileged as in his earlier poems. The Minister has no more idea than the vagrant of the causes of the chaos in the country, and moves very quickly from delusions that his fame will protect him to surrender to his lust for dancing and forgetfulness. Okot has shown how the blunt instruments of arrest and torture have broken off the dialogue between the ruler and the ruled of the earlier poems and rendered constructive political action impossible for the time being. Nevertheless, what positive values there are in the poem are associated with the clan way of life in the countryside, which Lawino celebrated and the vagrant so vividly remembers.

In *The Elephants*, Serumaga re-states the personal dilemmas of those who have suffered the consequences of political violence, but looks at them from a greater distance and largely contains them within the conventions of naturalistic drama. Maurice, a refugee from a neighbouring country, is living with David, a University research fellow who witnessed as a child the death of his mother during troubles in his own country. David intercepts the news of the death of Maurice's parents and conceals it from Maurice by himself writing letters purporting to come from them. He also pretends that his own parents are alive. A crisis comes when Maurice decides to marry Jenny, an American girl, and determines to go to see his parents to tell them. Jenny compels David to tell Maurice the truth, but the disclosure shatters the delicate balance of David's sanity. Serumaga tightly controls the prolonged dialogue between David and Jenny, revealing and withholding information without obscurity and building up and diffusing tension skilfully. All the characterization is convincing, particularly the presentation of David with his dependence on his apparently paternal relationship with Maurice. In *A Play*, Serumaga had attempted to show the world through the eyes of a man on the verge of insanity, at severe risk of losing the audience in the resultant confusion; in *The Elephants* we see a similar man from the outside, but the occasional hints of his own private nightmare make a stronger impression because we understand its cause so much better. The extremely intellectual dialogue has disappeared from his style along with obscurity of action, but this remains theatre about and for an élite, with little to offer a popular audience.

It was in *Majangwa* (first performance 1971) that Serumaga found a popular dramatic idiom for the theatre of lurid effects and hazy symbolism that he had attempted

in *A Play*. His success was mainly due to his use of local tales and dances. The eponymous protagonist, a worn-out drummer-entertainer, and his wife Nakarijja pause to rest on their hopeless journey in search of fresh audiences to perform to or fresh things to do. They have been reduced by their poverty and by Majangwa's declining skills to performing the sexual act in public, and Nakarijja remembers that shame bitterly, as well as her unfulfilled longing for a child. Majangwa tries to cover up his impotence in increasingly elaborate fantasies which in the end focus on death. Dance, mime and role play, as well as judicious use of changes of pace and tone, make this a play of movement and varied action, and Majangwa's dilemma as he tries to interpret his decline in life from the time he performed in Court to this lonely place on the edge of death, represents the break-up and decadence of the society he served. Majangwa and Nakarijja are very memorable characters, and Serumaga's control of language and theatrical effects is much improved.

Serumaga has been described as a man of "extraordinary entrepreneurial ability".[123] Play-writing is only one of his many activities, which also included acting and the production of his own works by his own Theatre Limited-Abafumu Company. His experimental spirit was even more in evidence in his next play, *Renga Moi* (first performance 1972), where the English language is used only by a narrator-diviner who directs and comments on the action, while dances and songs from four of the ethnic groups of the country are shaped "into a kind of dramatic form through which to express a feeling of deep unease at the violence beneath the skin of twentieth century Uganda."[124] At the same time it is, in the words of Andrew Horn, "an attempt to broaden the ethnic base of *Majangwa* and to reach into the non-verbal expressionism of African ritual, as perhaps sifted through the techniques of Grotowski and Julian Beck". *Renga Moi* does not seem to have been printed. According to Horn's account,

> it is based on an Acholi myth, from northern Uganda, in which the warrior chief of the village of the seven hills must choose between defending his people from an armed attack and completing the ceremony which will preserve the lives of his newly born twins. He leads his villagers into battle and sees his children sacrificed to propitiate demonic spirits, only to find that upon returning home after successfully staying off the attackers, the villagers decline all responsibility for the death of the twins.[125]

Another Ganda playwright who reflects the political troubles of the late 1960s is John Ruganda (b. 1941). His play *The Burdens*[126] (1972) is haunted by the memory of a political arrest. Ruganda's play lacks the grotesques of *A Play* and is easier to follow, but its initially naturalistic presentation is extended by the use of the fantasy of role play. Wamala, a former Cabinet Minister recently released from detention, is unable to accept his new impoverishment and drinks and gossips his life away while his family suffers.

[123] Horn, op. cit., p. 27.
[124] Macpherson, op. cit., p. 17.
[125] Horn, op. cit., p. 33
[126] See Ellen Kitonga, *A Study Guide to John Ruganda's Play*, The Burdens (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1977) and A. N. Parasuram, *Guide to John Ruganda:* The Burdens (Madras: Minerva, 1977).

After a particularly stressful day, his wife loses control of herself and kills him. Despite a tendency to slightly long-winded dialogue, Ruganda evokes the atmosphere in a home where members of a family have become burdens to each other but tells us little of the situation that caused their woes. The play contains many theatrically effective confrontations, for example the battle between husband and wife for their son's respect, the assumption by the wife of the role of the rich man mocking Wamala or the mother's attempt to hide the murder from bewildered son and daughter. However these scenes hide the fairly superficial characterization and the paucity of new insights into Wamala's situation. Particularly in the last scene, which extracts the last ounce of pathos out of the fatherless children's slow realization of what their mother has done, Ruganda seems to be taking an easy way out. *Black Mamba* (first performance October 1972, printed 1973) is a satirical farce. During the absence of the Professor's wife his houseboy invites his own wife to town to sleep with the Professor and earn in one night as much as he earns in a month. The Professor's bright student, Odiambo, is taking part in a Government drive to rid the town of prostitution and inevitably finds the Professor out. There is good caricature in the portrayal of the forceful, self-confident Professor and of the houseboy's wife, who is so quickly persuaded to overcome her initial repugnance at her husband's demands by the new way of life she begins to enjoy; however, the play's development is rather too obvious and the issues it raises in connection with prostitution are superficial.

Davis Sebukima's gloomy melodrama in the novel *The Half-Brothers* (1974) is in very pronounced contrast to the light satire of *A Son of Kabira,* reflecting his response to a changed political atmosphere. Sebukima again mixes satirical modes, but in this case he does not fully succeed with any of them. The novel begins in the village, but its focus on only one family prevents the creation of a sense of community that Sebukima had achieved in his earlier novel. Much of the action concerns the hard-drinking, sexually licentious life-style of the urban rich, but Sebukima has not adopted the slick urban writer's narrative style that breathes life into this kind of activity. The novel satirizes contemporary politics, but the roots of power rivalry are so narrowed by the focus on one family that political life is trivialised beyond reasonable satirical licence and Sebukima makes no valid political comment. The action of the novel is melodramatic in the extreme, and perhaps its major virtue is the creation of suspense in the cat and mouse game the half-brothers play in the second half of the novel. Kikawa and his younger half-brother, Kigere, have the same mother, but different fathers. Kigere's father resents the son by his wife's previous marriage and does all he can to hurt him. The faultless Kikawa outdoes the lazy Kigere in school and obtains a senior civil servant's post on merit. Kigere drifts into pre-independence politics simply because he is too lazy to work, and, by a series of coincidences, climbs to the dizzy heights of second-in-command in the independence government, in charge of the ministry where Kikawa employed. From that position he resolves to make Kikawa suffer slowly for all the grievances created by his success at school, and the rest of the novel describes the manœuvres that lead to Kikawa's imprisonment and Kigere's assassination by a younger brother who is not satisfied with the pace of his preferment.

It was inevitable that general political instability in the country, its exacerbating

impact on the tensions inherent in a multi-racial society and the usually tragic consequences of this on personal relationships and destinies should have been of major concern to writers issuing from the Asian community of Uganda, a relatively small group whose position was ambivalent from the time of independence and became impossible in the early 1970s. Ugandan Asian writers have all been concerned with that ambivalence, seeking to create acceptance for themselves as Uganda grew or, as that dream became an absurd one, bewailing the tragedy of their non-acceptance and analysing its causes.

Inter-racial marriage is a symbol of acceptance of which Bahadur Tejani (b. 1942) makes use in *Day After Tomorrow* (1971). His Asian hero and African heroine succeed in overcoming the obstacles to their love affair, but the title which sets the events in a hoped-for future clearly invites scepticism as to the likelihood of a happy ending. In the radio play *Beyond the Line*[127] (recorded, June 1971), Laban Erapu (b. 1944) explores the same theme in a much more ambivalent way. His Goan heroine, Brenda, believes in interracial marriage in principle, but not in practice for herself. In another radio play *Sweet Scum of Freedom*[128] (recorded, April, 1972), Jagjit Singh (b. 1949) accepts the inevitability of the rupture. Because of their cultural exclusiveness and sexual hypocrisy and because of the greed and ruthlessness of African politicians, the Asian men he describes can form relationships only with African prostitutes. Keval spends the last night before his departure to England with a prostitute he knows well; intruding into their conversation are radio reports on the speeches of Dr. Ebongo, scourge of Asians, prostitutes and other anti-social elements, recently wounded in a night club brawl. The play's criticisms of both communities are strongly expressed but finely balanced: every time Keval is moved to rage by Dr. Ebongo, a very little prodding from his girl friend restores his sense of balance and induces an impulsive counter-attack on his own community, very much in character for the edgy young man.

In the novel *In a Brown Mantle* (1972), Peter Nazareth (b. 1940) also accepts the inevitability of exile for many Ugandan-born Goans. He places their dilemma alongside what is the most serious attempt in Ugandan prose fiction to describe the political processes of the immediate independence period as well as their consequences. Like Ralph Singh in West Indian writer Naipaul's *Mimic Men* (1967), Deo D'Souza looks back from the loneliness of permanent exile, but whereas for Singh politics was only one episode in life, for Deo it was the central experience. Deo was attracted by the anti-colonialist Goan politician, Pius Cota, in neighbouring Azingwe, and when the future Prime Minister, Robert Kyeyune offered him a post in his party, Deo accepted. Kyeyune gained power at independence by allying himself with the corrupt Gombe Kukwayo, and Gombe's racial resentment led to Deo's exclusion from political office. Deo watched the increasing corruption of Gombe and others, but Kyeyune refused to believe his reports, leaving him the choice to martyr himself by a public fight, as Pius Cota did, or make enough from bribes to run away. He chose the latter. Now, in exile, he reads of an

[127] In *Nine African Plays for Radio*, ed. Gwyneth Henderson and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 127–144.

[128] In *African Theatre*, ed. Gwyneth Henderson (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973) pp. 35–51.

attempt to assassinate Kyeyune. Nazareth takes the idealism of pre-independence nationalism far more seriously than did Sebukima in *The Half-Brothers,* but his description of the growth of political parties and their slide from idealism to corruption is still unconvincing, partly because his other subject, the position of Asians (specifically Goans) in East Africa, detracts from the fullnes of the description. Deo admires Kyeyune until the end, but it is difficult to see why. From his first meeting with Deo, in his bar-room arguments, he always hedges on serious issues. With the crowd he has charisma, but when in power he is too weak to use that charisma to fight for his beliefs. The only other African politician described, Gombe, does not slide into corruption, but is a greedy villain from the start. In constrast, the Goan politicians Pius Cota and Deo are angelic in their spirit of self-sacrifice, and Deo's eventual lapse is very sympathetically explained. The vignettes of Goan life, though they occupy much less space, give a more concrete impression of a community's dilemma than the description of the actions of African politicians. Nazareth has not achieved the extremely difficult taks of transcending the cultural barriers within East African society, but he has faced some of the major issues in recent Ugandan history more squarely than other Ugandan writers of prose fiction.

Partly because some Ugandan writers live in Kenya and partly because of the ease of communication between the two countries, some literary fashions have been common to both. One such fashion which is dramatically different from the rural tales of Kimenye or Grace Ogot or the Conradian fiction of Ngugi is the slick, fast-moving novel, usually in an urban setting. Most novels of rural life attempt to create a sense of social stability, of a community that considers its actions carefully according to a tried and tested code, that resists change and moves only very slowly. In contrast, many East African novels of the 1970s suggest social instability by their description of rapid and violent action and by the violence of their language. The characters are free of any restraining code of conduct and are ruled primarily by their lusty appetite for life and their boundless curiosity. The narrator, either a first-person hero narrator, or one closely identifying with the hero, suggests their aggression and indiscipline by his own comments to the reader and his tendency to intrude and digress. The beginning of *The People's Bachelor* (1972) by Austin Bukenya (b. 1944), is representative of the style:

> "Note the symbolic sexual significance of the broomstick in this scene."
>
> There is something very peculiar about the way Britishers pronounce their *u,* especially in the word *Sexual.* Perhaps it was this peculiar sound in Senior Lecturer John O'Goat's utterance that brought Mutwe's mind back from Lisa's heaving breast, where it had followed his wandering eyes in a most unacademic, embittered sexual orgy.
>
> Lisa was an absurdly beautiful girl, I mean, that kind of artistic perfection which makes you suspect that the gentleman who manufactured these goods is given to occasional fits of showing off his skill....Mutwe and his two Academics Anonymous colleagues...had...nicknamed her the "Virgin," an entirely wrong label for what the mere sight of Lisa made you desire and imagine. (p. 7)

The narrator intrudes his opinions on British pronunciation and on the Creator in a very conversational manner, even using the first person "I mean," and then links these comments by implication to the thoughts of his hero Mutwe. There is the mildly blasphemous, rather self-conscious, wit of the reference to "the gentleman who manufactured these goods" and we have immediately been propelled into the most important subject of all, sex, whilst racial differences, perhaps the second most important, have been mentioned in passing.

One of the first East African novels to use rapid and violent action and a variety of sexual experiences to comment on racial relationships was *The Experience* (1970) by Henry Kimbugwe, a Ganda writer who signs himself Eneriko Seruma (b. 1944). The story relates how Tom Miti, after a fight with his father, goes to live in the house of his white friend, Ian Turner. After a time, one of Ian's friends arranges for him to study in the States. Tom is deported from America in the middle of his course, completely embittered by his experience of white racism, and returns to Ian's house. Ian snatches Mary Katembe, a Ganda girl, from Tom, casually offering his white girl, Sarah, in exchange, but Tom rudely rebuffs the humiliated Sarah. Seruma's points about the illusions surrounding relationships between white and black men in neo-colonial Africa are lucidly made. Ian's servant kills Tom's neighbour whilst driving Ian's car, and Ian is foolish enough to come to commiserate. Tom has to drive him away:

> "Your car has killed this man. *You're a* muzungu. Whatever gave you the idea you can share our grief? Do you want to commit suicide?" (p. 23)

Tom is still dazzled by the affluent ease of white people's lives and the apparent warmth of their casual friendships, and only after his "experience" does he see the exploitative nature of Ian's interest in Africans. His recognition of reality is then contrasted with the illusions of Mary Katembe, the latest recruit into Ian Turner's world. *The Experience* did not have the popular success the Kenyan Charles Mangua's novel *Son of Woman* was to enjoy a year later perhaps because the causes of Tom Miti's bitterness *are* as remote as Seruma suggests from the attitudes of the untravelled East African and because that bitterness has too crushing an effect on Tom's zest for life, an essential characteristic of the neo-picaresque hero. Also, Seruma is sometimes rather heavy-handed, particularly in the extreme egotism Ian Turner displays after Tom's return from America: he is not the same character as in the early part of the novel; seen through new eyes, he is far less generous and outgoing.

Since the publication of Seruma's novel, the description of sexual activities in East African fiction has frequently been far more explicit than in earlier works, and sex has had an important place in many novels and stories, including Seruma's own stories, collected in *The Heart Seller* (1971). Ugandan writers have explored the sexual cultures of the different racial groups in Uganda and the consequences of sexual affairs between people of different races. Students who travel find whites in their own countries to be inadequate performers,[129] often with perverse sexual tastes.[130] Expatriate whites are

[129] As in Omunjakko Nakibimbiri, *The Sobbing Sounds* (Uganda: Longman, 1975), pp. 111–112. Discussed further below.

[130] As in *The Experience*, pp. 85–87.

unhappy with their marriages, fascinated by Africans, and exploitative and rapacious in their relationships with them.[131] The Asian writers Tejani, Singh and Nazareth describe the conflict between inhibitions and sexual fascination in Asians' relationships with Africans, and Seruma describes the same conflict in his story "The Goan Girl."[132] Nazareth contrasts his Goan hero's hesitation towards the life of hard-drinking and hard-whoring that his African political friends introduce him to with their own uninhibited sensuality.[133] Most of the African writers emphasize a similar freedom from inhibition.[134] In "Song of Malaya," the shortest and slightest of his "Songs", Okot p'Bitek uses a prostitute[135] as a spokesman for views about sexual culture in Africa which amplify and explain the cultural contrasts implicit in Ugandan fiction. Okot believes that guilt about sexual desire was introduced into Christian thought by St. Paul and into Africa by Christian missionaries. On his behalf, the *malaya* attacks all obstacles to the fulfilment of sexual desire, including venereal disease; she concentrates her attention on the hypocrites who attack her profession because of their false morality to which they themselves fail to conform; she celebrates the overwhelming power of the sexual drive and the pleasure of its fulfilment.

The two Ungandan novels with the loosest structure and the most intrusive narrator are Bukenya's *The People's Bachelor*, and *The Sobbing Sounds* (1975) by a Ganda writer who uses the pseudonym of Omunjakko Nakibimbiri. The former gives us an undergraduate's eye view of the East African world. Two major experiences in Mutwe's life are held loosely together, along with a number of general descriptions of campus life: Mutwe's girl friend, Lisa, is stolen from him by the white lecturer, John O'Goat, and fails her exams as a result of the emotional disturbance; Mutwe participates in a student strike and then observes the resultant posturing of the Head of State, the disproportionate police violence and the closure of the campus. Through Mutwe's eyes, Bukenya gives us a series of well-realized observations of campus life and a number of excellent caricatures: of expatriate lecturers, of the image-conscious Vice-Chancellor and of the "fatherly" Head of State. Mutwe and his fellow "Academics Anonymous" give no quarter to anyone, particularly not their fellow-students, who gossip and fornicate their way through University with contemptible triviality. The novel is marred more by this "holier than thou" attitude than by its looseness of structure. The strike and the affair of Lisa are both taken too seriously because they are given too shallow a context in the life of nation and individual. It is a pity that Bukenya did not deflate the intellectual pretensions of the Academics Anonymous with the precision with which he deflated everyone else, but he has a good eye for significant detail and a good ear for the right phrasing in caricature.

Most novels that describe sexual experiences do so in relation to other aspects of life, but *The Sobbing Sounds* is nothing else than a celebration of the sexual arts of the

[131] As is Ian Turner in *The Experience* in his relationship with Mary Katembe. Also see the behaviour of John O'Goat and Sir Nathaniel Barry in *The People's Bachelor*.

[132] *The Heart Seller* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), pp. 78–82.

[133] See *In a Brown Mantle*, pp. 46–56.

[134] The failure of the student Mutwe to consummate his relationship with Lisa in *The People's Bachelor* is a strange exception in this respect.

[135] "Malaya" is the Swahili for prostitute and is sometimes used in East African English.

Baganda. The "sobbing sounds" are the shouts and cries a Ganda woman utters during intercourse. The first-person narrator, Kabaliga, overhears them repeatedly by spying on his brother and his teachers, and eventually succeeds in causing them himself, thus finding what is to be his major occupation in life. The manœuvres of his teachers and himself to arrange assignations with others' wives and daughters cause endless comic embarrassments, but we are left in little doubt that it was worth it. Nakibimbiri is well in control of his anecdotal, digressive style, and the incidents are varied, but his single-minded concentration on one subject eventually palls, and the novel's ending is disappointing since we see so little of the adult Kabaliga.

But the seventies also witnessed the fast growth and maturation of a considerably more arresting literary figure, a worthy rival to his fellow Acoli Okot p'Bitek. A number of factors in the life of Taban lo Liyong (b. 1938) isolated him from literary events within Uganda and helped to create his idiosyncratic, iconoclastic style. Taban's family emigrated from the Southern Sudan to northern Uganda, and he claims to have had an uncomfortable childhood as a result of this immigrant status. He had his higher education in the U. S., not Britain, which would have been more fashionable. He followed an eccentric academic path, starting as a student of political science, switching to English and then doing an M. A. in Creative Writing at the famed University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. On his return to East Africa, he was refused a job in Makerere, as a result, he believes, of dubious political manoeuvring. He therefore became an exile in Nairobi for personal reasons in 1968, that is, a few years before the bulk of Ugandan political exiles came to join him. He is the most prolific of Ugandan writers, though he attracts relatively little critical comment because of the idiosyncrasies of his work. Between 1969 and 1973 he published eight book-length works: a collection of essays, *The Last Word* (1969) which contains autobiographical material and literary and social commentary; a collection of oral pieces from Lwo communities, *Eating Chiefs* (1970); two collections of short stories, *Fixions* (1969) and *The Uniformed Man* (1971); two collections of poetry, *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* (1971) and *Another Nigger Dead* (1972); a collection of autobiographical "meditations," *Meditations in Limbo* (1970) and *Thirteen Offensives against Our Enenmies* (1973) which includes essays and poetry. As Taban has resorted to a variety of publishers, including the East African Literature Bureau, the East African Publishing House, Heinemann, and even Equatorial Publishers, Ltd., the order of publication of his books is no decisive indication of the order in which the various pieces were written. The author generously warns his critics against making false assumptions in this respect. My speculations about the chronology of the writings depend partly on the evidence of prior magazine publication and partly on guesswork from the work's content.

At all events, the variety of the genres Taban has practised is one symptom of his search for a form that reflects what he calls the "fractured" nature of modern man's view of the world. In the Preface to *The Uniformed Man*, which was apparently written in 1967, he explains that past societies could draw on a unified cosmology, which enabled their artists to create unified works of art. Now, however, these cosmologies have been

destroyed, and the honest contemporary writer must reflect the fragmentary nature of man's contemporary world view:

> What we can write legitimately are fragments, sentences, words. Never a paragraph. Nor a story. Nor a tragedy. If we venture to write a paragraph, a story, a tragedy, a poem, we can only succeed in putting together collages....Epigrams, yes; parables, yes; comics, vignettes, yes; torsos, yes; incompletes, of course. Larger works? Collect more Canterbury Tales, more Decamerons...all stories centred on particularities; nothing general, complete, or whole. (p. xi)

This fragmentary literature will not be based on the presentation of consistent and elaborate fictions, it will be a literature of ideas:

> the importance of thoughts, ideas, rather than of art should be our primary concern....Instead of writing a story solely for the purposes of emotive satisfaction, we should strew every bit of the paper with thoughts which cannot be ignored for the story; arrest every wedding-feast guest with philosophy instead of a fantasy about an albatross. (p. xiii)

Taban's experiments in various genres can usually be seen as attempts to devise ways of presenting a literature of ideas through a succession of arresting fragments.

As much of the material in *The Last Word, Fixions* and *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* was written before his return from America, Taban was experimenting from the beginning with the three genres of essay, story and poem. The contrast between *Fixions* and *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* suggests that he was faced with a curious dilemma: whilst he is a fluent and relaxed writer of prose, he is evidently clumsy and uncertain in his use of verse.[136] On the other hand, through his stories, he singularly fails to convey any serious idea which seems important to him, whilst the poems express again and again all the concerns that trouble him in the essays in *The Last Word*. Some of the stories in *Fixions* are essentially collections of fictional fragments strung together as a series of digressions from an initial fictional situation,[137] and the technique of fragmentation by digression is used again in both *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs*[138] and *The Uniformed Man*,[139] where the digressions are often discursive rather than fictional and therefore communicate Taban's ideas directly to the audience. However, the technique of digression is a constant irritant to the reader: it produces works of anarchic formlessness which are rarely a success. Taban clearly needed other means to paste together his collages of arresting ideas.

On his return to East Africa Taban's first post was a Tutorial Fellowship in the Cultural Division of the Institute of Development Studies, where he did work on Lwo oral literature. *Eating Chiefs* is a product of that research. The writer presents oral material in a "transmuted" form, which makes it very difficult to estimate the relation-

[136] This clumsiness is discussed and illustrated by Roscoe, op. cit., pp. 116ff.
[137] For example "Tombe Gworong's Own Story," pp. 26–29.
[138] For example in "An Excerpt from an Essay on Uneven Ribs: A Prelude," pp. 41–51.
[139] For example "Herolette," *The Uniformed Man*, pp. 5–15, 58–69.

ship of the "bits and pieces" to their oral originals, but most of the pieces are written in a form of verse which is very different from the bulk of the poetry in *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* and similar in some respects to much oral verse. The writing is often paratactic: sequences of clauses are presented without the linking words that would indicate grammatical or logical relationship; extensive use is made of various forms of parallelism, the repetition of certain words or sentence patterns replacing grammatical subordination as a means of holding the writing together. *Eating Chiefs* is an interesting work with some fine pieces that reward careful study; it has been very much underestimated, possibly partly because of the unfamiliarity of the verse style, but chiefly because of the absence of adequate linking explanatory material to relate the different pieces historically to one another.

Eating Chiefs is also important because of its influence on Taban's later poetry and prose. The prose in *Meditations in Limbo* is paratactic; it makes some use of parallelism, and the style is well suited to the mixture of biographical narrative and wide-ranging speculation of the work:

> Helen Westeastian is a confluence of East and West. Bless the Americans for their ugliness. They never go to a place but stir up troubles among other peoples and themselves. In the fifties, a General by the name of Eisenhower saw it fit to fight a senseless war in Korea.
>
> An army private called Henrick enlisted, or was drafted, and shipped off to Korea with his good wife. They stuck to birth control. Or thought they did.
>
> Henrick went to shoot down Northern Koreans in the jungles. His wife went to bed with their good cook South Korean. The east met west.
>
> Actually west loves east. That fight which always precedes friendship, or love; that preliminary grappling in mutual assessment, stays with them too long. (pp. 46–47)

On the other hand, most of the longer poems in *Another Nigger Dead* exhibit some form of parallelism either of repeated phrases,[140] or of grammatical patterning.[141] Much of the collection consists of elliptical, strongly figurative one-paragraph poems, sometimes vaguely connected by common ideas, but never grammatically linked. Even closer to the style of *Eating Chiefs* is the verse of the "Ancient Egyptian Poems" in *Thirteen Offensives against Our Enemies* and in the later collection *Ballads of Underdevelopment* (1976), which depends on heavily end-stopped epigrammatic lines, very often linked by parallelism:

> Behold he who had no knowledge of harp-playing now possesses a harp
> He to whom never man sang now praises the goddess of music
>
> Behold they who knew not the taste of wine
> Now stagger with tummies bigger than the barrels of kings

[140] For example, pp. 1–13.
[141] For example, pp. 14–16, 54–61.

Behold they of knowledge are now hunted down
And those who carry straw strut like cocks in barnyards
where the master cocks have been decapitated
Behold women who wore aprons now don the sceptre of power
And the powerful reduced to beggary levels.[142]

Taban could hardly reduce the size of his "fragments" further than he has done in these collections of aphorisms, but the sense of discipline that the parallelism suggests replaces the anarchy of digression and makes for a much more acceptable collage of ideas.

In rejecting elaborate fiction, Taban forbade himself the unifying benefits that an author gains by arousing his reader's interest in fictional characters, but he found an excellent substitute in the increasingly deliberate use he made of dramatized versions of himself. The first essay of his first book, *The Last Word,* seems to be primarily concerned to create the first version of Taban: the cheeky young dictatorial author.[143] This persona is present in the digressions in the stories in both *Fixions* and *The Uniformed Man,* and the brilliant student on the point of returning from the U.S.A. whom we hear in *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* is a basically similar character: though gloom and despair occasionally creep in, sheer *joie de vivre* usually enables him to rise above them. In his later works, this cheeky young man turns sour and bitter, ostensibly because his talents have not been adequately recognized after his return to East Africa and because of the increasing intrusion of spies and informers in East African intellectual life. There are, however, subtle differences between the personae in these later works, though they all draw from the same limited stock of Taban's personal relationships. While cynically withdrawing from the world instead of joyfully anticipating the future, the Taban of *Meditations in Limbo* is as belligerent toward his readers as the earlier angry young man. But the persona in *Another Nigger Dead* is very self-consciously humble:

cynicism
in my hour of pride i courted you
humility
let me rest my future in thee. (p. 22)

In both these works, Taban has lost the confidence to advise his readers and has withdrawn from public affairs, but in the "Ancient Egyptian Poems" in *Thirteen Offensives against Our Enemies* he is once again offering advice and concerned with political rather than personal issues. Within each work, the characteristics of the persona are fairly consistent and help to give unity of tone to the collage of autobiographical fragments, animal fables and historical or literary references which make it up. These later versions of the persona are Taban's equivalents of Okot's singers, half spokesmen,

[142] *Thirteen Offensives against Our Enemies,* pp. 51–52.

[143] For example: "I am going to tell you the story of my father's death. By and by. But I am a dictator; I hold the gavel. While it is in my hand, I shall wield a heavy dictatorial power. No need turning over the pages to see how much longer you have to submit. For I might never tell you about my father at all. On the other hand, I might. No knowing." (*The Last Word,* p. 8).

half representative figures, exemplifying the dilemma of the intellectual or artist in Africa. Taban calls himself "a sensitive barometer for our time."[144]

It is difficult to summarize the ideas of a writer who makes a virtue out of inconsistency,[145] but Chris Wanjala comes close to the essential unity of Taban's concerns when he says: "The Tabanic Genre assumes Africa's humanhood in the Negritudist sense and goes out of its way to advocate Africa's manhood."[146] Taban attacks all those who glorify Africa's past for blinding themselves to the consequences of her military and economic weakness, and thereby perpetuating it in the present. He bemoans that present weakness which he links to his own impotence as an artist, since they both arise from the same "changed conditions" and he seeks a way to initiate himself and his fellows into a new manhood:

> Initiation
>
> That was my problem. That is our problem. That is the problem of our time. I mean coming to terms with changed conditions.[147]

Unlike Okot, he does not see this initiation primarily in terms of the preservation of past rituals; instead he prefers to emphasize the mastery of new techniques, in schools, in farms and factories, and on battlefields.

Taban's work has not been a great critical or popular success. Critics tend to ascribe the fragmentation to lack of application rather than deliberate policy;[148] the general reader, who enjoys the jokes or admires the daring of the man in revealing personal details of his life or in directly attacking political abuses, still dismisses his work as lightweight. This audience response suggests that, in his analysis of the shape contemporary art should take, Taban is either ahead of his time, or, possibly, completely mistaken. However, his presence in Nairobi in the late 1960s and the early 1970s was a useful corrective to the romantic sentimentalization of Africa's past that might have arisen from poor imitation of Okot. His literary example has also encouraged very varied experiments in both prose and verse. In exploding the rather narrow concepts of what is acceptable in poetry or novels that guided the Ibadan school of writing a decade earlier, Okot p'Bitek and Taban lo Liyong have done considerable service not only to Ugandan and Kenyan writing, but also to African writing as a whole.

The greater part of Taban's output was produced outside Uganda: the coup of 1971 and the rapid revelation of the true nature of Amin Dada's regime were not conducive to any outburst of creative activity. Kampala swiftly declined as an intellectual and

[144] *Meditations in Limbo*, p. 39.

[145] In *Meditations in Limbo* he puts himself on trial for contradicting his earlier work, and persuades his judge to release him since Taban present is not the same as Taban past (see pp. 54–56).

[146] Chris L. Wanjala, "The Tabanic Genre" in *Standpoints on African Literature*, ed. C. L. Wanjala (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973), pp. 86–87.

[147] *Meditations in Limbo*, p. 18.

[148] Wanjala, for example, dismisses the *The Uniformed Man* as "unconvincing rationalisation" and goes on: "Rather than flooding the market with sketches, Taban should present us with a finished work." op. cit., p. 93.

literary centre although the Makerere literary journal *Dhana* continued to appear for a while. Though Ntiru's example influenced some poets such as Timothy Wangusa (b. 1947),[149] the major influence on the poetry in *Dhana* continued to be Okot. Echoes of Okot's words occur casually as the authoritative words of an acknowledged master, as when Peter Anyang'-Nyong'o talks of books that "Smash my testicles in my sleep."[150] Poets imitate Okot's discursive and repetitive manner and their lines are often similar to the brief lines of his later poems, breaking up sentences into very simple sense units. Probably the most prolific poet in this style is a recent editor of *Dhana,* Acoli author Cliff Lubwa p'Chong (b. 1946). His most ambitious publication, "Lament of Alunya the Voter,"[151] is another close imitation of the "Song" form, similar to Buruga's; an extract from an unpublished longer poem, it can be taken as representative of one solution to the problem of a writer who chose to remain in Uganda when open political comment was nearly certain to lead to "disappearance": he fought yesterday's political battles. Alunya's complaint is directed against an unnamed Councillor who has enriched himself since his election but done nothing for those who elected him. In a country without elected officials it has little satirical force, despite its considerable wit. A man of varied talents, Lubwa p'Chong is also an actor and a playwright: he contributed to the survival of Ugandan theatre with two plays, *Generosity Kills* (first performed 1971) and *The Last Safari* (first performed 1974), which were published together by Longman's Kenya branch (1975).

Another response to the situation was to write apolitical works in which the more secure environment of the past was recreated, as Nakibimbiri did in his novel. Often even apolitical works appear to reflect the spirit of the times in Uganda, in the violence they do to taboos surrounding death. In "To The Childless,"[152] later included in his *Black Jesus and Other Poems* (1978), Jem Kittobe does not simply condemn those who have no children to the double-death of being unremembered: he describes in foul detail their empty wombs and the mutilations that await them in their witches' funeral. There is a similar perversion of taste in Nuwa Sentongo's play *The Invisible Bond* (first performance 1972)[153] which describes the activities of night dancers eating human flesh and of a corpse they have reanimated.

However, as Andrew Horn has noted,

> Within two years of Amin's accession to power, creative people from the University, Civil Service and public life—as well as thousands of ordinary citizens—had begun covertly to escape from the increasingly violent and arbitrary oppression of the military regime. Those who survive now enrich the artistic life of more liberal nations.[154]

[149] For samples of Wambusa's poetry, see *Poems from East Africa,* ed. David Cook (London: Heinemann Educational, 1971), pp. 182–186.

[150] Ibid., p. 12.

[151] *Dhana,* 2, 1 (1972), 37–43.

[152] *Poems from Black Africa,* ed. Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), p. 155.

[153] In *African Plays for Playing,* ed. Michael Etherton (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), pp. 7–44.

[154] Horn, op. cit., p. 46.

Because of a common interest in English as a literary medium, because, too, of vestigial remnants of the inter-territorial tradition inherited from colonial times, many Ugandan writers sought shelter in Kenya, where they contributed to the evolution and growth of this nation's cultural life. Okot p'Bitek and Taban lo Liyong were granted posts at the University of Nairobi. Eneriko Seruma was in the employment of the East African Publishing House. Obviously the Kenyan capital provided a healthier and more stimulating environment and several young Ugandan authors benefited from the opportunities offered by the University Writers' Workshop which had been started in 1968 and availed themselves of the facilities for publication in the inter-territorial anthologies issued by local publishing houses.[155] For example, Patrico Abangira, who learnt his craft in Nairobi, is a poet with a striking visual imagination, as illustrated in "An Old Cottage":

> Alone now, it still stands
> bathed and scraped to injury by time
> on creaking bones, no longer erect
> it stoops to gaze. Fidelity perhaps,
> to the departed members
> long gone back to ground.
>
> From the gaping blacknesses
> That were windows once,
> once in a while
> a brick drops;
> like a dry square tear
> from the orbits of a groaning skull.[156]

It is conspicuous that Ugandan writers in exile failed, or more probably, refrained, to comment through art on their country's tragedy, which the eviction of Amin Dada did little to alleviate. Okot's confidence about a poem he was working on in the mid-seventies, *Song of a Soldier*, is probably relevant to many other writers: "it is a very terrible book because I lost quite a lot of relatives in the Uganda coup, a lot of friends too, and after I write a few lines, I drop it because it causes a lot of tears."[157] Taban lo Liyong perhaps best expressed, in "Do Not Be a Soldier, My Son," the spirit of those who waited:

> Live to see another day, for all days are not the same.
> Not too far ago, politicians strutted the land
> like the squirrel with testes five.
> Where are they now to be seen but far in exile
> Dying from unknown disease with or without a grave?

[155] Of special merit in this respect were Chris Wanjala's anthologies, which were issued by the East African Literature Bureau: *Faces at Crossroads. A "Currents" Anthology* (1971, repr. 1977) and *Singing with the Night* (1974).

[156] *Faces at Crossroads*, p. 67.

[157] Bernth Lindfors, "An Interview with Okot p'Bitek," *World Literature Written in English*, 16 (1977), 292.

Not too far ago, politicians strutted the land
like squirrel sink not, prithee, with them.

The youngsters abused, fashion wings with which to fly.
Be not a soldier,
Turn thy face to be a scribe.
Prithee, attend.[158]

[158] *Thirteen Offensives against Our Enemies*, p. 62.

Stephen Arnold

4. TANZANIA

Surveys of East African literature grant Tanzania a literature in Swahili, but generally ignore its modest though persistent production in English. (In the famous polemics sparked in 1966 by Taban lo Liyong's "Is East Africa a Cultural Desert?" Tanzania was never even mentioned.) The differences between this literature and those of Kenya and Uganda cannot be accounted for without some discussion of national specificity in history and culture. Swahili literature especially needs to be a frequent reference point. A broad historical sketch of the context of literary development and trends in Tanzania is therefore a prerequisite to correct assessment of any generic types and individual texts.

In the geographical region of Tanganyika—called Tanzania since unity with Zanzibar in 1964—oral and written art has ancient roots. Since independence in 1961, remarkable strides have been made towards forging a national literature from an unlikely amalgam of over one hundred and twenty ethnic oral traditions, from the oral and written—and largely parochial and non-Bantu—Swahili tradition, which dates back hundreds of years,[159] and from the literature in English, a tenacious residue of more than forty years of British rule.

So diverse were the peoples of Tanganyika that in 1954 when President-to-be Nyerere began his country-wide campaign for independence, he could find only one word intelligible to all his countrymen, "Uhuru." Twelve years later in 1966, Swahili, the language of a minority, was declared the national language, and today there can be no doubt that there is a national literature in that language. In the years of debate over national language policy, and of difficulty in implementing the decision once it was made, literature in English quietly rivalled contemporary Swahili literature.

Though most observers set the birth date of East African literature in English at about 1964 when Ngugi published *Weep Not, Child*, and from the late 1960s on have had plenty of English language fodder to feed on from Kenya and Uganda, Tanzania's participation in this so-called flowering, in the eyes of critics at least, began only in 1968 with Peter Palangyo's *Dying in the Sun*, and then dried up. Twenty years from now it will seem silly to have quibbled over a few years' lag between Tanzania and her

[159] Swahili literature has been the object of much scholarly attention. For historical surveys, see especially Lyndon Harries, *Swahili Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) and Jan Knappert, *Four Centuries of Swahili Verse* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979).

neighbours, but explanations for it can illuminate the unique aspects of Tanzanian literature, which has accumulated unnoticed by chroniclers of the region's literary life.

Some commentators of African affairs would have us see Tanzania as culturally retarded in comparison to its siblings of East Africa. It might be more accurate to refer to it as the Cinderella or Ugly Duckling of the three, treated by "mother" Britain as a foster child rather than as a full-fledged offspring. Unlike princess colonies Uganda and Kenya, whose full ownership by the British crown was undisputed by other imperialist powers, Tanganyika had come to Britain in 1920 as a Trusteeship mandated by the League of Nations when Germany was stripped of her possessions. Never an official colony, much was extracted from her and little invested in her cultural "development". Her sister colonies received the "blessing" of settlers who made Nairobi and Kampala centres of imported culture for their leisure and for cultivation of high-level lackeys, leaving Dar es Salaam an outpost for transient work only. (History will doubtless judge this neglect as beneficial.) Education in English was geared towards supplying lower-level civil servants who could read the language, know its grammar for clarity's sake in composition, but not attain the proficiency necessary for compelling agitational writing. Literary works in English and Swahili promoted by the British were invariably elementary in style and openly propagandistic. The most sophisticated products were of the Rider Haggard *King Solomon's Mines* type—anti-African and innocuous as literary models. Publishing opportunities and incentives for Africans were nil.

Prior to independence, Tanganyika's only known writer in English was Martin Kayamba (1891–1940), who after visiting Europe in 1931 eventually became the highest African civil servant in the territory, the chief clerk to the Provincial Commissioner in Tanga. His two books, *An African in Europe* and *African Problems* (both published posthumously in London in 1948 by the United Society for Christian Literature), show signs of ghosting, for East African idioms are lacking. Carefully guided, Kayamba saw through rose-coloured glasses a Britain populated by gods. Saintly MPs allowed him to use their Christian names. Though he observed some poverty and unemployment he encountered no misery and was assured there was no racial discrimination in Britain. On returning home, the pious Martin, so inspired by his colonial saviours, changed his name to Kayambason in order to cloak his Bantu name in European garb. He has since become the target of many scornful jokes and a common symbol in Tanzanian literary culture. Kayambason appears with regularity in secondary school dramatic skits such as a humorous Swahili play, *Martin Kayamba* by G. Uhinga.[160]

The British presence was also very strong in the first novel in Swahili, *Uhuru wa Watumwa* (1934) by James Juma Mbotela[161], who after being freed from an Arab slave ship by British sailors, lived for a time in England and wrote accounts of Britain similar to Kayamba's. Since German rule was so brutal, and since armed uprisings against it

[160] *Darlite*, 2, 2 (1968), 133–152. Kayamba's impressions of England had first appeared in Swahili as *Tulivyona na tulivyofania Ingereza* (London: Sheldon Press, 1932).

[161] An English version was later made available by C. G. Richards as *The Freeing of the Slaves in East Africa* (London: Evans, 1956).

were so frequently successful, the British adopted a liberal pose that found some gullible champions among Africans they groomed as propagandists.[162]

A second period began with independence and lasted till the famous Arusha Declaration of 1967, when President Nyerere formally defined the proposed aims and methods of his own brand of socialism *(ujamaa)*. Since syllabi for literature courses in Tanzanian secondary schools and at the national University of Dar es Salaam claim political essays as part of their legitimate domains, it should be acknowledged that Julius K. Nyerere (b. 1922) revealed himself as undisputedly the most eminent man of letters of his nation: his Swahili translation of *Julius Caesar* (1963) was followed by several book-length essays in English and in Swahili throughout the sixties and by his Swahili version of *The Merchant of Venice* (1969). The laurels for purely literary merit would have to go to Shaaban Robert (1909–1962), the "Shakespeare of Swahili,"[163] but the clarity and eloquence of Nyerere's prose in English, the logic of his arguments and precision of his vocabulary mark him as a masterful writer of English by any standards.

Occasionally criticized for writing philosophical policy statements such as *Education for Self-Reliance* (1967) in English rather than in the national language, Nyerere has simultaneously answered these critics and others who say Swahili is an inadequate language for building a modern nation, by translating works of Shakespeare into it. Remarks by Ebrahim Hussein about Nyerere's translation of *The Merchant of Venice* provide an early definition of the distinctness of Tanzanian literature within East African literature:

> *Mabepari wa Venisi* is more than a translation. It is an interpretation of the original text. Even the title is not a literal translation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. By emphasizing Mabepari ("capitalists") the translator is attempting to read into the play a fable from a wider socio-economic viewpoint. He is rejecting the individual parochial viewpoint of the original which sees the source of the Jew's problem as lying rooted in his own character rather than in the pious Christian capitalist society that he lives in. Mwalimu Nyerere's version offers a more sympathetic approach to the Jew's problem by pinpointing the society of *mabepari* and the system of *ubepari* (capitalism) as important factors in the human conflicts portrayed in the play.[164]

The spirit of Nyerere's emphasis on system rather than individuals informs today's Tanzanian literature in Swahili more than its English writing, but the trend is distinguishable in the latter to a degree sufficient to make a meaningful contrast with Kenyan and Ugandan literatures, which are in general more akin to European literatures in their

[162] On the novel as a foreign phenomenon, see Penina Muhando and Ndyanao Balisidya, *Fasihi Na Sanaa Za Maonyesho* ("Literature and theatre arts") (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1976), pp. 62–72.

[163] The only book-size study of this important pioneer of modern Swahili writing is Rainer Arnold, *Afrikanische Literatur und nationale Befreiung: Menschenbild und Gesellschaftskonzeption im Prosawerk Shaaban Roberts* (Berlin: 1977).

[164] Ebrahim Hussein, "Shakespeare in Swahili," *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 72 (1973), 104–105. Hussein is the country's best playwright, but also a well-known writer of poetry, short fiction and criticism, mostly in Swahili.

emphasis on anti-social behaviour rooted in the unfettered play of individual impulses and appetites.

The bulk of Tanzanian literary efforts in English have been juvenilia of an ephemeral nature coming out of the University College, opened in October 1961 in Dar es Salaam. Most of them are available in the University's literary journals *Darlite* (1966–70) and its successor *Umma* (biennial since 1970). A few, especially poems, can be found in the Students' Union *University Echo* and *University Echo Bulletin* (irregular throughout the 1970s), and in the political magazines on campus: *Cheche* was banned in 1970 and was succeeded by *Maji Maji,* which was sponsored by the Youth League of the nation's political party. Even the *Journal of International Relations—"JIRA"*, put out occasionally at the University in the late seventies, welcomes English-language poems as exemplified in E.E. Lushakuzi's "A Juvenile Nation in Predicament".[165] *Moran* (the Maasai word for warrior), was a short-lived English-language literary periodical inspired by *Darlite* and put out by students at the teachers' college at Morogoro in 1967. Of at least one hundred and fifty authors in these periodicals, half to two thirds have been Tanzanians, many of them regular contributors, and a few earned their spurs there in English before going on to publish separate volumes, usually in Swahili, in their own names: i.a. Katigula, Kamera, Mvungi, Hussein, Senkoro, Mulokozi, Kezilahabi, and Mkufya.

Rare appearances by Tanzanians have been made in anthologies such as David Cook's *Origin East Africa* (1965), David Cook and David Rubadiri's *Poems from East Africa* (1971), or Lennard Okola's *Drum Beat* (1967). A few Tanzanian names also appear in Ugandan and Kenyan periodicals such as *Penpoint,* the *East Africa Joural, Ghala, Zuka, Nexus,* and *Busara.* And between 1964 and 1969, stories and poems by Tanzanians were featured on the weekly B.B.C. Africa Service "Writers' Club": T. L. Mbutu, N. G. Kizzinga, Yusuf O. Kassam, Godwin Kaduma, J. M. Bunyabe and E. K. Chesaina.

Early issues of *Darlite* typify English language literature of the post-colonial and pre-Arusha Declaration period. Authors were evenly distributed among Tanzanians, Kenyans, and Ugandans, and contributions were indistinguishable from those in *Penpoint* at Makerere, in which the alien art for art's sake tradition prevailed. *Darlite's* Tanzanian editor who had won the 1966 Rockefeller Poetry Competition—organized by the East African Literature Bureau—with feebly precious apings of sensitive British romantics, wrote in the inaugural editorial: "The *Darlite* has been launched as an experiment to see what can be done towards fulfilling some responsibilities to our society and especially to OURSELVES. These responsibilities are cultural, linguistic and, especially, LITERARY." He referred to the College literary group as the "last born child" neglecting duties that "our two sister colleges ... are relentlessly struggling to fulfil." At that time V. S. Naipaul had just concluded a month's residence at the College, and the editor reported that "Mr. Naipaul struck at our smug laziness in reading creative work 'of merit,' and at the romantic delusion that we can create a national literature out of a mere wish, without trying to find something worthwhile to say." Poetry in *Darlite*

[165] *Journal of International Relations,* 1, 2 (1977), 70–71.

had titles like "Lovers on the Lawn", "Perphaps—Till When" ("Goodbye, holiday in the sun"), "Haikus to a Maiden," "Lost Childhood," "Glo-Worms and Shooting Stars"; stories were similar in their individual and romantic concerns: "Two Husbands a Night," "The Gambler," "Love Conquers at Last."

This should be sufficient evidence in support of the contention that *Darlite* began on a neo-colonial footing. Even in the issues of 1967, the year of the endlessly publicized Arusha Declaration, *Darlite* preserved its aloofness from social struggles, maintaining its loyalty to narrower interests: "our relentless struggle is to crush that indifference to the arts which for quite a long time has held sway over the Hill [i.e. the University College] ... another challenge .... We need above all to bridge the obvious and artificial gulf that exists between literature and the other disciplines at the college."[166] In fact, it was not until after 1970 that Tanzanians dominated English-language student writing in their own country: even in that year, a volume of student works from the University of Dar es Salaam encouraged by the East African Literature Bureau included only two Tanzanians among the eleven authors.[167]

These were the days now known as "the reign of Shakespeare," when the syllabi and examination papers of the Department of Literature which had been formed in 1964, were still set by the British and the degrees it granted were essentially in English literature. But in 1967–1968, at the time when the Department of English at the College in Nairobi was abolished, the first African Literature Paper was approved by the University Senate in Dar es Salaam, and Shakespeare's hegemony began to be broken. Courses in Oral Literature and other indigenously inspired subjects came soon after, and by 1970, when the University became autonomous, a wave of negritude was giving way to a socialized curriculum in literature. This drift can be charted by the *Darlite* issues of 1968–1970, which began a trend towards greater awareness of Africa and social commitment, heeding the call to "Go Back to the Soil." The shift was most dramatically punctuated by the birth of *Umma* ("masses") to replace *Darlite* in 1970.[168]

In the first issue of *Umma*, the lead story "The Expatriate", by Mukotani Rugyendo —a Ugandan—symbolizes the post-Arusha Declaration phase of Tanzanian literature in English. In it a student goes to the home of an expatriate English professor for a chat about creative writing. As usual the professor scornfully belittles African literature in English as "too simple—nothing to analyse." The student, for a change, defends this literature, denounces the neo-colonial professor, and leaves. From this time on, in contrast to the more purely literary content of *Darlite* and *The University Echo*, readers of *Umma* were confronted by poems like: "Domestic Mathematics in a South African Ghetto," "Destitution Amidst Plenty," "Southward His Gun Points," "Blood-Stained Bread," or "For Frelimo"; and short stories such as "Go Back to the Land," "The Firing Squad," or "Forget Old Times, Bourgeois Scholar."

After 1968, Tanzanian literature in English broke finally from the rootless cosmopolitanism of Commonwealth literature (as defined at Makerere, the neo-colonial

[166] Editorial in *Darlite*, II, 1 (1967).
[167] *Just a Moment, God!*, ed. Robert Green (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970).
[168] See *Darlite*, II, 2 (August 1968).

cultural headquarters of East Africa in the 1960s, with its cultivated élite), to take on distinctly national features in the various genres of English imaginative writing—drama, short fiction, poetry of commitment and the novel,—as well as in Swahili.

While Swahili has generated such accomplished playwrights as Ebrahim N. Hussein and Penina Muhando, few plays are produced, and there is next to nothing in English. The only pieces worth noting are translations by Hussein of a worker's conversation about socialism, "Listen Here, Bwana, I Say,"[169] and of his own play *Kinjeketile*.[170]

Most examples of short fiction have been written as school texts. In general they are artless contrivances in the service of grammatical and moral instruction. Another type, which became nearly extinct in the seventies, was the pulp pamphlet story for youths, such as F. Kawegere's *Inspector Rajabu Investigates, and Other Stories* (1968), a trio of clumsy narratives about apprehension of jewel thieves, gaining parental approval for marriage, and the evils of embezzling. The most prolific writer of youth fiction is Akberali Manji, a regular contributor to the *Sunday News*. The only reasonably accessible example of his work is *The Valley of the Dead and Other Stories* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972). In the title story, which is followed by six others based on roughly the same formula, a game warden's ten-year old son steals Dad's gun for a nearly disastrous hunt for wild beats. A sound thrashing from the father precedes the learning of a moral lesson. In Swahili these crude tales abound.

Readers with a general interest in African literature may have read early Tanzanian short stories in English in David Cook's anthology of student work from Makerere, *Origin East Africa* (1965). M. M. Hadji from Zanzibar contributed two sensitive pieces which seem like chapters from the same novel, yet nothing subsequently came from his pen. Nazareno Ngulukulu, once an editor of *Penpoint*, gave "A Prescription," an amusing though slightly turgid tale against which later works can be measured for maturation. Tom Chacha's story "Road to Mara" had the good fortune not only to be anthologized again in Neville Denny's *Pan African Short Stories* (London: Nelson, 1965), but also to be excerpted as an example of stylistic excellence in John Berry's *Africa Speaks* (London: Evans, 1970). Though a biographical note by Berry indicated that Chacha was back in Tanzania, continuing to experiment with the short story, no known proof of it had seen print by the end of the decade.

In *Darlite, Umma,* and other East African literary journals a number of skilfully written short stories have appeared. However, encouragement seems to be lacking, for almost no writers have published a second story. One of the few exceptions is Majolla Mbele. Another, Elijah K. Chesaina, won a prize for his first story, "Why, Tell Me Why," about construction workers who build luxurious accommodations, yet must live in shacks themselves; a second story, "A Sample," confirmed his talent which, however, was allowed to lie fallow throughout the seventies. Barnabas Katigula (b. 1944) showed promise in the short story before publishing one of the best Tanzanian novels in English in 1974; since then, for reasons unknown, he seems to have stopped writing.[171]

[169] Issued in *Joliso*, I, 1 (1973), 93–102.

[170] Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1970. The Swahili original had been published in 1969.

[171] Mbele's stories "A Girl in the Bus," and "The Story of an Uncle and His Nephew" can be found in *Busara*, IV. 1 (1972), 6–9, and *Umma*, V, 2 (1975), 92–96, respectively; Chesaina's "Why, Tell Me Why,"

In 1970, one of the first female writers of the country, Martha V. Mlangala published a technically skilful story about tensions between a girl hitch-hiker and a truck driver.[172] Besides becoming a noted novelist in Swahili under her married name of Martha Mvungi, she later produced a collection of Hehe and Bena folk tales in English translation.[173] It should be emphasized that the national literature of Tanzania does not only consist of the as yet small rivulet of English writing, or even of the mighty stream of Swahili verse and prose, classical and modern, in Arabic or in Roman script: it also includes as its earliest foundation the vast oral heritage of many ethnic groups. Some of Tanzania's languages may possibly come to be used in writing but most of their oral lore will have to reach modern readers in English versions. While Swahili oral art has already received much attention from European and African scholars,[174] it is highly desirable that the traditional lore of other ethnic groups should be more widely known and that translations—such as those which T. O. Beidelman collected among the Maasai and the Kaguru and published in a variety of learned but often confidential journals[175]—should be made available to the literate audience. Martha Mvungi's collection represents a milestone in a development that began with Innocent K. Kayombo's *Stories of our Tanganyikan Forefathers* (London: Sheldon, 1952) and was later illustrated in William D. Kamera's collection of Iraqw stories.[176]

In the 1960s Tanzania's most published poet in English was Yusuf O. Kassam (b. 1943). His poems of brooding malaise and incipient violence appeared in various journals and in anthologies such as *Poems from East Africa* (1971) which was edited by David Cook and the Malawian poet David Rubadiri; several were presented on the B.B.C. "Writers' Club." There seems to be some reason for conjecturing that he may surface again in Swahili. Walter Bgoya (b. 1931), who later became a well-known editor and political commentator, apparently abandoned English poetry in the 1960s, as did Godwin Kaduma who was featured on the BBC in September 1966, but chose to become involved in Swahili theatre.

Government policy and especially the spirit of the Arusha Declaration fostered a large amount of committed poetry, much of it fated—in terms of its strictly literary interest—to ephemeral status. The unfavorable opinion expressed about East African

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which won the 1966 Afrika ya Kesho (Africa Tomorrow) short story competition, appeared in *Darlite*, III, 1 (1969), 18–20, and again in *Ghala*, VI, 8 (July 1969), 30–31. It was also broadcast on the B.B.C. Writers' Club in July, 1969. His "A Sample" is in *Darlite*, IV, 1 (1969), 7–9. Katigula's stories were published in *Darlite*, I, 1 (1966), 39–43, and IV, 1 (1969), 28–34.

[172] "Was It an Illusion?," *Darlite*, IV, 2 (1970), 34–38.

[173] Martha Mvungi, *Three Solid Stones* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975).

[174] For a recent example, see Jan Knappert, *Myths and Legends of the Swahili* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1970).

[175] See notably Beidelman's "Ten Kaguru Texts," and "Further Kaguru Texts," *Journal of African Languages*, III, 1 (1964), 1–37, and V, 2 (1966), 74–101; "Some Kaguru Riddles" and "A Maasai Text," *Man*, 65 (1963), 158–160, and 222 (1965), 191; "More Kaguru Texts," *Baessler-Archiv*, XV, 1 (1967), 149–182; "Eleven Kaguru Texts," *African Studies*, XXVI, 1 (1967), 3–36; "Eight Kaguru Texts", *Anthropos*, LXII, 3/4 (1967), 369–393; "The Filth of Incest," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, XII, 1 (1972), 164–173; "Nine Kaguru Tales," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, XCVI, 1 (1970–71), 16–31.

[176] William D. Kamera, *Tales of the Wairaqw of Tanzania* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976).

poetry in English by John Reed in 1968[177]—he called it "literary roughage," a dead end—is still largely true of anglophone poetry in Tanzania: good poets are born into the language of their art. Nevertheless, this does not invalidate the intrinsic interest of this writing, nor give us licence to pass it over unnoticed.

In the English language press (now the *Daily News,* formerly the *Nationalist* and *Standard*), amateurish poems appear regularly under titles such as "Africa Must Be Free," "Mondlane and Cabral," "Sons of My Soil, Panic Not," "Woman, Do Thy Share," "Comrade JM Died as a Hero," and so on. Generically the traditional praise poem (in which God often parleys with heroes such as Presidents Nyerere and Samora), elegies, and exhortations to virtue predominate.

These newspaper poems usually contain references only to contemporary Africans, and to no African history beyond the headlines; frequently they are barded with European mythological, literary, and historical allusions (e.g. "That Shakespearean saying; /Frailty is thy name woman [sic]/ .... Joan of Arc did it/"; "Guinea Bissau now free,/ The Gordian knot she's now cut/ ... /What indeed a Pyrrhic Victory!/"). In the Youth League publication *Maji Maji,* on the other hand, though English is usually the medium, African literary and historical allusions abound and European ones are absent in poems like: "Song of Workers," "Azanians Awake!," "Smash Capital Now," and "Up With Socialism!" One might conclude from this observation that the newspaper poetry is written by older people, educated by the British, and is of a type that will die out. The *Maji Maji* type will probably endure—increasing in quality due to persistent practice—because it is poetry written to demonstrate solidarity with Africa-wide events.

Some of the Youth League poetry in English is directed at domestic concerns, however. Notable examples are Jesse Mollel's "if all amens," an ironical, lyrical attack on religion's drag on revolutionary advance,[178] and J. Makoyegifwe's "Wait No More," calling youth to violent revolution against imperialism and its domestic agents.[179] The best sample of this kind of poetry that is readily available to readers outside Africa is "Bagamoyo"[180] by F. E. M. K. Senkoro (b. 1953). Bagamoyo is a coastal town north of Dar es Salaam; its name, meaning "Lay Down Your Heart," was given to it by African slaves put in stone cells there before being shipped away by Arab slave traders. In lyrical narrative verse the poet juxtaposes physical facts of ancient and contemporary Bagamoyo to show that no revolution has occurred at all in his country, that the old slave pens now hold working-class prisoners, that the old slave masters' castle is now a police station, that nothing but a change of the palace guards has taken place.

Beginning with the April-May 1978 issue of the Tanzanian political magazine *Outlook,* Hubert Temba (b. 1951), a young reporter well known for his muck-raking, had his own poetry column, "Latitude of Life." Surprisingly, the first edition featured a melancholy meditation devoid of politics, "I Sit Alone on the Silver of the Bay." If this heralds a regressive trend, the majority of Tanzania's English Language poets will not welcome it. It is not likely that the individualistic and purely lyrical style will displace

[177] John Reed, "Poetry in East Africa," *Mawazo,* I, 3 (1968), 31–36.
[178] *Maji Maji,* N° 16 (July 1974), 40.
[179] Ibid., N° 23 (August 1975), 37.
[180] Published in *Okike,* N° 11 (1976), 78–80.

the predominant proclivity for declamatory propaganda verse, in which style is invariably subordinate to content, which voices the aspirations of the masses of citizens and, in spite of its artistic weaknesses, inspires them.

The form which has the widest international appeal is the novel. Nevertheless, Tanzanian novels in English are still very few. The first to appear was *Dying in the Sun* (1968) by Peter K. Palangyo (b. 1939), a biologist who turned to literature and, like Taban lo Lyiong, attended the creative writing program at the University of Iowa. This quiet, meditative novel deals whith a young man, Ntanya, who is called back to his village on the occasion of his father's death. The latter was a brutal, selfish man, who was responsible for the death of his wife and was generally hated by the community. The story unfolds for the greater part in a very pessimistic mood. For all his experience of city life, Ntanya is swayed by custom. He has some reason to believe that he is a bastard, but in spite of his hatred for his father, he gives up his job and attends to all the ancestral rites, even though interdiction to till the ground during the mourning period may well spell complete ruin for himself and his family. Yet, this is not another tale of ancient superstition versus modern enlightenment. The problems of the new Africa are represented by Ntanya's friend James, a government official who fails to coerce the villagers into applying government instructions for agricultural development and is consequently fired; it is also represented by Teresa, an orphan girl who had to engage in prostitution and with whom Ntanya falls in love. But the story ends with a vindication of the old cyclical conception of life as the son of Ntanya and Teresa grows into the physical likeness of Ntanya's father thus demonstrating perhaps the continuity of generations and the indomitable power of life to maintain and renew itself. Palangyo's main themes are generation conflict, alienation, and love. Though the work contains many excellently written passages and deft handling of psychology, it is marred by excessive sentimentality and a timeless atmosphere expressing a cyclical view of natural and human history which is totally inconsistent with socialist aspiration.[181]

On the heels of Palangyo's novel came *Village in Uhuru* (1969) by Gabriel Ruhumbika (b. 1938). Once again the theme of father-son conflict dominates, focusing on the difficulties of Nyerere's TANU (Tanganyika African Nationalist Union) in breaking tribal and regional identities in order to build a nation. The hero is a young representative of the party; most of his problems come from his relationship to his father, who cannot understand why he should have been displaced by an elected official from his position as traditional headman of his village, or why he should abandon the homestead of his ancestors for a new, better and more comfortable but nevertheless alien and unsanctified, house as part of the government's land consolidation scheme. To the old man, the new African authorities merely take up where the white colonizer left off: they are out to finish the job of completely dissolving the way of life in which his very being is rooted. A coolly analytical and, it must be added, rather pedestrian story, *Village in*

[181] The novel's introspective tone and its subtlety—untypical for first novels in Africa—have been widely praised; the most comprehensive and sensitive article on it is David Cook, "A Walk I' the Sun," *Joliso*, II, 2 (1974), 47–60.

Uhuru is nevertheless notable for the objectivity with which it portrays the personal problems resulting from the confrontation of old and new. Although the author is fully on the side of modernization, unlike like-minded writers in Ghana and elsewhere he shows complete understanding and sympathy with the plight of the traditionalists and with the dignity and harmony of a way of life that is doomed to disappear. Ruhumbika's novel is fascinating as a documentary, but it lacks the feeling of personal involvement, and this aloofness vitiates the literary quality of the work.

Next came perhaps the best of this early fiction, a little-known novella published in Nairobi by Barnabas Katigula (b. 1944), *Groping in the Dark* (1974). Both national and tribal (Sukuma) in details, it grapples harmoniously, inobtrusively, and at a very personal level, with problems from the idealistic, non-revolutionary, reformist point of view of *ujamaa*. A story of hope maintained against great odds, it shows individual problems as social group problems. Mature in technique and concentrated in themes it portrays the injustices of male-female relationships in the nexus of urban versus rural and religious versus agnostic contradictions.

Printed in Dar es Salaam, *Blood on Our Land* (1974) by Ismail Mbise (b. 1944) blends the fictional and the documentary modes more skilfully than Ruhumbika's novel. Though it provides a truly gripping account of the events leading up to the expulsion of the Wameru people from their ancestral lands by the British in 1951, it fails in its attempt at allegorical evocation of the neo-colonial situation of most of contemporary Africa, including Tanzania.[182]

The last English novel to have been printed in Tanzania or to have been produced by a Tanzanian writer in the seventies was *The Wicked Walk* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1977) by W. E. Mkufya (b. ca. 1950). This is also the first novel of urban life in the country's anglophone literature. It depicts the corruption of city-based bureaucrats in Dar es Salaam and the decadence it forces upon the youth which struggles to understand social problems in order to overcome them. It also features a morally admirable prostitute, Maria, and her daughter, Nancy, whom she cannot protect from the evil engendered by the ruling class. Deo, Nancy's frustrated boy friend, represents the ideologically confused youth attempting to find a key to revolution.

In passing, several novels by expatriates—excluding "Europeans" like Hemingway —should be mentioned, because they are fully inspired by participatory residence in Tanzania: *The People's Bachelor* (1972) by Austin Bukenya from Uganda, *Bamanga* (1974) and *Leopard in a Cage* (1976) by Jacqueline Pierce from the U.S.A., *Rebel* (1969) and *The Stubborn* (1976) by Bediako Asare from Ghana. Two Kenyans might also be included: Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* (1966) is set in Tanganyika, and Henry R. Ole Kulet has published *Is it Possible* and *To Become a Man* (1972), two tales about the Maasai who are as Tanzanian as they are Kenyan for, as one of his characters puts it, "A Maasai village is a Maasai village, regardless of its whereabouts."

[182] For a detailed analysis of this failure and of the book's many merits see my "*Blood on Our Land:* Pre-Independence Action Related to Post-Ujamaa Policies," in *African Literature: Artist and Audience*, ed. Richard O. Priebe and Thomas A. Hale (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1979), pp. 84–102. The U.S. African Field Service has issued "Conversations with African Writer Ismail Mbise" (tape No 7).

To conclude this brief survey it may be useful to point to some of the contrasts that characterize Tanzania's peculiar position in anglophone African literature and to speculate, however tentatively, on the future of this particular stream of creative writing.

In 1978, Tanzania's government officially claimed 60% literacy. The country's rural population is 96% of its total of some 16 million, and its ruling class about 8%.[183] English is beyond the ken of most of the people that are literate, and those who can read it still prefer to buy works by Peter Cheyney, James Hadley Chase, Harold Robbins, and Ian Fleming rather than domestic English produce. Though the English language readership and sales are currently stable, Swahili readers and sales are increasing. Because English is no longer a language of great power as it is in Uganda and Kenya, it would not be wrong to call it a colonial hangover that may fade slowly. The developing contradictions apparent in these facts were obvious as early as 1970, when the editors of *Umma* wrote in the first issue: "We realize that we can reach only a small section of our society but we know, despite what we would still like to believe, that this still is the most influential part of society."

It is significant that only expatriate writers (e.g. Asare, Pierce) have ever written more than one novel in English. Almost without exception those who have proven themselves in English (i.a. Ruhumbika, Mbise, Kezilahabi, Senkoro) later switched to Swahili. John Povey's 1970 prediction that English and Swahili literature would coexist indefinitely in Tanzania[184] still seems correct, but the balance has tipped in favour of Swahili.

When the government nationalized the major means of production in 1966, the advertising base was cut off for many little magazines in which English language apprenticeships could be served. From 1971 to 1974, English was further crippled by a severe paper shortage in the country. In the allocation of supplies priority was given to government documents, school texts, and Swahili literature. By 1975 it had become much easier to get published in Swahili than in English, and few writers will probably ever turn back. English has lost its prestige. And in 1975, partly as a reflection of the success of Tanzanian experiments which had demonstrated the literary viability of Swahili, the Union of African Writers declared that its membership should promote Swahili as the lingua franca of the continent.

In switching languages, many Tanzanian writers have been struggling to come to grips with the problem of audience. They are no longer faced with a sophisticated élite, but instead with a readership of newly literate adults who require works with practical orientation. The formerly dominant fare of "East African literature", i.e. spy and crime thrillers and sex-oriented love stories, is being challenged by reform themes, by a serious concern for society, and the influence of this trend can be detected in the English literature that keeps trickling out. This English literature still treats the great themes of

[183] Readers interested in social class composition and history should consult Issa G. Shivji's *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, and London: Heinemann Educational, 1976); and Walter Rodney, "Class Contradictions in Tanzania," *The Pan-Africanist*, No 6 (June 1975), 15–29. The official "socialists" are part of the privileged 8%.

[184] John Povey, "The Beginnings of an English Language Literature in East Africa," *Books Abroad*, 44 (1970), 380–387.

identity, old versus new, love and death, but it is doing so more and more in terms of specific national localities and problems. It is less and less a literature for tourists and anthropologists. Perhaps for these reasons local critics often choose to ignore it rather than attack it.

Though nothing in Tanzania's anglophone output has rocked the international literary seismograph, nor is likely to cause measurable vibrations on the Richter scale, it will probably show signs of life for some time to come. The Kenyan critic Chris Wanjala was right in approving the official critical attitude which led the Tanzanian authorities to ban some of the low-brow popular writing that was imported from Kenya: this, he said, was a matter of "political utility against entertainment value" in a literature that is "essentially a product of capitalist values where sex, crime and violence can be put between two glossy covers by a writer and sold at a high price." Tanzanian authors, he implied, are more "worried about the need to create a new social and political order" than about "tickling the reader into taking smooth rides in the wonderland of sex."[185] But Wanjala was oddly wrong when he wrote in a bibliographical survey: "Tanzania must be careful; she has no authors to boast of at the moment aside from the Zanzibar-born playwright, Ebrahim Hussein."[186] Critics might now begin to look through the correct end of the telescope, to stop discussing East African writing as homogeneous, with no contribution from Tanzania. It was the same Kenyan critic who pointed out that "the 1971 East African Writers' Conference sounded the death-knell of a Pan-East African literary consciousness. Since then people think as Kenyans, Tanzanians and Ugandans and we might never think as East Africans again" for the "different cultural policies of East African governments have escalated conflicting literary theories in the East African Community."[187] In this process of national and ideological differentiation, there is no reason to believe that Tanzania's English literature has no distinct and living part to play.

[185] Chris L. Wanjala, "Imaginative Writing Since African Independence: the East African Experience," in *The East African Experience: Essays on English and Swahili Literature*, ed. Ulla Schild (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1980), 9–24.

[186] Chris L. Wanjala, "East and Central Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, X, 2 (1975), 16–24.

[187] Wanjala in Schild, loc. cit., p. 24.

ALBERT S. GÉRARD

5. MALAWI

Of the three territories—Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland—which had been administered as the Central African Federation from 1953 to 1963, the poorest in many respects was Nyasaland, which became independent in 1964 under the name of Malawi:[188] "the absence of mining and industry left Nyasaland without either an industrial colour bar or trade unions, though the country was so poor that a large number of its able-bodied men were regularly abroad, working in South Africa, Mozambique, or the Rhodesias."[189] In consequence this densely populated territory, the "Cinderella of the Protectorates," has often been described as "a feudal backwater."[190] Paradoxically, this economic backwardness was accompanied by a comparatively high level of literacy, which in turn is reflected in some aspects of the literary history of the country. This phenomenon was probably the result of two historical factors. Prior to the establishment of European control the area was populated by peaceful tribes which were an easy prey to Arab slave traders from the Swahili coast; their meek disposition accounts in part for the facility with which the early Scottish missionaries were able to spread Christian teaching, which, as Bridglal Pachai has observed, "could more easily be grafted on to societies which did not stress military virtues and raiding, but wished to live at peace with their neighbours."[191] The second factor was the comparative excellence of the education (primary, vocational and, from 1940, secondary) provided by the missionaries: those of the Free Church of Scotland mission who had responded to the call of David Livingstone, and those of the Dutch Reformed Church who had come from South Africa at a later date.

As was usual in African areas under British control, where Protestant Christianity prevailed, the first literary consequence of Western-type education was the emergence of imaginative writing in a number of vernacular languages, especially Cewa and

[188] For information about the historical background, see Robert I. Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), P.E.N. Tindall, *History of Central Africa* (London: Longmans, 1968); Bridglal Pachai, *Malawi: The History of the Nation* (London: Longmans, 1973).

[189] John Hatch, *A History of Post-War Africa*, (1965; repr. London: Methuen, 1967), p. 107.

[190] Ibid., and Tindall, p. 245.

[191] Pachai, p. 32.

Tumbuka.[192] This did not occur as early as in Lesotho, another country where literary development was in inverse ratio to economic prosperity: the first work of narrative fiction in Cewa was not published until 1933. Entitled *Mbiri ya Nthondo* (Story of Nthondo) it was written by Samuel Yosia Ntara (b. 1905), a former pupil of a Dutch Reformed Church mission school, in an attempt to recapture and preserve in writing the feel of the early period of European rule.[193] It deserves mention in the present context because it was immediately translated into English by the Rev. T. Cullen Young and published in London by the Religious Tract Society under the title *Man of Africa* (1934) with a preface by Julian Huxley. What had attracted the famous scientist in this "novel" was its documentary value for African anthropology. Ntara was a profuse writer who remained interested in the history of his people, but only one of his other imaginative works is available in English:[194] *Mnyamboza,* which was issued in Cewa by the Nkhoma Mission Press in 1949 and was published almost simultaneously by the Lutterworth Press in London as *Headman's Enterprise: An Unexpected Page in Central African History*. The translator's flowery title was intended to emphasize what the Rev. Young considered to be the essential message of the book: through this "historical novel" recounting the career of Chief Mnyamboza, who had reigned over the Cewa for almost half a century, Ntara had demonstrated that the spirit of innovation and enterprise was by no means absent from the African's mental make-up.

While African languages were the predominant medium of instruction in the school system set up by Protestant missionaries, it has been estimated that by 1930 about 6 per cent of the school population had gained some knowledge of English.[195] It was during the early thirties, when Ntara was launching a native literature in the local languages, that native writing in English seems to have made a start. In 1962, the American historian Robert I. Rotberg discovered in the Nyasaland archives a typescript entitled *A Dialogue of Nyasaland Record of Past Events, Environments & the Present Outlook within the Protectorate*. Its author was a member of the Tonga tribe, George S. Mwase, who was born in the 1880s and had died early in 1962. Probably the first extended piece written in English by a Malawian author, it was in fact a report on the rebellion which broke out in 1915 against "a government that seemed to devote nearly all of its energy to the collection of taxes and the punishment of defaulters";[196] it also contained an account of the life of the leader of the uprising, John Chilembwe, and personal reflections about race relationships in the protectorate at the time of writing. It was edited by Rotberg as *Strike a Blow and Die* (1967) and went through a second edition with a revised introduction in 1970.

With the emphasis laid on vernacular languages both in the missionary school

[192] See S. M. Made et al., *100 Years of Chichewa in Writing, 1875–1975* (Zomba: University of Malawi, 1976) and my *African Language Literatures*, pp. 204–207 and 227–232.

[193] See Bridglal Pachai, "Samuel Josiah Ntara, Writer and Historian," *Society of Malawi Journal*, 21, 2 (1968), 60–66.

[194] For a translation of Ntara's most important piece of historical writing, see *The History of the Chewa*, ed. Beatrix Heintze (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973).

[195] Tindall, p. 256.

[196] *George Simeon Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die: A Narrative of Race Relations in Colonial Africa*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967; 2nd ed. with revised Introduction, 1970), p. xix.

curriculum and in the publication policy of the joint Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Literature Bureau (set up 1948), it was almost inevitable that potential black authors in Malawi should follow the pattern set in South Africa and in the other territories of the Central African Federation. There were two differences however: whereas early black writers in English in Zambia and in Zimbabwe were educated locally, often at the University College in Salisbury, their Malawian contemporaries were trained abroad. And while their country, like several of the weaker successor states on the subcontinent, was practically compelled, for obvious economic and geo-political reasons, to gravitate to the orbit of the Republic of South Africa, the cultural and literary pole of attraction lay in East Africa.

This special relationship was established by David Rubadiri (b. 1930), who contributed three notable poems to David Cook's *Origin East Africa* (1965), had his only novel, *No Bride Price* (1967), issued by the East African Publishing House in Nairobi, and co-edited *Poems from East Africa* in 1971. At a Commonwealth Literature Conference held in Brisbane in 1968, after he had been Malawi's first ambassador to the United States and the United Nations, he explicitly described himself as an East African writer, claiming that "the identity of the African cannot lie comfortably within the structures of a 'national' identity as defined by western and eastern concepts."[197] In the late sixties he had been appointed to teach education at the Extra-Mural Department of Makerere University in Uganda. It should perhaps be recalled at this point that Dr. Hastings Banda, Malawi's nationalist leader, who had been elected prime minister in 1964, had become the first president of the new republic in 1966. In 1970 he became the first black African ruler to open diplomatic relations with the Republic of South Africa. In 1971 he was to be sworn in as President for life!

Rubadiri's career as a man of letters, slight as it is, reflects the enthusiastic hopes, the awareness of Africa's problems and the disillusionment—in short, the general curve followed by idealistic African intellectuals between 1960 and 1980. His poetry had not yet been collected in book form by the late seventies although it had first been printed in such prominent journals as *Transition* (East Africa), *Black Orpheus* (West Africa), *Présence Africaine* (Europe) and the *Negro Digest* (United States), and very widely anthologized. Much of it is inspired by the need, based to some extent on negritude thinking, to revaluate, however belatedly, the concept of an African culture. At the Brisbane conference of 1968 he could still assert that "the search for liberation of the physical, the emotional and the spiritual is central to the identity of the African," by then something of a platitude. His renowned "Stanley Meets Mutesa"[198] was likewise his contribution to the Utopian Senghorian notion that Africa might play a significant part in promoting universal understanding. But Donald Herdeck's eloquent contrasting of the two versions of "The tide that from the West..." shows how Rubadiri's inspiration grew in maturity and bitterness between the original composition of the poem (which he wrote as a young student at Makerere in the early fifties, although it was apparently not printed

[197] David Rubadiri, "The Theme of National Identity in East African Writing," in K. L. Goodwin *National Identity*, ed. K. L. Goodwin (Melbourne: Heinemann Educational, 1970), pp. 51–57.

[198] For a discussion of this poem, see Lloyd W. Brown, "The Historical Sense: T. S. Eliot and Two African Writers," *The Conch*, 3, 1 (1971), 59–70.

until 1970) and the final text, which appeared in 1968.[199] Yet the bitterness is subdued and oblique. The balance and restrained tone of Rubadiri's poetry may illustrate the gentle temper of his fellow countrymen: it certainly ushers in the characteristic mode of later Malawian poetry.

The political evolution of Malawi and of its leadership, though far from unprecedented in black Africa, must have contributed powerfully to the sense of dejection which affected Rubadiri over the years. Interviewed by Lewis Nkosi in 1965, he had stated most forcefully that his main interest at the time was "trying to play the little part I can in contributing towards the reconstruction of my country". He had added, as a sort of apology for poetry, that "the only thing that Africa has got to boast about, and one which I think can contribute towards humanity is the spiritual force which we still retain", a sense of values which "a number of our friends in the other countries are beginning to lose very fast because of fast and rapid economic development".[200]

But the writer must have been painfully disturbed by the speedy general demoralization which sapped the very foundations of African cultures as the new leaders and the urban crowds embraced with self-destructive delight the Western model of economic development. This was very obvious in his only novel, *No Bride Price* (1967), which recounts the adventures of a young civil servant who allows himself to become involved in shady dealings with Asian traders while his love for a beautiful unsophisticated native girl (who happens to be his sister!) is thwarted by his attraction to a perverse white woman and to a highly intellectual and refined Indian girl. The puzzled hero is conveniently and significantly saved by an army coup. This was a work of considerable ambition in which Rubadiri attempted to deal simultaneously with the moral theme of political corruption and with the complex problems of personal adjustment arising from the co-existence of blacks and Indians in Eastern Africa and from the cultural differences between them.

No Bride Price was not well received: the story is marred by the irrelevant intrusion of a melodramatic double incest story and by the many improbabilities in plot and character depiction; more generally, as Gerald Moore put it, Rubadiri had observed "the real nature of the temptations and moral obfuscations which attend sudden power with an eye that is decent and humane, but his hero is too flabby an instrument to expose them fully."[201] Peter Nazareth, a Ugandan writer of Goan origin, was the only critic to stress Rubadiri's skill in contrasting "the hollow, corrupting life of the city with the healing, communal power of life in the village," and the genuine sense of community in the village with the empty rhetoric of fashionable "African socialism."[202] Nevertheless, by the time the novel appeared there was nothing new in this rudimentary antithesis.

[199] Donald E. Herdeck, *African Authors* (Washington, D.C.,: Black Orpheus Press, 1973), pp. 372–373. The early version was published by S. Okechukwu Mezu in his "The Origins of African Poetry," in *New African Literature and the Arts*, ed. Joseph Okpaku (New York: Crowell, 1970), pp. 52–63. The final version was printed in Gabriel Okara *et al., Poetry from Africa* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1968).

[200] Lewis Nkosi, "Conversation with David Rubadiri," *Africa Report*, 9, 7 (1964), 14–15, repr. in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed. G. Killam (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 118–126.

[201] Review in *African Literature Today*, 2 (1969), 51–52.

[202] Peter Nazareth, *Literature and Society in Modern Africa* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972), pp. 175–181.

More original was undoubtedly Rubadiri's emphasis on what an Indian woman in the novel describes as "this frightening feeling of seeing two cultures doomed to live together not taking the challenge—this acceptance of double standards with the hypocrisy of believing it does not exist" (p. 107). When an attempt was made to meet that challenge, it was in a direction which Rubadiri would certainly have deemed undesirable. In an interview recorded by the B.B.C. African service in 1970, he acknowledged that he was not really a prose writer, adding that he had written *No Bride Price* "as an accident."[203]

Actually, Rubadiri's was not the first novel to have been published by a Malawian writer: in 1966, Aubrey Kachingwe (b. 1926), a professional journalist who had received most of his education and training in Tanzania and Kenya, had issued *No Easy Task*, whose narrator hero—a journalist—chronicles the dramatic and often unpalatable events that accompany his country's accession to independence. While indicting the corruption of the politicians (they are "a tribe of their own") in a manner that had become conventional almost since the début of Cyprian Ekwensi, the Malawian novelist chose to comply with the requirements of ethics rather than reality and let goodness triumph over evil in the end. He also evinced the concern with prostitution as a characteristic feature of urban life which was to become a major trend in East African writing with Oculi's *Prostitute* (1968).[204] It was perhaps his main claim to originality that he displayed an exceptional awareness of the successful prostitute's role as a significant factor in politics.

The third Malawian writer to emerge in the late sixties was Legson Kayira, who claims he does not know his date of birth, but must have been born around 1940. He first reached print with *I Will Try* (1966), an autobiographical account of his obstinate search for education, which started him in 1958 *walking* all of the 2500 miles to Khartoum as a preliminary, as it turned out, to studying in the United States and in England, where he ultimately settled in the late sixties. His first novel, *The Looming Shadow* (1967) was published in New York with a blurb describing it somewhat hyperbolically as "the first authentically African novel by a native African"! The story takes place in a tribal milieu in colonial days and satirizes witchcraft and traditional justice, "the looming shadow of darkness left from antiquity." Despite the book's ominous title, the writer's outlook is fundamentally comic and his tale is a comedy of manners ridiculing both sides with detached amusement. By the late sixties, however, critics had become familiar with the work of Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi; accordingly, they were more demanding of emergent authors than they used to be during the preceding ten years. Reviewing *The Looming Shadow*, Gerald Moore noted dryly that "the disadvantage of this impartial distribution of favours is that we do not greatly care." And Mphahlele observed at the time that while Kayira "captures the quality of village life" and "is good at sketching the surface of things," the story is "naïve" and "petty," revealing a talent that was still to blossom.

The blossoming began with *Jingala* (1969), which offered a far less simplistic view

[203] "David Rubadiri Talks to Edward Blishen," *Cultural Events in Africa*, No, 80, 1/2 (1971), (supp.).
[204] On this particular motif, see Judith Cochrane, "Some Images of Women in East African Fiction," *ACLALS Bulletin*, 5, 1 (1978), 32–49.

of the issue. The eponymous character, a decrepit old man at 55, is of course meant to symbolize the traditional Africa that is passing away. The culture-clash motif takes the usual form of a conflict of generations when Jingala's determination that his educated son, Gregory, should comply with traditional norms, live in the village, marry, till the soil and become a respected elder, meets with stiff opposition from the young man, who has decided to study for the priesthood after high school. Kayira himself called attention to the parallel between this and *Blade among the Boys* (1962) by the Nigerian novelist Onuora Nzekwu.[205] Ezekiel Mphahlele complained that the Malawian writer did not seem to be "sure himself where, if at all, his affiliation lies."[206] It might be argued, on the contrary, that *Jingala* revealed a less flippant approach to a serious problem, with a balanced, and thus ambiguous, perspective. The death of Jingala is an apt emblem of the disappearance of the world-view to which he was attached, but his defeat is not presented as an occasion for rejoicing: it is pathetic and even to some extent tragic. Nor is it certain that the young man's choice, which he is now free to follow, has not been subtly imposed upon him, or that it is altogether desirable.

In his interview with Margaret Henry, Kayira had shown his awareness that "there will come a time when it will be quite useless to start writing on the old and the new. I think in the next few years we will find it necessary to branch off and find something entirely different." A deliberate effort at self-renewal was perceptible in his third novel, *The Civil Servant* (1971), the very title of which announced a re-orientation of his interests towards the modern African society of urban bureaucracy. Dealing with the contrasted but equally uninteresting love lives of two civil servants, the book was extremely disappointing. The central plot focuses on an illicit love affair between George Chipewa, the head-clerk whose marriage has failed, and Isabella, a young country-woman whose husband is working in the South African mines. Its interest resides mainly in the characters of the two women involved, but the reader's attention is constantly diverted by secondary characters, superfluous sub-plots and loose ends of all sorts. Apart from these structural defects, the novel fails in two important respects. Kayira indulges in an overabundance of pointless, redundant and ultimately boring dialogues. Furthermore, the light tone of these and the inclusion of several comic incidents in the story are strangely at odds with the painful plight of the characters.

Such discordance between Kayira's fundamentally comic outlook and his determination to tackle highly serious topics[207] was even more in evidence in his fourth novel, *The Detainee* (1974), which handles a theme that had already become trite in the West African novel in English: the disillusionment brought about in the intellectual élite by the violence inherent in the despotic regimes, whether military or otherwise, which after a dozen years of independence had established their control over much of black Africa. Kayira was joining the ranks of those who had fathered what might be called "the new protest writing." The novel was obviously intended to stigmatize a black dictatorship which organizes its thugs into so-called "Youth Brigades," licensed to terrorize the most

[205] Legson Kayira interviewed by Margaret Henry," *Cultural Events in Africa*, 41, 1/3 (1968), (supp.).
[206] Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (rev. ed.; London: Faber, (1974), p. 256.
[207] For a more extended discussion of Kayira's novels, see Adrian Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East and South* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), pp. 215–225.

harmless citizens into blind obedience. While its subject is not to be dismissed lightly, the book is marred by Kayira's inability to raise his tragic imagination to the level of a reality with which press reports had made his readers all too familiar. His hooligans are tame enough despite their swagger and an occasional murder; their talkative victims indulge here and there in weakly comic dialogue. Significantly, after turning out four novels in seven years, the author remained silent throughout the second half of the decade.

By the mid-seventies, Malawi could be seen to occupy a very specific position in the literary history of black Africa. It had given birth to three novelists whose six novels, however mediocre, were printed by reputable publishers in Europe and the United States. At that time, Zambia, with far greater economic resources for a similar population of around five million, could not boast more than one novelist, Dominic Mulaisho. As to Zimbabwe, then still Rhodesia, it had likewise produced only one black novelist: Stanlake Samkange. But there was another side to this comparative literary precociousness of the economically least developed among the successor states of the Central African Federation: there is some significance in the fact that the two more productive writers of this first generation should have been active outside the country.

One of the reasons why Rubadiri and Kayira chose to stay and work in exile even after Malawi had become independent is undoubtedly to be found in the character of Dr. Hastings Banda's regime and in the hypersensitive vigilance of the powerful Censorship Board which was set up in 1968. A revealing light was shed on its workings in the literary field when Harriet McIlwraith reported that much of the best in African modern literature was banned in Malawi, including Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana,* Achebe's *No Longer at Ease,* Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino,* Lubega's *The Outcast* and even Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala.* Such a list suggests that "all comment in fiction or non-fiction on contemporary Africa seems to be suspect" to Malawian censors, while "any frank presentation of male–female relationships is liable to get the same treatment as the most sickening, sexist pornography." Turning to the attitude of the Censorship Board—which contains non-Africans and respectfully follows Dr. Banda's personal conceptions on African matters and his "old-fashioned" views on sex—Harriet McIlwraith went on to say

> a vindictive thoroughness characterises the exclusion of poems by David Rubadiri, once a colleague of Banda's. He was the first Malawian writer to make a name abroad, and now [1979] lives in exile elsewhere in Africa. It must be because Rubadiri is in it that the Board has banned Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier's standard Penguin anthology of African poetry. Regarding Rubadiri's novel, *No Bride Price,* the Censorship Board has made clear to those who might stock it in Malawi that though the book is "not legally banned," they should not make this title—or anything else by Rubadiri—available to the public.
>
> Legson Kayira is another Malawian who lives abroad, where his novels are quite widely known. Two, however, are banned in Malawi.[208]

With the seventies, it appeared that Dr. Hastings Banda—once obsequiously described as "His Excellency the Life President, the one man who has done so much to

[208] Harriet McIlwraith, "Dr. Banda's Banned Books," *Index on Censorship,* 8, 6 (1979), 56–58.

bring interest, insight and vitality into the speaking and teaching of Chichewa"[209]—was now prepared to allow a little more freedom in the promotion of imaginative writing in English. Following the Makerere pattern, there was an upsurge of creative activity at the English Department of the University of Malawi, which had been founded in 1964. Gifted students were efficiently encouraged by expatriate teachers such as David Kerr, Lan White, James Gibbs, Angus Calder or Adrian Roscoe.

A new generation of authors emerged in the midst of animated discussions which began in 1970 at Chancellor College. The outcome was the constitution of the Writers' Group, which met every Thursday with an average attendance of forty-five. In the following year, the Hetherwick Press, which had been founded in Blantyre by Presbyterian missionaries in the early years of the century, issued *Mau: 39 Poems from Malawi.* This, together with the publication of a cyclostyled little magazine, *The Muse,* by the Writers' Group, seemed to augur well for the future of Malawian poetry in English. As early as 1972, however, Kerr and White voiced some misgivings. While proudly pointing out that "the dead hand of Eng. Lit. is almost wholly absent" from the poetry of young Malawi poets, who are "long past the temptations of fine writing, and well aware of the advantages of irony and understatement," the two lecturers could hardly refrain from mentioning the impact of censorship in however measured terms:

> The Malawi Government Censorship Board is not obtrusive or tactless. It has rarely questioned any publications from the University.... Yet there is no doubt that its very existence is inhibiting to local writers. Direct political comment is automatically ruled out. So too, more seriously, is that direct involvement with the village majority which would be the hallmark of a mature local literature.[210]

This situation probably accounts for specific features in the new literature such as its abundant use of "irony and understatement". Kerr and White claim that "the clear superiority of their poetry over their short stories and radio plays has...something to do with their isolation in the community as a whole," but the choice of poetry as a favourite medium of expression may owe as much to the oblique, esoteric character of modern poetry which renders it peculiarly suitable to a sensitive political climate. There was need also for caution in the choice of topics: it was understandably not advisable to discuss the problems of racialism or unemployment either in openly political terms or in realistic imaginative fiction.

According to Angus Calder the inhibiting effect of the censorship should mainly be taken to task for "the strange gap between 1971 promise and 1979 lack of evident fruit."[211] Indeed, the only collection of poetry by a single Malawian writer that reached print in the seventies, Frank Chipazula's *Visions and Reflections* (1973), was published by the Zambia state company NECZAM. Though a comparatively large number of Malawian poets used English, they achieved publication of a sort only in *The Muse* and

[209] Steve S. Mwiyeriwa, "Printing Presses and Publishing Houses in Malawi," *African Book Publishing Record,* 4, 2 (1978), 87–97.
[210] David Kerr and Lan White, "New Writing from Malawi," *Afriscope,* 3, 12 (1973), 54–59.
[211] Angus Calder, "Under Zomba Plateau: The New Malawian Poetry," *Kunanini* 1, 2 (1979), 59–67.

in another local cyclostyled journal which was launched in 1976, *Odi*. Their poetry has a quality of its own which Adrian Roscoe ascribed to a preference for "a quieter tone and a less public posture than its East African equivalent. It uses a more subtle and circumspect statement and is rich in irony and ambiguity. It seems often to lie at the opposite pole from East Africa's ear-splitting verse."[212] It is true, as Calder remarks, that "the temptation to be strident and glib about obvious 'social' and 'political' themes is one which they perforce must resist" and that the fact that "censorship seems to worry as much about 'sex' and 'bad grammar' as about 'politics' ... makes it all the more stultifying." Yet the sense of obliqueness, the quietness, the subdued impression of privacy that emanate from the poems of such younger men as Jack Mapanje (b. 1944), Felix Mnthali (b. 1933), Steve Chimombo (b. 1945) and several others, were already conspicuous in Rubadiri's poetry, composed *in tempore non suspecto*. The three writers named gained some recognition outside the narrow confines of their own country: Chimombo's "Napolo" was published in a Canadian journal in 1975 and a few years later the Danish journal of Commonwealth studies *Kunapipi* printed two poems by Mapanje and one by Mnthali.[213]

Also during the seventies an attempt was made to create a modern drama deriving partly from the local folk traditions associated with the Nyau cult. This cult, which is by no means dead, had been studied in the late sixties by the Rev. Mattheus Schoffeleers of the Dutch Reformed Church, who had pointed out that one of the most organic expressions of this cult, which is of great antiquity, was through mask performances embodying the basic concepts and myths of the community while providing at the same time an opportunity for humorous entertainment.[214] Dr Schoffeleers described his findings at a conference on "Drama in Malawi" which was held at Chancellor College on November 23, 1974, as a kind of postscript to the first College Drama Festival (8–9 November). The festival itself gave birth to modern Malawi drama: alongside an excerpt from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* and E. Zirimu's *Keeping up with the Mukasas*, two genuinely Malawian plays were performed: *Who Will Marry Our Child?* by Joe Mosiwa and *Phuma Uhambe* by Bayani Ngulube.

The second festival, held in March 1976, provided an opportunity to introduce further local playwrights, such as James Ngombe *(The Banana Tree, Beauty of the Dawn)*, Innocent Banda *(The Lean Years, Lord Have Mercy, Cracks, The First Rehearsal)*, Chris Kamlongera *(Love Potion, Graveyards)* and a musical, *Opera Extravaganza* by Peter Chiwona and Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza. Several of these, selected by James Gibbs, were printed in Limbe as *Nine Malawian Plays* (1976). This was one of the first books to bear the imprint of "Popular Publications", a series established in 1974 as a subsidiary of the Catholic White Fathers' Montfort Press (founded 1957).[215] This local press which had already printed a collection of folk tales, *Tales of Old Malawi*

[212] On Malawi poetry, see Roscoe, pp. 134–149.

[213] Steve Chimombo, "Napolo," *Malahat Review*, 36 (1975), 15–24; Felix Mnthali, "Write," Jack Mapanje, "Kabula Curio-Shop" and "Requiem," *Kunapipi*, 1 (1968), 66–68.

[214] J. Mattheus Schoffeleers, *Symbolic and Social Aspects of Worship Spirit among the Mang'anja* (unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1968).

[215] See Mwiyeriwa, pp. 91–93.

(1974), edited by E. Singano and Adrian Roscoe, also issued Paul Zeleza's *Night of Darkness and Other Stories* (1976). By the end of the seventies, the new generation of Malawian writers had not yet produced a full-scale novel, and the activities of the "Popular Publications" series seemed to slow down, especially with regard to writing in English. The most interesting contribution was Steve Chimombo's *The Rainmaker* (1978).

Chimombo, who had returned to Malawi from his studies at Leeds in 1972 and had started editing *Outlook–lookout,* "a bulletin of language, literature and culture", in 1975, was already well known locally as a poet and short-story writer when James Gibbs produced his play as part of the second University Drama Festival in 1976.

The Rainmaker is, in Gibbs' words, "an ambitious attempt to dramatize the origin of a rain-making cult and through it to explore some fundamentals of Cewa religion". In spite of the missionaries' tireless efforts over more than a century, traditional beliefs and rites have no more disappeared in Malawi than anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa: dancing and even such "modern" vernacular forms as the Yoruba opera are still close to their mythical origins; they are not yet cut off from their primeval religious significance. Art performance, therefore, is inevitably mixed up with the still deeply-held beliefs of part of the population. In the case of *The Rainmaker,* the strange ambiguity which presides over the inevitable syncretism between the tradition and the new uses to which it has been put, has been made clear with uncommon vividness in James Gibbs' own report of rehearsal and performance: .

> The play requires a performance by *Nyau* figures, the hunter and the elephant. During rehearsals I was able to work with the hunter and one pair of the elephant's legs to establish the points of entry, the position of drummers and the main outline of the action—the stage-directions demanded that the hunter and the elephant express their harmony by drinking from a single calabash. As the first night approached I gave up hope of having a serious rehearsal of the episode but I was anxious to see how the elephant structure was progressing, and after prolonged negotiations I was taken into the long grass on the edge of the campus to see it. On the day of the performance Chimombo and I were approached by student members of the *Nyau* cult—not members of our cast but initiates who had been called in to advise on the construction of the elephant—and a performance fee of £ 5.00 was demanded. It was clear that the whole *Nyau* episode was increasingly in the hands of cult members rather than costume or property mistress, producer, playwright or cast. In the event negotiations over the sum were still in progress when the performance began and the cue for the entry of the *Nyau* figures was followed by a pause which could have been dramatic, but which, for me at any rate, seemed to spell disaster. I had just decided that the dancers were not coming when jagged sounds began to cut through the evening air. The lights dimmed—an arrangement between the performers and the lighting operator—and the hunter and the elephant entered to an amazed-awestruck-delighted audience. The elephant was accompanied by attendants, some appropriately dressed, some not, some known to me, some not. The hunter danced and in his excitement cut an actor across the nose with his hunting axe! The elephant circled, shuffled, dominated and exited—*without drinking the symbolic draught!* The hunter—he at least had attended rehearsals and knew the episode was part of a larger work, a play—swept up the calabash and gave chase.

He re-entered a moment later and returned the calabash indicating as best he could despite his mask that he and the elephant had drunk together.[216]

Few testimonies are as revealing of the strange complexity of the problems attending the constitution of formal modern-type drama in the midst of societies which, though allegedly christianized, remain deeply attached to their traditional creeds, yet at the same time are overtly, sometimes naïvely, thirsting after the material rewards inherent in Western culture and its economic foundation.

As the decade was coming to an end, however, it was difficult to entertain high hopes for the immediate future of anglophone imaginative writing in Malawi. Rubadiri was no longer heard of, Kayira had not published any new novel since 1974, the revival initiated at the English department in the early seventies had almost petered out, it seemed that the authorities were once more concentrating on the promotion of Cewa, the language of the dominant ethnic majority, and, according to Angus Calder, censorship had become more stringent since the mid-seventies. But His Excellency the Life President was, like the century itself, nearing eighty. He was one of the oldest statesmen in independent Africa and the problem of his succession was bound to arise in a not too remote future. For those who were aware both of the enormous power wielded by modern despots in the new Africa and of the capricious suddenness with which the winds of change could transform the political scene, radically unexpected developments could by no means be excluded in cultural, including linguistic and literary, policy, with possible long-term results that were totally unpredictable.

[216] James Gibbs, "Theatre in Malawi," *Odi*, 2, 1 (1977), 13–18, repr. in *Afriscope*, Nov.–Dec. 1977, 69–71.

MICHAEL R. WARD

6. ZAMBIA

Zambian literature is one of the smallest national literatures in anglophone Africa. Before the country became independent in 1964, the Northern Rhodesia Publications Bureau gave encouragement to books in the vernacular, and it was not until the mid-sixties that an effort was made to spur creative writing in English. By this stage, Lusaka and the Copperbelt towns had long established themselves as the major urban centres, linked by a "line-of-rail" which was the axis of industrial development. This features prominently in the genesis of Zambian cultural awareness, for the doctrine advocated by President Kenneth Kaunda under the name of "Zambian Humanism,"[217] not only tended to reconcile "multiple tribal customs,"[218] but also sought to reduce the gap between town and country. Zambian Humanism evolved partly as a result of the need for a national direction and as proof positive that Zambian independence justified itself. The dangers of continuing the tradition of colonial exploitation were apparently real enough. President Kaunda's first statement of Humanism (made in a speech to the ruling United National Independence Party in 1967) warned of such dangers and frankly asked, "Are we being human, are we being African by following this line of thought and action ?" There is little doubt that the new code of behaviour was intended to halt the decline in the country's morale and put a stop to corrupt practices.

In the early discussions that occurred about the development of a Zambian literature in English, attention was drawn to the difficulties attached to the problems of a small English-speaking élite whose heavy administrative responsibilities would not allow much time for creative writing. John Reed (then Professor of English at the University of Zambia), anxious that expectations should not overwhelm real possibilities, was probably overstating the case when he wrote of "a few nostalgic poems from Ambassadors living abroad and a few novels by journalists who though busy have learned to write quickly."[219] Speaking about the rise of Zambian literature has never been easy. Taking a retrospective view one Zambian writer, Andreya S. Masiye, wrote in 1970:

[217] This doctrine has been expounded in Kenneth Kaunda's various books: *Zambia Shall Be Free* (London: Heinemann, 1962), *A Humanist in Africa* (London: Longmans 1966) and *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to its Implementation* (Lusaka: Government printer, 1967).

[218] Timothy K. Kandeke, *Fundamentals of Zambian Humanism* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1977), p. 55.

[219] John Reed, "A Zambian Literature?," *New Writing from Zambia*, N° 2 (1966), 2–6.

> I regard the date 1968 as a landmark in Zambia's literary endeavours. Two things happened. There was an increase in our cultural activities; secondly, the number of periodicals, and other literary forums multiplied.[220]

Yet it is hard to see a justification for this view: Zambia's second important literary journal, *The Jewel of Africa,* appeared in 1968 indeed, but *New Writing from Zambia,* had already been established in 1964. These early periodicals were crucial in launching the debate about Zambian writing in English: published and printed in Zambia, they provided a necessary stimulus to young writers. Some of the editorials speak of the paucity of writing, and in 1969 *New Writing from Zambia* gives the explanation that "creative writing in Zambia is not allowed to blossom because we are all afraid of writing incorrect and ungrammatical English." It is interesting to note here that English composition in Zambia has not attempted to be self-consciously "correct," but has aimed at a fidelity to the way English is spoken in the country.

Any chronological account of the literary history of Zambian writing in English must begin with *The Lands of Kazembe* by Andreya Masiye (b. 1922), a play which was first produced on the radio in 1957, but was not published in Zambia until 1973. The author, however, was no beginner: as early as 1946, he had won a prize from the Northern Rhodesia African Literature Committee for a story in English, *The Lonely Village,* which was printed in London in 1951; in 1962 he had a tale in his native Nyanja language published by the Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Publications Bureau. It was also in 1962 that Kenneth Kaunda (b. 1924) produced his autobiography, *Zambia Shall Be Free,* a direct and convincing account of his struggle to win independence. In 1967, Longmans of Zambia published *Shaka Zulu,* a play by Fwanyanga M. Mulikita (b. 1928), who was already responsible for a piece of short fiction issued in 1958 by the Publications Bureau in his own language, Lozi; in the following year, the same author produced Zambia's first collection of short stories, *A Point of No Return*; it was published by the National Educational Company of Zambia (NECZAM), a company that was to be responsible for the production of the bulk of Zambian literature.[221] Three years later came two novels published by NECZAM: Masiye's *Before Dawn* and *Ticklish Sensation* by Gideon Phiri (b. 1942). These were followed in 1971 by a miscellaneous collection of short stories edited by Mufalo Liswaniso, *Voices of Zambia,* while Heinemann Educational were issuing the first Zambian novel in their African Writers Series: *The Tongue of the Dumb,* by Dominic Mulaisho (b. 1933). It was at this time, too, that the first poetry collections began to appear: *A Sheaf of Gold* (1971) by P. Zulu and *Poems* (1972) by Lyson Tembo, both of which were published in Zambia. The publication of Zambian plays came last in this line of development, though the plays themselves (as with the Masiye work mentioned) had often been written and produced long before; the reason for this lies in the type of drama being produced: popular plays which were edited

[220] "Zambia's Literary Quest," *The Jewel of Africa,* 2,3/4 (1970) 4–7.

[221] For more detailed information about NECZAM, see Anon., "National Educational Company of Zambia Ltd." *African Book Publishing Record,* 1,2 (1975), 135–136; Simon D. Allson. "State Participation in Publishing: the Zambian Experience" in *Publishing in Africa in the Seventies,* ed. E. Oluwasamni (Ile-Ife, 1975), pp. 59–69, and Geoffrey J. Williams, "The Zambian Publishing Scene: A Commentary," *African Book Publishing Record,* 3,1 (1977), 15–21.

and revised in the light of audience reaction. The exception to this was *The Long Arms of the Law* by Kabwe Kasoma (b. 1933), which was serialized in the first three issues of *The Jewel of Africa* (though even this play is currently being revised for a new edition); his epic trilogy on the life of Kenneth Kaunda has never been published in full though the second part, *Black Mamba Two,* was anthologized in the African Writers Series in 1976;[222] in the same year, his play, *Fools Marry,* was published in Zambia.

Unlike other parts of East Africa, Zambian literature did not emerge from a "taught" tradition of written art. But it is interesting to note that a number of key works are a reworking of or are partly based on, earlier texts: the *Black Mamba* plays use material from Kaunda's autobiography; *The Lands of Kazembe* and *Shaka Zulu* are based on historical documents. It is therefore difficult to dismiss Zambian literature as being without a foundation in the world of books. At the same time, one can have no hesitation in saying that written works by Zambians belong squarely to the real world. The appeal is to that elusive, yet present phenomenon, "the common man." Zambian writers attempt to deal directly with current issues: social conflict, urban re-adjustment and national values. The development of a literary style is seen as a process which re-inforces unity as expressed through the philosophy of Zambian humanism. As Masiye says:

> The development of literary style is important. Our styles must meet the requirements of Humanism and interpret it correctly.[223]

In Zambia as in many other African countries, prose fiction began on a small scale, most writers trying to gain experience by composing short stories, which were usually published in the two local literary journals before being collected in book form. This shorter fiction displays the variety of styles and approaches that have been employed to respond to "the requirements of Humanism." Indeed, such works were very much part of the national debate which generated the new code and in some cases, pre-dated Kaunda's earliest pronouncement. The journals mentioned were an important open forum for the publication of a number of experiments. The traditional oral tale was either directly transcribed, as in "The King's Decision" by Stanley Liswaniso,[224] or the writer used the stylistic devices of oral narrative to tell a modern story: "A Smartly Dressed Man"[225] by William Saidi (b. 1937) is a tale with an urban setting, yet behind the plot and the characterization lies a surreal quality which belongs to the tradition of folklore. These stories serve the purposes of Humanism by their references back to rural traditions. But in a very real sense, Saidi is also making a comment on the problems of urban living, and this is evidenced in the anecdotal tale "We All Make Mistakes,"[226] which explores the absurdities of drink and prostitution without attempting to moralize on either subject. Saidi's strength lies in his detachment from the issues he is describing,

[222] In *African Plays for Playing*, ed. Michael J. Etherton.
[223] "Zambia's Literary Quest," p. 6.
[224] *The Jewel of Africa*, 1,1 (n. d. [1968]), 9–11.
[225] *New Writing from Zambia*, N° 1 (1966), 13–19.
[226] *New Writing from Zambia*, N° 2 (1969), 10–16.

and in his comprehension that these are part of a general human condition: people are fools. It is this that links him to the dramatist Kabwe Kasoma, whose play, *Fools Marry*, explores this condition at greater length.

In his excellent story, "The Passionate Rebellion,"[227] Andreya Masiye is more concerned to provide a moral. The central character is a girl who has mastered in a figurative sense several aspects of Zambian tradition: for example, she is able to perform dances from a number of different regions; when she marries a man from another tribe, her family disapproves, but by the end of the story, they have come to recognize the wisdom of their daughter's decision. Masiye's intention is to illustrate the real strengths of a commitment to national unity: the child that results from the marriage will be the beginning of a new, different order.

The first book-size collection of stories was Mulikita's *A Point of No Return*, which a reviewer malevolently described as an "uninspiring procession of plastic people, stereotypes and skimpily explored social situations."[228] Yet it is difficult to see, given the situations that he describes, how Mulikita could have rendered them more faithfully. It is true that the collection shows a writer coming to terms with his craft, and with the restrictions imposed by the form itself: dramatic conclusions are occasionally tacked on to the end of stories bluntly and hastily, and there is evidence at times of too much "explaining". But there is no doubt of Mulikita's command over his material. The stories range variously between settings of an urban and a rural nature and attempt to present us with the blunt truth about them. In "Back to Rural Romance" he exposes the constraints of village life in which strict taboos operate, a far-from stereotyped depiction of village inhibitions, fears and barriers to communication. In the urban stories, he shows how violence and degrading living conditions lead to despair and crime. It is in his detailed descriptions that the author best succeeds in the exploration of social conditions. "Chibikubantu's Lover" details the multiple composition of a "compendious mattress" which is being purged of bedbugs; the mattress symbolizes the collated effort of man's experience, where improvisation works with the hoarding of precious materials to form, in spite of its transience, a whole: the sense of a unified society can be achieved, Mulikita seems to say, through science and communal effort. "The Borders of Reality" treats modern scientific methods sympathetically, illustrating the possibilities for positive good that can be exerted by means of hypnosis. The central character is a psychiatrist who conceives the beneficial effects of returning his society to a sense of the past: "From the past he was sure that a profitable present and future course of human events could be constructed."[229] A restoration of past order and integrity is also advocated in "A Tender Crop", which tells of a man who returns to his village after forty years of unrewarded service on a white man's farm: his "point of no return" is reached when he discovers that he can obtain from his fellow villagers a unity and a willingness to work which make his venture a success. The story brings out the human potential to

[227] *The Jewel of Africa*, I,4 (1968) 24–30.
[228] L. Bloom, *The Jewel of Africa*, I,3 (1968), 23–24.
[229] Mulikita, *A Point of No Return*, (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1968) p. 111.

be found in the ashes of the dead past, and therefore displays Mulikita's commitment to Humanism.

The past and the future are central pre-occupations in *Voices of Zambia,* which offer, John Reed said, "an oddly convincing image of Zambia."[230] Many of the stories in the volume deal with the conflicts that arise as a result of newly acquired wealth and position. Contempt for tradition is seen to accompany the rise to eminence, and is frequently regarded by the writers as dangerously objectionable. Until the late sixties, short fiction of this kind was the only way in which the budding anglophone Zambian literature exploited the wealth of dramatic material afforded throughout the continent by this conflict between old and new. It could only give fractured mirror images of the complexities and antagonisms in Zambian society, until in 1971 Dominic Mulaisho's novel, *The Tongue of the Dumb* appeared as the first fitting attempt to do justice to the oneness of the nation.

The title refers to the central issue of communication, which informs the writing. Set in colonial days, the novel tells of two societies, the mission and the village, which live alongside each other and yet are separate worlds, held together by the most fragile communicating links. Mulaisho enables us as readers to see the similarities between the two communities, parallels existing on an individual and a social level, yet he does not come to our assistance in unravelling the many mysteries that occur: it is part of his purpose to make us feel a sense of conspiracy, of lurking evil. The description of Luangua river which "never looks more peaceful than when a crocodile has just pulled a human being into its inner caverns" is an indication of this purpose. The novel is concerned with the crisis in confidence that occurs when the leadership of the two communities is shaken by dissidents, and analyses a period in time when "the whole fabric of society was at stake." The dissidents, Lubinda (in the village) and Father Oliver (in the mission), are stern advocates of tradition; the leaders, Mpona and Father Gonzago, are liberal humanists. There is a sense in which we can see Mulaisho's novel as a prophetic parable of political behaviour in post-colonial Zambia, representing the clash that was to occur in the Zambian leadership in the year of the novel's publication. Mulaisho's portrait of this impending crisis is deeply affected by his own commitment to Humanist ideals. Despite his at times misanthropic view of man (even Mpona is shown to behave despicably), the novel offers a criticism of hospital orderlies who treat village lepers as "just names, names to be matched against the numbers just as you brand cattle." The real evil of disunity lies in the loss of communication so that, as John Reed aptly put it in his review, "man's tongue which by communication founds community becomes the instrument of the spread of evil gossip."[231] Communication is restored in the novel with the aid of science (the dumb child at the centre of the conflict is made to speak), but more importantly, with Father Oliver's recognition that his "scientific doctrine" has been mere magic, itself the foundation of evil. At the end of the novel the two divided communities have established, however uncertainly, a corporate being.

[230] John Reed, "Zambia's Writers on Parade," *Times of Zambia,* (26 January 1972), 6.
[231] Ibid.

By comparison with *The Tongue of the Dumb,* Andreya Masiye's novel, *Before Dawn,* is a much slighter achievement. There are superficial similarities between the two works: *Before Dawn* is also set in a village in Eastern Zambia before independence. But whereas Mulaisho is anxious to explore the possibilities of a social situation riven by developing conflicts, Masiye is content to present a simple narrative account of a young boy growing up. The differences between the two novels are distinctive: *The Tongue of the Dumb* has no single identifiable central character; *Before Dawn* pursues one character throughout, seeing the situation through his eyes. *Before Dawn* is about survival. The boy, Kavumba (the name means "whirlwind"), grows up under painful circumstances: his father is a rake who leaves home, and his mother dies in agony. Kavumba receives a little education, but fails to find a job. Having survived his experiences in the war, he returns to his village, where he becomes the headman. It is part of Masiye's purpose to show up the tenaciousness of the village-born man. Kavumba's strength lies in his fidelity to village traditions: his father had failed to win the confidence of the village because he had scorned the traditional authority, the Bwalo, but Kavumba shows his respect for it in his rejection of his father. Masiye does not explore the callousness of this rejection. With Kavumba's return to the village, peace and unity are restored. Masiye takes over the persons of his central character in the closing pages of the book and tells us that "A new era was beginning in our village."[232] Though often richly inventive and true to the life of the village—the narrative is sprinkled with the songs of the villagers—*Before Dawn* suffers from a heavily autobiographical perspective; the "truth" of the work as fiction is affected by the author's lack of detachment. Kavumba has no faults and in idealizing his village hero, Masiye puts his credibility at risk.

The difference in literary approach and quality between those two early Zambian novels probably reflects differences in the training of both writers: born in the early twenties, Masiye was educated in mission schools and completed his studies in a variety of British army schools, whereas Mulaisho, who is a decade younger, attended a local teachers' college before studying economics, history and English at the then University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Although Zambia's third novelist, Gideon Phiri, is himself a decade younger than Mulaisho, his *Ticklish Sensation* is basically an autobiographical novel like Masiye's, albeit in an altogether different key. A tale about an obsession, it anticipates the Ugandan novel, *Sobbing Sounds* (1975) by Omunjakko Nakibimbiri, in the detailed account of the sexual escapades of its central character. Phiri's story, however, is chiefly concerned with the early efforts of young Jojo to reach sexual fulfilment. On the one hand, Jojo finds himself frustrated by indignant elders, on the other by school authorities who forbid his entry into the grounds of a neighbouring girls' school. The last pages of the novel find him, now an Information Officer, locked in the arms of his wife-to-be enjoying at last "the real ticklish sensation." Despite the apparently pornographic nature of the subject matter, the novel is a moral tale with a conventional conclusion, as is Phiri's second novel *Victims of Fate* (1974), a story about crime and punishment. Phiri does not trouble himself greatly with social background, though there is a somewhat tenuous link in the work between Jojo's

[232] Masiye, *Before Dawn* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1971), p. 143.

emancipation from the bondage of adolescence and Zambian political independence. In addition to this, the structures of the educational community are seen to be associated with colonialism: Jojo views the school system itself as tending to retard African development on a political level. But *Ticklish Sensation* does not attempt to be a serious novel: Jojo deliberately mocks the traditional notion of respect. It is a mockery with which Phiri, through his authorial association with the central character, to a large extent identifies himself. There is evidence to suggest that the novel is a satire on youthful folly. It is impossible to divorce this issue from the journalistic style of the story: in its deliberate flippancy, it is a slap in the face of the ponderous African novel tradition, and as such constitutes an important departure—less successful in what it actually offers than in what it had seemed to promise.

Up to the late seventies, Zambian novelists concerned themselves with rural themes in colonial settings not as an escape from national realities and urban problems, but as a way of reflecting upon these realities and problems in isolation. On the contrary, the younger Zambian poets mostly wrote poetry which tackles these problems directly. *The Loneliness of a Drunkard* (1973), the first collection of Richard Chima (b. 1945), shows the poet stretching out towards the securities that ought to be there (a family, a love, a political ideology for Africa), only to find a world dominated by superpowers and selfish corruption. As a poet, Chima assumes the role of the hurt victim in an exploitative situation where he is being used as "raw material."[233] In his protest against this situation, he places his youthful faith as a reformer in the power of the word. Yet there is a sense in which this poetry, through its tendency to revel in despair, is an escape from the realities themselves. Through drink and drugs, existence becomes a flight from social problems: it is interesting to note in this respect the number of times the word "exist" is used with "exit" as the underlying meaning.

In *Africa is Made of Clay* (1974), Patu Simoko (b. 1951) appears to be in many ways just as despairing as Chima, but his poetry produces images which give a totality to the experiences he describes, thus achieving detachment and form. Simoko's wilderness has specific dimensions and he has mapped out a plan of the area. There is also at least one poem in the collection that expresses faith in African self-reliance: "Julius, who will oil thy feet?"[234] is a deeply felt tribute to the exceptional integrity of Nyerere as a leader.

It is intriguing to observe that Zambian drama evolved in the span of a few years from the preoccupation with the past that is characteristic of narrative prose to an obsession with present-day problems analogous to the central inspiration of Zambian poetry. As Michael Etherton pointed out in his introduction to Masiye's *The Lands of Kazembe*, which can be regarded as the foundation stone of Zambian literary drama in English, the play is adapted from, and has even borrowed the title of, the English translation, made by the explorer Richard Burton (1821–1890) of the diaries of a Portuguese explorer, Francisco de Lacerda (1753–1798), whose trip to the Zambezi River and negotiations with the Lunda King Kazembe are often regarded as the inauguration of modern Portuguese imperialism. Masiye's adaptation is at times very

[233] Chima, *The Loneliness of a Drunkard* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1973) p. 7.
[234] Simoko, *Africa is Made of Clay* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1974) p. 60.

close to the original text in the sense that whole phrases are lifted from Burton. But these are less significant than the changes which the Zambian writer has introduced: telling dramatic effects created in his depiction of Lacerda's crossing of the Luangua (which is significantly different from the original) draw their strength from images supplied by Masiye himself.[235] As to Mulikita's *Shaka Zulu,* it is partly based on E. A. Ritter's biography of Shaka, but the play itself is largely an exercise in rhetoric and seems to have little importance above its employment of the technique under discussion.[236]

Side by side with these somewhat bookish, though undoubtedly learned and well-meant products, a more popular theatre was developing,[237] dominated by the figure of Kabwe Kasoma, who for many years was ignored as a serious dramatist: his plays were misunderstood by adjudicators; they were considered inappropriate material as entertainment on an official level. By sheer tenacity of purpose, and through his direct appeal to the Zambian popular audience, Kasoma has nonetheless survived, and his works even managed to receive a modicum of learned attention.[238] The distinguishing feature of his early plays lies in their satirical view of the conditions imposed on people by industrial society. In the introduction to *The Fools Marry,* Kasoma says he is not so much laughing at drunkenness and infidelity, "but rather at the industrial copperbelt which creates them,"[239] and indicates that the events of the play are based on real happenings. He works away from the concept of "the well-made play" in a region where the author takes his identity from the people he describes and from the audience to which he addresses himself. Hence the publication of one of his plays became the culmination of a group effort, worked out over several years, rather than an initiating event in itself. The fact that Kasoma has acknowledged his indebtedness to Kaunda's autobiography in his composition of the three plays about the life of the Zambian leader is further evidence of his attempt to merge or collate one creative experience with another.

The method employed by Kasoma as a dramatist is directly related to his political

[235] See Francisco José Maria de Lacerda e Almeida, *The Lands of Cazembe. Lacerda's Journey to Cazembe in 1798,* translated and annoted by Captain R. F. Burton (London: Royal Geographical Society, 1873). On those historical events, see Ian Cunnison, "Kazembe and the Portuguese," *Journal of African History,* 2(1961), 61–76 and M. D. D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1973). For a more detailed discussion of the play, see Michael R. Ward "Two Zambian Plays: Reworking the Colonial Experience in the Context of Modern Theatre," *African Social Research,* 18 (1974), 676–688.

[236] A detailed analysis will be found in Donald Burness, *Shaka, King of the Zulus, in African Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1976), pp. 57–69.

[237] Interest in theatrical activity in Zambia seems to have been started by Alan Simpson. "Theatre in Zambia," *Guardian* (London), 12 August 1965, and with an anonymous essay, "The Beginning of a New Beginning for Zambia," *World Theatre,* 14 (1965), pp. 285, 287, 289: this had a follow-up in "Theatrical Situation in Zambia," Ibid., 15,1 (1966), 56–57, and in an essay by Walter Lucas, "Drums and Drama in Central Africa," *Drama,* 82 (1966), 38–41. Interest seemed to wane in the late sixties, which brought forth only Michael Etherton's "Writing Plays in Zambia," *Jewel of Africa,* 1,2 (1968), 7–8. In 1970, however, John Barner's report—"Michael Etherton, lecturer in English at the University of Ibadan, is Interviewed on Zambia's Experimental Theatre," *Cultural Events in Africa,* 64, (1970), supp.—was indicative of a renewal for the promotion and the study of which Etherton himself was largely responsible, as suggested by such brief essays as "Zambia—Popular Theatre," *New Theatre Magazine,* 12 (1972), ii, 19–21, and "Indigenous Performance in Zambia," *Theatre Quarterly,* 3,10 (1973), 44–48, an issue which also contained David Pownall's "European and African Influences in Zambian Theatre," pp. 49–53. In 1975, Zambia' first theatre festival workshop was commented on in David Wallace, "Zambia on Stage," *Zambia Magazine,* 73 (1975), 16–19.

[238] Michael Etherton, "The Dilemma of the Popular Playwright: The Work of Kabwe Kasoma and V. E. Musinga," *African Literature Today,* 8 (1976) 26–41.

[239] Kasoma, *Fools Marry* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1976) p. iii.

message. This is obvious from *Black Mamba Two,* a work which is concerned with the risk of individuals failing to communicate with one another. Though Kasoma sees these "distortions" as elements in the general comedy of the human predicament, his observations are rooted in the misunderstandings that occurred between colonial officials and aspiring nationalists. The logical outcome of this must be an attempt to establish a common rapport, and this takes place in the play when efforts are merged in the interest of national unity. Inevitably, the colonial settlers are left out of this but the point has been made: the problem is not solved with the demise of colonial rule. In a one-act play entitled *Distortion* (written and produced for a Workshop on Communication for Social Development held in Lusaka in 1974), Kasoma again tackles the problem with reference to the misunderstandings between township-dwellers and city authorities in a post-colonial situation. The solution this time lies with the Community Development Officer, who manages to collate interests by patient understanding and care. Kasoma's achievement as a dramatist is central to our understanding of Zambian literature, since he recognizes the dimensions of the composite experience he describes and sees the need not simply to talk about Humanism, but to practise it. In the words of one of the township-dwellers in *Distortion:* "Here we don't talking humanism on lips. We live humanism."[240]

As the seventies were coming to an end after a decade and a half of political independence under one of the more respected leaders of Africa, it was perhaps possible to identify a number of characteristics peculiar to the budding national literature of Zambia. The pursuit of an ideological goal is clearly present, as is the contradictory recognition that human beings, either through their folly, their failure to communicate, or their wayward pursuit of selfish desires, are prone to betray that goal. The extreme of the latter feature is best represented by Saidi's stories, and by Kapelwa Musonda's collection of anecdotes, *The Kapelwa Musonda File,* originally published weekly in *The Times of Zambia* and first collected in 1973. The popularity of this type of writing (which must also include *Ticklish Sensation*) lies in its irreverent humour and in its journalistic clarity. Kasoma and Mulaisho form the link between this "school" and what we might term the "Humanist writers": Kasoma illustrates by the use of satire, Mulaisho by the use of analogy,[241] and yet both are politically committed writers devoted to the aims and intentions of Humanism. Mulikita and Masiye represent the generation of writers who grew up with the independence struggle, and their works show a tendency which, if not actually propagandist, does set out with intention to inculcate the national ideal.[242]

A definition of Zambian literature must take into account the way literature in Zambia has been popularized through journals, newspapers and play productions. Complementary to this is the writer's association with his audience, either by stealth (through anonymity, for example) or by a direct reaction to audience response. There is a sense in which Zambian literature speaks directly to its audience, as in the poetry

[240] Kasoma, *Distortion,* UNICEF Workshop, April–May 1974 (Lusaka: University of Zambia, 1974).

[241] Mulaisho's new novel, *The Smoke That Thunders* (London: Heinemann, 1979), offers further evidence of this.

[242] A further example of how some writers intentionally apply themselves to the task of "corrective" writing is presented by Joseph Muyuni's novel *A Question of Motive* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1978).

or in such prose fiction as *Ticklish Sensation*; this directness owes much of its impetus to journalism. Through these different methods, Zambian literature becomes not merely public, it becomes the voice of the people, responding to its audience and using audience response as part of its method of production. The merging of the artist with his community is no mere accident, it is the result of attempts by Zambians to create a literature which is distinctively their own. However slight the body of existing literature, we are bound to note its composite response, at once varied, experimental and ambitious, to the requirements of a composite society, of which it endeavours to offer a faithful reflection.

David F. Beer

7. ETHIOPIA

Literature in a European language evolved in Ethiopia in the early 1960s, adding to the country's literary tradition, which stretches back almost two thousand years. Because of various influences which worked to bring the age-old feudal Empire almost precipitately into the modern world during the twentieth century, contemporary Ethiopian authors have turned to English whenever they have written in other than the indigenous language, Amharic. Few non-Ethiopians can read Amharic with its unique syllabic script, and Ethiopian writers have thus felt the same artistic and economic impulses that have moved other African authors to use English or French in order to attempt international recognition.

As a result of World War II's aftermath, English replaced French as the accepted second language of Ethiopia and the language officially used in all secondary and higher education, as well as in the diplomatic sphere and much of the business sector. 1961 saw the inauguration of Haile Sellassie I University (now Addis Ababa University), whose English Department was initially able to stress a high standard of competence in the language and encouraged creative writing in English through a number of publications, notably the literary journal *Something*. During the early sixties other English-language publications appeared in Addis Ababa and invited literary contributions, notably *Menen* and the *Addis Reporter*, both of which cast a lively eye on cultural, social and literary life. Like the *Ethiopian Mirror* they are now inactive but are survived by the *Ethiopia Observer*, which has been instrumental in presenting some important English translations of Amharic writing.

Unlike other African literatures in English which emerged at approximately the same time, Ethiopian literature in English has always been concurrent with a strong output of writing in the country's official language, Amharic. Moreover, Ethiopian literature in both Amharic and English is strongly influenced by centuries of writing in Ge'ez, the old Ethiopic literary language, which still survives as a liturgical language in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.[243] Earliest writings in Ge'ez consisted of translations from Aramaic and Greek of the Old and New Testaments and other holy works, and in fact the full text of the Book of Enoch is preserved only in its Ge'ez version. By the thirteenth

[243] For a survey of the many centuries of writing in Ge'ez, see Enrico Cerulli, *Storia della letteratura etiopica* (Florence: Sansoni, 3rd ed., 1968).

century original religious and didactic works were appearing, together with some translations of Arabic writings. Secular writing also evolved at this time in the great chronicles of the reigns of successive rulers and through the compilation of the monumental *Kebra Nagast,* the "Glory of Kings," a literary storehouse of legend and tradition. Ge'ez continued to be used in writing to the beginning of the present century, although by then it was meaningess to all but a small number of Church-educated Ethiopians.

Meanwhile Amharic, which had been a vernacular for centuries, had to wait until the twentieth century to become an accepted literary language. The early 1900s saw the beginnings of serious Amharic writing, however, even though it had to compete with Ge'ez at first. Early Amharic writing tended to be infused with stock moral didacticism in one form or another, and often still is, influenced as it has been by the traditional association of the Ge'ez written word with ethical instruction. Yet since the earliest attempts, hundreds of books have been published in Amharic, and although much variation of standards still exists, an increasing literary sophistication has been the rule, and much quality work is to be found in the growing body of Amharic literature, which now ranges from serious and original prose to popular poetry and a plethora of "penny dreadfuls."[244]

English translations from Amharic, Ge'ez, and one or two other Ethiopian languages have usually directly preceded significant creative work in English by Ethiopian writers, and one suspects a stimulus-response relationship. The first such translations, a short novel and two plays by Makonnen Endalkachew (1892–1963), appeared in 1955, and are interesting as examples of Amharic literature, which formulate and preserve traditional social values and promulgate the teachings of the Church. In 1962 *Fitawrari Balay,* an Amharic novel by Imru Haile Sellassie (b. 1892), appeared in the *Ethiopia Observer* in English; although suffering from a repetitious plot and flat characterization, it is a good example of a stock moralistic romance. This was followed in 1964 by *Tobbya,* a translation of the first novel ever printed in Amharic; the work of Afawarq Gabre Yesus (1868–1947), it had been published in Rome in 1909 under an original title meaning "Fictitious Story"; the English translation displayed its moral intention with the introductory comment that "Much is due to him who is kind to others, much is lost to him who does evil to others."

A more significant 1964 publication is Sahle Sellassie's first novel, *Shinega's Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press). This book is an attempt to compromise in a way on the question as hotly debated in Ethiopia as elsewhere on the continent: whether to compose in an African or European language. Sahle Sellassie (b. 1936) is from the Chaha branch of the Gurage tribe, and has written novels in English as well as an Amharic novel and some short stories. He attended University College in Addis Ababa

[244] For a useful survey and bibliography of early Amharic literature see Albert S. Gérard, "Amharic Creative Literature: The Early Phase," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies,* VI, 2 (1968), 39–59. Also see David F. Beer, "Ethiopian Literature and Literary Criticism in English: An Annotated Bibliography," *Research in African Literatures,* VI, 1 (1975), 44–57. More recent discussions of modern Amharic writing include Thomas Leiper Kane, *Ethiopian Literature in Amharic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), and Reidulf Knut Molvaer, *Tradition and Change in Ethiopia: Social and Cultural Life as Reflected in Amharic Fictional Literature, ca. 1930–1974* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

before doing graduate work in France and the United States, and works at present as a translator. *Shinega's Village* is unusual in that it was written initially in the Chaha language, using Amharic script. Since no one except Sahle Sellassie is literate in Chaha, however, the book was at once translated into English by the author and Professor Wolf Leslau, as had been intended from the start. It makes enjoyable reading, and provides an insight into village life in contemporary Ethiopia and the strains and conflicts that are inevitable as modern life reaches out into the countryside.

In 1961 the *Ethiopia Observer* printed an English translation of an Amharic short story, Tadesse Liben's "Truth." Although strictly following the moralistic tradition by relating how a successful man rejects true friendship for a false lover, this story was the harbinger of a series of Ethiopian stories soon to be written in English. In the same way, translated Ethiopian poetry appeared before any poetry composed in English. 1957 saw the publication, in the *Ethiopia Observer,* of a Ge'ez poem translated by Menghistu Lemma and Sylvia Pankhurst, "On the Eve of Battle." It is an interesting blend of traditional patriotic verse and Ethiopic hymnology heavily reliant upon biblical allusion. A very different poem appeared in *Something* in 1962: a rare translation of a poignant lament from Tigrinya, a language of the exploited northern provinces. The poem is a forerunner of the poetry of social protest that was to be written in Amharic and English later in the decade.

Apart from the 1955 translations of Makonnen Endalkachew's two sermonizing plays, no other Ethiopian drama was translated into English until 1964. Then the *Ethiopia Observer* published a translation of *Marriage by Abduction* by Menghistu Lemma (b. 1925), and thus brought this notable author to the attention of the English-speaking world. The play is a delightful comedy of manners based on reconciling tribal marriage customs with modern ones, and its satirical target is those smart young men who complacently frequent Addis Ababa's ubiquitous coffee bars. It was to set the tone for a longer and more important play by the same author, *The Marriage of Unequals* (1970). Translated from Amharic by the playwright himself, this play is a situational comedy of two lengthy acts which shows some influence of Congreve and Molière yet deals with an entirely Ethiopian setting and subject. Beneath the play's light-heartedly satirical style lie a number of quite serious points, most of them focusing on questions of social and economic inequality. These are brought out by the actions of the main character, Baharu, an Ethiopian version of the "been-to", who, instead of using his foreign education to get the usual cushy administrative job in the city, has gone to live in a remote village where he has started a school and a number of self-help programmes. *The Marriage of Unequals* has been one of the few Amharic works to be translated into Russian as well as English, and has been produced in both English and Amharic; it was once performed in English by Americans wearing traditional Ethiopian dress at the American Embassy in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopian authors have inevitably been influenced by their country's unique history, long-established religion, and ancient literary tradition. All three play an important part in modern Ethiopian literature and help differentiate its subject matter from that of other African literatures:

> We have no reason to protest vehemently against cultural assimilation because we have never been victim to it. If we have become westernised it is because we wanted to. It has not been forced upon us. Likewise we have no reason to search for our roots because we have never lost them. On the contrary, we have become victims of our own tradition, of our own roots. We have lost ourselves in self-praise, in clapping our hands to our stunted tradition which we consider sacred.[245]

The above is perhaps as true of Ethiopian literature in English as it is of literature in the indigenous languages. The artistic limitations of didacticism, so often found in Ge'ez and Amharic writing, are also evident in the first Ethiopian novel in English, *Confession* (Addis Ababa, 1962) by Ashenafi Kebede (b. 1937). The writer grew up in Addis Ababa, went to the United States to study language and music, and later became director of the National School of Music in Addis. According to the dust-cover his novel is "The most exciting, heart-breaking story of an Ethiopian in the United States," and attempts to reveal the problems of inter-racial love and student life abroad. In spite of its obvious message, the story is nevertheless at times effective and alive even if the text is carelessly printed. An Ethiopian student in race-conscious America is made welcome in the home of a wealthy white girl, Caroline—until her parents discover he is actually her boyfriend:

> So far the relationship between Caroline and me stayed completely undiscovered. We kept our relationship seemingly platonic to her parents. We suppressed our feelings in front of them and drew as much satisfaction as we possibly could out of our few furtive glances and remarks which had some significance only to us. But the crucial hour arrived. I guess it had to arrive. Our wit and patience didn't help. The events followed an unpredictable and rough course that was impossible to avoid. One of those accidents, I suppose, that had to happen. (pp. 83–84)

Because of the ensuing ugliness Caroline eventually attempts suicide, fails, marries the student, and together they take part in the marches for racial equality of 1961–1962 during which Caroline, now pregnant, is killed by a white mob in Louisiana. The couple's search for happiness, involving as it does considerable movement from place to place, follows the staple theme of much Ethiopian literature, including *Fictitious Story* and *Fitawrari Balay*: the physical quest for spiritual meaning and satisfaction.

Following his success with *Shinega's Village*, Sahle Sellassie chose to write his next novel in English. *The Afersata* (1968), was published by Heinemann Educational in their African Writers Series. It has a somewhat superficial plot which rests only on the burning of a villager's hut and the search for the culprit. This search is conducted through the institution of the *afersata*, a committee from the community which investigates such crimes. The *afersata* meets a number of times but decides nothing, and the arsonist is never found. The author's dominant aim is to portray the highly communal and self-sufficient nature of peasant society far from the towns; this communal element is stressed throughout the novel and eventually summed up in the words of the *afersata*'s

[245] Sahle Sellassie, "Yegan Mebrat," *Ethiopian Herald* (October 20, 1974), 6. The title is Amharic for "Hidden light," and the article bemoans the fact that critics of African literature ignore Ethiopian literature.

leader: "Fellow villagers, we are all responsible for the burning of Namaga's hut, and we are all condemned collectively to compensate him for his loss, because we have failed to find out the criminal" (p. 89). Meanwhile Sahle Sellassie toils rather unsuccessfully with a problem still confronting Ethiopian writers: how to portray cultural setting authentically without burdening the reader with details unrelated to the movement of the story. Few African cultures are as little known as those of Ethiopia, and most writers attempt to inject local flavour into their English fiction through scattered Amharic terms whose meanings must be found in footnotes or glossaries. Alternatively they provide background commentary and description within the text. The dangers involved in an excess of either technique are obvious, and the latter is illustrated in *The Afersata* by the characterization of Argaw, who is the *cheka shum,* or local official:

> In a land where illiteracy is the rule rather than the exception, in a place where the slightest sign of education is an article of admiration, to be a Cheka Shum, and especially a literate Cheka Shum, is indeed something great. And Argaw was one. (p. 7)

So far so good. But the point soon becomes laboured:

> "It is sufficient," answered Argaw and pulled out a blue ballpoint from the outer pocket of his khaki coat. He had in the chest pocket of his coat three ballpoints that appeared to have been stuck in there more for prestige than for use. Ballpoints, fountain pens and pencils are symbols of literacy, and some people stick them in the most visible part of their clothes as if they were medals of honour. (p. 12)

Such direct authorial comment makes *The Afersata* often seem like social or political history rather than fiction, Frequently a mixture of background information and didactism causes the narrative to recede entirely:

> If the Ethiopian peasants could not improve their material life over the centuries it was probably because they could not enjoy fully the fruits of their labour; and if material progress stagnated it was probably because the creators of material civilization were despised. The man who carved wood, the man who tanned leather and the blacksmith who forged iron into utensils was an inferior creature by the fallacious logic of the ignorant. (p. 16)

The simplistic social approach found in *The Afersata* is more than adequately compensated for in the next English novel by an Ethiopian author, Daniachew Worku's *The Thirteenth Sun* (1973). Due to suppression by Haile Sellassie's government, this remarkable book was not available to readers in Ethiopia until late 1974. Taking its title from the Ethiopian calendar, which consists of a thirteen-month year, *The Thirteenth Sun* is very much set in the present, yet full of that concern for history which pervades both the form and content of so much of Ethiopia's literature.

In the novel the past is everywhere, permeating and polluting contemporary existence. Goytom and his half-sister Woynitu accompany their dying father, Fitawrary Woldu, a nobleman full of contempt for modern ways, to the Abbo shrine on Mount

Zekwala where he hopes to find a cure for his heart disease. The thoughts, reactions, attitudes and sensations of these three people are revealed through their alternating points of view presented for the most part in the form of sombre internal monologues. Thus in the opening chapter we share Goytom's attitude towards his sick father:

> And then something began to rumble and gurgle in the sick man's chest. He began to twitch and roll convulsively. You began to think, listening to him, that he must be a wizard, and master of these remote cliffs, ranges of hills, buttresses and the table mountain—that he it was who originally planted the church in this killing ruggedness, and wantonly dotted the hills with those rotten hovels—that it was he who poisoned men's brains with complacency—that it was he who devoured their hearts with stagnancy and decadence—that it was he who was responsible for this deadly existence. (pp. 8–9)

To the disgust of the educated Goytom and Woynitu their father devoutly believes the priests at the shrine will cure him, and he superstitiously follows their unpleasant dictates, although not without some silent grumbling:

> The point is that I cannot go on taking two or three bottles of water only to throw it up the next moment. Why, it's only just now that the priest told me that the disease in my system is beginning to be washed out... which means I will have to take more and more of this water until I am cleaned. This priest! He has shown me some black matter, a small worm, and some larvae that came out of my bowels in proof of what the Abbo holy water is doing for me. (p. 47)

The pilgrimage up the mountain gradually unfolds a broad panorama of the unlovely actualities of present-day Ethiopia, rooted as they are so often in the medieval nature of that society. Yet the novel is by no means a mere vehicle for social and political comment. Such criticism is there, which is why the book was initially banned in Ethiopia, but the author transcends the limits of didacticism by his technique and style, and through a plot sustained by the realities of the quest for a cure and the accumulation of pent-up emotions inevitably climaxing in violence.

Above all, *The Thirteenth Sun* is a novel of brutality and exploitation. Each character is quick to make the most of a situation or weaker person. The Fitawrary exploits his son and daughter shamelessly in order to get his way, and Woynitu is sexually exploited by her mother, her halfbrother, and finally by a rapist. At every turn the Church is depicted as the great exploiter of the poor, the sick and the superstitious. Beggars flaunt their sores and deformities to win scraps and are quick to exploit fellow wretches weaker than themselves. Everywhere the land is shown to have been exploited by an unenlightened peasantry, and it now enslaves them, making them impoverished, callous and sullen. They take advantage of pilgrims going to Abbo by charging outrageous prices for filthy food and lodging in hovels on the hillside. Goytom's and Woynitu's servants quickly exploit the final predicament by demanding astronomically excessive payment before carrying the Fitawrary's corpse down the mountain. Each person does his part to depict a grasping and inhumane society in which overwhelming poverty and predation allow little room for altruism or progress.

Sahle Sellassie's *Warrior King* (1974) was the third Ethiopian novel to be published in Heinemann's African Writers Series. Unlike *The Afersata,* it is a historical novel and deals with the early part of the life of Emperor Tewodros (fl. 1855–1868), from his origins as a bandit named Kassa to his ascension to the throne after Ras Ali's defeat at the Battle of Aisha. Tewodros has always been something of a culture hero in Ethiopian fact and fiction, and is the subject of a considerable amount of Amharic literature as well as of one English-language play, to be mentioned later in this chapter.

Unfortunately, *Warrior King* suffers from the same excess of documentation and sparsity of dialogue as *The Afersata.* Immediacy is buried beneath historical fact, although clearly the author's dilemma is that he cannot assume familiarity with these facts on the part of many readers. Descriptive passages are sometimes handled well, however, as is the character of Empress Menen, whom we see sitting at her high window in Fasil's Castle at Gondar looking aloof down on her subjects, and who insultingly sends Kassa's battered soldiers a joint of fetid raw meat with which to recover their lost blood after a battle on the Sudan border. At one point, Kassa's army on the move is described thus:

> The warriors on horseback were at the head of a long line of foot-soldiers. Composed of about four hundred lancers and twenty musketeers, followed by hundreds of shield-bearers, donkey-drivers, woodcutters and grass-mowers, who were followed in their turn by scores of wives and mistresses leading children by the hand or carrying babies on their backs, the marchers numbered not less than a thousand. So marched the Ethiopian warriors of old. (pp. 62–63).

The final sentence is typical of a rhetorical habit which often tends to make this work a history book rather than a historical novel; nevertheless, some of the colour of the Emperor's violent life comes through to us. The novel ends on the note which was to sound so loud throughout the reign of Tewodros: the problem of keeping rebellious and feuding lords under control. The introduction of a strange "cat-eyed ferengi" (white man) in the closing chapter hints at the contact with Europe that was soon to develop and eventually lead to the downfall and suicide of Tewodros. Sahle Sellassie has written a sequel to *Warrior King* entitled *Suicide at Amba-Mekdala,* but so far this book has not been published.

Abbie Gubegna (b. 1934) is well known in Ethiopia for his popular Amharic writing, including instructional poems on the dangers of venereal disease and alcohol. He has been a civil servant and a journalist, and attended the International Writing Fellowship Program in Iowa. In 1964 he published a play in English, to be dealt with later in this chapter. His 185-page English novel *Defiance* (1975) was published by the Addis Ababa branch of Oxford University Press. It is a timely reminder to Ethiopians of the hardships suffered once before under oppressive rule.

The story takes place in Addis Ababa in 1937 during the Italian occupation. An old patriot, Fitawrari Abesha, defies an Italian general, Angelo, and is thrown in prison to await execution. He is released, however, after one of his daughters becomes the mistress of Angelo. The family gains the general's trust, then they assassinate him before

fleeing the city to join a guerilla group operating in the countryside. The exciting and tragic outcome of their flight forms the climax of the story.

Unlike his play, Abbie Gubegna's *Defiance* is on the whole well written. Some effective description vividly brings to life an Italian dungeon for Ethiopians, atrocities perpetrated by the fascists, and a hillside battle. Perhaps the portrayal of Angelo, who is caricatured as a fuming, screaming, bloody-eyed fascist, is somewhat overdone, as is the invective used by Italians and Ethiopians alike throughout the novel, but we are left in no doubt regarding the emotions of both sides. A frequently recurring theme is that of those Ethiopians who collaborated with the Italians, the opportunists who "associated themselves with our foes, taking for their own advantage the destruction of their country" (p. 58).

During the 1960s a number of short stories were written by Ethiopians in English. In 1963, just a year after the English translation of Tadesse Liben's short story "Truth", an English story by Hassen Elmi, "The Two Lovers," appeared in *Menen* with the editorial comment that it was being published to encourage all potential Ethiopian writers. Well within the Ethiopian didactic tradition, "The Two Lovers" demonstrates in a rather incredible manner that "love can burn as bright and warm as a glowing fire, and suddenly turn to bitter ashes." Some of the English stories which subsequently appeared in *Something* combine moral instruction with social criticism as far as censorship would allow. Thus Kebede Aberra's "Spent Youth" (1964) is not only an instructive warning but also a condemnation of the rigid value virginity holds in traditional Amhara culture. Assege Hago's "You Too, my Son"! (1967) graphically questions the structure of a society which can propel a young man to madness through poverty and despair. The hopelessness of the peasant class is vividly analysed by Abebe Semegn in "Don't Cry, Old Woman" (1964) and by Berhane Meskel Redda in "Gebre-Aregawi's Hopes" (1964). Other stories by Abebe Semegn have dealt with the love problems of educated young people in a traditional society, and his "Ambitious" (1964) attempts a diagnosis of certain aspects of the relationship between servant and master in Ethiopia. Tesfaye Gessesse's "Ayee my Luck," which attained international recognition through its publication in *African Arts* in 1971, gives a trenchant account of an Addis prostitute and her hypocritical customer; it is an attempt at penetrating the psychological make-up most of us wear to differing degrees.

Although for the most part short story-writing ceased for a while in the latter sixties with the demise of *Something*, in the spring of 1974, when it became clear the season for political change was approaching, the English-language *Ethiopian Herald* published a series of stories by various local authors. Most of these stories are thinly disguised social commentary on penury, servitude, or the contrast between modern Addis Ababa and an impoverished countryside; they are strictly traditional didactic exercises attuned to the times; as literature they are mostly weak. One exception is Daniachew Worku's "The House with the Big Worka" (April, 1974), a moving story of a peasant mother's search for her teacher son in the city.

Turning to drama, one finds that the quality of Menghistu Lemma's translated Amharic plays is unfortunately not to be found in Abbie Gubegna's *The Savage Girl*

(Addis Ababa, 1964). Written ten years before his novel *Defiance, The Savage Girl* was the first play written in English by an Ethiopian. Although not without some saving features, this work illustrates only too well the pitfalls and weaknesses of a nascent form of expression. Like many Amharic plays, *The Savage Girl* is an allegory based on Ethiopian history. A forest girl living a solitary and idyllic life at peace with nature—she has a Bible, however, symbolizing Ethiopia's sixteen centuries of Christianity—finds she can no longer avoid the impact of the outside world. Her contact with civilization inevitably causes her to lose her innocence, to become disillusioned, and to return to her forest cave, where she dies; this, in terms of the allegory, seems to be a moral lesson on the virtues of isolationism and misoneism, two traditional Ethiopian attitudes. Although the play has possibilities on the symbolic plane it gives little thought to the requirements of dramatic production; far too many momentary scenes abound which if projected onto the stage would be ludicrous, and the author's English, particularly in the verse he sometimes injects into the dialogue, is to say the least unfortunate at times:

> Girl, Girl, that you are wild and pretty
> Please have for me a bit of pity.
> I love you more than all the girls of the crowded city.
> (I, ii)

Happily the shortcomings of *The Savage Girl* are not repeated in the English plays written by Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (b. 1936), Ethiopia's leading playwright. This author has written and produced over twenty Amharic plays and has adapted works of Shakespeare and Molière to the Amharic stage. He has written some notable English poetry as well as drama, and in 1966 became director of the Haile Sellassie I Theatre, now renamed the National Theatre. He was appointed to a major post within the Ministry of Culture in 1975. On May 5, 1963, his short historical play *Tewodros* was first performed, an event which led to the opening of the Creative Arts Centre in Addis Ababa. In 1965 the play was published in the *Ethiopia Observer*. *Tewodros* is remarkable for the way in which Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin captures in a brief space much of the spirit and turbulence of this man, who rose to lead Ethiopia in its hard fight for unity. Tewodros is depicted as a heroic visionary, who dreams of a united Ethiopia and who is willing, although beset on all sides by foreign enemies as well as local warring chieftains ("Those vampires of the day who divide their country against itself") to sacrifice everything for a stable government and nation. The considerable time period encompassed by the play is handled adroitly through a cobbler-messenger who fills in chronological gaps and makes comments on the situation in the manner of an ancient Greek chorus.

Azmari, another short English play by Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, was published in the *Ethiopia Observer* simultaneously with *Tewodros*; it has its setting in contemporary rural Ethiopia just outside of Addis Ababa. *Azmari* is an Amharic word meaning "minstrel," and the play is a defence of those peasant crafts which, in traditional Ethiopian society, are relegated to the very lowest classes, even though some of these

crafts, such as pottery, metalwork, or carpentry, are vital to society. Like her father and grandfather before her, Shashitu is an *azmari,* but her musical gifts are despised by her forward-looking mother and parvenu brother because minstrelsy brings in no money. Her brother, a broker, spends his life "on the street corners of give and take, where the only music that matters is the sound of jingling coins," and his persecution of his sister and destruction of her lyre make Shashitu an effective symbol of the scorned and censored artist in an increasingly materialistic culture.

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's *Oda-Oak Oracle* (1965) is according to a leading critic, "one of the finest plays to have been written in Africa."[246] It is divided into four parts: a lengthy Prologue, a two-part Climax, and a long Finale. Its popularity in both East and West Africa is due partly to the archetypal plot which includes an ancestral command, an obligatory sacrifice, and a tribal "strong son" who has been blessed by the gods with unusual strength. The will of the ancestors constantly pervades the drama. In terse ritualistic style we learn that since the Oracle has decreed that their first-born must be a sacrifice to the dead, Shanka, the strong son of the tribe, cannot bring himself to consummate his marriage to his bride Ukutee:

> How strong is the strong
> With his essence cut up?
> Say. How manly
> With his heart borne down? (p. 35)

Shanka's friend Goaa, who had once been taken from the tribe by foreigners but escaped to return, has been exposed to other kinds of thinking and is to some extent an enlightened element in the midst of tradition and superstition. This knowledge of the outside world is also a curse, however, and it is in the character of Goaa that the play approaches the allegorical level:

> I am unwanted
> Since my return
> From having been kidnapped.
> Since my escape
> From the strangers' clasp
> Who floated
> Our peoples of the Valley
> Across the great waters,
> I am avoided by the Oracle,
> I am accused
> O having come back
> With their strange ways. (p. 2)

[246] Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 374.

In an isolated fit of passion Goaa himself impregnates Ukutee and the resulting child is an outrageous insult to the ancestors, cheating them as it does of a first-born child by Ukutee and the tribe's favoured son.

Images of birds, trees, water, storms and seed abound in the play, juxtaposed with the overwhelmingly static atmosphere of the inflexible ancestors. The dead rule the living and meet deviation with destruction. According to the author, Goaa is symbolic of the modern African at odds with much of tradition and suspect because of his seemingly radical ideas. This enforced isolation within his own people is what drives Goaa to Ukutee, who sees herself as a spurned wife. Early in the play Goaa prophetically defines his own fate:

> Did I run from the strangers
> Merely to be felled
> By my own people
> As one possessed by evil spirits? (p. 5)

Shanka's sin of omission is as insulting to the dead as is the adultery of Goaa and Ukutee. Thus destruction is the inevitable outcome for all concerned, since, as is made quite clear throughout the play,

> The dead only demand
> In their ancient wisdom,
> Older than the memory of man.
> The living only obey
> Wondering;
> Till they join hands with them
> In the marriage of death. (p. 33)

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's other play in English is the experimental verse drama *Collision of Altars* (1977), which had been completed in 1971. In the preface the writer states that he has put into the play "the idea of an illustrative total theatre, functional dance, mime, incantation, incense burning, African masks and rituals, Ethiopian Orthodox Church chants, music and praise singing." All are put to effective use on a stage which is anything but dull. These devices encompass the theme of the disintegration of Emperor Kaleb's Axumite Ethiopia (roughly from 587 to 629 A.D.). Actual historical events, such as Kaleb's expedition to South Arabia, a great smallpox epidemic, and the Emperor's final renunciation of the secular world for a cloistered life, are treated with that same dexterity shown in the handling of events in Emperor Tewodros' career in *Tewodros*. One high point of *Collision of Altars* in an eerie Invocation of the Dead, an effective touch in this case, but otherwise a stock ingredient in the indoctrinating Amharic pantomimes currently performed in Addis Ababa.[247]

Poetry in English flourished along with other Ethiopian writing during the 1960s, and, not surprisingly, ranged from weak, amateurish attempts to the inspired work of Solomon Deressa and Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin. Beginning in 1963, the university literary

[247] See David F. Beer, "Notes on an Amharic Political Ghost-Play," *Yale/Theatre*, 8, 1 (1976), 35–37.

journal *Something* provided the initial platform for most English-language poetry. Some early poems by Eshetu Cole in that journal are fairly typical of the sombre nature of much Ethiopian poetic expression. Their composer, a student and later professor of economics and Dean of the Arts Faculty at Haile Sellassie I University, was imprisoned in 1974 without trial, like so many others, on the charge of opposing the current military government. In "The Traveller" (1963), a moral void is simply and directly drawn:

> I am a traveller in a very strange land.
> A traveller without a guide,
> A land without a path (11. 16–18)

Still clearly an early poem, his "That's How we Move Away" (1963) turns on a repetitive, almost helpless style which reinforces the poem's cyclic fatalism:

> We hope
> And we despair
> Sorrow following joy
> Loss following victory
> Despair following hope
> Night following day
> Death following life
> Man following man
> In an endless caravan
> That's how we move away. (11. 21–30)

Most Ethiopian poets at one time or another feel that they must attempt to come to grips with the meaning of their ancient heritage and those who write in English are no exception. Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's "What Price the Wound we Opened in the Tender Eye of our Love?" (1963), in spite of its "precious" title, serves as an effective illustration of this kind of national self-examination while anticipating one of the main concerns of his later English poetry:

> Our mothers gave us names
> and we reaped hate cult,
> Our fathers gave us tenet
> And we worshipped the grave,
>
> Must I learn to aspire
> only on your corpse?
> Must you learn to sing
> only on my defiled fate? (11. 6–13)

One or two poets have been able to brush off significant analytical penetration of the past. Some even see their past as an albatross to be rid of, as does Messele Ijjigu in the 1966 issue of *Something:*

Hush!
Don't tell me of the past,
To trouble my mind, to ache my heart
("Time", 11. 16–18)

Few Ethiopian writers have managed to shrug the weight of history from their shoulders, however. The English poems of Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin published in *Présence Africaine* (1966) are a case in point. These attracted considerable attention, and some were reprinted in Austin J. Shelton's critical anthology *The African Assertion* (1968). In one of the best poems, "Ours", Ethiopia is seen in fiercely contrasting ways; on one hand the nation embodies a proud and ancient past,

Time-old
Highland of highlands
Ancient
Where all history ends
Where all rainbows meet, (11. 1–5)

and the Ethiopian loves his country

For what you are—
Time-old.
Slow
In change
Sure
In your steps
Cunning
In your freedom. (11. 76–83)

Yet tactfully phrased in the past tense is the brutal realization that Ethiopia is also a land where

In your belly
Progress rotted
Under your feet
Peasants died. (11. 17–20)

The short, terse style is similar to that employed by Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin in his drama *Oda-Oak Oracle,* but we meet a less concise language in "Bad Days", where the same device of the past tense is carefully used to examine what *is* by describing what *was:*

Around what seemed the parched lips
of a hunger-silenced child,
fat, oily flies paraded.
They say those were the bad days...

When every floor was swarmed
by plague-emitting rats,
and the air was abused
by the stink of man's flesh. (11. 1–4., 19–22)

Other themes dealt with by this prolific writer paradoxically include a plea to the youth educated overseas to reunite himself with the best of his cultural roots, yet "Also of Ethiopics" admits that urban Ethiopia is perhaps already irretrievably part of the less desirable trends of the modern world:

> We, the wonder plants of cinema screens
> Generation of car-hooters and time-hooted
> Children of past ruins and present insecurities
> We, of hollow-hearts and jazz minds (11. 1–4)

Whether it likes it or not, after centuries of isolation the nation has awakened to find itself in a world where

> man swims
> In the asylum of a beatnik-bomb-age
> Or hangs on
> In a sino-american wrestle world.
> ("Fear Shall Fail", 11. 37–40)

Solomon Deressa (b. 1937), is Ethiopia's other leading writer to have produced some notable English poetry. He has been active in drama and broadcasting, and was well-known for his lively articles in the excellent *Addis Reporter* until it was closed down by the government in 1969. He studied at the Université de Toulouse, and is a poet equally at home in Amharic, French and English. Some of his poems were published in *African Arts* (1969) and reveal an intimate yet technically varied style. His "Prayer" (1969), however, turns more on imagery of futility and renunciation, and one is not surprised that it is quoted in the preface of Daniachew Worku's *The Thirteenth Sun:*

> Make the flame flow and the fountain smoke
> On an adamant floor a handful of sand I'll sow
> Fragile pebbles to harvest come the season of dearth.
> There is not much else to do.
> Don't you see, the castle heroic gun-rest
> Is as from today a favourite suicide spot.
> Crystal images to skin ourselves on, O Lord.

In 1972 Solomon Deressa attended the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and the result was a further collection of poems, some of which were published in the United States Information Service magazine *Topic* (1974). One of these is a piercing and prophetic comment emanating from the decade which had just ended, and is appropriately entitled "Abyssinian Sixties":

> What an age!
> Mature beyond its future.
> Departures that forego aspirations.
> Morning glories and Job's tears,
> lilies and roses.

Buds clamp on their inner selves
as the storm approaches.
Darkness shall soak us
in accumulated pains,
and names explode like flowers in summer.
Will the heroes be maimed,
our dreams congested
dragging their buttocks
along the same asphalt that buried the flowers,
and lovers stand aside
to watch the tight fornication of tradition?

Apart from Solomon Deressa, little English poetry of note has appeared so far in the 1970s. The few small collections of English poetry recently printed in Addis Ababa by their authors will, like *The Savage Girl,* do little to enhance the reputation of Ethiopian writing at home or abroad. This is also true of the poems of Taddele Hiwot which have appeared in the *Ethiopian Herald.* His lengthy work "Thank You, Majesty" (March, 1974), published six months before the sudden overthrow of Emperor Haile Sellassie, is an attempt at traditional courtly praise resulting in a sycophancy unrelieved by much poetic merit:

In vain many tried to advise you
That Ethiopians hardly change.
With you constantly teaching us,
Giving us what we could not demand.
Sharing the only right kept for Yourself
The Right you deliberately kept for us
Until Ethiopians moved to this maturity.
You our time's noble off-spring
Live for us and receive thanks. (11. 27–35)

Other poems published by this writer since the downfall of the Emperor reveal him to be quite capable of changing with the times—a necessary qualification for a courtly or political poet to survive—and Taddele Hiwot now turns his talents to repetitious criticism of Haile Sellassie's government and propaganda for the new regime. In this respect his efforts are presumably socially useful, and firmly within the well-established Ethiopian homiletic tradition. His "Government of the Hebreteseb" (February, 1975)—the last word of the title may be translated as "unified common peoples"—is thirty-three lines on Ethiopia's new political order, seen as

The revelation of the wise ones;
Where there are no princes or poverty
Where the labourer is the king and the only king.
Mysterious fire that kindled
Gradually enlightening one third of the globe,
Then and then, reviving the third world,
Killing exploitation of man by man,
Ending war between the have and have-nots, (11. 1–8)

while the author's personal approval of the change in governments clearly, albeit lamely, follows:

> Well, what can I say,
> Except to say I am in love with it;
> Like all children of labourers,
> I love it at first sight. (11. 14–17)

Daniachew Worku's unusual novel, the poetry of Solomon Deressa, and the drama and poems of Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin are undoubtedly the high points of over twelve years of Ethiopian writing in English—writing which, although not occupying a very considerable position in the canon of English creative literature in Africa, is still worthy of attention. The Ethiopian writer still has a number of handicaps to overcome, not least of which might be the centuries-old literary tradition within which he still tends to work. Absolute innovation and creativity, moreover, require complete freedom of expression, and this he has never had. He has always worked with government or Church censors peering over his shoulder. *The Thirteenth Sun* and the poetry of Solomon Deressa and Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin were allowed to circulate freely in Ethiopia because the evils depicted could officially be attributed to an earlier and discredited political regime, yet no writer in current Ethiopia would dare express himself freely or spontaneously since he might well find himself in prison for "opposing the current military government."[248] Ethiopia's governments have always expected writers to support their policies, and the republican leaders are no different, as was made clear in an editorial in the *Ethiopian Herald* entitled "Books and Writers" (April, 1975):

> Men of letters have contributed a lot to the progress of society in many parts of the world. Perhaps a few Ethiopians can take pride in the contemplation of the fact that their works too have contributed something towards the political consciousness of the urban population. Now that the Ethiopian people have overthrown the archaic system of feudalism and found their freedom in socialism, it behoves men of letters to assist in the economic reconstruction of their country.
>
> Freedom, equality and justice are now here. Men of literature have a great responsibility therefore to mould the minds of the younger generation to ease the socialist reconstruction of Ethiopia. At the same time also utmost care should be taken that the books published for public consumption conform to certain standards.....
>
> The Ethiopian Writers Association could certainly look after itself in accordance with the principles of Ethiopian Socialism.

No writer could mistake the meaning of this statement, and thus Ethiopian writers must accept censorship or else join Africa's other authors in exile.

Ethiopia is not the only country to suppress freedom of speech, of course, but other factors also discourage the writer, whether he uses English or Amharic. The high cost of imported paper, and thus the high cost of printing, inhibit the chances of profitable publishing for the home market, as does the absence of established publishing houses

[248] On this point, see Alem Mezgebe, "Ethiopia: The Deadly Game," *Index on Censorship* 7, 4 (1978), 16–20.

in the capital and the low level of literacy among the populace. The author who writes in English must rely on Heinemann's African Writers Series or one or two other specialized foreign publishers to take his work on; this, while opening up wider vistas overseas, does little to enhance his reputation at home.

Writing in the late seventies, one does not know what to predict for the future of Ethiopian literature in English. If the would-be author avoids the Scylla of writing in Amharic and remaining unknown outside his country, then he must come close to the Charybdis of writing in English or another European language, which not only cuts him off from many of his countrymen, but also leaves him open to charges from linguistic nationalists. In the new Socialist Ethiopia, English in showing signs of losing ground as a strong second language, for several reasons. Efforts which are perhaps overdue are being concentrated on making the masses literate in Amharic, and a new language policy for the nation is being formulated. This policy may well be influenced by the country's recent political realignments. Whether Ethiopian creative writing in English will eventually be considered a phenomenon of the sixties and early seventies, or whether it will continue to grow with other African literatures in European languages is, like so many other things in present-day Ethiopia, a very open question.

David F. Beer

8. SOMALIA

Although Somalia has produced little written literature as yet, some Somali writing exists in three different European languages, indicating that, like other Africans, a few Somalis have felt the need to communicate creatively in a language of widespread currency. To appreciate this literature it is helpful to understand the unique ethnic and political background of Somalia, a republic which occupies most of the Horn of Africa and holds the distinction of being the easternmost country on the continent. Except for the neighbouring Republic of Djibouti, Somalia, or the Somali Democratic Republic as it is officially called, is perhaps the most homogeneous nation in Africa both linguistically and culturally. While over a hundred languages are spoken in Ethiopia, Somalis speak one common language which, in spite of strong regional variations, serves in its standard form as a powerful unifying factor in a society traditionally nomadic and fragmented by clan rivalry. Further homogeneity is provided by the country's religion, Islam, to which the ancestors of the Somalis, an eastern Cushitic people, were converted by Arab coastal settlers centuries ago.

Colonialism has played a major part in recent Somali history and dates back to the mid-1800s. France initiated a European presence with the acquisition of the port of Obock from the Sultan of Tajura in 1862. This was followed in 1884 by the expansion of the port into a protectorate and the transfer, in 1887, of the protectorate's seat to Djibouti. Britain took over the northern coast of Somaliland in 1884 and established a protectorate with Zeila as its chief port. In the 1890s Italy established her presence in what is now southern Somalia, and Ethiopia seized Ogaden in the same decade; both areas were to become part of Italian East Africa in 1935. This part of Africa has thus been exposed to three European languages for some time, and to Arabic for several centuries.

In spite of the long presence of Arabic, little Somali writing has been produced in that language. The reasons are not hard to discover. Until recently few Somalis—even Muslim religious men—were completely literate in Arabic. Moreover, traditional schools using Arabic as the language of instruction have not emphasized literacy as much as memorizing the Koran, and, had literacy schools existed, it is doubtful whether many pastoral Somalis would have had the leisure to attend for long.

Although various proposals for making Somali a written language had been put forward since the early 1900s, no orthography was generally or officially accepted until

1973. Thus any literature in the indigenous language must of necessity be quite recent. However, over the centuries the Somalis have developed an unusually large and rich body of oral art which is immensely popular throughout the country, and which has more than compensated for the lack of a written literature.[249]

With Arabic as the language used in most primary schools prior to 1973, and English, French and Italian given their own emphasis as official languages in the respective colonial areas, it was at least theoretically possible up to the mid-1970s for an educated Somali to be multi-lingual yet illiterate in his own language. The Somali press reflected this state of linguistic affairs until recently with publications only in Arabic, Italian and English, French being of course the journalistic language of former French Somaliland. Since 1973, however, the Ministry of Information and National Guidance in Mogadishu has published the *Hidigta October*, a daily newspaper in the Somali language.

As their rich corpus of oral lore indicates, Somalis are highly sensitive to the finer arts even if they so far possess a meagre written tradition. In Somali culture oral poetry, singing, folk-dancing and drama have always been vital activities. Poetic ability is highly valued and admired, and poetry recitals form a popular pastime. Major themes are war, peace, love, and camels. Although formal theatre is an imported art form dating only from the early 1950s, it also has become increasingly popular, and a number of theatre groups now exist which tour the country regularly, bringing entertainment to a nation of over three million people, three quarters of whom are still pastoralists.

A few English translations of Somali oral literature have been made, but they do not appear to have influenced the production of writing in English, as in the Ethiopian case. The pioneering work is *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* (1954), an anthology compiled by Margaret Laurence. First published in Nairobi, it was reprinted in 1971 by the Irish University Press in Dublin. Some of the poems and stories in the anthology are paraphrased. Explanatory notes and a long introduction add to its value, although some of the information it provided is now understandably dated.

More significant is B. W. Andrzejewski's and I. M. Lewis' *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (1964). As its editors state at the outset, the book offers an insight into an extensive and rich oral production. *Somali Poetry* is informative not only because of the poems it contains, which are presented with parallel Somali and English texts, but also because of the lengthy introduction provided. This introduction gives important information on the Somali people, their history, and their language. Since the book was written when Somali still had no official orthography, i.e. before 1973, full attention is paid to this problem and detailed information on the contending systems of transcription is provided. The final section of the introduction deals with the characteristics of Somali verse and the biographies of the poets represented.

Three kinds of poems are recorded by Andrzejewski and Lewis: classical, traditional and modern, and religious verse in Arabic. The classical poems deal with such subjects

[249] See I. M. Lewis, "Literacy in a Nomadic Society: the Somali Case," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 256–276. A brief historical survey will be found in Albert S. Gérard, *African Language Literatures* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1981), pp. 155–170.

as ingratitude, theft, politics, and war; one graphically warns of the respect to be shown powerful people:

> A forest with lions and a place where the buttocks and manes of beasts of prey are seen,
> Can only be crossed by stilling all sound; leave them unroused.
>
> (p. 65, 11. 1–2)

Several brief love songs are recorded. Some are modern "*heello*" first made popular by lorry drivers and now widely broadcast on radio much like "pop" songs:[250]

> A flash of lightning does not satisfy thirst,
> What then is it to me if you just pass by?
>
> (p. 146)

National pride and politics provide material for modern Somali verse just as they do for classical poetry. Thus the unification of ex-Italian Somalia with the former British Somaliland, and the resulting creation of the independent Somali Republic, is celebrated in an anonymous poem:

> Freedom and dignity have reached us,
> We have brought together the two lands.
> Glory to God!
> Say: 'It is God's victory,
> It is God's victory!
> We are victorious.'
> Beat the song, join the dance!
> Everyone, with all your might!
> And now let us finish, cease!
> It is God's victory!
> It is God's victory!
>
> (p. 148)

A recent piece of Somali literature in translation is Hassan Sheikh Mumin's play, *Leopard among the Women* (1974). Translated by B. W. Andrzejewski, the play is printed with parallel texts in English and Somali, the latter being a transcript of a tape-recording made during a performance at the National Theatre in Mogadishu in 1968. Hassan Sheikh Mumin (b. 1930) comes from north-western Somalia and works for the Cultural Department of the Somali Ministry of Education. He is a well-known poet, broadcaster, and actor in his country, and has composed several poems and some very successful radio dramas.

This particular play was chosen for translation by Professor Andrzejewski from over three hundred plays produced since the birth of the Somali theatre. His choice was based on popularity, poetic value, and relative freedom from obscure or detailed political

[250] See *Somali Poetry*, pp. 49–51. A complete scholarly study of this genre, which is also very readable and contains extensive English translations, is John W. Johnson, *Heellooy Heelleellooy: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, African Series, Volume 5, 1974).

allusion. As in Ethiopia, the Somali stage is a vehicle for social edification, and drama usually provides undisguised moralistic and didactic messages. *Leopard among the Women* portrays a scheming Mogadishu rake who prides himself on how many innocent women he has seduced (eighty at the latest count), and who fools yet another young girl into believing he has legitimately married her. The couple, Shabeel ("the leopard") and Shallaayo ("she-who-repents") stand in contrast with another couple, Diiddan and Diiddane ("she-who-rejects-evil" and "he-who-rejects-evil"). The latter pair get married in order to take care of a child abandoned by divorced parents. No dramatic climax or denouement is involved; the playwright is content to allow dialogue, song, repartie, and situation in his sixteen scenes to speak for themselves on the plight of abandoned women and children in Mogadishu.

The rich Somali imagery and alliterative language are of course, all but impossible to reflect in the English text of *Leopard among the Women,* although both are hinted at in the label names of the characters mentioned above. Like *Somali Poetry,* this publication is additionally valuable for the introduction provided by Professor Andrzejewski. Forty-odd pages cover such subjects as the nature of Somali drama, social and cultural settings, stage directions, and the problems involved in the transcription of Somali. Three scholarly appendices are also included, plus detailed notes which help illuminate many allusions and references, the full meaning of which would otherwise remain hidden to the non-Somali reader.

The first Somali author to write in a European language was William J. F. Syad (b. 1930). Since he was born in Djibuti, where the French language was given complete supremacy by the former colonial authorities, it is not surprising that although some of his work is in English, he writes predominantly in French. After the publication in Paris of his first volume of poetry, *Khamsine* (1959), Syad entered service with the government of the Somali Republic. The volume consists of sixteen poems in French and nine in English, with a preface by Léopold Senghor who is generous in his praise for Syad and his work:

> Il a conservé quelque chose de cette gracieuse ambiguïté que souligne son type de "Nègre Marginal" car Syad est un Somali, un nègre d'Orient, comme la reine de Saba.
>
> Ses poèmes ont le parfum subtil du Cantique des Cantiques. Et aussi l'accent des poèmes de Tagore, c'est dire qu'ils sont les fleurs naturelles d'une terre de poésie, de la terre du nard et de l'encens: des orchidées parfumées.
>
> (p. 7)

The poems in *Khamsine* are mostly quite brief, some consisting of little more than half a dozen two-word lines. Characteristically short, few of Syad's lines are more than four or five words in length. The French poems deal mainly with love, and are divided into three sections respectively entitled "Du sable aux creux d'une main", "L'aube d'une vision", and "Crépuscule". Preceding the first section is a short poem which sets the mood and at the same time reveals why the poet has named his collection after the wind which blows from the Sahara for a brief period each year:

Comme
le *khamsine*
du désert
Tu as passé
dans ma vie
et pour toute
trace
Tu n'as laissé
que des sillons
vagues
et ce répit
de grâce
(p. 11)

This ephemeral, fragile quality is further developed in subsequent poems. In "Ni Poète...Ni Ecrivain..." Syad appears to create his poetic stance:

Je te prie de croire
Je ne suis
ni poète
ni écrivain
mais une pensée
vouée à l'éternel *néant*
où tout est vibration
dans l'engrenage transitoire
où tout est rien
je ne suis
qu'une vibration
dans la myriade des mortels
(stanza 3, p. 13)

Although many of the poems are airy contemplations on the fragility and passing nature of love, others look to Somalia for their inspiration. Thus "L'Ange aux ailes brisées" reconstructs a Somali legend:

J'ai rêvé
que dans l'antique légende
de mon pays natal
existait un ange
banni à jamais
du néant vibrant
aux ailes brisées
par le feu du *Mal,*
(stanza 1, p. 29.)

while in "Hier" we find the poet's sense of his origins combined with the spirit of his love poems:

Oh! Naftaye
tu m'as conté
le passé de ma culture
Pensée ivre de ma race
Somale

Et comme
ce sable fin
aux creux
d'une main
tu glissais
dans le passé
où l'esprit
seul
peut glaner
(11. 7–20, p. 44)

The English poems in *Khamsine* mostly maintain the same style as the French ones, but some of the six grouped under the heading of "Nationalism" are not only noticeably longer works; they are also characterized by a fierce patriotism and imagery far removed from the tenor of the French poems. Many lines come close to cliché, and, as in the French poems, all punctuation is dispensed with. The main themes are anti-colonialism and Somalia's independence, which was promised in 1950 and proclaimed in 1960. In "When Dawn will Rise", first written in 1954, we hear a clarion call for liberty and independence interwoven with the dream of the greater Somalia which will one day unite the Somali populations of Ethiopia, northern Kenya, and former French Somaliland. "Hunger at their Heels" is dedicated to all Somalis who go abroad, and specifically protests against the exploitation of Somalis in the French and British armies. The volume concludes with "The Birth of a Nation", honouring the new African countries that gained independence in the 1960s.

Syad's later work consists of more of the same kinds of French and English poems. His subsequent two volumes, *Cantiques* and *Harmoniques*, were both published in Dakar in 1976. No information is given about the poet in either volume, and only two poems are dated, one for 1960 and the other for 1963, indicating that the two collections represent the work of a considerable span of years.

Cantiques opens with a love song in English addressed to "Shoukry," which a footnote explains is from the Arabic work "Shoukran," meaning grace, and thus used, with the same implication, as a girl's name in Somalia. A tender, fragile quality pervades the short French poems which follow. Love is delicate, easily lost, and almost spiritual rather than physical:

Une infime
partie
de mon âme
repose
ce soir
dans le creux
de tes
mains
(p. 125)

Focus on the immediate moment, the present emotion, is required—we can hope for no more. As a lover the poet attempts to capture "Une voix/une âme/Un Instant/de

ma vie" (p. 25), since for him love exists almost excruciatingly in a moment's glance, a shadow, a hint, a smile: "mon âme/frémit/à ton sourire" (p. 78). In spite of his claim, however, that

Ma profession
de foi
est l'extase
de ton
âme en délire,
(p. 111)

some of Syad's poems appear to come closer to being tributes to "ce dieu païen/idole/de l'Amour" (p. 105).

Two poems in *Cantiques* stand out from the rest in that their subject is Ethiopia and Ethiopians. These works, written in Addis Ababa at a dinner table, we are told, are eulogies to the "Belles Filles d'Ethiopie" and the "Terre D'Aethiopia." A sense of the quiet dignity of the Ethiopian woman is evoked in the former, while the latter creates a feeling for the grandeur and history of that nation. Syad provides footnotes for both poems, which helps with a number of his allusions, and it is noteworthy that in one of these footnotes he refers to L.S. Senghor as his "respecté Maître".

The companion volume *Harmoniques* likewise consists of randomly arranged short poems, often untitled, and mostly in French. Many are no more than very brief word-pictures, glimpses of a thought, emotion, or fancy which are developed no further. A few poems are quite introspective, but most are addressed to an unidentified loved one, as in *Cantiques*. Indeed, the only unity offered in these volumes is the brevity and tone with which the loved one is addressed; no kind of progression, biographical, chronological, or otherwise, appears to exist. Occasionally a page mystifies the reader, as for instance page 49 in *Harmoniques*, where the words OYSTER BAY appear alone but do not seem to be the title of a poem, section, or anything else. Fragments of popular Somali songs appear without warning in the texts, reiterating the same romantic attitude found in Syad's own work. "Toi" and several other words are often inexplicably capitalized; the reader is left to guess why. Frequent juggling with the visual appearance of many of the poems by random line spacing and length seems to be equally arbitrary. Although only a brief section in *Harmoniques* is entitled "Effluves," in reality perhaps most of Syad's poems might so be labeled.

The only other Somali poet so far to write and publish in a European language is Mohamed Said Samantar (b. 1928), who was born in Wardore and educated at the Istituto Magistrale and the Istituto Universitario di Diritto ed Economia di Mogadiscio. He later attended the University of Rome, and holds a degree in political science. He entered Somalia's diplomatic service and was appointed ambassador to Italy in 1970 and to France in 1974. Given his educational background and his career it is not surprising that his poetry is written in Italian, and translated into French. His collection *La pioggia è caduta/Il a plu* was printed in Rome in 1973. The fourteen poems in the book were written over a period of twenty-five years from 1947 to 1972, and are

printed with parallel French translations; the title of the volume is also the title of the longest poem in the collection.

A brief preface in Italian only by Adriano Miranda notes that some of the poems in *La pioggia è caduta* previously appeared in Italian and other periodicals, and adds that some are based on the poet's experiences during the colonial period in Somalia. A four-page introduction by Nicole Lécuyer in Italian and French reviews the themes of Samantar's poetry and reminisces on the poet's Somali background, noting that he was born at the foot of a tree.

Fourteen poems written over a quarter of a century scarcely form a significant corpus for analysis, but in general it might be said that the earlier ones, written in the late 1940s, deal with nationalism and imprisonment. In "Libertà/Liberté", dated 1947, the narrator looks back on a time of naïve innocence prior to being thrown in jail by the Italians: "Ricordati quanto ero felice nei giorni di libertà;/I miei passi leggeri correvano nelle verdi foreste della nostra boscaglia."[251] "Somalia mia!" (1948) was written the year Britain returned the Ogaden area to Ethiopia, and calls for a unified Somalia while passionately lamenting what has happened:

> Somalia mia!
> La tua disunione stringe il mio cuore e mi toglie ogni forza;
> La tua disunione riempie le mie vene di una rabbia sorda;
> La tua disunione condanna i tuoi figli all'amarezza dell'esilio.[252]

Samantar's images of camels, wood, milk, lions and shepherds help evoke a nostalgic picture of the Somali homeland, while other imagery reveals the brutal realities of colonial domination. "Il prigioniero di Warder/Le prisonnier de Warder" (1947) is a moving portrait of a political prisoner in a dark cell, who dreams longingly of his camels and their milk, of spring flowers and blue sky, and who warns his captors darkly that his hour of revenge will one day come. "Anima ferita/Ame blessée" (1965) describes metaphorically and romantically the passage from innocence to experience, a theme also found in the poems dealing with growing Somali nationalistic awareness. "Lumumba" (1963) is both a praise-poem to the Congolese leader and a lament for his untimely death, and possesses a refrain-like quality similar to that found in Somali oral poetry.

"Lumumba" is a good example of how the French translations of Samantar's poems are sometimes victims of the inevitable *traduttori traditori,* particularly as far as lineation is concerned. Yet the spirit of his poetry is retained in its French version, as is evident in "Africa, fiore appassito/Afrique, fleur déjà fanée" (1965), a poem comparing the continent to a young woman who has been seduced:

[251] "libertà," ll. 11–12: "Rappelle-toi combien j'étais heureux alors que j'étais libre, / Et que mes pas légers couraient dans nos maquis sauvages."

[252] "Somalia mia!," ll. 9–12: "Oh! Somalia mia! / Ta division déchire mon cœur et m'ôte toute force;/Ta division remplit mes veines d'une colère sourde;/Ta division contraint tes fils à l'amertume de l'exil."

Afrique, qui donc t'a condamnée
A toujours courber l'échine?
Qui donc a décidé que tu sois à jamais la fiancée séduite
Sans arriver jamais au jour des épousailles?
(11. 6—9)

This concern for Africa as a continent is shown in several poems. The spirit of Pan-africanism is particularly evident in a poem which shares its title with the volume, "La pioggia è caduta" (1966), and which is addressed, as the poet points out in the final line, "A tutti i figli dell'immenso continente africano!" At least two poems confront the world-wide issues of injustice, futility, and lethargy. The starving child addressed in the final and perhaps best poem, "Lo sguardo di un bambino/Dans le regard d'un enfant" (1972), is not necessarily a Somali child, or even an African one, but a universal child who is the victim of mankind's neglect, greed, and inhumanity:

E ti dico
Lascialo senza rimpianto
Questo mondo
Dove hai fatto una breve apparizione
Casuale.
Bambino innocente, fuggi
Da questo mondo che puzza di sangue,
Di parole avide, di surplus
E di milioni di panettoni invenduti.[253]

Two Somalis have so far published short stories in English. Yousuf Duhul, a lawyer by profession, left his country for political reasons and lived in London. His short story "The Last Morning of Buttonnose"[254] is an effectively written story of the last few hours of a Mogadishu streetboy's life, prior to being run over by a car. Ahmed is nicknamed Buttonnose because of his flat nose, and through his thoughts and feelings we vividly enter the world of an impoverished urban ragamuffin. The story has no room for sentiment, but is uncompromisingly factual, and leaves an unforgettable impression.

Abdi Sheik-Abdi lived in the United States from 1968 to 1975. He studied literature and received a degree from the State University of New York at Albany. In his first short story, "The Luncheon,"[255] a misunderstanding and a temptation lead a young man to be ousted from his uncle's home, where he had been receiving one free meal a day. There is some good characterization and description in the story. Another story by Abdi Sheik-Abdi, entitled "The Man Who Shot the Sky,"[256] is based on a Somali folk tale about the reason why the sky and the earth are so far apart now, thus preventing many of mankind's prayers being heard in Heaven.

There may be some significance in the fact that the first Somali novel was written

[253] "lo sguardo di un bambino," 11. 19–28: "Ce monde / Que tu t'apprêtes à quitter, / quitte-le sans regrets / Ce monde / Où tu n'as fait qu'une brève apparition / Involontaire. / Enfant innocent, / Fuis ce monde puant de sang, / D'avidité, de surplus / Et de millions de brioches invendues."

[254] Published in *Okike*, No. 7 (1975), 11–25.

[255] Published in *Black World*, 24, 8 (1975), 56–66.

[256] Published in *Okike*, No. 10 (1976), 1–4.

in English, even though its author, Nuruddin Farah (b. 1945), is from the southern part of the country, formerly colonized by Italy. Entitled *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), it has its setting in Italian Somaliland and from internal references to the Ogaden and Ethiopia, the story appears to take place around 1950. A note at the end of the final chapter indicates the book was written in 1968 in India, where Nuruddin Farah studied literature and philosophy at the University of Chandigarh. A quotation at the beginning of the 179-page novel reveals its title to be taken from a Somali proverb:

> God created Woman from a crooked rib;
> and anyone who trieth to
> straighten it, breaketh it.

The implications of the proverb become clear as the character of Ebla is gradually developed. As the story opens, Ebla has run away from her family compound because she has been promised in marriage against her will to an "old man of forty-eight" in exchange for several camels. She accompanies a local camel train to Belet Wene, the first town she has ever seen, and stays with relatives who quickly relegate her to the status of a servant. To Ebla, the town is the only place to flee to, and there she quickly passes from innocence to experience. Mirrored in miniature here is the general problem of urbanization in Somalia, where an increase in urban population of over 200% between 1950 and 1970 brought with it the usual erosion of old values and increased economic and social problems.

Ebla's town cousin soon finds it expedient to marry her off for gain, and she avoids this second unwanted match by once more running away, this time eloping with a young government official to Mogadishu. She loses her virginity to him the first night they are there, and the pair go through the ceremony of a Muslim marriage the following day. Her new husband, Awill, leaves for a three-month study tour in Italy soon after, and Ebla is soon informed that he is involved with an Italian girl. By now she has learned a great deal else also, and is ready to use men as she feels they use her. Accordingly, she becomes the secret wife—in effect the whore—of a wealthy man while Awill is away, and discards him as soon as her husband returns. The theme of the exploiter exploited unfolds in the context of the relationship between the sexes in Somalia, and the author's obvious sympathies with Ebla enable him to convey a message similar to that found in *Leopard among the Women*.

It is hard to decide whether *From a Crooked Rib* is primarily a sociological novel or a novel of character. The story is purely Ebla's story, seen predominantly through her eyes. She has been brought up as a Somali nomad who cannot read or write her own name, and she is ignorant about town life. Yet she is very much her own person, with an almost thoroughly pragmatic approach to life whenever it suits her. She has an enquiring and analytical mind, and accepts the basic loneliness of the individual with the attitude of "everybody for himself". Thus she has been able to desert her dependent grandfather without caring whether he lives or dies. Her attitude is at least partly due to her resentment of the role she must play as a woman in Somali culture, with its subordination, vulnerability, and constant dreary labour. As she develops through her

experiences in Belet Wene and Mogadishu, Ebla wins what she feels is complete independence from relatives, friends, and men in particular, and as the novel ends she appears to achieve the subtle dominance over her husband for which she has subconsciously wished all along.

Despite occasional stylistic awkwardness, *From a Crooked Rib* creates a valid and lively picture of a Somali woman's world when she is caught up in a conflict between her own goals and those her culture dictates for her. Realism abounds in the novel; the reader is not spared details of sexual habits, female circumcision, messy nose blowing, or lice. Description of the crudities of nomadic life on one hand is balanced by the awareness of the revulsion a tribesman can feel for town life, all effectively highlighting the problems of Somali pastoral society at odds with urbanization.

Nuruddin Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976), displays considerable development in the writer's abilities. With both more breadth and more depth than *From a Crooked Rib*, it is more cosmopolitan in nature, and more technically complex. Written in the present tense like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, its flavour is often reminiscent of Soyinka's *The Interpreters*—the favourite novel of Koschin, its main character. Koschin is a Mogadishu teacher who agreed, two years previously in England, to marry Nancy, an English girl. Nancy now arrives in Mogadishu expecting Koschin to keep his promise, much to the latter's surprise and alarm. As far as plot goes, this is it. Hanging on this scanty structure, however, is a wealth of impressions filtered through Koschin's consciousness which expose in 181 pages the many facets of life in the Somalia of the mid-1970s. Like Ebla in the earlier novel, Koschin is a complex character, who reveals himself as he shows his attitudes towards the life around him. A sophisticated young man, who has done a thesis on James Joyce overseas, he loves cerebral gymnastics and allusions to such wide-ranging figures as Freud, Nietzsche, Prometheus, Plato and Albee. He is a complete idealist regarding the Revolution, disgusted at his school principal's seduction of girl students, and looks with a cynical and bitter eye at much of society. He also has some quite earthy flaws: he never washes his ears, and his underwear is worn until ready to fall apart, at which point he dumps it in the sea.

Through Koschin's internal monologues the reader gets a view of Somali urban life which is every bit as sordid as that given in *From a Crooked Rib*, and far more extensive. Physical filth now more fully parallels social and political filth. A public toilet is described thus:

> In the toilet, squalor hit him in the face. I hit those that don't hit back, squalor seems to say. A very badly ventilated cubicle, roughly cemented, with four hangers nailed to the four corners of the walls, not to mention the no-longer usable chewing-sticks all over the floor. Cockroaches appear to be very much at home, they stream in and out of the general pit. Someone has missed the target by a few centimetres and has painted a Picasso-Modernissimo on the edges. Some people can never notice holes.
>
> (pp. 11–12)

Soon our vision is expanded, with a view of the capital:

> Mogadiscio. Mogadixo. Maqaldisho. Muuqdisho. Its populace: gangsters with no gang, a town with no treasure, no history beyond what Davidson gives it in his most authenticated narrative as blood-suckers in Berbera. People with no purity. Donkey-man damned to the last degree, that is what we all are, not on this side of darkness, neither on the other, unacceptable to everybody on the face of this earth. Friends we have, both in the East and the West, depending on what era. Good heavens, we are all puppets of Prometheus, the Cupbearers of Zeus! Bad blood, the worst there is.
>
> (p. 21)

Although the narrative in *A Naked Needle* sometimes acquires an almost deliberately obscure quality, the fast exchanges of dialogue throughout prevent the novel from getting bogged down by its passages of social commentary. It is an intellectual novel, thoroughly cosmopolitan in its approach and assumptions; no excuses are made for its Somali origins or setting, either by textual explication or explanatory notes and glossary. In this sense perhaps it heralds a coming of age for the European-language novel from the Horn of Africa, and assumes the same on the part of its readers.

By 1980, when his third novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk* had been issued in London, Nuruddin Farah could legitimately be regarded, like Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin from Ethiopia, as one of the very few significant writers in English to have emerged from a part of Africa where British cultural influence had never been very active.

PART IV

COMPARATIVE VISTAS

Albert S. Gérard

INTRODUCTION

In the studies of African literature in European languages, the early sixties saw the germination of a comparative, i.e. translingual, approach. Gerald Moore's *Seven African Writers* (1962) dealt with four francophone and three anglophone writers; Claude Wauthier's *L'Afrique des Africains: Inventaire de la négritude* (1964) was also concerned with both French and English writing, chiefly from a political point of view; Fernando Morán's *Nación y alienación en la literatura negroafricana* (1964) focused on negritude poetry and its possible relationship with Afro-American writing and English prose from South Africa; Anne Tibble's "survey," *African English Literature* (1965), is part of this trend in spite of its title which, as Jahn uncharitably emphasized, "is misleading, as the book also considers works in French and some in Portuguese. It also contains irrelevant chapter about writers in African languages."[1] Concentrating on one geographical region, Judith I. Gleason's Northwestern University dissertation, *This Africa: Novels by West Africans in English and French* (1965) was considerably more satisfactory.

This comparative bias was bound to prove all the more attractive to scholars who were able to read more than one language as Black Africa's literary production was still rather scant and easy to compass. The trend branched off in two directions: one produced ambitious, purportedly all-embracing, surveys of the type which was briefly discussed in the Introduction to these volumes. The second trend was more in line with traditional comparative studies: one example is Willfried Feuser's *Aspectos da literature do mundo negro* (1969) which studies the relationships between various segments of black writing across the board: Afro-American literature and negritude, the francophone novel and early Nigerian fiction.

Meanwhile, however, the fundamental truth of Fanon's shrewd statement about the unperceived diversity of Black Africa was proving itself. As long as Africa was subjected to her European masters her writers were united in a sense of brotherhood, the purpose of which was both to abolish the colonial sytem and to assert the dignity of the black man and the value of his civilization. But as soon as Africans took—or thought they were taking—their fate into their own hands, the emphasis shifted from the apology for an African culture whose unity existed primarily in the uninterested and uninformed eye

[1] Janheinz Jahn, "Modern African Literature: Bibliographical Spectrum," *Review of National Literatures*, 2,2 (1971), 224–242.

of the white man, to a defence of African cultures in their genuine plurality. Independence meant division. Politically, this was not considered desirable and the consequence of the upholding of unnatural frontiers established by the foreign conquerors in the nineteenth century in total disregard of the aspirations and historical affinities or hostilities of the societies concerned, was made glaringly obvious in the swift spreading of despotic systems and tyrannical one-party states: that this was the price to be paid for a minimum of stability was evidenced by the many military coups—most of them of tribal inspiration under some sort of "democratic" garb–which plagued Black Africa throughout the ensuing decades.

Divisiveness took on less brutal, more acceptable forms in literature, which became one of the privileged fields where group identities could assert their specificity in the most vocal and articulate form. The early negritude controversy between Senghor on the one hand and Mphahlele and Soyinka on the other, can be interpreted in a number of ways: it illustrated the conflict between Rousseauistic glorification of past values and the aspirations of future-oriented urbanized intellectuals; it was a case of French abstraction *versus* British pragmatism; it was a generational crisis, with the sons seeking to destroy their symbolic father in order to take his place. Above all, it was the first piece of evidence for the real existence of a linguistic barrier cutting across Africa as a result of the arbitrary decisions of blind history.

If this book is to be more than a meaningless compilation of factual data, it should demonstrate that African literature in progress is moving steadily and fast towards more differentiation, rather than less. And this it does against the express wish of many African intellectuals. At a Lagos festival in 1977, someone put forward the ludicrously Utopian proposal that Swahili should become *the* Panafrican language. Latin managed to be the sole language of culture for a brief while (just a few centuries) but now even the Catholic Church has to admit vernacular liturgies. In the eighteenth century French was the favourite medium of aristocratic intercourse as well as enlightened culture from Lisbon to Moscow: it had to yield its position with the growth of romanticism and increasing respect for the languages really spoken by men. As the language of finance and technology, of computers and Coca Cola, American English occupies a prominent position at the time of writing: there is no reason why it should not have to bow, in a century or so, to Japanese or Arabic. The curse of Babel will always lie upon us all, and there is no doubt that the linguistic borderlines should remain the first parameters for any taxonomy of African literature.

Within such borderlines is has often been thought that homogeneousness and uniformity are the rule. It may be true that many a francophone African writer thinks of himself primarily as a member of *la Francité* with Paris for his cultural rallying point. And apart from local idioms, there are few differences of any substance between writings from the different parts of the former Portuguese empire. This is probably largely due to the extensive process of "glottophagy"[2] to which the intellectuals of "Latin" Africa

[2] This useful word was coined by Jean-Louis Calvet in *Linguistique et colonialisme: Petit traité de glottophagie* (Paris: Payot, 1974), in order to describe the process whereby a stronger language (i.e. one whose influence is bolstered by superior physical and/or economic power, sometimes combined with higher cultural and intellectual prestige) manages to dominate, smother and ultimately destroy altogether, the languages of

were submitted. As a result of their conquerors' indifference and even contempt for the native languages, these were not reduced to writing so that the new élite was unable to realize their literary aspirations in the modern fields of writing and the printing press except through some foreign medium. In order to remedy this alienation timid attempts were made in the seventies to introduce African words and turns of speech into French and Portuguese as written in Africa.

But the earliest signs that the literary partition of Africa was not going to stop at linguistic borders appeared in anglophone West Africa: in the distinct fates which History meted out to the literatures of Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. Differences in the new states' home policies, in the evolution of the new societies under their new leaders, in national cultural policies ranging from literary *laissez-faire* to financial support cum political control—all these institutional elements contributed to giving the literary life of each new state its peculiar shape at least as much as the colonial and pre-colonial cultural backgrounds had done. Indeed in many cases the writers themselves consciously fought with the weapons proper to their craft to ensure that these new states should become nations, that is, that the original sense of tribal allegiance should be superseded by a national patriotism paying homage to the multi-tribal state. This they often had to do while at the same time castigating the state's leadership for its immorality and corruption and while trying to integrate elements of their own tribal legacy into the new literature. They often had to concoct their nationalistic propaganda in exile!

That the structure and institutions of the new states contributed to the progress or otherwise, to the shaping and to the orientation of modern-type literature became clear soon enough in Ghana, and Nigeria, in South Africa, in Uganda and in Kenya, and has now been securely established by several of the contributors to these volumes. For a variety of reasons, fragmentation along state lines did not come into French writing until later and there are indications—such as the 1980 coup in Guinea-Bissau eliminating the mulatto Cape-Verdean leadership—that the lusophone countries of Africa are bound for political and therefore literary differentiation as well.

This process of fragmentation is likely to upset the doctrinaire comparatist as much as the Utopian Panafricanist: African unity may now be seen as a myth born out of the dialectic between colonialism and anti-colonialism, out of the combined ignorance of Western exploiters and philanthropists on the one hand, Western-educated blacks from Africa, America and the Caribbean on the other. The hard reality of this waning century is that African writing in European languages is now parcelled out into three large linguistic sets, each of which, in its turn, is further divided into a number of national sub-sets, with an intimation that regional (or tribal) sub-sub-sets—Yoruba and Igbo, Swahili, Luo and Kikuyu—may be in variously advanced stages of preparation. If account is taken of the Arabic language tradition in Muslim West Africa and of the vast amount of creative writing in some fifty vernacular languages, it becomes clear that

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those who come under the control of its speakers. Although Calvet goes back to sixteenth-century linguistic theory and even discusses linguistic power relationships in fourteenth-century England, he fails to point to the fact that modern colonial "glottophagy" derives from the cultural and linguistic imperialism of the Romans and of the Latin language. Nor does he point out that Arabic has had similar effects wherever Islam was introduced by Arab military conquest in the few centuries following Hijra.

Africa is not likely to contribute significantly to the materialization of the comparatist's dream of a single *Weltliteratur* accessible to all. Rather, the Black continent is treading in the footsteps of Western Europe: just as the Celtic tribes of Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula had to adopt the language of their Latin-speaking conquerors and failed to produce any writing in their own languages for more than half a millennium after the fall of the Roman empire, so the modern literature of sub-Saharan Africa emerged first in the Portuguese language and first captured the attention of the outside world in the French language. In former British Africa a plurilingual tradition of writing has been in the making for more than a century. But as the literary production develops, the main trend is obviously in the direction of diversification, towards the consolidation of pre-existing variety, and the materialization of new differences introduced by present political and economic developments.

On the other hand, this budding diversity of African writing provides wide new fields for the comparatist to harvest fresh crops. If the specificity of the comparative approach resides in its determination to overcome national and/or linguistic boundaries, then it is clear that only the methods evolved by comparative literature can do justice to the as yet unexplored network of relationships which are bound to exist between Africa and other parts of the world; they are indispensable to the production of a balanced, comprehensive portrayal of African literature itself; indeed, one might go so far as to claim that in the plurilingual states of Africa, a comparative approach is necessary to embrace the literary patrimony of the nation in its totality.

This final part does not aim at exhaustiveness: its modest purpose is simply to illustrate some of the directions which the emerging significance of Africa on the world's literary scene suggests for the devotees and practitioners of comparative literature.

It seems only natural to start this enquiry with comparative essays concerning some of the many aspects of Africa's verbal art. For, contrary to common belief, the written art was by no means brought to the Black continent by European educationists: although Africa's verbal art remained predominantly oral for centuries, by the fifth century A. D., Ethiopia could boast a corpus written in her own language and in a modified version of the Sabean script brought in by conquerors from the Arabic peninsula. And the spreading of Islam brought not only a new religion, but also a new language, Arabic, whose alphabet was used at least from the eighteenth century on to transliterate vernacular languages both in West Africa and on the coastline and islands of the Indian Ocean. Literature in European languages represents only the top crust of a multi-layer cake, for it was preceded in many parts of the continent by a fairly abundant crop of creative writing in vernacular languages using the roman script. The problems that arise from this peculiar situation are illustrated by Professor Daniel P. Kunene, who discusses the survival of typically oral devices in the modern written art produced by several societies in Southern Africa, and by Professor Ali A. Mazrui and Mr. Mohamed Bakari, in their comments on the relationship between the oral tradition, the Swahili stream of Islamic writing and modern English-language literature in East Africa.

In the study of the modern literatures of sub-Saharan Africa, the translingual

approach is by no means new. Essays and books have been published, dealing from the comparative viewpoint with anglophone and francophone works and authors: this is all the more easily done as many French and English colonies received their independence around 1960: their paths of evolution, divergent though they may have proved, started from the same background: of power being transferred to Africans, of neo-colonial interest from multinational companies, of rampant urbanization, and of the price to be paid for lack of experience in terms of corruption and sheer wastage of resources. Specific aspects of this common development are dealt with by Dr. George M. Lang from the sociological point of view of the emergence of class consciousness and by Dr. Janis A. Mayes from the more formal point of view of the modes and targets of irony in three novels from Cameroon and Nigeria.

Seldom, however, have scholars in African literature endeavoured to bring Portuguese writing into the network of relationships that should be unravelled. The main reason, no doubt, is that Portuguese is not yet one of the languages with a basic world-wide currency: only a few Portuguese-speaking scholars have given any attention to the influence of negritude on lusophone writing.[3] It is therefore a new vista indeed that is being opened by Professor Willfried F. Feuser through the trilingual approach of his two essays, which complement each other as they deal respectively with a matter of content, the modern-city motif, and a matter of literary genre, the short story.

Whether the epithet "comparative" is appropriate when dealing with two national literatures using the same language might be a topic for pedantic discussions. Yet it cannot be denied that one single idiom can be the literary language in countries whose cultures are entirely different. While French is the sole culture tongue of the greater part of former French Africa, the Maghreb states of North Africa have a twofold literary tradition: one in French and one in Arabic. And while Islam is the most widespread religion of both the Maghreb and important sections of black Africa, the latter usually offers an admixture of syncretism which has allowed Vincent Monteil to speak of *"l'Islam noir,"* in which elements of pre-Islamic beliefs and practices manage to assert themselves. Although, then, both regions are geographically part of the African continent, and have been historically subjected to French political and linguistic imperialism, the differences between them are such that few scholars have been attracted to a joint consideration of their literatures.[4] Professor Gerald Moore shows a way towards filling this sorry gap in his analysis of selected novels written in French by North and Black African authors.

Furthermore, the use of the same literary language, the sharing of a common French culture as well as a common black skin and a common past of oppression, combined with the historical friendship of Senghor and Césaire in promoting the liberating ideology of negritude—all this does not prevent the often overlooked fact that francophone Africa and the francophone West Indies also have entirely different cultures. For it is not unimportant that a West African writer does have an African mother-tongue, whereas

[3] See for example, Richard A. Preto-Rodas, *Negritude as a Theme in the Poetry of the Portuguese-speaking World* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970).

[4] A step in the right direction was taken with the publication of *Patrimoine culturel et création contemporaine en Afrique et dans le monde arabe*, ed. Mohamed Aziza (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1977).

his West Indian counterpart was raised in standard French or in some "debased" creole variety of French. And whereas a West African intellectual, however sophisticated, may proclaim his attachment to the traditional values of his society and even his respect for its religious beliefs and myths, it is difficult for his West Indian peer, who has been as successfully uprooted from this backround as any black American, to share in this kind of feeling. African and Caribbean writings in French are thus brought forth by two cultures which have been moving in different directions ever since the first black slaves were taken across the Atlantic; it seems inevitable that they should differ increasingly as the French *Antilles*, now dubbed *"départements d'outremer"* become ever more closely integrated with France. Since Lilyan Kesteloot's epoch-making book, in which West African and West Indian poets were seen to co-operate in close harmony, the nature of this co-operation has been questioned and problems have been noted, as was illustrated during a symposium on "Négritude africaine, négritude caraïbe" that was held in Paris in 1973. Professor Jacqueline Leiner, who is well known as an expert on Césaire, analyses new dimensions of the distinction between the Caribbean and the African poetic expressions of the black experience.

This need to identify the varieties of negritude prevailing on either side of the Atlantic Ocean and to assess their significance in terms of ideological concept and poetic practice, brings us to an almost limitless domain which has as yet hardly been explored: the literary relationships between Africa and the rest of the world. For although the (usually misleading) image of Africa in Western literature has been examined with laudable solicitude by a number of scholars,[5] as has the influence of the Negro Renascence on the negritude movement,[6] it goes without saying that a myriad of other types of rapport have existed between Africa on the one hand, and both Europe and the Western hemisphere on the other. The literary connection between Africa and the Americas is of course of especial interest, first because of the role of the large negro diaspora brought to the United States by the slave trade, and second because of the fact that the rest of the Western hemisphere, Latin America, belongs to the Third World like Africa. Paradoxically, what Professor Michel Fabre, who is editing Richard Wright's correspondance, has established in his contribution, is a sort of non-link: the total indifference of the greatest black American writer of his generation towards the literature that was being produced by other blacks in Africa, coupled with his complete lack of sympathy for the negritude school's endeavour to extol traditional African values. As to Professor Lemuel Johnson, he underscores parallel patterns in the disillusionment and increasing aloofness from politics that characterize a number of Third World novelists

[5] Studies in imagology are abundant. See for example: Léon Fanoudh-Siefer, *Le Mythe du Nègre et de l'Afrique noire dans la littérature française de 1800 à la Deuxième guerre mondiale* (Paris: Faculté des Lettres de Paris-Nord, 1968), Martine Astier-Loufti, *Littérature et colonialisme: L'expansion coloniale vue dans la littérature romanesque française, 1871–1914* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1971), Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (n.p.: The University Press of Virginia, 1971), Martin Steins, *Das Bild des Schwarzen in der europäischen Kolonialliteratur 1870–1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Thesenverlag, 1972) and E. C. Nwezeh, *Africa in French and German Fiction (1911–1933)* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1978).

[6] See for instance Christophe Dailly, "Renaissance de Harlem et éveil de conscience littéraire en Afrique noire francophone: Négritude," *Revue de Littérature et d'Esthétique Négro-Africaines*, 2 (1979), 111–122.

represented in this case by Ayi Kwei Armah from Ghana and Edmundo Desnoes from Cuba.

There is little doubt that one of the most fruitful areas for comparative studies will be the identification and interpretation of similarities and differences in the modern literatures of Africa and of other Third World countries, as all have emerged fairly recently from colonial bondage to the responsibilities of independence, and are trying to shed the "burden" of their traditional creeds and subsistence economies in order to enter the way of "Progress" through industrialization and urbanization. But it must be acknowledged that for African writers using European languages, the preferred models have originated in the literary tradition of the former colonizer: from Shakespeare to Eliot and Yeats, from Corneille to Zola and Aragon, from Camoëns to Portuguese realism. Within this vast field, Mrs. Danielle Bonneau and Professor André Lefevere have chosen to concentrate on a fascinating phenomenon which has only recently surfaced in African literature: the existence of some sort of kinship (in need of definition) between the present evolutionary stage of African, and more generally Third World, societies, and the literature that was produced in Athens at a time when European civilization was dawning, when religious beliefs, economic life and even political organization were curiously analogous to what can be found even now in some African societies. There must be some reason why Yoruba writers of English were the first to be attracted to classical Greek tragedy although the way had been paved by an Ijo playwright, John Pepper Clark, and his *Song of a Goat*. This at first sight unexpected source of inspiration first came to the fore in Ola Rotimi's handling of the Oedipus theme in *The Gods are Not To Blame*, but it was truly highlighted when Wole Soyinka was commissioned to produce his own africanized translation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, which is here discussed from two different and at the same time complementary viewpoints.

For a variety of reasons, it is a deplorable fact that Western scholars are unduly ill-informed about the research done on African literatures by their peers in socialist countries. Few Western specialists are aware of the extent and intensity of socialist scholars' interest in the field, in spite of the valiant informative efforts of such contributors from Eastern Europe to *Research in African Literatures* as Pál Páricsy and Vladimír Klíma. Indeed, fewer still have been able to become cognizant of the many scholarly works which have not been translated into a Western language. The last two essays in this book are expressly designed to provide material towards the fulfilling of one of the most urgent tasks of Comparative Literature: to help dissipate the dark cloud of ignorance and misunderstanding between East and West. It is the editor's hope that Dr. Vladimír Klíma's general survey and Dr. Helena Ryauzova's more detailed account of the reception of Luso-African writing in the Soviet Union will generate among Western readers better informed awareness and appraisal of the achievements of scholars from Eastern Europe in the field.

There is no need to point out that this last part of the book has an exceedingly fragmentary character. Nor is it necessary to apologize for this. The arrival of a whole continent on the world literary scene is a momentous event in the literary history of mankind. Although African literature in European languages is barely a quarter of a

century old, it was already a major effort for the team of contributors to describe it in itself, with a maximum of accuracy and orderliness. The essays that follow merely aim at exemplifying a few of the numberless directions which the comparative approach might usefully explore in order to avoid that exclusive preoccupation with African literatures in and for themselves which might turn the discipline into a scholarly ghetto.

CHAPTER XII

THE THREE LITERARY TRADITIONS

DANIEL P. KUNENE

1. WRITTEN ART AND ORAL TRADITION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Literacy among the black peoples of Southern Africa is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, and written literature a twentieth-century one, with roots in the nineteenth. Prior to this, all verbal communication, including that of an artistic nature, was oral. Since then, written and oral modes of communication have co-existed, especially in the art of story-telling.

All the writers under discussion here were to varying degrees products of the oral tradition, the earlier writers to a greater degree than the later. The oral influences in their writings will be identified as we proceed. It will have to be borne in mind, however, that in addition to the usual contrastive features between oral and written narratives, such as the communal nature of oral story-telling versus the privacy of the creative process and the eventual consumption of the finished product in written narrative, there is the new set of values which came in with literacy and acted as a powerful factor in the writer's conception of right and wrong, good and evil, proper and improper, and so on. Indeed these influences have been so powerful and all-pervasive that they will be seen to give a very important new dimension to the relationship between the artist (i.e. the writer) and his audience (i.e. the reader), namely that the artist is now, *inter alia*, a crusader for the new order which, in his judgement, is better than the old.

The oral tradition of verbal art developed its shape in the course of many centuries in the midst of pre-urban, pre-industrial societies, human groups that were comparatively small and therefore highly vulnerable, not only to human enemies, but also to the caprices of nature and especially to the vagaries of the climate. Strong group consciousness—that is, national unity, which, for some reason is called "tribal" when dealing with Africa—was felt and understood to be quite essential if the group was to survive. Traditional oral art, therefore, is constantly directed towards the clear definition of moral-social issues with a view to bolstering solidarity among all members of the community, particularly the young.

When writing came into use, such deep-rooted attitudes were by no means given up even though the total cultural context, the power relationships, the value system, were undergoing accelerated change. While adopting the new technique, creative artists remained loyal to the societal ethic which was at such odds with the individualism that pervades Western literature. Furthermore, they resorted to narrative devices with which

they were familiar because these constantly occur in oral art: they now placed them in the service of a new cause, the cause of change, innovation, modernity.

It is significant that the modern African-language writer, like his oral counterpart, almost invariably has two sets of characters: those who are villains because they deviate from what is defined as behaviour required to ensure the continued well-being of society, and those who are considered to be heroes because their behaviour is a constant reinforcement of the society's ethos. One of the major literary consequences of this need to distinguish clearly between good and evil is the adoption, by the writer, of the technique of the twice-told tale. This manifests itself as a repetition, either in fact or by implication, of the episodes and situations in the story. The "good" characters do all the right things, while the "bad" characters do all the wrong things. The moral, either stated or implied, is that the "good" are rewarded and the "bad" punished. This is, of course, taken directly from the oral story-telling tradition which is replete with the twice-told story design. One common theme which is thus structured in oral narrative, is that of a young person, usually a girl, who goes in search of some prize, or simply on a journey necessitated by the conflict in the earlier part of the story, and is confronted with many trying situations on the way. If, through the human qualities of kindness, sympathy, selflessness, etc., she handles these situations well (it may involve helping some weaker creature, or cleansing the sores of an old woman by licking them with her tongue, and so on), she obtains a big reward in the end. This often takes the shape of getting married to a handsome prince or king and living a life of luxury. When, later, she goes back home to visit, her obvious prosperity makes her sister envious, and the latter undertakes the same journey. She, however, has the antisocial qualities of cruelty, selfishness and lack of compassion; she blunders at every turn, and ends up being punished.

Sometimes the parallel situations in which the two characters are involved are placed side by side, so that they begin and end at the same time; but sometimes they are placed end to end, so that the end of the first triggers off the second.

In a like manner, the writer crusading for change will sometimes create two sets of characters for the sole purpose of making them mirror each other's traits and sharpen their outlines by sheer force of contrast. In Ndawo's *Uhambo LukaGqobhoka*,[1] Ngqola, the protagonist (later named Gqobhoka), symbolically renounces his society because he finds it evil; in a series of vicarious dream experiences, he receives salvation through the white man's religion, is baptized, and sees white missionaries and soldiers bound for Mhlangeni, his original home, in order to convert and baptize the people there in the same way that Gqobhoka himself had been converted and baptized. In this situation Gqobhoka is "good" because he has seen and accepted "the light," and his fellow citizens of Mhlangeni are "evil" because they refuse to be moved by his dreams, but persistently laugh at him instead.

So it is with Mofolo's *Moeti oa bochabela*[2] where Fekisi is "good" because he is

[1] Henry Masila Ndawo, (d. 1949) *Uhambo lukaGqobhoka* (Lovedale, 1909). (Xhosa; tr.: Gqobhoka's [i.e. Convert's] Journey.)

[2] Thomas Mofolo (1876–1948), *Moeti oa bochabela* (Morija, 1907; repr. 1975) (Southern Sotho; tr.: Traveller to the East).

totally and uncompromisingly opposed to the "evil" ways of his society, while his fellow-citizens are "evil" because they refuse to see "the light" which he tries hard to show them. The point is that whenever society is considered to be morally corrupt and in need of salvation, the artist could theoretically always create characters who reflect the dichotomy between the corrupt masses on the one hand, and, on the other, the one or two individuals who are sensitive to this corruption and who preach repentance to avoid the wrath that is coming. This is the message of Noah before the Flood, of the Lot story with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The "Repent ye!" call sets off a man as deeply aware as Ngqola, Fekisi or Christian, from his obstinate, pleasure-loving, morally depraved fellow-men. In *Moeti oa bochabela* we are specifically given Phakoane, Fekisi's neigbour, as the epitome of corruption, violence and drunkenness. His death in a demented state during an eclipse of the sun, is the "wages" of his sinful life. And to make sure we do not miss the significance of this event, Mofolo makes Phakoane die a cruel death in which his flesh shrivels up and grows disfigured even before he dies, as if consumed by fire, and while his body is being carried to the burial place after his death, his face suddenly twitches and twists as if in great pain. The murderers of Sebati, an innocent man who was hated by the local chief because he was considered proud since he was a man of independent means, also die a similar death. In contrast to this vivid picture of physical suffering, torture and disfigurement, Fekisi's death is described as a beautiful event symbolizing the successful conclusion of the hero's search for God's salvation and the everlasting life. His face is radiant with joy as he sees Christ face to face and is being received into the Kingdom of Heaven. In simple terms then, Fekisi is rewarded and Phakoane and his likes punished.

In written literature the two tellings of the tale are never end-to-end, but always simultaneous or side by side. Only individual episodes within the major story can sometimes be arranged end-to-end. For the verbal artist, the literary means of setting up these two categories most poignantly is to be found within the general ambience of the metaphor, embracing such specific literary techniques as the fable, the parable and the allegory, in which reality is symbolically represented. And this explains why, in the early days of writing (in the late nineteenth century, before serious literary works were undertaken), the small creative efforts publicized through the African-language newspapers usually took the form of allegory or parable, whose meaning in terms of the daily lives of the people was often made patent as a kind of resolution and conclusion. Like the proverb, these literary forms thrive on analogy. You speak on one level and either leave it to your listener or reader to make the necessary transference to the level of his own objective situation, or do it for him as indicated above. The implication is that the logic which one might be inclined to dispute if it were conveyed directly as in a debate, becomes unassailable when given in the form of an equation, so that the acceptance of the logic of the one premise, which is usually enshrined in the wisdom of the ancients, implies automatic endorsement of the parallel logic on the literal plane of argument.

In fact, this is where the African oral tradition of narrative joins the Christian oral tradition of the sermon. The preacher reads his text, elaborates on it, and then applies its lesson to the daily lives of his congregation. The logic and the design are the same.

First, the congregation is placed in a position of accepting the first premise as propounded by the unchallengeable authority of the Bible; thereafter they are expected to accept automatically the application of that first premise to their daily lives. Indeed Mofolo based the plot of his book *Pitseng*,[3] on the application of Mr. Katse's famous sermon on true, selfless and enduring love, to the lives of the people of Pitseng, the youth in particular. After that sermon, the rest of the book is devoted to the quest of Aria Sebaka and Alfred Phakoe for the kind of love Mr. Katse preached about on that memorable Sunday before Alfred's departure from home. The long search ends when they discover each other and realize for the first time that each has that kind of love for the other.

Bunyan 's *Pilgrim's Progress* was of course the best example to emulate in exhorting one's compatriots to repent of their "evil" ways. That is why, to quote Gérard, "Of the whole corpus of European literature, Bunyan 's masterpiece is the most widely translated in Africa."[4] Yet one should constantly bear in mind that, while Bunyan's message was that all mankind was corrupt and stood in need of salvation, Ndawo's and Mofolo's heroes in the examples quoted above, see the Xhosa and the Sotho respectively, if not indeed the entire black population of the African continent, as the sinful ones who need to be saved. The whites are excluded from the condemnation because they are the bringers of the religion of salvation. If in Ndawo's book they march their armies to Mhlangeni, the hero's home-place, it is in order to destroy symbolically the "evil" origins of the black race, to deculturate the Africans, and thenceforth to re-acculturate them, giving them a new god, a new religion, a new language, new names, new houses, and so on without end.

The writer never considered his writing relevant unless it concerned itself with the social issues as he saw them. One particular form of the problem of good and evil, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable behaviour, was connected with the concept of obedience, that is, with the distribution of power and authority within the group. And one of the mainstays of pre-colonial African societies was the clear-cut, formalized and even ritualized manner in which people related by birth or marriage behaved towards each other. This objectification, both in behaviour and in speech, of the relationships of people went far beyond the nuclear family: it covered the extended family with all its numerous branches. There were specific kinship terms denoting and describing these relationships, each of which was more than just a mere label, but coincided with a pattern of behaviour appropriate to the relationship established by the term. These kinship terms were used constantly by those concerned, whether in addressing each other or in talking about each other, which was a way of reinforcing their expectations, from each other, of mutually complementary behaviour patterns.[5]

[3] Thomas Mofolo, *Pitseng* (Morija, 1910; repr. 1951). (Southern Sotho; place-name, lit. "In the pot.")

[4] Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 434.

[5] By way of an example, it may be helpful to point out to non-African readers that terms for "uncles" and "aunts" are more specific in Southern African than in European languages: the "uncle" who is one's *father's younger brother* is called *"little father"* the "uncle" who is one's *father's older brother* is called *"big father"*; the "aunt" who is one's *mother's younger sister* is called *"little mother"*; the "aunt" who is one's *mother's older sister* is called "big mother." Strictly, therefore, the terms "uncle" and "aunt" are restricted to *mother's brother* and *father's sister*, respectively.

Some of the observances arising from this were more important than others. Among them was respect for someone older than oneself: father and mother, elder siblings, uncles, aunts, little mothers and big mothers, little fathers and big fathers, and so on. This flowed over the family boundaries to control and define one's relationships with members of the community at large who were called Father-So-and-So, Mother So-and-So, Grandfather So-and-So, Grandmother So-and-So, older Brother So-and-So, older Sister So-and-So, etc. The etiquette also prescribed and proscribed forms of behaviour carrying certain responsibilities and privileges based largely on respect and obedience for the older, protection and affection for the younger.

Obedience therefore entailed not only a willingness to carry out all reasonable requests, commands and even demands of senior persons, but also listening to their advice and showing them respect. Humility was part of what one might call the "obedience complex": arrogance, insubordination, head-strong behaviour, lack of respect and deference for those older than oneself, were all antithetical to obedience.

It must not be imagined, however, that disobedience, stubbornness, arrogance, and other negative attitudes were unknown before the advent of the Europeans. On the contrary, oral tales abound in which one of the characters suffers a moral lapse and is either punished or runs into a series of misfortunes, or is subjected to a curse because he or she has been guilty of disobedience in this broader sense. But this was a waywardness recognized by all concerned as a temporary and unfortunate surrender to the selfish, anti-social desires and wishes of the individual, temporary in its consequences, and regretted by all, including its perpetrator. The new type of disobedience which the writer found himself confronted with in his rapidly changing society, however, was an expression of a growing sense of individual freedom and responsibility, a repudiation of the old values. And there lies the crucial difference. The emergence of the individual was accelerated by, and seen as part and parcel of, europeanization in all its ramified manifestations. This placed the writer in a dilemma because, while he embraced and encouraged the process of westernization generally, he was not happy about some of its effects on his society, especially those threatening to destroy the concept of the family as then understood and revered.

It was in this context that Thomas Mofolo, in his second novel, saw the youth of Pitseng as corrupt because they did not approach the question of courtship and marriage with the same reverence as the youth of the pre-European days had done. Not only does Mofolo condemn the young people involved, but with even greater force he accuses the whites of having corrupted the youth of Lesotho as demonstrated by the fact that this unwholesome attitude to courtship and marriage whereby a young man and a young woman decide on these matters without consultation with their parents, is prevalent only among the christianized young.

Like the oral narrator, the writer rewarded obedience and punished disobedience. Obedience was often accompanied by other positive qualities and achievements such as good progress at school and eventual success in life, and vice versa with disobedience. That is why the heroes of Mofolo's *Pitseng*, Aria Sebaka and Alfred Phakoe, are so successful in everything, and their courtship and marriage are a shining example to the other young people. And that is why "disobedient" young people like

Ioda Msimang and James Moraka are made to hurt each other the way they do and end up on the brink of personal disaster.

It is indicative of the contradictions in the dynamics of the socio-cultural situation of the African since the advent of the whites, that the writer sometimes identifies with the rebellion of the young against what they see as parental tyranny. Almost invariably this centres around the question of marriage, the problem being: to what extent should the children marry the young woman or young man of their choice, as against the partner preferred for them by their parents? I suspect that the real issue here is that concerning the role of *bohadi* cattle in the founding of the marriage partnership. Marriage by exchange of cattle was considered a heathen custom by the missionaries, and one of their arguments for its abolition was that it represented a "sale" of the girl by her father, and that therefore the father would often succumb to greed and force his daughter to marry the son of the man who could afford a higher *bohadi* than the others—in other words, sell her to the highest bidder. This, it was argued, would be done in total disregard of the girl's own wishes. Some writers actually see this greed for cattle as the root of the problem, with the girl as its "victim." But there have to be other reasons too because the young man is often himself forced into a marriage he does not want. The two sets of parents may simply like each other and decide to use their children to link the families in a more formal way; or the decision may be capricious, intended as a demonstration of the parents' authority over their children.

The plot generally depicts a bewildered child who is torn between obedience to his or her parents, on the one hand, and, on the other, his or her own inclination. The latter would be construed as "disobedience," and lead to a sense of guilt. Compromise is impossible. What does happen in many cases is that the child acquiesces as a form of protest in which he or she technically obeys his or her parents, hoping by that same act to prove that arranged marriages are never successful. The consequences are, of course, disastrous.

This frequent motif is well illustrated in D. M. Jongilanga's Xhosa novel, *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko*.[6] The protagonist is an unhappy girl, Zoleka Funca, whose impending marriage to Zolile Xatasi distresses her on two counts: first, it will interfere with the completion of her studies (she is training to be a nurse); second, Zolile was chosen for her by her father Zenzile and when the story begins she has not even set eyes on him. Her own true love is Zwelakhe Songcishe, a young man she met at the Healdtown Training Institution, who is now teaching in East London.

Even as she goes through the motions of getting married to Zolile Xatasi, Zoleka is taking a secret vow to make the union fail. She refuses to consummate the marriage, is rude to her in-laws and is always sulky; in her relationship with her in-laws, she breaks one taboo after another; she absconds to King William's Town where her father ultimately finds her, gives her a thorough beating and sends her back to her husband's people. Her behaviour is worse now as she takes to brooding and becomes generally lethargic. On the third day after her return she kills her husband with an axe while he is asleep. On hearing the news, Zoleka's mother dies of shock.

[6] D. M. Jongilanga, *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko* (Lovedale, 1960). (Xhosa; tr.: The Snapping of the Cradle Skin).

Zwelakhe has meanwhile also been going through a similar crisis of conscience. His father would like him to marry in the proper way, that is to say, neither by eloping, nor to a girl of doubtful character. Therefore he suppresses the temptation to elope with Zoleka before her marriage to Zolile. Unable to forget her, however, he now visits her regularly in jail, and they arrange to get married secretly, but his father gets wind of this plot and threatens to disinherit him if he dares marry a girl with that kind of reputation. In desperation, Zwelakhe now turns to his ex-sweetheart, Zodwa, for advice. Zodwa, driven by jealousy, gives him poisoned brandy. The poison begins to take effect while Zwelakhe is on his way to the place where Zoleka has been living and working since her discharge from jail. He arrives there while she is absent, and collapses and dies in her room in the servants' quarters. On her return Zoleka is so shocked at discovering Zwelakhe's body that she commits suicide by drowning in the sea.

Meanwhile Zodwa, whose involvement in Zwelakhe's murder has not been found out, moves to Johannesburg, but within a short time begins to be haunted by Zwelakhe in her dreams. He threatens vengeance. One night she is so frightened by her nightmare that she runs out into the street where she is hit and killed by a car.

The number of deaths in this short novelette is staggering: Zolile Xatasi is murdered by his wife Zoleka; Zoleka's mother dies of shock; Zwelakhe Songcishe is poisoned by Zodwa; Zoleka commits suicide on discovering Zwelakhe's body in her room; Zodwa is killed by a car as she tries to run away from her nagging conscience. The reason for so many corpses is the mistaken belief that death, *per se,* makes a story a tragedy. The writer misses the whole point of his own plot, namely that the real tragedy lies in the fact that Zoleka is a victim of the fluid state of her society, a society tragically split into rebellious, yet at the same time guilt-stricken, youth, and traditionalist parents who refuse to face the fact that their world is fast passing away.

Tamsanqa, in his play *Buzani Kubawo,*[7] makes the young man Gugulethu the central figure of a marriage intrigue quite similar to that of Jongilanga's story. Early in the story Gugulethu tells his father, Zwilakhe, and his uncles that he will not marry Thobeka, the girl they have chosen for him, because he is in love with another girl, Nomampondomise. When they insist, Gugulethu assumes a passive attitude and refuses to talk to anyone about the impending marriage, except to tell them to "Ask my father" ("Buzani kubawo"). Taking advantage of this passiveness, his father makes all the necessary arrangements for him to marry Thobeka. In his state of inertia, Gugulethu does not oppose his father's scheme actively. He even fails to inform Nomampondomise who, having accepted his marriage proposal, and being unaware of the latest developments, rejects the suitor found for her by *her* parents, thus forcing them to return the *bohadi* cattle. When she hears of Gugulethu's marriage to Thobeka, she commits suicide, whereupon her mother dies of shock.

Gugulethu does not consummate the marriage, and he lives away from Thobeka for the next twelve years, during which time she gives birth to three children fathered

[7] Witness K. Tamsanqa, *Buzani kubawo* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1958). (Xhosa; tr.: Ask My Father).

by other men. Gugulethu's father eventually persuades her to go and join him. But on the very first night of her arrival he murders her and her three children with an axe. He is sentenced to death for this crime, and his mother is so shocked that she commits suicide by drinking poison.

Again the consequences are bloody, but the tragic point is missed. One cannot help asking what is the purpose of an obedience which leads to so much suffering? Would it not be more exciting and more believable to see the young rebelling against this tyranny by taking the partner of their own choice? Yet it is perhaps true that in real life *some* children would rather suffer the consequences of an unwanted marriage than incur the displeasure of their parents, which leads to the internalization and suppression of their anger and to a passive-aggressive attitude. It is difficult to see poetic justice in this kind of plot. It is, rather, a situation of double misery for the children who are faced with unwanted marriage partners, giving up those they truly love and then as a consequence having their lives shattered beyond redemption. Significantly, writers who choose to resort to European languages deal with the marriage theme (with its attendant sub-themes such as the bride price and parental authoritarianism in the choice of a spouse) in a somewhat different light: they often handle it as material for comedy rather than tragedy and their stories mostly come to a happy ending, with the children triumphing over the regressive despotism of their families.

The point is that African-language writers in South Africa, being closer to the pre-colonial tradition of oral art, are also more intensely aware of the tragic situations which the normative conservatism of traditional societies can generate in a period of cultural transition. Another example, which is also illustrated in French, English and Portuguese writing, is the "Prodigal Son" theme, well-known in South Africa as the "Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg" motif. It usually focuses on a young man who leaves his home in the country for the city, almost invariably Johannesburg, whither he is attracted by glamour and the promise of relatively high wages. There he falls victim to all the evils which result from indulgence in pleasures of the senses: he is involved in get-rich-quick schemes which often lead to gambling and violence; he is thrown into jail for one crime or another; he contracts venereal disease; he is reduced to penury and so on. In the end he is overtaken by a sense of guilt, and he sees that his only salvation is to go back home, and renounce his life of sin.

This theme, too, is well represented in African novels and plays written in European languages, where it appears most notably as one particular form of the "city novel". But unlike the marriage theme, the writers do not handle it in a way that is consistently favourable to cultural innovation: city mores are a far more problematic factor in African life than are marriage customs. The point, however, is that the "obedience factor"—the demands of total loyalty to the traditional norms of society—is quite an obsession with many African-language writers in South Africa. In most cases, obedience, that is, submissiveness to traditional authority, is a measure by which other qualities can be inferred. The spirit of obedience goes hand in hand with regular school attendance, good grades, successful career, happy marriage, good upbringing of own children, god-fearing and law-abiding behaviour. Absence of submissiveness, on the other hand,

entails playing truant at school, poor grades, failure in life, unsuccessful marriage, neglect of own children, godless tendencies and social disapproval.

As the writer's primary aim is to convey his moral, the obedience factor has an unfortunate effect on characterization: the author usually declares his characters good or bad before the story has even begun. Sometimes this is even reflected in the characters' symbolic names, which commit them in advance to behaving in accordance with the meanings of their names. In such cases, the bulk of the book virtually consists of a series of exempla designed to "prove" that the writer's judgement is correct. This in turn leads to the projection of good and evil in absolute terms resulting in characters who are either saints or devils, but not human beings.

In his determination that the reader shall not miss his message, the writer, besides being very explicitly moralistic in the body of his story, often writes a short foreword in which he overtly declares his purpose. Judging by the regularity with which these forewords commit the author to the elimination of the social problems of his day, one must conclude that the writer's first concern was social relevance, with literary excellence coming second.

As our first example, let us take Segoete's foreword to his highly moralistic book, *Monono ke moholi ke mouoane,* singling out only the points which he himself underscores. The Sotho writer lists the lessons to be derived from his book as follows:

(1) E bolela ho feta kapele ha maruo a lefatshe.
(2) Bophelo ba motho le bona bo a senyeha, mme qetello ya bona ke lefu.
(3) Bohlale ba motho, boo a lekang ho iphedisa ka bona, bo sitwa ho mmoloka mme bo mo hlahisetsa ditsietsi tse ngata.
(4) Bophelo ba nnete bo fumanwa ka tumelo ho Jesu ya bolaetsweng baetsadibe.[8]

(1) It tells about the transience of wordly riches.
(2) Man's physical life also wastes away and its conclusion is death.
(3) Man's cleverness, with which he tries to obtain the means to live, fails to bring him salvation, and it leads him into many difficulties.
(4) True life is found through faith in Jesus, who was killed for the sake of all sinners.

Segoete concludes his foreword with an exhortation advising the Basotho to live according to the aphorism: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God."

In the introduction to his Zulu poems *Inkundla yokwazi* Kenneth Bhengu proclaims:

Le ncwajana ngiyilobele ukuba ifundise abantu bakithi abansundu ukuziphatha kahle, nokuqonda ubuzwe babo, nesithunzi namalungelo abo.[9]

I have written this little book in order to teach my black people to behave properly, and to understand their nationhood, as well as their dignity and their rights.

[8] Everitt L. Segoete (1858–1923), *Monono ke moholi ke mouoane* (Morija, 1910, repr. 1940), p. vi. (Southern Sotho; tr.: Riches are Mist, they are Vapour). All translations of quotations from the African works mentioned are by the present author.

[9] Kenneth Bhengu, *Inkundla yokwazi* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, n.d. [1962]). (Zulu; tr.: Council of Knowledge).

The Xhosa writer S. Dazana explains his purpose in *Ukufika kukaMadodana* in the following unmistakable terms:

> Ndinikela eli linge kumzi oNtsundu, ngakumbi kulutsha lwakowethu. Ndinethemba lokuba uninzi kulo lofumana ukukhuthazeka kumahla-ndinyuka obomi.
>
> Xa sinokuohi sikhumbule ukuba akukho namnye umntu obomi bulula, ongenazinzima zalo mhlaba, sinokukhuthazeka ekulweni nezethu iinkathazo.[10]

> I offer this effort to the Black nation, especially to the youth of my country. I hope that many of them will find comfort in it as they face the ups-and-downs of this life.
>
> If we bear in mind that there is not a single person whose life is easy and is free from the trials of this world, we will take courage in fighting our own tribulations.

As a final example we may quote another writer from Lesotho, Bennett M. Khaketla, who was much concerned about the high incidence of *diretlo* (murder for medicinal purposes) in his country. His foreword to his novel, *Mosali a nkhola,* includes the following statement:

> Hoo ke ho rerileng ka buka ena ke ho tlosa babadi bodutu, le hore batho baa e belang ba ke ba inahanele taba ena ya diretlo ka hloko, ba e hlahlobe ka mekgwa yohle, ba bone hore na e ka fediswa jwang.[11]

> What I intend to achieve with this book is to entertain the readers, and also to make those who read it pause a moment and consider with care this matter of medicinal killings and think how it can be stopped.

Such explicit pronouncements testify to the writer's inordinate preoccupation with the moral significance of his work. It is therefore understandable that he should use every opportunity to convey his message to his readers directly rather than through his characters. In terms of narrative style, this is achieved through a temporary abandonment of the narrative line, that is, through digressions. One problem with digression is that the author has to put his characters in a state of suspended animation to reactivate them when he has finished saying his piece: a perfect analogue to this is the sudden stoppage of the movement of a film while the commentator explains a point of detail in the still confronting the audience. This clumsy procedure can be avoided by employing techniques which make the story carry the message with it as it moves along. There is an inherent irony here when we consider that it is through believable characters that the message is best rendered poignant and meaningful, yet such characters fail to emerge precisely because of the interruptions which are intended to ensure that the message is not lost. After all, there is nothing better calculated to make one understand failure than to *see* failure, and you can see it most effectually, even though vicariously, if you are able

[10] S. Dazana, *Ukufika kukaMadodana* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1957; repr. 1958), Preface. (Xhosa; tr.: The Arrival of Madodana).

[11] B. M. Khaketla, (b. 1913), *Mosali a nkhola* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1960; repr. 1978; Preface). (Southern Sotho; tr.: What a Calamity This Woman Has Brought Upon Me!)

to empathize with someone experiencing it. Apply the same method to other experiences of your characters, and your purpose is achieved much better than if you preached your lessons from the pulpit.

Digressing in order to talk to the audience is no doubt another of the many carry-overs from oral to written narrative. But there is a qualitative difference. Oral narrative is fluid, not rigid. To begin with, the narrator has his audience all around him. Their responses, whether verbal or non-verbal, set up a dialogue effect in which the narrator and the audience can never exist separately. In addition, however, there are other environmental factors such as the baby who may suddenly cry for its mother's attention, the children playing a little distance away, the hens pecking away on the ground and sometimes coming too close and having to be *kibi*-ed away,[12] and so on. The number of potentially distracting influences is infinite, and therefore the opportunities to halt the narrative temporarily and attend to life's immediate needs are never lacking. It is not felt as a jolting experience for the narrator to switch from the story suddenly in order to address his audience: it is part of the back-and-forth flow of communication.

The writer who interrupts the flow of his story to talk to his reader does not have the advantage of an immediate feedback. He nevertheless does it in the hope and expectation that his prospective reader will concur with his judgement. Such authorial intrusions can take a variety of forms, a few of which we now proceed to illustrate: One is quoting a wise saying as an analogue to ensure that the reader has no choice but to concur, as does R. R. R. Dhlomo in *Indlela Yababi:*

> USolomon kaDavida wathi endulo: "Ngokuba izindebe zomfazi omubi ziwuju, nolwango lwakhe lubushelezi kunamafutha."[13]
>
> Solomon the son of David said long ago: "For the lips of an evil woman are like honey, and her kiss is smoother than oil."

This follows Ben Lutshani's contemplation of Delsie Moya's beauty, which he finds irresistible even though it is obvious to him that Delsie has an evil character. This kind of appeal is used frequently, with the writer often quoting from the store of wisdom of his people, usually with some introductory phrase like "We Mazulu (or MaXhosa or Basotho, or Mandebele, as the case may be) have a saying that goes ...".

Thomas Mofolo prefers the direct address to the reader in *Moeti oa bochabela:* after describing how Fekisi fought the men who came to the pastures to *kgwathisa* the herdboys (i.e. make them lie down and receive a few lashes, usually done in a playful way), and how he put them to flight, Mofolo asks a rhetorical question—"Le re he badisana ba ne ba ke ke ba mo rata?"[14] (Do you think then that the herdboys would not have been attracted to him?)—the oblique meaning of which is: How could the

[12] *Kibi* is a term used in Lesotho to shoo away chickens which are a nuisance for one reason or another. Very often it is preceded by the sound *ksw*, giving *ksw kibi*. *Kibi* itself comes from Dutch *kiep*, fowl.

[13] R. R. R. Dhlomo, (1901–1971), *Indlela yababi* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1946; repr. 1970), p. 75. (Zulu; tr.: The Way of the Wicked).

[14] Mofolo, *Moeti oa bochabela*, p. 9.

herdboys resist loving him? In some cases the writer actually attracts the reader's attention by a direct call, as Guma does in *UNomalizo*.[15] Many others use this device in order to establish an intimate, relaxed conversational style of communication with the reader. An even closer intimacy is sometimes created when the author invites the reader to share his authorial omniscience: in a sort of conspiratorial atmosphere the author as good as holds the reader by the hand to make him take a peek behind the veil of human limitation. Guma provides the best example as he "tip-toes" with the reader to eavesdrop while Bangela proposes love to Nomalizo: the novelist himself tells the reader he is doing this even though it is "a shameful thing" to spy on people in their moment of privacy. Which suggests, as will be seen later on, that in some cases the author feels his omniscience imposes on him a responsibility he would rather not carry.

Another favourite form of authorial intrusion is for the novelist to offer some abstract generalization designed to clarify the paradigmatic value of the characters and/or plot patterns. At a point of crisis in *Indleba yababi*, R. R. R. Dhlomo points out that

> Uhlobo olufana noDelsie lwamantombazana oluphilela injabulo nezinkanuko zenyama kalubafuni abesilisa abaluhloniphayo. Luthi bazenza amakholwa. Zona zifuna abesilisa abangakhathali ngesimilo somuntu wesifazana. Abafika bamphathe ngobulwane, abone ukuthi insizwa le engacengi lutho.[16]
>
> Girls of Delsie's type who live for pleasure and the desires of the flesh do not like young men who treat them with respect. They say that such young men behave like Christians. They, for their part, prefer men who do not care about the respectability of a woman; who come and treat them like animals and show them that they are not begging for favours.

This is a commentary on Delsie's refusal to accept Ben's advice to reveal the true murderer of Thomas Gwebu, who was Delsie's boy-friend at the time he was murdered. Delsie is now in love with the person most likely to be the murderer, namely Dick Mthakathi, one of those young men who treat their women "like animals."

Elsewhere in the same novel, the Zulu writer intervenes in his own name to pretend that he is not endowed with omniscience:

> UDelsie kasazi ukuthi wenzani nokuthi uyaphi. Useyisisulu nje salomfana ongenasimilo naye.[17]
>
> We don't know what Delsie is doing, nor where she is going. She has now become the play-thing of this boy who has no manners either.

This is said as Delsie gets into a motor-car with a young man who is not her regular lover. Both of them have been drinking and it is pretty obvious that they are going somewhere to sleep together. The author averts his eyes and would rather not know

[15] Enoch S. Guma, *UNomalizo; okanye: izinto zalomhlaba ngamajingi-qhiwu* (Tsolo, 1918) (Xhosa; tr.: Nomalizo, Or: The Things of This World are Unpredictable).

[16] Dhlomo, op. cit., p. 107.

[17] Ibid., p. 129.

what, in fact, exists first and foremost in his imagination. The same voluntary temporary abandonment of the power of omniscience had been practised by Mofolo in *Chaka,* though with greater credibility, for when he writes that

> Isanusi o ne a se a nkile seo a se nkileng ho Noliwa, seo re sa se tsebeng, a se etsa kamoo ho tsebang yena a nnotshi.[18]
>
> Isanusi had already taken from Noliwa whatever it was he had taken, which *we* don't know, and had done with it what he alone knew.

It is not only clear that the writer would rather not be party, even as a *spectator,* to the evil designs Isanusi has in mind to accomplish with *whatever part he wanted* [unknown to the author as well] from Noliwa's body, but such ignorance does not affect the principle of verisimilitude, since the Sotho author is dealing with allegedly historical characters, about whom he is not a position to be truly omniscient.

Yet another type of authorial comment, used only rarely, is to explain for the benefit of the reader that an undesirable consequence of the story's action could have been avoided if only the problem had been approached in a different way. An interesting example of this occurs in Dhlomo's *Indlela yababi:*

> Uma uMaDutshwa wayethe kumntanakhe: "Mntanami, isitha sakho esikhulu ngomunye wesifazana ozishaya isihlobo sakho, kodwa eqonde ukukwenza ufuze imikhuba yakhe emibi." Uma uMkaMoya wayesho njalo enganeni, eyivusa ukuba ixwaye amanye amantombazana "aziyo" ngothando lwasemadolobheni, ngabe wamsindisa engozini eyesabekayo eyehlela umntanakhe eGoli.[19]
>
> If MaDutshwa had said to her child: "My child, your greatest enemy is another girl who makes herself your friend, but aims, in actual fact, at making you acquire her evil habits." If Moya's wife had spoken like that to her child, and advised her to stay away from other girls "who know" about the love relationships in the cities, she would have saved her from the serious danger which befell her child in Johannesburg.

This is also in the nature of gossip between author and reader: they discuss the affairs of the characters, with the author commenting on their weaknesses.

Although these and other types of authorial interference with the flow of the story may appear to result from defective mastery over the techniques of the written art as elaborated in Europe and America, they deserve attention as vestigial remnants of the devices that characterized traditional oral performances. They try to transfer to the written text the easy give-and-take, the close intimacy between narrator and audience, for the essential purpose of making sure that nobody will miss the moral message of the text. Hence the frequency of digressions, which provide the author with opportunities

[18] Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka* (Morija, 1925; repr. 1957), p. 118. (Southern Sotho; proper name of person, sothoized from *UShaka,* derived from *ishaka,* an intestinal beetle which may cause delayed menstruation.)

[19] Dhlomo, op. cit., p. 25.

to convey his valuation of his character and his feelings about their fate in an absolutely unambiguous manner.

But the South African writer who uses his own language can also find in the arsenal of oral tradition other devices capable of achieving his fundamental purpose, techniques which are less direct, less obvious, less clumsy and have the twofold advantage that they allow the narrative to flow on uninterrupted and that they are also aesthetically pleasing in their own right. And the most important of these is a figure which I have ventured to call "eulogue", referring to

> the different kinds of praise reference: names such as deverbatives, nouns describing the hero according to his action, or metaphorical names comparing the hero to natural phenomena; and, for example, praise by association of the hero with some other person whether himself (or herself) praiseworthy or not. These mechanisms for praising the hero are sufficiently important to the poem, and sufficiently unique, for a new term to be justifiable in referring to them.[20]

Eulogues originally belong to heroic poetry. They are the means of expressing the poet's admiration for the subject of the poem, who is either a brave warrior, a brave hunter, a renowned warrior-king, etc., or a combination of all these at once. As such he would be among those entrusted with the protection and defence of their king and country if danger threaten. With each brave act he performs, he deserves at least one eulogue to praise him; very often he receives several, each reflecting a different aspect of his bravery as perceived by the poet.

The modern writer of fiction also uses eulogues, even though by no means to the same extent as the oral poet, to show his admiration of the character who upholds the ethical standards and the system of beliefs of his society. Of course, literate persons, i.e. writers and their readers, having been christianized in the process of acquiring literacy, will belong to the section of the total society that accepts and upholds the new, Judeo-Christian beliefs introduced by the colonizers. This does not mean, however, that characters in written fiction are praised only for living Christian lives. Often one still finds warrior qualities recognized and given high praise.

Fekisi, the hero of Mofolo's *Moeti oa bochabela,* is known for always coming to the rescue of those who are bullied by the strong. After he had rescued a man in the land of the Batlokwa, who was being attacked by four others, Mofolo refers to him with a eulogue: *"Mothusi-wa-baa-tujwang-le baa-tlatlapuwang"*[21] (Helper-of-those-who-are-harassed-and-are-robbed-of-their-belongings). Likewise, in recognition of Fekisi's constant kind disposition towards other people, Mofolo uses the following eulogue: *"Ngwana-wa-Setsoha-le-pelo-ya-maobane"*[22] (Child-who-is-getter-up-with-the-heart-of-yesterday). These are "deverbative eulogues," based on a verb denoting a praiseworthy deed which characterizes the hero.

[20] Daniel P. Kunene, *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. xxii.
[21] Mofolo, *Moeti oa bochabela,* p. 46.
[22] Ibid., p. 1.

Another kind of eulogue, more strictly metaphorical, is in frequent use. A random example comes from John L. Dube's Zulu novel, *Insila kaTshaka*, where the protagonist, Jeqe, is referred to as *"UJeqe onjengempisi"*[23] (Jeqe-who-is-like-a-hyena). The reference here is to the predatory habits of the hyena, to the animal's qualities of fearfulness and fearlessness which are transferred to the warrior Jeqe.

But perhaps the most widely used eulogue for an admired protagonist in fiction is what I term "the eulogue of filial relationship", through which the character is praised by reference to his/her paternal parentage: he/she is described as Son-of-So-and-So, or Daughter-of-So-and-So. While the emphasis is on belongingness, on the fact that the character did not simply "emerge out of an anthill" as the Basotho would say, but belongs to a clan lineage, there is also an implication that the son or daughter so praised is so outstanding that anything or anyone he or she is related to is automatically admirable: the father does not have to be specially distinguished for this eulogue to be used. Dube often calls Jeqe *"Umfo kaSikhunyana"* (the son of Sikhunyana). In *Pitseng*, Mofolo refers on many occasions to his morally impeccable characters, Aria Sebaka and Alfred Phakoe, as *Moradi-wa-Sebaka* (the daughter-of-Sebaka) and *Mora-wa-Phakoe* (the son-of-Phakoe). In *Chaka*, the protagonist is many times referred to as *Mora-wa-Senzangakhona* (the-son-of-Senzangakhona) before he, as it were, "falls from grace", when he degenerates—in Mofolo's eyes—into a callous beast.

Adjectives, especially colour adjectives, are often used as eulogues to praise an admired character. There is a scene in Mofolo's *Moeti oa bochabela* where Fekisi fights against ten men who do not like his interference in their *kgwathisa* sport with the herdboys, and he routs them all. Fekisi is then praised as *Fekisi-e-Mosootho* (the dark-brown-Fekisi). But again, as in the case of the father in filial relationship, this does not mean that the dark-brown colour is particularly beautiful, nor that there are other Fekisis with different complexions. What is does mean is that Fekisi is an admirable person, and therefore whatever distinguishing feature he has automatically shares his renown.

Admiration for the agent promoting the beliefs and ethical standards upheld by the author extends beyond the human actor to non-human actors, including inanimate objects which are effective when used by a human being as his instruments. Animals are often praised by reference to their colour, as the lion that leaps to the attack in *Chaka*, or the hyena prowling around the village at night ready to pounce on someone. Colour is prominent in the praise of certain inanimate objects used as *efficient instruments*, such as Chaka's black-and-white spear *(le lephatshwa)* as he transfixes the enraged lion with it, or his black shield in his first fight as a member of Dingiswayo's armies. It is not the colour that matters, but that in which it inheres. Mofolo often indicates his aesthetic admiration of the lion by substituting the eulogue *namane-e-tshehla* (the yellow calf) or *kgomo-e-tshehla* (the yellow bovine) for *tau* (lion).

In the scene where a lion attacks Fekisi, Mofolo conveys the impressive aspect of the animal not only through the eulogue *namane-e-tshehla* but also through a technique

[23] J. L. Dube (1870–1949), *Insila KaTshaka* (Mariannhill Press, 1933; repr. 1951). (Zulu; tr.: Tshaka's body-servant).

which is peculiar to the Sotho language: the delayed subject. In Xhosa and in Zulu, the subject is often placed *after* the predicate, not for reasons of emphasis or of rhetoric but as an alternative which ranks completely equal with the opposite syntax of subject followed by predicate. In Sotho, however, the effect is different, as when Mofolo writes:

> e tsositse mohlahla, e tonne mahlo,
> e tiisitse mohatla, namane e tshehla.[24]
>
> [It] raising its mane, staring with its eyes,
> and holding its tail taut, the yellow calf.

If he had placed the grammatical subject where it would be in normal, low-keyed speech, though still using the eulogue, the phrase would read:

> Namane e tshehla e tsositse mohlahla,
> e tonne mahlo, e tiisitse mohatla.
>
> The yellow calf raising its mane, staring with
> its eyes, and holding its tail taut.

If he had further substituted the ordinary denotative noun *tau* (lion) for *namane-e-tshehla,* then the entire statement would have been reduced to:

> tau e tsositse mohlahla, e tonne mahlo,
> e tiisitse mohatla.
>
> the lion raising its mane, staring with its
> eyes, and holding its tail taut.

To the Sotho reader, such small alteration would rob the statement of much of its power, in particular its aptness in conveying forcefully the writer's admiration of the lion.

A more complex procedure is resorted to in Mofolo's *Chaka,* in two passages devoted to praise of the lion and of the hyena respectively. In both passages, the eulogue taking the place of the denotative noun is a little poem which, though complete in itself, is part of the sentence in which it appears. Furthermore, in the passage about the lion, the poem itself is the delayed subject:

> Ya re feela ham-m-m, ya be e se e le ka hare
> Tshehla ya boMothebele, kokomoha,
> Tshehla, thokwa-lekakuba,
> Ekare o sa je tsa batho,
> O itjella dirobala-naheng!
> Motjhana a se na babo-moholo
> Oa n'a bolaya a be a ratha.[25]

[24] Mofolo, *Moeti oa bochabela,* p. 59.
[25] Mofolo, *Chaka,* p. 15.

It just went ham-m-m, and it was immediately in their midst,
Tawny-One, Brother-of-Mothebele, rise up,
O, Tawny-One, Fawn-coloured King-of-the-Wilds,
Why, you eat not what belongs to the people,
But eat, for your part, the sleepers-in-the veld!
A nephew bereft of uncles
Kills and claims all.

The pronoun "it" at the beginning of the translation acts as a substitute for the temporarily delayed nominal "subjectival phrase", i.e. the poem whose own rather complex syntactic system operates independently from the larger system of which it is nevertheless a part.

Just as an oral narrative performance is apt to be interspersed with songs, so will the South African writer of modern fiction in his own language break into poetry whenever an opportunity presents itself. Taking his cue from his people's admiration of the bull, which was often the pride of the herd, Sotho poet James J. Machobane composed an epic about a bull named Maphatshwe (Black-and-White-One) because of its colour. While the story is basically in prose, albeit of a poetic character, it includes two long praise poems for the bull. These extol various aspects of Maphatshwe's physical appearance, his temperament, his courage, his strength and fighting skill, his experiences, such as his encounter with four other bulls all at once in a bull-fight and with warriors who tried to capture it. The following excerpt refers to Maphatshwe's birth and to his mother, Kgalodi, in labour:

Mphatlalatsane, Maphatshwe, kgomo e ntle
Naledi ya hosasa ya e etella pele;
Ya theoha e kaletse pitsi ya mafube
Kgomo ya sekgutlo, Maphatshwe.

Kgalodi ya ema ntle, har'a sekgutlo,
Ya hana badisa, ya hloboha mohlape wa lesaka!
Ya hanella har'a lehlaka, kgomo 'a ntate.
Ya bobola, yaka seboba sa mokgwabo wa madiba.
Ya e lahla namane, botle ba sekgutlo,
Athe hase kgomo ke tladi!:
Ya theohela har'a lehlaka e kaletse pitsi e ntle, Mafube.[26]

Morning star, Maphatshwe, beautiful bovine,
He was heralded by the star of morning;
He came down riding upon the fiery horse of dawn's light,
He, bovine of the valley, Maphatshwe.

Kgalodi stood outside in the centre of the valley,
Spurned the herdsmen and forsook the herd of her fold;

[26] J. J. Machobane, *Mphatlalatsane ea sekhutlo* (Morija, 1947; repr. 1954), pp. 67–68. (Southern Sotho; tr.: Mphatlalatsane [i.e. Morning Star] of the Valley).

Stubbornly she stood among the reeds, bovine of my father.
And she murmured like a bot-fly of the swamps around deep pools.
Then quickly and smoothly the calf was born, beauty of the valley.
None knew he was no bovine, but lightning!
He descended among the reeds riding upon the beautiful fiery horse of dawn.

Many examples could be quoted of modern writers in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa who are still responding to the urge inherent in the oral tradition, breaking into poetic praise the better to convey their admiration or gratitude or deference as the case may be, weaving prose and poetry into a whole in which each offsets the other, and in the process revealing their own biases, approbations and evaluations as the story proceeds. But whereas in pre-colonial days such poetic outbursts were usually connected with the heroic and pastoral values of traditional societies, the modern writer is bound to adapt oral devices to the new historical situation that has been created for his people. For instance, the imagery usually connected with the depiction of a war-like hero in the heat of battle will be adapted to modern times and types: the "warrior" of the present day is the educated person and his "battlefield" can be defined as the areas of activity where his education can be of service to his people. Such service is seen in political terms because it offsets the deprivation suffered by the blacks under an oppressive, exploitative white rule whose propaganda for continued supremacy is based on the alleged "backwardness" of the black people. It is, of course, also appreciated on a short-term basis inasmuch as it contributes to the immediate alleviation of suffering among the blacks.

A good illustration of this is Makhokolotso Mokhomo's poem in honour of the medical doctor 'Mota Rasebeane Ntšekhe. She sees Dr. Ntšekhe as a warrior fighting disease. Since she constantly uses lightning imagery to convey the swiftness with which Dr. Ntšekhe moved from one area to another in performing his duties, when alluding to his birth she uses the word *leru,* commonly glossed as "cloud", but carrying the associated meaning of "lightning" or "thunder" as well. The birth itself is symbolically referred to in the action of "planting a reed", that is sticking a reed over the door of the house in which the mother of a new-born baby is confined:

Ha Ntšekhe ho hlometswe leru lehlaka
Ho tswetswe Rasebeane, Seabela-batho
La tsokotseha ntshing tsa Qoqolosing!
Le nyoloha le entse leswiti,
Le kgwaetse tladi-mothwana ka lehafing;
Mmane wa lona o futse dikgomo le batho
Pul'a lona ke tsheola, ngwanabo sefako,
Ha e fafatsa lefu o lahla sehlajwe.[27]

At Ntšekhe's has been planted a reed for a cloud,
There has been born Rasebeane, Giver-unto-men;
It hovers over the slopes of Mount Qoqolosi,

[27] Makhokolotso Mokhomo, *Sebabatso* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, n.d. [1954]), p. 6. (Southern Sotho; tr.: A Thing of Pride).

It moves up casting a heavy shadow,
Hiding a lightning shaft under its armpit;
Its lightning strikes at cattle and men,
Its rain comes down in sleet, in miniature, hail,
When it sprinkles, Death flees away.

In a similar manner, Reuben Caluza, the well-known Zulu composer and poet of the twenties and thirties, saw John Langalebalele Dube as a "warrior of education". Dube, born in 1871, had studied in the United States at Oberlin College and other institutions. That was when he met such outstanding black Americans as W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. He returned to South Africa so inspired by Washington's Tuskegee Institute that he determined to found a similar school among his own people. He succeeded in 1901 when he established the Zulu Christian Industrial School, which was later renamed the Ohlange Institute. In addition to this, Dube started the Zulu newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* in 1903. In recognition of this man's outstanding achievements, Caluza composed the following song:

Vul' indlela mnta kaDube
Kade sisebumnyameni;
Izizw' ezimnyama ziding' ukukhanya
Ma uzihkanyise wena Mafukuzela.
Phaphamani zizwe ezimnyama
Nifundis' abantwana benu
Akuphel' umona namagqubu
Ma nilandel' abaholi bakini.
Omame kanye naobaba
Bayimihamb'im' elizweni
Sebehamb' ebezishuteka nje
Bexoshwa ngenxa yendaba yeLand Act.
Sahlupheka!

Blaze the trail, son of Dube,
We have long been in darkness;
The black nations are searching for light
Bring the light upon them, you pioneering one.
Wake up, you black nations,
Give your children education,
Let there be an end to jealousies and grudges
And may you follow your leaders.
Our mothers and our fathers
Have become homeless wanderers,
They have become mere landless squatters,
Moved from place to place because of the Land Act.
Alas, how we suffer!

A number of such dirges have been written by modern African-language poets on the occasion of the death of an educated person, in the same way as oral poets used to compose songs of mourning for the fallen warriors.

But if the main function of the literary artists in pre-literate cultures was to popularize and bolster their society's moral code of conduct by praising desirable behaviour with all the verbal techniques at their disposal, such techniques could also be used to discourage deviancy by intimating the author's dislike and disapproval of objectionable characters. Such feelings are usually manifested through the choice of uncomplimentary words, dysphemistic phrases and ugly images which, in oral performance, are lent greater force by gestures, grimaces and vocal modulations conveying anger and hate. A good example of this disapproval of a character occurs in Mofolo's *Chaka,* in the scene where Chaka fights for his life against his blood-thirsty half-brothers and their henchmen on the morning after he killed the hyena. Chaka's adroit movements, with every swing of his stick a deadly stroke, are described in short sharp phrases, which punctuate the more elaborate descriptions of the fate of his victims. The latter incur authorial disapproval for seeking to kill a man who not only is innocent, but has just saved a girl from the jaws of a hyena; they are disliked also for their cowardice in combining against him. One is described as dying with his skull broken open and his brain spilling out, and is said to have "died belching like someone who had drunk too much beer". Another has his chin split, separating his jaws so that his tongue dangles in space: "that man died an ugly death!" Yet another one receives a blow which cracks his skull between the eye and the ear, and his eye falls on the ground, "a big mass like that of a sheep". The last one is struck on the back of his head and he falls on his face, "and died with his teeth buried in the ground." As regards Mfokazana, Chaka's first half-brother to attack him, whom Chaka felled with one blow, the reader is told that "blood was pouring out of his mouth, his nostrils and his ears, and it flowed like that of a sheep whose neck had been severed." The descriptions are lively and full of venom. The objectionable characters are belittled and ridiculed, and their deaths are described in animalistic terms: it is not difficult to see how an oral narrator would act out some of the parts.

The influence of tradition does not make itself felt solely in the stylistic devices which enable the author to intimate his appraisal of his characters and so to convey his standards of righteousness to his readership. It is also obvious in the very presentation of the characters themselves and especially in the prominence awarded to the social group as a collectivity of mostly anonymous individuals acting in unison to influence the development of the plot. A character which is symbolic of a personality trait such as greed or envy, is an allegorical stereotype who never develops into a full human being because his/her behaviour is intended solely to demonstrate and illustrate that he/she is greedy or envious. It makes no difference whether the character is called John or Thebe or Greed or Envy: in this context, he/she remains "anonymous". If we distinguish two extreme types of fictional characters—the totally "anonymous" and the totally individualized—there is no doubt that namelessness does move a character closer to total "anonymity."

Now, total anonymity in characterization is a prominent feature of oral art, and the fact that it occurs with such regularity in written literature is a measure of the extent to which many writers still respond to the idea of communal involvement with the total

didactic intent of the story, an idea which stems directly from the oral tradition. When cast as a group, anonymous characters are usually referred to as "the people" or some appropriate noun substitute such as "they" or "the others." In oral narrative these characters mostly act as "watchers" who always make appropriate comments at suitable moments, are always on the side of right and justice, and help to guide the story towards a successful conclusion. In written literature on the other hand, this technique has been taken a significant step further in that anonymous characters now represent both the good and the bad elements in society.

Thomas Mofolo's works contain many examples of intervention by the good element in society. In *Moeti oa bochabela* "the people" stop Fekisi from seeking out in his rage the murderers of Sebati and punishing them by his own hand for their deed; "the people of the village" stop Phakoane from beating up his wife when he arrives home drunk and accuses her of not having protected his child from being struck by lightning. In *Chaka* "the women" and "the girls" sing songs praising Chaka and castigating the cowards after Chaka kills a lion single-handed after all the men had run away. On another occasion "the women" sing a mournful song in caustic criticism of Senzangakhona who has just given the order for Chaka's enemies to kill him for no reason whatsoever. They appeal to the gods for intervention and indirectly hint at their knowledge of the secret surrounding the hero's illegitimate birth. In *Pitseng*, after it has become known that the new preacher had saved some men from dying in the snow, "the people" speak many words of praise in his honour and "the men he had saved together with their wives" bring gifts of food, utensils and firewood.

Examples of the bad elements in society featuring as "anonymous" characters can be adduced from Dhlomo's *Indlela yababi*. After Delsie Moya and Thomas Gwebu have absconded to Johannesburg where they frequent places of entertainment such as music-halls and dance-halls, the fact that they had been highly respectable people in Natal is said to be of no importance to "these people who live this kind of life in Johannesburg", because all "they" want is that "you should be one of them". At the court-hearing which is to determine how Thomas Gwebu died, "all these people who filled up the court" have come to hear the outcome of the case so that they have something to gossip about. Characterizing them as false friends, Dhlomo goes on to moralize about them:

> Kulapho-ke buphelela khona lobubuhlobo balababantu. Uthi omunye wabo angavelelwa ishwa, esikhundleni sokuba bamkhalele, bamsize, ubezwa sebeqhwebana izinqulu ngaye. Sebethi wayenzani wayethi ungcono kunathi. Yikho-ke bebuthene lapho. Bazozizwela okubi okungase kubaphe into yokuhlafunwa ngemilomo kuze kurele elinye ishwa futhi.[28]

> That is the extent of the friendship of these people. When one of them is overtaken by misfortune, you hear them gossiping about him instead of sympathizing with him and helping him. They now ask what was he doing, did he think he was better than we. That is why they are assembled here. They have come to hear for themselves whatever ugly thing may give them something to chew in their mouths until another misfortune strikes.

[28] Dhlomo, op. cit., p. 77.

And the Zulu novelist further describes how Delsie's unnamed "girl friends" peer into her face to see whether she shows any sadness.

Anonymous characters who are depicted singly and remain nameless are usually referred to as "a certain man," "a certain woman," "a certain person," and so on. In the opening paragraphs of the second chapter of *Pitseng,* the man to be known later by the nickname of Mr. Katse, is referred to as "a certain young man," and then a little later as "the preacher". In *Moeti oa bochabela* Fekisi fleeing from home in the early hours of the morning overhears "some people" plotting to kill "another"; he follows them secretly to the place where they have enticed their intended victim; he saves him and "the poor man" thanks Fekisi; yet, during the brief dialogue that ensues between the two of them, the man not only remains nameless: he is put aside for good once this additional illustration of "the wickedness of the black people" has been givee. It is a final gesture of his rejection of this wickedness, that Fekisi "ran with great speed so that he should leave that evil village."

In conclusion it seems clear that the most important single factor shaping the aim as well as the structure and texture of most written African-language prose narratives in Southern Africa is the author's moralistic intent. This makes him focus his attention more on the characters in his story than on the situation. The situation itself is important largely as an opportunity for the character to reveal his/her personality traits. Since, however, the character's ethical significance is decided upon in advance, the situation is mostly contrived in order to evoke a pre-determined response: this has a stilting effect on the whole process of character delineation. "Good" characters are emblems of undiluted goodness, "evil" characters of unmitigated evil. The story then assumes the nature of a fable in which the mere mention of the name of a character evokes a fixed set of moral responses.

This often leads to the author choosing symbolic names for his characters, thus reinforcing the tendency for the reader to associate the character with good or evil. Mxabaniso in Guma's *UNomalizo* is a real trouble-maker who constantly causes quarrels between people, Molatlhegi (alias Motimedi) in Moloto's *Motimedi* is truly lost in both the physical and the spiritual senses, as indeed the very last sentence in the book shows. One example at least—A. C. Jordan's *Ingqumbo yeminyanya,*[29] still one of the best novels in any African language—provides evidence that this technique need not rule out subtle characterization. In compliance with tradition, the writer named his characters for their parts: Zwelinzima ("The world is full of trials"), heir to the Mpondomise chieftainship, does go through great hardships leading eventually to his suicide; his uncle Dingindawo ("Position seeker"), who acts as regent, is bent on keeping the throne for himself; Mthunzini ("The shady place") is the one who steals the confidential letters when Zwelinzima plans to return from exile and take over the chieftainship, and who alerts Dingindawo to the plot. Nevertheless, Jordan's protagonists, unlike those of most African-language writers, are well-rounded individual characters endowed with their

[29] A. C. Jordan, *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* (Lovedale, 1940). (Xhosa; tr.: The Wrath of the Ancestral Spirits).

own idiosyncrasies and plausible psychological motivations. So far, however, Jordan's Xhosa novel remains the exception that proves the rule.

For although Jordan was able to combine allegorical names with individualized character depiction, it is more usual for fictional characters in African-language writing to be endowed with that absence of personality which we have called "anonymity". This, undoubtedly, makes for "shallow" and "flat" characters; it does not promote "exploration of individual character" or "the analysis of the private emotions and motivations and experiences."[30] Yet, there is also a positive side. Oral narratives simply thrive on anonymous characters because it is their very anonymity that gives such characters the authority to speak and act in the name of the entire community. Through them the traditional artist can convey the sentiments of whole crowds of people, he can distil the opinion or consensus of the community and mould it into what "they" "said" or what "they" "thought" or how "they" "felt" as in that representative example from Mofolo's *Pitseng* in which the gratitude of the communities of the entire Pitseng valley is conveyed in an abstract "dialogue." Besides, there is no better way to show the community's involvement in the ups-and-downs of the story than through anonymity in characterization.

Throughout Africa, the new socio-economic order introduced by Europe has raised numberless enormous challenges for the traditional societies. African-language writers in the southern subcontinent have shown themselves to be especially alarmed by the way the old, time-honoured, stable family relationships are threatened in this new order. They are therefore obsessed with the problems of authority and obedience. Feeling as he does—and as oral artists did and still do—that his role is first and foremost that of a teacher, an activator of the conscience of his society, the modern writer is impelled to pass judgement on his characters' behaviour and to indicate the standards by which they are to be praised or blamed.

In order to discharge his moral duty, the writer has a variety of methods at his disposal, some of which are inherent in the Western novel as a genre. But some, too, derive from oral art as the author adapts them to the new medium. In communicating his message and revealing his feelings, the modern writer either digresses in order to give himself a chance to deliver his lesson direct to the reader, or he adopts a poetic stance in which approval or disapproval is carried within the tide of the narrative, making it more pleasing while at the same time conveying the writer's feeling ruled by his moralistic intent. The latter technique, which often assumes the shape of poetic prose, can also lead to actual verse being introduced in the midst of the story's prose text. But the writer's most frequent methods for expressing his appraisal of his characters derive even more directly from oral art as do the various types of eulogues, the dysphemistic words or phrases, the delayed-subject technique. These are integrated into the prose, enriching it while at the same time telling the reader what the author thinks of his characters.

Members of oral societies are endowed with an acute and exacting sense of verbal aesthetics. They are exceedingly sensitive to the right use of words, phrases, proverbs, etc. This is the result of centuries of practice in the art of story-telling and of poetic

[30] Gérard, op. cit., p. 379.

recitation. Yet the concept of art for art's sake is foreign to them: art is always functional. Its function is undissociably moral and social. Traditionally, its concrete purpose was to define and perpetuate the unquestioned values of the community. The written art has the same function, which is why in most cases the entire narrative can be described as a declaration of the author's purpose; why, too, many authors are not satisfied with this and offer introductory statements as apologies for the ensuing text. But the concrete purpose has changed to some extent with the overall changes brought about by history. It no longer resides unfailingly in the perpetuation of the ancestral outlook. Writers are deeply aware of the challenges which their societies have to meet; they are conscious that the old mores will seldom generate adequate responses and that a modicum of alteration and adaptation is imperative. Their concrete purpose is to evoke in their readers a similar awareness of the modern African's problematic situation. That is why one cannot overemphasize the importance of the writer's efforts to enlist his readers' consensus. Together with the writer's close watch on his characters and his emotional responses to their actions, this intimacy with the reading audience completes an important triad comprising author, characters and readers. And the story becomes the deliberations of a court in which society is on trial.

Ali A. Mazrui and Mohamed Bakari

2. THE TRIPLE HERITAGE IN EAST AFRICAN LITERATURE

Three major influences have helped to shape literature in East Africa in the twentieth century: first, the influence of ethno-African traditions involving the values of different linguistic and tribal groups; secondly the influence of European tradition on East Africa's modern writers; and thirdly, the influence of Islam as modified and conditioned by the social circumstances of East Africa.

The ethno-African heritage is multipolar simply because it consists of different ethnic traditions. The tales and verses of the Kikuyu in Kenya are bound to be different from the traditional literature of the Luo, as indeed both traditions are different from those of the Chagga and Baganda. Each is rooted in the unique way of life and the unique history of each group.

The Afro-European heritage, on the other hand, is bipolar rather than multipolar. The two poles of Europe's literary influence in Africa consist of the liberal tradition and the radical tradition. The liberal tradition in Africa is older, and was basically received in the class-rooms of literary criticism and the pulpits of individualism either in the colonies or in the universities of the Western world itself. In its earlier manifestations the liberal tradition did accommodate nationalistic sentiments and commitment to self-determination for African cultures and groups. African writers of the later periods of colonialism were often liberal nationalists: they believed in the ideals of individuality and in the dignity and eventual autonomy of Africa. The radical tradition came later as African intellectuals became increasingly fascinated with the perspectives of Marxism and its derivatives. It gained momentum with the disillusionment of African independence, and the growing conviction that new forms of imperialism were still manipulating Africa and distorting its destiny. Like liberalism, Leftist radicalism in Africa is often fused with African nationalism.

As for the Afro-Islamic heritage, this was a unipolar phenomenon pulling towards itself diverse influences and traditions, and then in some way attempting to synthesize them. This is very different from the co-existence of the different tribal cultures of Africa and also from the competitive confrontation between liberalism and radicalism in the Afro-European heritage. Swahili culture was born initially out of a marriage between Islam and the Bantu civilization, and Swahili then became a magnetic force in its own right, attracting towards itself a diversity of contributions. It is in this synthesizing and magnetic sense that Swahili civilization might be called unipolar. Islam began to pene-

trate East Africa in a significant way in the tenth century after Christ. The Swahili as a people were then exposed to a new international religious ideology. In the centuries which followed they were subjected to external influences to an almost unique extent in Eastern Africa. This was largely responsible for the development of a culture that was at once basically Bantu and largely Islamic at least in its earlier forms. For centuries the maritime nature of Swahili society maintained some of its international connections with Islam, partly through the flow of Swahili scholars and students to the intellectual centres of Islam in North Africa and the Middle East. But at the same time the evolving Swahili civilization was silently and profoundly absorbing the surrounding Bantu traditions and cultures.

The multipolarity of ethnic literature does indeed provide a rich plurality of traditions and perspectives. But on the whole the ethnic literatures of East Africa are inaccessible to each other. The Chagga do not normally seek to learn the verse of the Kikuyu; nor are the Baganda qualified to evaluate the tales of the Acholi. The different worlds of ethnic literature may deserve parity of esteem—but however equal they may be they are definitely separate. The question inevitably arises whether ethnic literature in East Africa carries the risk of perpetuating ethnic divisions and tensions.

Afro-European literature, on the other hand, is a reflection not of ethnic differentiation, but of class differences. The writers who use the English language are almost invariably members of the new bourgeois intelligentsia. Almost always they are relatively well educated and have entered professions which, in African conditions, might be called "middle class". Their readers are also either already members of the bourgeoisie, or aspiring to become so in the class-rooms of European-style educational institutions. To that extent, Afro-European literature is indeed one of the symptoms of the new social stratification in the region, based in part upon command of the English language and upon initiation into aspects of European culture and civilization.

The Swahili language, by contrast, is a language both of the élite and of a substantial section of the masses. This is certainly true in Tanzania, where Swahili is not a reflection either of ethnic division or of class differences, but the medium of a culture which transcends both these divisive systems. Indeed, Swahili in Tanzania and Kenya helps different ethnic communities to communicate with each other and serves to moderate relations between and within the social classes. The magnetic unipolar function of Swahili has thus sought to synthesize diverse traditions, reconcile different ethnic groups, and moderate class relationships. But while the readers of Swahili literature are often drawn from many different social classes, the writers of Swahili literature are part of the larger élite in the region, and especially in Tanzania and Kenya. The writers of Swahili literature are indeed drawn from a larger segment of the population than the writers of literature in English. The anglophone élite is more élitist than the Swahiliphiles. Nevertheless, those who command the pen even in the Swahili language are a kind of literary artistocracy.[31]

[31] See notably Wilfred Whiteley, *Swahili: The Rise of a National Language* (London: Methuen, 1969). A general account of Swahili writing will be found in Lyndon Harries, *Swahili Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). The latest history of traditional Swahili literature is Jan Knappert, *Four Centuries of Swahili Verse* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979). A brief survey will be found in the relevant chapters

Turning to the implications of the written word as against oral literature, we must first recall that ethno-African literature in East Africa has, until very recently, been overwhelmingly oral. It has consisted of inherited poetry and song, tales and fables, proverbs and traditional witticisms. Dennis Duerden has reminded us that in at least some African traditional societies "the conscious and determined preservation of stored memories is a sacrilege."[32] Written records could therefore constitute a defiance of the ancestors and the spirits.

The Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek brings the discussion of the sacrilege of literacy into a new context. *In Song of Lawino* we listen to the lament of an uneducated African village woman who has lost her husband Ocol to a literate African woman and to a heritage of books:

> My husband's house
> Is a mighty forest of books,
> Dark it is and very damp,
> The steam rising from the ground
> Hot thick and poisonous
> Mingles with the corrosive dew,
> And the rain drops
> That have collected in the leaves.
>
> If you stay
> In my husband's house long,
> The ghosts of the dead men
> That people this dark forest,
> The ghosts of the many white men
> And white women
> That scream whenever you touch any book,
>
> The deadly vengeance ghosts
> Of the writers
> Will capture your head,
> And like my husband
> You will become
> A walking corpse.[33]

Duerden draws particular attention to the image "The ghosts of the many white men and white women... scream whenever you touch any books". He argues that such images are drawn from the ancestral shrines which prefer to veil secrets.[34]

But while traditional ethno-African literature was primarily oral, the new Afro-

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of Albert S. Gérard, *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington; Three Continents Press, 1981). For a short synthetic acount of the history of East African literary writing in Swahili, English and other languages, see Albert Gérard, "Pour une histoire littéraire de l'Afrique orientale," in *Neo-African Literature and Culture*, ed. Bernth Lindfors and Ulla Schild (Wiesbaden: Hejmann, 1976), pp. 181–195.

[32] Dennis Duerden, *African Art and Literature: The Invisible Present* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1977).

[33] Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966), pp. 202, 204.

[34] Duerden, op. cit., p. 8.

European literature has been primarily written. The English language in East Africa is a language learnt more through books than through the noises of the market-place. A railway porter or a domestic servant may indeed have a smattering of English, but fluent command of the language is a product of the classroom. There is little oral literature in the English language. Some lyrics are composed and set to Western music of some kind or to black American music. But on the whole literature in the English language in East Africa is a written rather than an oral heritage.

Somewhere between the primarily oral traditions of ethnic literature and the primarily written traditions of Afro-European literature lies the synthesized heritage of Afro-Islam. Swahili literature especially has encompassed both the oral legacy of Bantu verse and tales and the written inheritance of Islamic and Arabic influences. The advent of Islam on the East African seaboard brought the reduction of the Swahili language itself to writing, using a modified Arabic alphabet. Like the other non-Arab peoples of the world that were converted to Islam (such as the Persians and the Muslims of the Indian continent) the Swahili adapted the Arabic script to accommodate the peculiarly Bantu phonological system of their language. The alphabet gave them the tool which facilitated their transition from a largely oral traditional society to a new written civilization. By way of comparison it would be worth referring to other islamized parts of Black Africa, some of which—the Mandingo empire, Songhai and the Mali empire—had historical experiences strikingly similar to those of the Swahili, and to the rise of such city states as Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu and Siyu in what is today Kenya.

The initial days of written literature gave a disproportionately important role to the highly educated, the ulemas. These learned figures, versed in Islamic theology and law, helped to establish centres of learning, as well as to develop canons of literary creativity. A number of them were active in composing works of art that were to become models to be imitated by future generations of Swahili writers and scholars. The preponderance of highly educated intellectuals in the early days of Swahili literature was to be repeated in the early phase of Afro-European literature. In formal terms, the first generation of African writers using the English language were significantly better educated than was either William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens, neither of whom was a product of university education. The evidence would seem to show that written literature in East Africa, be it Afro-Islamic or Afro-European, began with writers of a distinctly élitist stamp. But in the case of Afro-Islamic writing the readers (or "consumers") were less class-bound than were the readers of Afro-European literature when they finally emerged.

Of the three parts of the triple heritage, ethno-African literature has been the least élitist, while at the same time preserving a reflection of the ethnic divisions in modern East Africa. But it is worth noting that some of the ethnic groups of East Africa have started producing a written ethno-literature alongside the ancestral oral traditions. Not all ethnic groups are large enough to tempt publishers into producing written texts, but large East African groups like the Baganda and the Kikuyu and the Luo have been experimenting with written literature of one kind or another for several generations now.

The written word has further played an important role in making the work of one of the three traditions of the triple heritage available to those belonging to the other two

traditions. Much ethno-African oral art has thus been made available in translation to Swahili and anglophone readerships. The contribution of translators and interpreters like John Mbiti of Kenya and Musa Mushanga of Uganda are cases in point. Many Swahili works have been translated into English by scholars like Lyndon Harries, James de Vere Allen, Ibrahim Shariff, Jan Knappert and others, whose successful efforts using the English language have made the riches of the Afro-Islamic heritage available to a wider audience.

What has been translated from Swahili into English has been poetry rather than prose. On the other hand, what has been translated from English into Swahili has tended to be more prose than poetry. The novels that have been translated into Swahili include works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe. Many European novels and plays are available in Swahili. Among those who have been engaged in this task is Julius K. Nyerere, founder-president of Tanzania, who translated Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

Another significant phenomenon that occurred in recent years was the emergence of authors who make use of both their mother tongue and English for their creative writing. Okot p'Bitek from Uganda translated his own poem, *Song of Lawino,* from the original Acholi into English. His impact on the wider society has been through the translation, rather than through the original version. On the other hand, Ngugi's Kikuyu play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I choose, published Nairobi, 1980) came after his agonized reappraisal of the inadequacy of the English language for expressing the soul of his society. In the course of writing *Petals of Blood* he became attracted to the songs of the Mau Mau, which he saw as national songs and as part of Kenya's national literature:

> In the course of writing the novel... I came to be more and more disillusioned with the use of foreign languages to express Kenya's soul or to express the social conditions in Kenya. I think people should express their national aspirations and their national history in the various national languages of Kenya, including the main language which is Swahili. But all the other national languages, like Gikuyu, Luo, Giriama, Kamba, Masai, are part and parcel of our national culture and we should express ourselves fully in those national languages instead of expressing ourselves in foreign languages like English.[35]

Ngugi's play was performed in 1977 for about a month and attracted large numbers of Kikuyu at the Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre near Limuru in Kenya. One speculation was that the very fact that the play was in an African ethnic language and was designed to reach the common people, made it doubly dangerous from the government's point of view. The play was banned, and in the early hours of the first day of 1978 Ngugi was arrested and detained.

Ngaahika Nedenda was definitely a fusion of oral and written tradition, and a marriage between the dramatic traditions of the Kikuyu and the new theatre arts of the

[35] "An inverview with Ngugi" published after his detention in the *Weekly Review* (Nairobi), 151, (9 Jan. 1978), 9–10.

Afro-European heritage. The actors on the stage were often local people improvising, but the basic nature of the plays was *written* and it was used as guidance for the different characters. The pen was in alliance with the voice in a literary experience that was at once cultural and ideological, aesthetic and political.

After the African-Islamic-European and the written v. oral polarities, the third major dialectic affecting the three parts of East Africa's triple heritage concerns the relationship between individuality and collectivity. Ethno-African verbal art until recently was collective and cumulative. It was a literature which accumulated over generations, and therefore a literature without authors. The heritage consisted of an intergenerational transmission. Sometimes it was an accretion of genius over generations, sometimes an accumulation of humour. Because the literature was cumulative and collective, it was a literature without plagiarism. There was no individual original source which any particular piece might be deemed to have plagiarized.

The European tradition on the other hand, was one of individual attribution. Each poem, each play, each novel is received as a product of a particular artist. The liberal factors involved are individual accountability and individual creativity. The writer is accountable for the faults of the book, and is to be credited with its strengths. The individual is the source of artistic creation. In earlier centuries European literature had a parallel tradition of collective and cumulative fertilization. In the days of William Shakespeare, literary plagiarism was not a major sin. On the contrary, Shakespeare himself borrowed stories, themes, and sometimes phrases, from right, left and centre. Quite often he plagiarized and then transformed what he had pirated into something more beautiful and more lasting. But the ethics of literature at the time did not narrow down the fountain of creativity to the bosom of a single genius, but allowed for open and unaccountable cross-fertilization.

Afro-Islamic literature has tended to lie between the thorough-going collectivism of ethno-African literature on the one hand, and the thorough-going individualism of Afro-European literature, on the other. Swahili literature has included parallel traditions of collective accumulation and individual composition. Classical Swahili poetry of the eighteenth century includes such individual giants as Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali bin Nasir and Muyaka. But in addition there is the flow of popular oral songs for weddings and other periods of merry-making; there are the gnomic utterances handing down the wisdom of generations; there are tales borrowed either from Bantu cultures of from Islamic and Arabic sources, plagiarized and collectivized without individual accountability.

The Kenyan writer Grace Ogot has captured the dilemmas of transition as one part of the triple heritage of East Africa begins to use the techniques of another part. Referring to African legends, folk songs, folk tales and proverbs as "the living expression of oral literary activity", she observes that

> The distinctive feature of this literature is that it represents a form of *collective* or *group* activity. Both the performers and the audience participate.

But she goes on to point out that reducing literature to writing is itself a process of individualizing the literature. This must be true even if it is indeed traditional ethnic lore which is now recorded, for

> The writing and reading of the book are... individual acts. If traditional oral literature is to be ensured of continuity it has to be given the preservation of the printed word. But will these literary transcriptions have the same meaning in what are vastly different contexts? What happens, for example, when a long spoken narrative is translated into writing? What happens to the warmth and richness of the speaking human voice? What happens to the sense of participation of the listener? How is the sustained attention of a reader to be maintained?[36]

As we now turn to the content of these three forms of literature, to the themes they treat and the characters they create, it appears that four kinds of relationships are involved. First, there is the Metaphysical Relationship, man's relationship with the Ultimate, which in this case could be God or spirits or the powers of ancestors. Secondly, there is man's relationship with society, which could be defined either in traditional ethnic terms or in terms of the modern nation-state; it could also be defined in terms of a religious community, and in this sense there is often a fusion between the Metaphysical Relationship and the new Social Relationship. Thirdly, there is man's relationship with nature. This could of course include both animate and inanimate parts of nature. Mountains and rivers, birds and beasts, fish and reptiles, could all have some kind of relationship with man. There are occasions when nature might even include the universe as a whole. At times, then, there might be a fusion between the Metaphysical Relationship and this Ecological Relationship. Fourthly, there is man's relationship with the private self. This Ego Relationship could include problems of psychology or of private aesthetic experience. It could touch upon issues of love and loyalty to private individuals, as distinct from wider loyalties to society and public concerns.

Traditional ethnic literature abounds in social and metaphysical themes. The questions of social duty or divine commitment, issues of fate and destiny, themes of ancestor worship and collective awe, have often featured in the concerns of traditional story-tellers and praise-singers. Concern for the Ecological Relationship is also to be found in this literature to some extent. There is poetry that addresses itself to the wonders of nature. But more often than not nature is treated as either part of the Ultimate (the Metaphysical Relationship) or part of societal arrangements (the Social Relationship). What is rarely to be found in traditional ethnic literature is the concern for the private self. It gives far less attention to the Ego Relationship, to private anguish and problems of the private psyche, than to question of divinity, community and environment.

The inherited liberal tradition of Europe, on the other hand, has tended to value the Ego Relationship rather highly. The crux of the matter lies in the central position which individualism occupies both in political and in literary liberalism. The artist has ultimately to express *himself:* " 'Fool!' said my muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write!'" But for the novelist the relevance of liberalism lies not simply in how much

[36] Grace A. Ogot, "The African Writer," *East Africa Journal*, 5, 11 (1968), p. 35.

individuality he permits *himself,* but also how much individuality he permits his characters. The Nigerian literary critic Obiajunwa Wali has argued that it was no accident that the European novel rose to maturity in the nineteenth century, for it owed its growth "to the liberation of the individual which the industrial revolution, in addition to other contemporary social forces of the period, made possible." And he goes on to argue that the main achievement of the nineteenth-century European novel lay perhaps in the in-depth exploration of personal relationships. But in Africa, under the weight of traditionalism,

> the liberated individual who owes greater loyalty to himself than to a society's structure of kinship groups is still a negligible minority.... The greatest challenge of the African novelist then is the question of character insofar as character lies at the centre of the structure of the conventional form of the novel, and insofar as the African writer, looking for themes and setting distinctively African, becomes involved in traditional African society.[37]

Wali overstates his case. But on balance he does capture the importance of individual distinctiveness in certain forms of European literature, and the dilemmas which this form of individualism has posed for African artists.

Of great importance in at least the romantic versions of European literature is a concern with nature (the Ecological Relationship). Perhaps the English paradigm, of this kind of identification with nature is to be found in the early poetry of William Wordsworth, who sees a grand design of joy in nature and at the same time laments man's incapacity to fulfil that design:

> Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
> the periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
> And 'tis my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes.
>
> The birds around me hopped and played,
> Their thoughts I cannot measure:
> But the least motion which they made,
> It seemed a thrill of pleasure.
>
> The budding twigs spread out their fan,
> To catch the breezy air;
> And I must think, do all I can,
> That there was pleasure there.
>
> If this belief from Heaven be sent
> If such be Nature's holy plan,
> Have I not reason to lament
> What man has made of man?[38]

[37] Obiajunwa Wali, "The Individual and the Novel in Africa," *Transition,* 18 (1965), 31–33.
[38] Wordsworth, "Lines written in Early Spring".

It should be added, however, that Western literature's interest in nature is by no means limited to the romantics: at all times Western poetic imagery has borrowed heavily from nature. Alexander Pope, in his *Essay on Criticism,* draws our attention to the different clichés drawn from nature and used in literature—ranging from shimmering streams to breezes whispering among the branches.

What liberal European tradition has been lacking in is a concern for Metaphysical issues and man's relationship with God. This change can be traced back to the Renaissance and the whole trend of secularization in Western intellectual history. This is not to say that there is no interest in man's relationship with the Ultimate, but although aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition have remained central to Western experience and thought, there is little concern with divinity as compared with the importance awarded to the Ego, to nature and the environment, and to social issues.

Liberal European literature shows somewhat more concern for social issues. Since the nineteenth century the bulk of its output has been more preoccupied with social relationships among private individuals than with issues of public import. Nevertheless it must be admitted that some of the greatest writers of the liberal Western tradition have focused their attention on matters of social criticism and political engagement: the towering figures range from Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century to George Orwell in the twentieth. But only the more radical representatives of the Afro-European heritage have put the Social Relationship in the first place while trying to minimize the Metaphysical and the Ego Relationships. At least the theory behind radical art is that the individual is little more than a reflection of the socio-economic forces which surround him. The related Marxist thesis that individual behaviour is, in the final analysis, class behaviour, creates a serious danger that characters in a novel may become stereotypes of class identity. In order to avoid this danger a writer who happens also to be a strong collectivist ideologically is forced to emphasize the distinctive aspects of the character in his novel if he is to breathe life into it.

An apt illustration of this is *A Walk in the Night* by South African novelist Alex La Guma. In many ways, the work is an indictment of the class structure in South Africa, particularly in its racial aspects. Where oppression is not simply in terms of class but also in terms of race the situation does not fit neatly within the orthodox Marxist paradigm. La Guma grapples with relationships involving both racial and class implications. But the novel itself is above all about individual personalities. In some respects, *A Walk in the Night* is an exercise in depicting isolation. This condition is reminiscent of the Marxist concept of alienation. But the technique of the artist does not consist in stripping the oppressed worker of his personality and reducing him to a class stereotype; on the contrary, La Guma is eager to infuse individual distinctiveness as a method of lending reality to a fictional figure. The liberal quest for distinctiveness and specificity becomes necessary for even a radical writer. In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o,

> A novelist must be always very, very particular even when he is trying to make a general statement.... Ilmorog is a fictional village.... At the same time, I hope

> Ilmorog is applicable to Kenya, as it is applicable to East Africa, Africa and the Third World.[39]

Just as a village can become a whole continent, so an individual can be a whole class. But in order to succeed in bringing out the general, the artist must succeed in teasing out the particular.

On balance, however, East African literature in English is still either excessively sociological or excessively socialist, either disproportionately concerned with the nature and dynamics of society or disproportionately engaged in a struggle to change society. A literature of private relationships between lovers or strangers without the larger public issues is only just coming to be born. Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is part of that birth.

At this point, it might be advisable to dwell at some length on creative writing in the Swahili language for a number of reasons: first, it is considerably older than any European-language literature in black Africa, since the earliest extant manuscript of a Swahili poem, the famous *Hamziyya,* is dated 1828; it was translated from an Arabic source, but the archaic language, the prosody and theme are sufficiently sophisticated for many scholars to infer that a literate tradition of Swahili poetry had been in existence since the fifteenth century at the latest. Second, ever since the first Swahili manuscripts were discovered by European explorer-missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, the literature has been exceptionnally well researched, even though huge gaps remain to be filled in our factual knowledge of its history. Thirdly, it occupies a special position in our general pattern since, in compliance with the usual trend of creative writing under the Afro-Islamic tradition, the written art in Swahili started—as it did in Hausa, in Fulani, in Wolof—with a striking focus on the Metaphysical Relationship, an overwhelming concern with issues of piety and worship, righteousness and spiritual values. Prior to the twentieth century, this literature consisted mainly of didactic religious epics calling upon members of the Swahili society to live in accordance with the precepts of Islam. The epics were couched in religious terms, often derived from a wider Islamic tradition, dealing with Islamic subject matter and influenced by the canons of composition characteristic of Muslim culture. A typical early example is the eighteenth-century *Utenzi wa Herekali* which deals with the armed struggle between the Prophet and the Byzantine emperor Heraklios. It is clear from the first that what Thomas Hodgkin said of Ghana's Islamic literary tradition is also true of the earlier stages of classical Swahili literature:

> It is a literature which can be properly called 'Islamic', in the sense that its authors were Muslims, trained in the Islamic sciences, conscious of their relationship with the Islamic past, and regarding literature as a vehicle for the expression of Islamic values.[40]

[39] "An Interview with Ngugi," loc. cit., p. 9.

[40] Thomas Hodgkin, "The Islamic Literary Tradition in Ghana," in *Tropical Africa,* ed. I. M. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 442.

Also significant is the fact that much of the poetry was composed, as indicated earlier, by ulemas, scholars versed in Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Some were descended from a long line of scholars, all exceptionally aware of the Metaphysical Relationship. In poetry the most prominent of them all in the late eighteenth century was Sayyid Abdallah bin Ali bin Nasir whose *Al-Inkishafi* (A Soul's Awakening) was composed around 1800. Meditating on the historical ruins of the island city of Pate the poet finds there an analogy with death. By reflecting on the once splendid achievements of the Swahili people of Pate, the beautiful architectural relics, the hedonist rulers, the intellectual life of the period, the poet castigates his own heart and urges it to take its cue from the fallen ruins and to ponder on the ephemeral nature of life, for happiness can only be found in life after death. The poem itself mirrors the history of Swahili civilization on Pate. Indeed, it is a microcosm of the rhythm of life in many a classical Swahili settlement. Above all, it is a reflection of the intellectual and spiritual preoccupations of the poets of those days. After expatiating upon the affluence that characterized the Sultanate of Pate —

> Their mansions, lantern-lighted, glittered bright
> with brazen lamps and lamps with crystal delight;
> Till light as day became their hours of night,
> and in their Halls walked Fame and Honour twain.
>
> Their banquetings with ware of T'sin were spread,
> each goblet with fine 'graving overlaid;
> And set in midst, the crystal pitchers made
> bright glitter-glow upon the napery lain.
>
> Fair to the eye, the rails of rich brocade—
> by Allah's Grace whose Bounty doth pervade
> Of teakwood and of ebony were made;
> rank upon carven rank they hung display'n —

the writer dwells with macabre relish on the transient nature of life and on what happens in the grave:

> Their countenances gaunt, mort-riven deep
> of once-red blood, of Death's sad wounding weep
> About their lips, their nostrils, shroud worms creep
>
> Become, are they, as food for worms, at last
> Foul things upon their bodies make repast.
> The white-ant and the emmet lay them waste,
> the viperine and cobra round them twine.
>
> The illustrious faces with death's flush are drear
> and fearful hued, as ape or mountain bear.

Their once-fair skins with wound are riven sere,
and out the shriven flesh the harsh bones strain.[41]

A combination of erudition, a keen grasp of the intricacies of Islamic scholarship and mores and above all a sense of commitment to the propagation of the Islamic dogma, characterize the poetic output of the time. The muse was in communion both with the Ultimate and with Society.

The nineteenth century saw the rise and fast growth of a poetic tradition more bent towards the secular. Everyday issues of social and political importance were captured in verse and preserved for posterity in the Arabic-Swahili alphabet. The leading spirit behind this process was the inimitable Muyaka bin Haji, who lived and wrote in Mombasa between 1776 and 1840.[42] In his hands, the quatrain *(shairi)* was restored to its rightful place as an important genre in Swahili prosody. Further, Muyaka "removed poetry from the mosque to the marketplace": with unprecedented mastery he turned out poems on the topical issues of his day; he wrote on love and infidelity, prosperity and drought, the sex exploits of key figures of his time and the calamities of the Mombasans. Above all, he became the celebrated poet of the Mazrui family who ruled over Mombasa in the first half of the nineteenth century; during the rivalry between the Mazruis and the Sultanate of Zanzibar, his poetry played a significant role in inspiring the Mazrui faction. Students of his poetry liken him to the court poets of Europe. To read Muyaka's poems is to delve into the past.

The significance of Muyaka as a turning-point in Swahili poetry does not lie only in his verbal virtuosity, in his masterly manipulation of the full gamut of the language: it also resides largely in his linking the Social Relationship with the Relationship of the Ego. The poetry of the private self is represented to a much more limited extent in Afro-Islamic literature than in Afro-European literature. But poets like Muyaka helped to build bridges between individual privacy and public concern. In the main, however, it must be admitted that his innovations in theme and imagery in this respect were to suffer at first the same fate as those of Petrarch or of the Provençal troubadours: the felicitous novelties of phrasing and choice of theme were to become trite clichés to ensuing generations, a state of affairs from which Swahili poetry did not emerge until East Africa, and especially Tanzania, gained independence.

For, as the nineteenth century wore on, the legacy of Muyaka made itself manifest chiefly in the growth of the secular epic dealing with the new contemporary theme of European colonial endeavours. Of course, such renowned poets of the time as Hemedi bin Abdallah bin Said al-Buhriy, whose prolific career began in the 1890s, went on writing lengthy poems dealing with the fight of Islam in the days of the Prophet and of his early descendants; and Mohammed Jambein al-Bakari was much respected for his homiletic poetry and his educational treatises in verse. But those learned men were also intent on reconstructing the history of their country and on recording African resistance

[41] W. H. Hichens, *Inkishafi* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 70, 79. Hichens' translation was first published in London in 1939.

[42] See W. H. Hichens, *Diwani ya Muyaka* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1940).

to German colonialism, that is, on history in the making. In his *Utenzi wa vita vya Wadachi kutamalaki Mrima 1307 A. H.*, Hemedi himself recounted a rebellion in which he took part in the 1880s; the Maji-Maji war of 1904–1905, in which present-day Tanzania takes a good deal of pride, viewing it as part of the heritage of collective resistance against foreign domination, was chronicled by Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini in the *Utenzi wa vita vya Maji-Maji.*

While during the colonial period many writers of Swahili tried to imitate somewhat slavishly the European models that were placed before them in missionary schools, some of the more significant among the poets that emerged after independence went on working within the traditional prosodic framework. They were deeply influenced by the classical tradition, which was defended by a former Tanzanian Justice Minister, the late K. Amri Abedi, himself a poet of note. They were trained in the classical Islamic education system and, in most cases, suffered a minimum of cultural alienation: while Islamic education accommodated aspects of traditional African culture, the Western system of education alienated and sometimes suppressed traditional value-systems. The recipients of such mixed education came out equipped with both the Arabic and the Roman scripts and tended to use the two interchangeably. They became conscious of the existence of the legacy of Swahili literature before being introduced to the literary heritage of literature in European languages. They accepted the legacy of the *ulamaa,* the priestly poets of old, and at the same time groped for a new idiom of *ujamaa* as a modern world-view. In order fully to assimilate, appreciate and evaluate their poetry, a grounding in classical poetry is necessary. Swahili culture is so vital a component of their poetry that is is difficult to be fully aware of the nuances without some familiarity with the various registers of the language.

The case of Abdilatif Abdalla el-Kindy, who was born in 1946, provides an excellent illustration of the new trends in Swahili writing. His poetry is at once intellectual and committed, dissident and diffident. What sets him apart from his contemporaries is his virtual mastery of the poetic diction and idiom in a way that few of them can match. His poetry is classical, inventive and creative without being stilted.

The public concerns of Abdilatif are not only primarily secular, they are also partly political. Radical in his politics, he was imprisoned for supporting the opposition party in Kenya. After a five-year stint in jail for sedition and libel, he compiled an anthology of his prison poems which covers his whole experience in Kenyan jails. His poems are militant and unrepentant in tone. The sense of isolation and the effects of solitary confinement are vividly recaptured in the imagery he uses. The anthology is reminiscent of the poems of Muyaka in which he castigated the treasonable behaviour of some of his compatriots. Equally striking is his nationalism. In one poem, reflecting on whether to embark on a self-imposed political exile, by a fine flight of imagination he puts himself in a position not unlike that of a crab: "Where else can a crab run to, save in its own shell?"[43]

Unlike many of the African poets writing in European languages, the poets writing in Swahili are seldom groping for an identity. There is a conspicuous absence of poetry

[43] Abdilatif Abdalla, *Santi ya Dhiki* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 77.

obsessed with the culture clash and cultural alienation or availing itself of surrealist devices. The only poems that come near "alienation" are those condemning the evils of neo-colonialism in its political sense and recounting the virtues of African socialism or *Ujamaa*. These have collectively come to be known as "the poetry of political combat." The very fact that Abdilatif and poets like him have continued to compose on a variety of themes that are of direct relevance to the realities of modern Africa, has vindicated the assumption that modern themes and issues are capable of being expressed in the traditional poetic diction. Not surprisingly in view of President Nyerere's policy in language matters, although creative writing in Swahili originated on what is now Kenyan territory—coastal towns like Mombasa and the offshore islands of Lamu, Pate and Pemba—it is now more flourishing in Tanzania, which of the three East African countries, correspondingly has the smallest proportion of creative writers resorting to English. The greater part of the literary output, both in poetry and prose, is in Swahili. This literature reflects the nationalistic nature of Tanzanian society. Politically the most radical nation in East Africa, it has managed to decolonize the various aspects of life there, ranging from an emphasis on Swahili for legislative deliberations to the politicization of the masses. Finding themselves in a radically tempestuous political climate, the poets and novelists have also been preoccupied with the problems of development. Poets compose long political epics extolling the virtues of socialism and emphasizing the pitfalls of too excessive a dependence on external economic and cultural models. Day after day, the predominant Swahili newspapers are inundated with poems reaffirming the clauses and articles of President Nyerere's Arusha Declaration of 1967, urging greater reliance on the land as the backbone of the Tanzanian economy and emphasizing the beauty of the Swahili language, customs and political culture.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o once took to task those who agreed with Ugandan writer Taban lo Liyong in denouncing the "literary barrenness" of East Africa. He accused such critics of being oblivious of the fact that there existed a rich legacy of written Swahili literature, long before a white man set foot in Kenya. Taban lo Liyong's statement was indicative of the Afro-European concept of literature. Imaginative writing in a non-European language was often thought of as barely civilized: the familiar proverbs, the stories about the tortoise and the lizard, so common in the oral tradition were recorded in writing as ethnographical curios or elementary reading material for schoolchildren. The patronizing attitude of writers recently returned from European and American universities often betrayed an inadequate understanding of the essence of literature. It was against this background, that Ngugi, addressing a Ghanaian audience in 1969, drew the attention of the Afro-European writers to the paradox of their situation:

> Behind the avuncular attitudes, the native embarrassment, and Lo Liyong's laments, was an assumption that a people's literature could only be written in English or in other borrowed tongues. Swahili literature, after all, had a strong tradition going back three of four centuries. Students are only now discovering how rich this literature is, especially in epic poetry and praise songs. To musical accompaniment, the poets sang of Islamic wars, of their legendary heroes, while here and there they tucked in moral sermons. In modern times, Shaaban Robert had published a huge

quantity of poetry: by 1962 he was already a major Swahili poet. In 1954 Okot p'Bitek had published a modern novel *Lak Tar* in Lwo. These aspects of the East African literary scene were hardly mentioned at the Kampala Conference [on African Literature, 1962].[44]

Ten years later, Ngugi, who was already famous as a writer in English, was writing his first play and his first novel in his native Kikuyu language: thus the coalescence of the ethno-African and the Afro-European trends was to acquire a new linguistic dimension. Luo author Jared Angira, too, a noted poet in English, was also experimenting in that direction.

But the question one feels bound to raise after this sketchy survey of East Africa's triple heritage concerns what prospects, if any, there may be for a polygamous marriage encompassing all three partners and fusing them into a new literary syncretism.

There are many instances in which the ethno-African traditions have mingled with the Afro-Islamic. Written Swahili literature synthesizes the Islamic with the Bantu; the balance between the two has varied: the Islamic factor was more pronounced at one time than it is now that the Bantu factor is in the ascendent. Oral art in Swahili has always included a larger Bantu component, a greater responsiveness to the truly indigenous aspects of local culture, encompassing non-Islamic religious beliefs: spirit songs abound either in their purer pre-monotheistic forms or as part of religious syncretism. Secret societies still flourish on the East African coast, based on indigenous approaches to the Ultimate: magic and sorcery are often captured in songs and incantations. A special source of oral tradition lies in sororities which are themselves secret societies. Their membership comprises elderly women known as *makungwi* (maternal mentors), whose main function is to tutor younger unmarried women in arts ranging from purely physical and sexual skills to the magical powers needed to preserve a man's fidelity and affection. Singing and recitation are a frequent medium of instruction in these societies.

The cultural interplay within the triple heritage also includes the very rules of Swahili prosody, where three linguistic traditions are involved: Arabic, Bantu and, more recently, the impact of English poetry.

In the old days the Swahili poets had to be grounded in the canons of Arabic prosody, which they eventually incorporated into the metrical patterns of Swahili poetry. Al-Mutanabbi and other highly regarded Arab poets were essential reading for those scholars-cum-poets. Like the vocabulary of religious experience, the vocabulary of metrical patterns was partly derived from Arabic. To achieve recognition as a writer, a mastery of these prosodic canons was a *sine qua non* for any budding poet, and the prosodic models gave rise to the various Swahili poetic genres: the *utenzi* or long-measure metre was used for didactic epics sometimes stretching to four thousand stanzas; the *shairi* or quatrain was generally reserved for much shorter themes, mostly secular and of topical interest; the *nyimbo* form was a metrical pattern invariably and exclusively devoted to songs for such social occasions as marriage, circumcision, puberty rites, and spirit possession.

[44] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Okot p'Bitek and Writers in East Africa," in *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 67.

Since independence, however, it has been the prosody of the English literary tradition rather than of Arabic that has generated new experimentation in Swahili. One aspect of this development is the introduction of blank verse and free verse into Swahili poetry, where rhyme and regularity used to be essential. Leading the new movement have been recent graduates of the University of Dar es Salaam's Literature Department who have been influenced by Western and European models of poetic composition. Since the early 1970s Euphrase Kezilahabi, the poet-novelist, and Ebrahim Hussein, the poet-dramatist, both of them contemporaries of Abdilatif, have exploited the hitherto unknown potentialities of blank verse in Swahili, disregarding traditional poetic diction as rather confining. The new genre is further typified by a preponderance of private images, thus establishing a new relationship with the ego, a new individualism. Though fairly intelligible on the whole, the bulk of the poems do not make sense to the average reader unfamiliar with European attitudes towards creativity. The paradox is that, while attempting to make his poetry easily accessible to the masses, Kezilahabi finds his audience restricted to schools and universities. The wider circle of lovers of poetry is put off by a new prosody of English origin and the privatization of imagery has initially tended to cut off vital links with the larger traditional society. If the poetry of Kezilahabi and Hussein has not yet found as many admirers as that of poets like Abdilatif and Akilimali or Mohamed Mwinyi Hamisi, that is so because they have been influenced by such stalwarts of Western literary tradition as Coleridge, Baudelaire, and the Metaphysical poets, whereas poets like Akilimali and Hamisi draw their inspiration from such as Shaaban Robert, a direct descendant of the ulemas of Swahili writing and its concomitant oral tradition.

While, then, the three main streams that constitute East Africa's literary heritage inevitably converge towards the emergence of syncretic phenomena, the new synthesis itself branches off in a variety of new directions. In East Africa as in other parts of the continent and indeed of the globe, English as a medium for literary expression receives a new colouring from the vitality of the local linguistic substratum. A number of ethnic groups whose imaginative abilities had been tapped only through the oral tradition are starting to produce written works of a hitherto unknown "modern", "Western", type: novels and formal stage drama. As to Swahili literature with its venerable tradition of poetic writing, devotional and secular, it has now entered a time of revival, with one branch looking to its Afro-Islamic origins, and another groping for new inspiration, new forms, more personal accents from the heritage which now links Africa with Europe. Underlying both trends is the deeper indigenous voice of Africa itself—still multipolar, still a legacy of the singer rather than the scribbler, but bearing the stamp of Africa's own historical experience in all its unity, in all its plurality.

CHAPTER XIII

FRENCH—ENGLISH: CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES

GEORGE M. LANG

1. FROM NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: A BILINGUAL APPROACH

Consciousness is a term usually reserved in literary history for sweeping changes of cultural periods, classical to romantic, romantic to modern. To speak of a transformation from national to class consciousness in African literature in European languages is, by implication, to posit the inauguration of a new literary period. Intriguing bona fide instances of Africans who wrote in European languages date as far back as the sixteenth century with Juan Latino, the Latin poet and scholar, and the eighteenth, with Antonius Amo, who was captured along the Guinea Coast, educated in Europe and published two Latin treatises on philosophy in the 1730s before returning to Africa and dropping out of Western history. African writing in Portuguese has been attested since the mid-nineteenth century, but political conditions have made its full development difficult for a long time. The existence of a major endogenous body of literature in European languages therefore dates only from this mid-century and not much is lost—from English, French, Portuguese or other European languages—if the inception of this literature is set in the fifties and its roots are traced to the twenties and thirties. The period of time involved is thus extremely short and the risk of exaggerating its scale is great. It is logical in these circumstances to ask for some constraints and a more precise setting for the above asserted shift during this period from national to class consciousness in African literature written in European languages.

Not the least difficulty in providing such a framework is defining "consciousness" itself. Within the confines of this modest contribution to African literary history, the word must not be allowed to assume its full phenomenological or philosophical, especially Hegelian, weight. Conventional European definitions of class consciousness as the convergence of a sense of class identity and a knowledge of that class' historical role are thus inappropriate here, one reason being that much literature which does in fact embody a post-nationalist consciousness in Africa, like the novels of "disillusion", by Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Camara Laye or Yambo Ouologuem, offers no programmatic concept of class.[1] Even in those cases where a conscious, usually

[1] See Arthur Ravenscroft, "African Literature, V: Novels of Disillusion," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 6 (1968), 120–137, and G. Griffiths, "The Language of Disillusion in the African Novel," in *Common Wealth*, ed. Anna Rutherford (Aarhus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1972), 62–72.

Marxist, model for class relations underlies literary works, that model diverges from European ones.

National or class consciousness in African literature should therefore be defined, as simply as possible, as overt reference to national or class categories within Africa and as representation of them in literary works. To assay national or class consciousness is ultimately to practise a sociology of literary content, an endeavour already initiated in African criticism by Bernard Mouralis in his *Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française* (1969) and G.-C. M. Mutiso in his *Socio-political Thought in African Literature* (1974). A certain sum of nominalism in unavoidable, indeed salutary, for the literary historian. His role is not to question given historical categories, only to transcribe those that writers depict. It will rapidly become obvious that both nation and class have very special denotations in Africa and that, to some extent, the very use of these terms is another example of the cultural imperialism about which African literature is so outspoken. Perhaps necessarily, literature written in European languages reflects some Western preoccupations, but Africa, in any event, is in a period of rapid nation-building, often to the chagrin of the cosmopolitan literary intelligentsia. Before undertaking any description of nascent class consciousness, it is mandatory to cast an eye upon the specific literary forms national consciousness has taken in Africa within the past decades.

The notion of nation is a thorny one there. Already fragmented along ethnic and linguistic lines, Africa was divided up by the colonial powers. In the early sixties a welter of independent states, often illogical in nature, came into being. There are few better examples of the old dictum "divide and conquer." The nations Europe landed on Africa severed lines of communication among ethnic and language groups and imposed unity upon agglomerations whose internal logic thereby became one of conflict and contradiction. To some, but only a limited, extent, literary nationalism was an instrument of that process; some writers and critics have confined their scope to national literary entities in conformity with national administrative patterns.[2] The majority of African intellectuals have on the contrary responded to their "balkanization" by seeking cultural, racial or political grounds for a larger unity. For Cheikh Anta Diop and Léopold Sédar Senghor, each heavily imbued with Islamic or Christian values respectively, the unity of Africa and the grounds of its identity are guaranteed by its common precolonial cultural heritage, be it Egyptian or Bantu.[3] Janheinz Jahn set forth a related literary claim when he founded his outline of "Neo-African" culture upon stylistic criteria he derived from the study of africanizing ethnographers and social theorizers like Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Father Placide Tempels and Alexis Kagame, Arthur Ramos and Fernando Ortiz, Jean Price-Mars.[4] The anti-racialism which used race "negatively", as Sartre recommended in "Orphée noir" in 1948, to define a solidarity stretching beyond Africa to the New World, proposed a similar sense of identity, and one founder of

[2] E.g. Doris Banks Henries, *Liberian Writing. Liberia as Seen by Her Own Writers as Well as by German Authors* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1970).

[3] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1965; rpt. 1979); Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté I* (Paris: Seuil, 1964).

[4] Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: The New African Culture* (New York: Grove, 1961). See his bibliography.

négritude, the Martiniquan poet-politician Aimé Césaire, modulated that concept into a political one and asserted the common nature of all victims of colonialism.[5] None of these ideologies are, strictly speaking, nationalist (not even that of Senghor who has invested his presidency of Senegal with his international literary prestige); they were nonetheless intimately associated with nationalism, even in the English-speaking nations which were said to be so opposed to Gallic attitudinizing. Where, as in the writings of Césaire or Sartre, they offered a class perspective, they were historically subordinate to a larger wave of ethnic or cultural feeling.

Literary nationalism in Africa is only secondarily a matter of national citizenship, though its precepts and goals have a familiar ring to those who have studied the development of nationalism elsewhere in the world: the glorification of a legendary past (the Empires of Ghana and Mali or Diop's Egypt), the praise of national heroes (the Chaka motif in African literature in both European and African languages[6]), or the establishment of an essentialist ontology around racial identity. Political or cultural identity is frequently predicated upon an asserted common heritage and where that heritage has no prior existence, it must be constructed by the labour of the pen. Too often the result is reification: "un objet hypothétique que l'on a voulu reconstituer, ou plutôt constituer à tout prix, et qui est, en un mot, la vision du monde des africains ... réelle ou supposée."[7]

In terms of actual literary production, the quest for identity tends, on the contrary, to turn inward to concrete personal or local sources, usually either tribal, like John Pepper Clark's or Gabriel Okara's literary use of Ijaw customs or language patterns, or ethnic, like Birago Diop's now classical transcriptions of a griot's tales into *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1947). Even an urbane and hermetic poet like Tchicaya U Tam'si published a *Légendes africaines* (1968), an attempt to forge a *plate-forme littéraire* similar to that of the Greeks in the West. Reference to the traditional heritage is the rule rather than the exception. Within the clearly European genres like the novel and modernist poetry, this sensitivity to traditional claims sometimes emerges thematically in the form of images of an Edenic Africa. The nostalgia voiced in Camara Laye's famous *L'Enfant noir* (1953) and, in a mediated form, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), to name only the two first modern classics of the pedagogical canon, is an expression of a quest for identity. The American critic James Olney correctly labels both of them autobiographical, the first in a more obvious sense, the second as a revelation of a "permeating" social reality and its effect on the author.[8] But revelation, like description, is a form of prescription and thus it is that these and other lesser works, as sincere as they were in probing into a lost or rapidly transforming tribal patrimony, are expressions of national

[5] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée noir," in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, ed. L. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948); Aimé Césaire, "Culture et colonisation," *Présence Africaine*, 8–9–10 (June—November 1956), 190–205.

[6] For information on the Chaka motif, see notably *Shaka, Sing of the Zulus in African Literature*, ed. Donald Burness (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1976).

[7] J. Paulin Hountondii, "Le Problème actuel de la philosophie africaine," in *Contemporary Philosophy* IV, ed. Raymond Klibansky (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1971), p. 613.

[8] *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1973).

consciousness in the special sense defined above, reflections of the social moment of nation-building and of its concomitant forms of identity.

The difference between national consciousness and class consciousness which, to be sure, is itself a form of identity, is sometimes hard to make out. For one thing, proponents of doctrines of class of any sect or creed would agree that there is and there ought to be a continuity between what was traditional Africa and what would be a future classless African society. In one sense at least, Senghor's theory of African socialism has a counterpart in Sartre's dialectic of race and class presented in "Orphée noir", though the former, the editor of the *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache,* and the latter, who wrote its prefatorial essay, were in fundamental disagreement.[9] Both equally incorrectly predicated their opposing positions upon the hypothesis that Africa was an exception to universal practice (and thereby unwittingly set the grounds and a precedent for including Africa within a European universalist framework; neocolonialism in the case of the former, Marxism in the case of the latter). For Senghor, Africa was a classless society and hence could leap over the stage of class warfare and capitalize upon an indigenous African community tradition to build a modern society; for Sartre, negritude was basically an antithetical anti-racism, a negative moment which would "pass," in a Hegelian sense, into the objective and positive concept of class without the mediation of national considerations and complications.[10] Critics holding either of these positions, the first of which is nationalist as defined above, the second class-conscious, can claim many of the same works as part of their literary canon, any one, for example, which affirms the humanity and nobility of the tribal tradition and does not lend itself to what the Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls "romantic glamour."[11] The line at which class consciousness begins is thus a blurred one.

To take one case, the attack upon corruption in *A Man of the People* does contain the essence of a proto-class consciousness, while Achebe's other novels, especially *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God,* with their concern for cultural identity, represent national consciousness. The difference is one both of tone and of content and can be attributed to the differing social contexts of 1958, when *Things Fall Apart* was published in anticipation of political independence, and 1966, when *A Man of the People* was published and the Nigerian nation-state was disintegrating and sliding toward civil war. The bitterness against corrupt politicians voiced in this last work is paralleled by the trenchant irony of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), the dark fantasy of Camara Laye's *Dramouss* (1966), the scatological cynicism of Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), and the pornographic delirium of Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* (1968). There is, moreover, a crucial distinction between these works and others which had preceded them and were in their own way critical enough of the West, Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), or even Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (1956) and Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (1957). Mongo Beti later renounced fiction for several years in favour of polemic in his *Main*

[9] See S. O. Mezu, *Léopold Sédar Senghor et la défense et illustration de la civilisation noire* (Paris: Didier, 1968) p. 194.
[10] Sartre, "Orphée noir", p. xl.
[11] Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann, Educational, 1972) p. 46.

basse sur le Cameroun (1974). The novels by Achebe, Armah and Ouologuem are critical of African society and the African state, no longer of colonialism alone. The socio-economic distinction between colonialism and neo-colonialism or imperialism thus enters literary history as a necessary qualification of the historical background of these two literary phases. Nonetheless, perception of class relations in these works is often limited to the recognition that there is *une classe politique* and that African politicians, too, serve themselves first.

Soviet and Eastern European critics discriminate between the literature of "social ideas"—by their definition progressive—and that of cultural identity. Writers like Soyinka and Achebe analyse society in terms of social struggles and are thus laudable, potentially class-conscious. These critics favourably contrast the realism of Ousmane Sembène, Beti and Oyono with the moralism of Cheikh Hamidou Kane, who sought a spiritual solution to social problems.[12] Marxist aesthetics is particularly concerned with questions of social and, after the advent of party-mindedness, socialist realism; within its framework realism is the natural genre of class consciousness. In Africa this connection is much more tenuous. The European bourgeois realism upon which Marxist aesthetics is founded has no counterpart there because the articulation of classes is radically different. Actual literary production of "post-nationalist" novels or poems does not in any event always conform to the sober realism the European Marxist aesthetics calls for. Indeed, in its most innovative forms, like Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966, Lwo version, 1969), it is intimately involved with traditional poetics.

Whatever its precise nature, there is no doubt that some modulation in literary mood has occurred and that the social background plays some part in it. By 1971, it was fashionable for young critics to attack Senghor as did Marcien Towa in *Léopold Sédar Senghor: négritude ou servitude?*; by 1972, French language mass editions carried such polemical attacks upon negritude as S. Adotevi's *Négritude et négrologues*. Comparative studies between militant black American and African writers were a matter of course, further evidence that Africa participated fully in the social ferment of those times.[13] The common thread running through all these phenomena is that they discuss the cleavages, stratifications and contradictions of African society itself. Perhaps in imitation of the precedent set by Sartre, perhaps because of the academic weakness for three-part models or perhaps simply because events in the European languages in question have three aspects (past, present, future), contemporary African literature is usually periodized as a ternary process. Ferdinand N'Sougan, to take only one example, distinguished a colonial phase, a phase of independence and then a post-colonial one. According to this view of things, the major event of contemporary history is already past and "post-colonial" literatures may be accredited one by one and admitted into the world literary

[12] F. M. Breskina, "Problème du heurt des époques dans la prose de l'Afrique occidentale," in *L'Afrique dans les études soviétiques, 1968* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 75–104; Y. L. Galperina, "Under the Sign of Ogun: The Young Writers of Nigeria, 1960–1965," in *Africa in Soviet Studies Annual, 1969* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 162–183.

[13] Mercer Cook and Stephen E. Henderson, *The Militant Black Writer in Africa and the U.S.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).

system.[14] The chief criteria of such a scheme are the legal existence of new African nations and a certain related stylistic and thematic autonomy. After a first stage consisting of a *Zöglingsliteratur* composed under the political and cultural domination of Europe, come the stirrings of a second phase of revolt and independence which can be detected in French-speaking Africa as far back as the twenties and thirties in those places where the colonized intelligentsia, assembled, especially in Paris. This phase took a concentrated literary form in French with the negritude movement and various other more diffuse forms in English, while in Portuguese the process was akin to the French, though spread out over a larger swath of time, having begun earlier and climaxed later. The third stage of this model is represented by the consolidation of national literatures (though the question remains open whether the focus of those nations is to be a given nation-state, a region or all of Black Africa itself). This model's unspoken premise is that with the assumption of political power by Africans themselves, the period of revolt is over. This has not proved to be the case.

Wole Soyinka's version of events as formulated in 1967 is worth quoting at length, for although it corresponds generally to N'Sougan's three stages, it diverges at a key point: the post-colonial phase is described as a pessimistic one and a new period of revolt is said to begin:

> The background starts at the united opposition by the colonized to the external tyrant. Victory, of sorts, came and the writer submitted his integrity to the monolithic stresses of the time. For this any manifesto seemed valid, any -ism could be embraced with a clear conscience. With few exceptions the writer directed his energies to enshrining victory, to re-affirming his identification with the aspirations of nationalism and the stabilization of society. The third stage, the stage at which we find ourselves, is the stage of disillusionment.[15]

This statement by a participant as much as an observer does explain adequately the present continued ideological as well as aesthetic revolt and indignation of African writers. But it accounts neither for literary works which even before the assumption of constitutional sovereignty and the ensuing frustrations had placed themselves outside a purely national, ethnic or cultural perspective, nor for those which were critical of nationalist *triomphalisme* at the very moment of independence, including, despite its ambiguities, Soyinka's own play, *A Dance of the Forest* (1963, performed 1960) and, in a different vein, Tchicaya's brilliant poetic display of despair at Western interference and African collaboration in the Congo, *Epitomé* (1962).

Overtly class-conscious works have a tradition almost as venerable and international as negritude, within which can be differentiated two strains, an essentialist negritude and a polemic one.[16] Although both tendencies overlap or co-exist in many authors, the

[14] Ferdinand N'Sougan, "Sociologie artistique et littéraire de l'Afrique," *Diogène*, 74 (1972), p. 106. See also David T. Haberly, "The Search for a National Literature: A Problem in the Comparative History of Post-Colonial Literatures", *Comparative Literature Studies*, XI, 1 (1974), 85–95.

[15] Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," in *The Writer in Modern Africa*, ed. Per Wästberg (New York: Africana, 1968), p. 16.

[16] L. V. Thomas, "Panorama de la négritude," *Actes du Colloque sur la littérature africaine d'expression française*, (Dakar: Faculté des lettres, 1965), pp. 45–101.

former attributed specific innate features to the African and was in profound conflict with the latter, a tactic, not a philosophy. Senghor, whose elaborate ontology takes both poetic and prose form, epitomizes the former, and Aimé Césaire, who coined the expression "négritude," the latter. By 1934 Jacques Roumain, the poet Sartre quoted in "Orphée noir" to exemplify class consciousness, had published his *Analyse schématique* and become a militant communist.[17] In Africa itself, an autodidact writer and film-maker like Ousmane Sembène, whose *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) depicts social conflict in political rather than cultural terms, is one early representative of class consciousness. Others were to follows.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has remarked upon the connections between Caribbean and African literatures and the profound influence of the former upon the latter. It should therefore come as no surprise that, following in the tradition of Caribbeans Roumain and Césaire, the Martiniquan Frantz Fanon is often associated with discussions of class consciousness in modern Africa, though politicians like Nkrumah, Touré and Nyerere made it theirs too from the period of independence. As a clinical psychiatrist who became convinced first of the therapeutic need of self-assertive violence for those oppressed by racism, and only thereafter of the ultimate weight questions of class bear upon the success of any cure for racial oppression, Fanon made his name as a spokesman for the Algerian revolution, but his books, in particular *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), have affected many African writers directly, especially in East Africa. Indeed, until the early seventies, East Africa was all but excluded from considerations of African literature, the major exception being Ngugi himself. Recently there has been an explosion of publishing activity and much of it, in particular that around the ephemeral review *Joliso* (1973–74), has been Fanonist in tone.

The critic Peter Nazareth refers to a precise instance of the transmission of Fanon's thought to an African novelist: Ngugi received a copy of *The Wretched of the Earth* just as he was beginning work on *A Grain of Wheat* in 1965, and, purportedly, shifted his novel towards a more "socialist" stance.[18] The stylistic and technical devices he used to do so are, as that critic pointed out, ingenious, but more relevant to the present topic is the question of which ideological characteristics justify considering the work to be class-conscious. There are two main precepts in Fanonist thought, the first the so-called hypothesis on the national bourgeoisie, holding that its goal was simply to take power for itself as a new ruling class, the second maintaining that violence was the sole agent by which the African masses could rid themselves of that parasitical élite. According to Nazareth, *A Grain of Wheat* is socialist "by implication" because it suggests that the substitution of foreign capitalists and politicians by local ones does not resolve all social conflicts and problems, a message in tune with the West African novels of disillusion, but more sharply drawn and with specific stylistic concomitants and ideological injunctions.[19] The same critic also revived the debate over negritude by criticizing Soyinka for

[17] Paul Laraque, "Politics and Culture," *Caliban: A Journal of New World Thought and Writing*, II, 1 (1976), 11–14. (Tr. G. M. Lang).

[18] Peter Nazareth, *Literature and Society in Modern Africa* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972), pp. 128–129.

[19] Nazareth, op. cit., p. 151.

dismissing political questions from art by rejecting the programmatic concerns of that earlier movement. Significantly, even Achebe's *A Man of the People* is subject to Nazareth's criticism, for however realistic it may be in portraying social forces in Africa, it fails to propose a solution and readers are left to draw their own potentially demoralizing and demobilizing conclusions.[20]

Two other East African writers notably exemplify degrees of class consciousness in African literature. Okot p'Bitek's work strongly recalls the disillusion and moral indignation of the West Africans. Oculi's *Orphan,* (1968) on the other hand, marks a step towards a fully committed literature since, unlike *A Man of the People* and p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966), it points toward the solution of social problems rather than merely laments them.

Just because many of these issues are familiar to the student of Marxist aesthetics, their presence in African literature and criticism should not necessarily be taken as evidence of excessive European influence. It is true that even the Asian influence which numerous allusions to Maoist literary pronouncement bespeak, was transmitted to Africa in English. An easy familiarity with Marxist terminology will henceforth be part and parcel of the intellectual baggage of both writer and critic in Africa and, although Ngugi prophecies a United People's Republic of Africa joining hands with a United People's Republic of Asia, this socialist culture is a very European one.[21] Yet the problems of matching practice with theory and vice versa, as well as the goal of *engagement,* though relevant in different ways in Europe, are also intrinsically related to the African situation and are equally pertinent to African authors. Nazareth allowed that *A Grain of Wheat* was not and could not be a socialist novel because history was not ripe enough, but that novel did incorporate one tenet of Fanonism: that a new national élite has usurped power for itself. A less explicitly stated but in essence the same position justifies speaking of a developing class consciousness in the West African novel, especially in the works of Armah, Nokan and Sembène, though the last author was on the scene earlier and does not have the same ties with the African middle class an the first two.[22] Class consciousness in African literature in European languages is not however limited to that view. Particularly in Portuguese-speaking Africa there are cases in which a more fully developed class consciousness is in force.

It perhaps reflects how deeply European rhetorical models have permeated African writing that the stereotypes frequently attributed to the various language groups of Europe hold true for the respective élites in Africa. Ezekiel Mphahlele's and Wole Soyinka's early reactions against negritude were tinged with traditional Anglo-Saxon distrust of Gallic polemic gusto. By the same token, the East African reception of Fanon differs markedly from that in Portuguese-speaking Africa and this is due at least in part to the ideological affinity between Portuguese and French, one attested to by the history

[20] Nazareth, op. cit., pp. 5, 59.

[21] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Links that Bind Us," *Joliso,* 2, 1 (1974), 67–71. The same article exemplifies many "Third World" attitudes, as does *Writers in East Africa,* ed. Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974), esp. pp. 3 ff.

[22] Frederick Ivor Case, "La Bourgeoisie africaine dans la littérature de l'Afrique occidentale," *Revue canadienne des Etudes africaines,* 7, 2 (1973), 257–266.

of literary relations between those countries and even by the structures of the languages themselves. Of course, Ngugi and others in the milieu around *Joliso* promulgated their positions from within a university setting in a relatively liberal state, while Angolan literary ideology was forged concurrently with the struggle of an avant-garde party to seize state power from the tenuous grasp of a declining colonial power. Nonetheless, while the East Africans did grasp the essence of Fanon, his passion as much as his politics, the Angolans have captured his thought more schematically and retained more of his original terminology. As in the case of Ngugi's reception of Fanon through Grant Kamenju, Paris served as the point of literary transmission. Mario de Andrade no doubt read Fanon in the original and, as editor of a French-language *Anthologie de la poésie africaine d'expression portuguaise* (1969), he was steeped in the French tastes Fanon shared.

Even so, there is a slight shift between the ternary model Fanon offered for the development of an authentic and class-conscious culture and that proposed by Andrade in various of his writings. His tryptich *négritude-particularização-iniciativa historica popular* begins at what is already Fanon's second stage, *retour aux sources*.[23] In Fanon's mind, the quest for identity was preceded, at least among the intelligentsia, by a period of deep assimilation of the colonizer's culture and the culture of the national bourgeoisie was the fossilization of that quest. The quest for non-Western identity marks the inception of revolt itself, but revolt remains partial and incomplete until a third stage of armed struggle is reached and the intellectual joins forces with the masses and attempts to stir them to organized political action. Quest for identity and even the edification of an alternative cultural model like Senghor's elaborate ontological negritude would not, according to Fanon, produce an original and vital culture. In other words, national and class consciousness are not mutually exclusive, and the latter can be seen to develop from the former. Sartre failed to foresee this in 1948. He presumed that class consciousness within African literature would develop directly out of the contradictions contained within a purely racial analysis of African identity. Ngugi, Nazareth and Oculi in East Africa and the poets Andrade anthologized in Portuguese-speaking Africa, not to mention the West African novels of disillusion whose rejection of national cultures has only a hint of programmatic class consciousness about it, demonstrate rather that class consciousness takes intimately national forms and is, at the same time, a critique, on the grounds of inequitable social stratification, of reigning national consciousness. Andrade inserts a period of *particularização* between Fanon's *retour aux sources* and his *combat*: "Os poemas precisam os contornos nacionais e incidem mais profundamente no real social..... O proprio enraizamento dos poetas no chão nacional determina a convergência de temas e a unidade de tom."[24] His emphasis upon *o chão nacional*, national soil, is only a step away from Fanon's stricture that that national liberation struggle alone is the *matrice matérielle* of authentic culture.[25] An-

[23] Mário de Andrade, *Na noite gravida de punhais: Antologia temática da poesia africana* (Lisboa: Sà da Costa, 1975), pp. 7–10; Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspéro, 1970), pp. 152–154.

[24] Andrade, op. cit., p. 9: "the poems clarify the outlines of the nation and delve deeper into social reality.... The fact that the poets themselves are rooted in the national soil determines convergence in themes and unity in tone."

[25] Fanon, op. cit., p. 163.

drade's expression *negar a negação* suggests affinity with Sartre's old model. The nationalist tones of the *Vamos descobrir Angola* movement, through which Andrade traces the development of revolutionary Angolan literature and his own roots, are further evidence of the relation between national and class consciousness in Angola. The ultimate literary representation of this line of thought is the long-time political prisoner Luandino Vieira's *A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier* (1974). The protagonist is an early militant in the national liberation struggle who becomes a nationalist hero.[26]

There is no room is the present setting for remarks ample enough to encompass the complexities of South African literature, as linguistically, culturally and ethnically varied as it is impressive—where, that is, it has been able to survive. African languages aside, South African literature in two European languages, English and Afrikaans, is fragmented like the country itself into isolated pockets of consciousness. White writers like Nadine Gordimer, even Roy Campbell, still appear in scholarly treatments of African literature.[27] Many black or "coloured" writers have been forced to take the road of exile, a brilliant young poet like Arthur Nortje following in the footsteps of Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Dennis Brutus. The range of vision is broad but at the same time the literature is impoverished, stunted, in the words of T. T. Moyana "mediocre."[28] Class, or even national, consciousness in any sense comparable to that used above, simply has no internal literary outlet, and writers imbued with either or both of them face particular hardships and run great risks living within South Africa. Since the transition into a modern literature, usually set at the beginnings of the fifties, black, and even some white, South African writing has been effectively a literature of protest and the predominant mode has been not disillusion, but outrage. In these circumstances, speaking of class consciousness in South African literature, at least in the sense of the representation of class differences in literature, is problematical. Although many black novelists would avow that they portray white characters somewhat two-dimensionally,[29] and their negation of the negation of white racism usually also has an implied class consciousness within it, much like Sartre hoped it would have in the remainder of Black Africa, yet most accomplished writers are nonetheless suspicious of doctrine. The urgency of their revolt and the need to communicate their despair to the outside world appear to preclude too ideological a commitment. Most South Africans can appreciate the literature of the exiles whenever they have access to it. Someday the grounds for this social and cultural solidarity will come to an end and later generations of writers as nationally or ethnically enfranchised as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Yambo Ouologuem or Okot p'Bitek will be in a position to voice disillusion over the after-effects of independence. In the meantime, the distinction between national and class consciousness in South African literature is hard to draw. Until there is a black bourgeoisie to overthrow within South Africa, the most pertinent element of Fanon's thought there will remain his tenet that

[26] The novel was first published in French as *La vraie vie de Domingos Xavier* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971).

[27] E.g. in Christopher Heywood, *Aspects of South African Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976).

[28] "Problems of a Creative Writer in South Africa," in Heywood, op. cit., pp. 85–98.

[29] E.g. Ezekiel Mphahlele in the revised edition of *The African Image* (London: Faber, 1974), pp. 14–15.

violent revolt has a positive effect upon victims of racial oppression, one already held by almost all black South African writers. No doubt, therefore, schemas of literary evolution more related to Sartre's or to Fanon's than to N'Sougan's will be needed to account for the future development of literary consciousness there. Perhaps Sartre's prescription of an ideological passage directly from racial to class consciousness will ultimately be more applicable in South Africa for the good reason that his framework was more traditionally Marxist in an economic sense and the proletariat, in the concise sense of an industrial and urban one, is more fully constituted there than through the remainder of Africa. In any event, the dialectic between national and class consciousness will play an important part in the definitive periodization of South African literature in the future, as it will across all of Africa and the developing cultures. Here, unfortunately, there is but space for these few deductions and none at all for proper induction of evidence.

To conclude, then, there are at least five major contexts for class consciousness in African literature in European languages: English and French-speaking West Africa, East Africa, Portuguese-speaking Africa and black South Africa (white culture there not having the social grounds for class consciousness in the above sense). There is moreover some overlap and mutual influence among these literary regions, English-speaking West and East Africans being in very direct contact, the important magazine *Transition* (recently re-baptized *Ch'indaba*) having moved from Uganda to Ghana in 1975, French texts like *Les Damnés de la terre* exerting influence both upon English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking intellectuals, many South African exiles having logged time elsewhere in Africa. Within each context class consciousness has a different meaning and assumes a different shape. The moral indignation expressed by the novelists of disillusion is not, within a strictly Marxist framework, a class-conscious attitude and in fact resembles more the anger and moralism that critics defending a "proletarian" perspective usually attribute to the middle class, adrift in history with neither understanding of historical forces nor power to alter them. Yet, for the reasons enumerated above, one can speak of a nascent class consciousness in them simply because writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Armah, Laye and Ouologuem depict class divergences and the machinations of a self-aggrandizing political class within their works.

Nowhere in African literature does class consciousness correspond to European philosophical definitions of it, especially those set out by Lukacs or other Communist thinkers. There are thematic parallels between the two realms, and the European still continues to exert a major influence upon the African. But the critical paradigm for class consciousness appears rather to be found in the thought of Frantz Fanon and to take either an Angolan or an East African form. The former is essentially a variation upon Fanon's three-step model for the development of a national culture around the armed struggle of the masses against an oppressive class, the national bourgeoisie; the latter's adamant espousal of "Third World-ism" is very Fanonist in a different way. In South Africa, though most writers call for violent overthrow of the racist regime there, there is as yet no clear-cut distinction between forms of national, that is, black, and class consciousness. The two seem still to be intimately interconnected in ways very specific to South Africa.

To some extent, Sartre's "Orphée noir" has been misread when taken as an analysis of African literature or culture. Much of its argumentation was intended to demonstrate to the European left that a new subject had entered upon the stage of history and to explain why that subject alone could resolve the European philosophical conflict between subjectivity and objectivity, existential experience and the rational movement of history. Senghor was dealing with the same issues of course and, as J. Paulin Hountondji has indicated, such discursive alienation and reflection of largely irrelevant European philosophical preoccupations are also a form of colonialism.[30] However important a role it played, Senghor's ontological negritude has become a relic of the past. His concern for cultural identity is outmoded. Are those who presume to rid Africa of prolonged Euro-centrism through the use of a class analysis any less influenced by a European (and therefore neocolonialist) ideology, Marxism? It is too soon to tell, but it does seem probable that a new literary period in African literature is at hand, a phase which does not simply amalgamate social and literary revolt, but re-directs it toward analysis of the contradictions within African society, the principle of which is the gap between the new privileged élite—to which of course most African writers in European languages belong—and the vast majority remaining.

[30] "Le Problème actuel de la philosophie africaine," loc. cit., p. 620.

JANIS A. MAYES

2. IRONIC STANCES IN CAMEROON AND NIGERIA

To generalize, irony in modern African fiction is used to accentuate basic contradictions and blatant incongruities manifest in particular African experiences. It functions both as a literary concept and as a social phenomenon. Some writers use it as a literary device, employing the ironic narrative style; others focus upon the irony inherent in the events and social situations they describe. In both cases, for the irony to be deciphered certain formal characteristics involving writer, narrator and text must be examined.

Since irony in its most usual sense depends upon a relationship of opposites, this same type of relationship is also reflected within the text. The writer comes to his fictional universe with a vision of reality that has been shaped by an understanding of various points of view. This vision gives substance to the content of the novel, and the narrative framework within which the writer's vision is placed gives the novel its structure of reality. Technically, the authorial voice remains outside the text; yet, the writer's personal point of view *vis à vis* these realities can be determined from his characterizations and the ways in which events are presented and described in the novel. The choice of a narrator is therefore an important one because the narrative voice represents a well-defined point of view within the text itself. Against this point of view the characters in the novels are defined, and events revolve around it. The narrator may be presented as an unconscious and uncritical observer or he may be a conscious ironist. What matters is whether the narrator is aware of the significance of the events he narrates and of the characters he describes.

If the use of irony is to be truly successful, then the text demands a reader who is aware of the African novel's referential quality. The references are born out of the dialectic relationship between what takes place within the fictional universe and those social and cultural realities to which that universe corresponds outside the work. In "The Criticism of Modern African Literature", Abiola Irele puts it this way:

> Despite the fact that our writers use the European languages to express themselves, the most original among them do so with the conscious purpose of presenting an African experience, and the best among them reflect in their works a specific mode of the imagination which derives from their African background. The African reference of an African work can be elucidated... by approaching the work with an insight into, and a feeling for, those aspects of African life which stand beyond the

work itself, its extensions into the African experience, and its foundations in the very substance of African existence.[31]

Notwithstanding literary influences, historical events and social backgrounds have left a deep mark upon the African writer and the African novel alike.

The rise since the 1950s of African fiction written in European languages parallels closely the move from colonialism to a period of independence in most African countries. The terrible oppression and frustrating discontent generally associated with these periods in history are expressed in many African novels. For Cameroonian writers Ferdinand Oyono in *Une Vie de boy*,[32] and Mongo Beti in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*,[33] oppression during the colonial period is presented through their use of irony as a literary device. Discontent is voiced by Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters*[34] through his portrayal of the ironies inherent in a newly independent Nigeria. Though the narrative approach and the experience underlined vary from one writer to the next, their fundamental purpose remains the same: to present an African reality as they see it and as they feel it.

Mention has been made of how on a technical level irony is employed in *Une Vie de boy*. Through his use of ironic narration Oyono details the life of Toundi, a young man who is in close contact with Europeans during the colonial period because of his job as a house servant. The writer's vision of this reality is offered in the form of a diary, giving the impression that events are recorded in the order of time. Viewed chronologically, much of the significance of what takes place is hidden from the characters involved. However, in retrospect, as the scenes are pitted one against the other, the text takes on a deeper meaning. Oyono's purpose is a dual one: he attempts to recapture a specific moment in historical time and to underscore his view of the incongruities inherent in colonialism as it was practised.

Oyono's choice of the house servant as narrator and recorder is an important one. Until the final days of his life, the narrator's point of view is limited. What he observes and records in his diary is not slanted to the liking of the Europeans whom he describes. They recognize him only in so far as he conforms to a stereotype and he recognizes them in the same way. A definite distance thus exists between the narrator and his narrative, the result of which is the emergence of two distinct points of view: that of the observer Toundi, on the one hand, and that of the Europeans, the objects of his observations, on the other. The co-existence of these two points of view within the same social context results in the reader's perception of the ironies described by the unconscious narrator.

From the beginning of the text, Oyono plunges the reader (who is as yet unaware

[31] Abiola Irele, "The Criticism of Modern African Literature," in *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood (New York: Africana, 1971), pp. 15–16.

[32] Ferdinand Oyono, *Une Vie de boy* (Paris: Julliard, 1956). Subsequent references to this edition of the novel will be indicated by the abbreviation *Boy* in the text.

[33] Mongo Beti, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976). This novel was first published by Editions Robert Laffont in 1956. References to the Présence Africaine edition will be given in the text by the abbreviation *Le Pauvre Christ*.

[34] Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Deutsch, 1965).

of the novel's content) into his use of verbal irony. For the reader is shown a man in agony, near to death, in Spanish (now Equatorial) Guinea and he must accept the description of an eyewitness observer at the scene:

> Je n'avais jamais vu un homme agoniser.
> Celui qui était devant mes yeux était un homme qui souffrait.... Il était une charogne avant d'être un cadavre. (*Boy*, pp. 9–12)

And there is no reason to question another observer's remark that he must have been "uno alumno," especially once two exercise books have been found by the body and their contents described. But things are not as they seem at first. The obvious contrast between text and context changes the significance of the observer's initial descriptions as well as some of the reader's impressions. Indeed, Toundi was a man who suffered, a living corpse before he became a *cadavre*, and also a student, but not of the kind that the exercise books found next to his body might suggest. Questions of identity are central to the novel and are treated thematically. Through his use of ironic narration, Oyono focuses upon the sharp contradictions between appearances and reality—between the roles played and the people who play them.

Oyono's technique is to present his narrator-servant as one who willingly accepts the role assigned to him and who functions as a stereotype of the "good boy" throughout most of the story. As long as he is uncritical and unquestioning of his role, Toundi observes and records in blind unawareness, unable to see the irony in the lives of his "masters." His description of Father Gilbert supports this idea:

> Je dois ce que je suis devenu au père Gilbert. Je l'aime beaucoup, mon bienfaiteur. C'est un homme gai qui, lorsque j'étais petit, me considérait comme un petit animal familier. Il aimait tirer mes oreilles, et pendant ma longue éducation, il s'est beaucoup amusé de mes émerveillements. Il me présente à tous les Blancs qui viennent à la mission comme son chef-d'œuvre. Je suis son boy, un boy qui sait lire et écrire, servir la messe, dresser le couvert, balayer sa chambre, faire son lit (*Boy*, p. 22)

Without reflecting in any way upon what Father Gilbert has done or said, Toundi simply itemizes the outward facets of their rapport. Yet this particular form of narrative acts as a kind of veil through which another equally unquestioning point of view, that of the priest, gradually filters. Father Gilbert emerges as patronizing, with no regard for Toundi as a human being. In fact, the boy is his object—his *chef-d'œuvre*. The narrator-servant remains totally unaware of the irony of what he has written in the diary; nor does he reflect upon the discrepancy between Father Gilbert's role as a priest, who supposedly has regard for human personality, and Father Gilbert's actions, which contradict this idea. Oyono's ironic narration paints two pictures: one is of the total humiliation and powerlessness of an ignorant man in a position of subservience in colonial Africa and the other is of the contradictions inherent in the colonizers who came to Africa in the name of civilization.

As long as Toundi is unaware of his position, the nature of his narrative does not

change. However, Oyono's picture of the oppression and of the ironies in the colonial environment becomes more detailed. At the same time there is movement away from the specific to the general. For example, to ensure that irony is not directed toward Father Gilbert as an individual, Oyono removes him from the scene through an unexpected motorcycle accident and replaces him with Father Vandermeyer. But the blatant contrasts between "the word" and "the act" continue, though the narrator is not aware of them. However, by focusing cumulatively upon specific individuals whom he observes within the walls of the church, Toundi unknowingly and obliquely ironizes the French who came as spiritual and community leaders:

> Mme Salvain était assise à côté du commandant tandis qu'au deuxième rang Gosier-d'Oseau et l'ingénieur agricole se penchaient avec un ensemble parfait vers les deux grosses filles. Derrière eux, le docteur remontait de temps en temps ses galons dorés....Sa femme, bien qu'elle fît semblant d'oublier ciel et terre dans la de lecture de son missel, suivait du coin de l'œil les manigances de Gosier-d'Oiseau et l'ingénieur avec les demoiselles Dubois. (*Boy,* 52–54)

But because he accepts the French only as far as they correspond to stereotypes, the observer does not perceive the inherent irony of what he sees and describes. What he writes emerges as ironic in the narration.

It is Toundi's penetration of the European stereotype that accounts for his heightened awareness and for the change in the nature of what he describes. As he gains insight into the people behind the masks, Toundi is made conscious of the role he plays and even more aware of the Europeans' conception of what that role entails. This change is first seen when Toundi realizes that the "commandant", his master, is uncircumcised: "Cette découverte m'a beaucoup soulagé. Cela a tué quelque chose en moi.... Je sens que le commandant ne me fait plus peur....Mon aplomb l'a beaucoup surpris. J'ai bien pris mon temps pour tout ce qu'il m'a dit de faire" (*Boy,* 44). The more insight Toundi gains about the French who surround him, the more aware he becomes of the oppression and of the ironies built into the colonial environment. Thus, he grows into a narrator who is aware of the significance of what he describes:

> J'ai trouvé le régisseur de prison en train d'apprendre à vivre à deux nègres soupçonnés d'avoir volé chez M. Janopoulos....C'était terrible...c'était terrible....Je pense à tous ces prêtres, ces pasteurs, tous ces Blancs qui veulent sauver nos âmes et qui nous prêchent l'amour du prochain....Je me demande, devant de pareilles atrocités, qui peut être assez sot pour croire encore à tous les boniments qu'on nous débite à l'Église et au Temple. (*Boy,* 116–118)

This awareness on Toundi's part explains the change in narrative stance noticeable at the end of the diary. Beaten near to death by the prison director, Toundi records his plans for the future, while rejecting his previous role. He emerges as a fully conscious narrator who has gone through his anagnorisis: "Il faut que je me sauve.... Je m'en irai en Guinée espagnole...Moreau ne m'aura pas.... Je vais courir ma chance, bien qu'elle soit très mince" (*Boy,* 189). The narrative voice heard at the beginning of the text takes

on more meaning, and the irony inherent in Toundi's question dominates: "Mon frère,... que sommes-nous? Que sont tous les nègres qu'on dit français?" (*Boy*, 11)

In *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* Mongo Beti's ironic narration likewise takes the form of a diary. The purpose is similar: to offer an insight into the African reality of the colonial period. However, though this is the general historical frame, Beti's narrative focuses specifically upon a Sunday. Wole Soyinka accurately characterizes Beti and his work when he says that

> Mongo Beti is perhaps the most assiduous writer to have taken up the challenge ... dealing expertly and authentically with the claims of Christianity as a filler of spiritual holes. His weapon is a deceptive generosity which disguises, until the last moment, a destructive logic, incontestible in its consistent exposition of cause and effect.... His task is the demolition of pretenders to cultural and spiritual superiority.[35]

Beti uses irony as a literary device to underline the destructiveness resulting from the presence of the Catholic Church in colonial Africa. His criticism of colonialism is more pointed than that of Oyono, and equally revealing of imperialistic oppressiveness.

A difference in characterization and by extension, in narrative focus, distinguishes Beti's irony from Oyono's. Where the narrator in *Une Vie de boy* gains in awareness, Denis, a guileless chronicler of his experiences as the priest's helper, does not. And while Oyono adheres to stereotyped characterization, Beti shows greater human variety in his portrayal of characters. These two differences, an ignorant narrator and variety in characters, account for the shift in narrative focus in the novel. Emphasis is placed not upon the way in which the narrator develops but rather upon the way in which other characters respond to the Catholic presence. The narrator's sole function is to present an ironic narration through which other points of view can filter.

In fact, the character who reaches a modicum of self-awareness in the novel is the priest. The characters and events responsible for his development are underlined. In spite of the diversity, two basic character types emerge: the African who openly rejects the practice of Catholicism and the African who *pretends* to accept its principles but believes otherwise. Beti's irony becomes most obvious when a priest, unaware of this, is confronted with the latter type. For example, Zacharie, the priest's cook, is involved in a tumultuous affair while on tour with the priest in Tala country. Though the priest is unaware of what is taking place, others on the tour, including the catechist, are not. Moreover, they seem to support Zacharie's point of view. But when the priest asks the catechist and Zacharie whether they would like to take on second wives, both, as "good Christians," reject the idea. The priest's response is one of ignorance: "seuls les catéchistes et les cuisiniers du R.P.S. sont bons chrétiens: j'aurais tant voulu voir les hommes pratiquer sincèrement la religion" (*Le Pauvre Christ*, 155). However, as the priest comes to understand the extent of the Catholic Church's ineffectiveness, he gains in awareness. This self-awareness is transformed into diffidence when he learns from a French doctor

[35] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 97–98.

that there is a venereal disease epidemic at the mission although "à leur entrée dans le camp, les femmes ne sont pas contaminées." Realizing the irony, the priest returns to France.

Though in different ways, Beti and Oyono criticize the colonial presence, and effectively expose the oppression and contradictions inherent in this historical period.

The nature of irony in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* differs markedly in style and tone from that in the works of Beti and Oyono. It does not rest in the narrative technique used by the writer; neither does it result from the blatant discrepancy between roles played by persons during the colonial era and the social realities against which these same roles are enacted. Soyinka's fictional universe embraces another socio-historical period: independent Nigeria. And instead of ironic narration, the writer's technique is to make use of three distinct kinds of characters whose primary function is to underline some of the discrepancies present in the newly independent nation. Effective use is made of an omniscient ironist narrator, of four intellectuals and of an artist, who are the interpreters and a pastiche of men and women representative of potential nation builders. They produce that distinct impression that there is discord between what the writer expected to find in the new nation and what is actually happening there. The result is that through his exposure of such incongruities Soyinka singles out for criticism objective ironies in a so-called independent Nigeria. What he succeeds in doing exemplifies Douglas Muecke's contention that "Ironic situations can be invented or presented by satirists whose object is to expose hypocrisy, wilful ignorance...or vanity. In such corrective or normative uses of irony, the victim to be exposed and discomfited is singled out; he is in the wrong and by contrast, those to whom he is exposed are in the right or at least safe from this particular attack."[36] Soyinka's use of irony then is prescriptive. His method is to have a sardonic narrator and highy conscious "interpreters" who criticize and expose those whose points of reference are destructive and vacuous. In doing so, the writers offers alternative ways to proceed in the building of a new nation. Illustrations of the Soyinka technique and of the ironies the deplores are interspersed throughout the novel.

One of the interpreters, Sekoni, a newly trained engineer returning from university abroad, envisions that he can help to build at home. His vision takes shape on the ship which brings him into Lagos: "the sea sprays built his bridges and hospitals, and the large trailing furrow became a deafening waterfall defying human will... Into earth delved one channel, breaking earth a thousand miles away with iron-plate catalogues of energies below the surface" (*Interpreters*, 26). Committed and qualified, Sekoni is unable to turn his dream into reality. The chairman of the construction company, who is a Nigerian like himself but whose character has been corroded, prefers the expertise of a white expatriate in addition to some kick-back money. Eldred Jones describes the irony thus: "It is ironical that in the novel Sekoni's positive dreams are thwarted by men whose vision

[36] Douglas Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 66.

stretches only as far as their pockets. Sekoni is destroyed by the society he tried to change."[37]

The extent of this destruction is made clear on a narrative level by the authorial stance that Soyinka adopts. He has obviously placed Sekoni in an environment where he can be measured against characters whose motivations and values are diametrically opposed to his own. The irony of Sekoni's situation is finally realized by the reader who can perceive both that the two points of view contradict each other, and that this contradiction is made more glaring in the specific socio-historical context in which it takes place. There is an uncritical acceptance of men in positions of power who could help, if only they would, to effect change in a new nation but who instead are overcome by their greed for personal enrichment and their fear of new ideas. On the other hand, there is the rejection of Sekoni who wants to use his expertise as an engineer for the benefit of the nation. This rejection is pushed to its physical limit when Sekoni is killed in an absurd automobile accident: "Too late he saw the insanity of a lorry parked right in his path, a swerve turned into a skid and cruel arabesques of tyres. A futile heap of metal, and Sekoni's body lay surprised across the open door, showers of laminated glass around him, his beard one fastness of blood and wet earth," (*Interpreters,* 155). The irony thus moves beyond the particular tragedy of Sekoni's personal experiences to encompass the whole nation and finally to include an irony of fate at the time of his death.

As if in a continuum, a similar situation is played out again with Segoe, a journalist. Though he does not die, his experiences are no less ironic. Segoe is unwilling to participate in the corruption of Sir Derinola and the other bigwigs who control the job for which he is qualified. He chooses not to play the game expected of him. The narrator comments: "Hidden inside Segoe as in several others of his age was a traumatic center of castor oil, and nearness to this vile colloid made schnapps the most revolting potion of his experience" (*Interpreters,* 84). And when Segoe watches the cortège of Sir Derinola pass by some time later, the conventional words spoken in the funeral oration clearly contradict the image that Segoe has of him: "his life our inspiration, his idealism our hopes, the survival of his spirit in our midst the hope for a future Nigeria, for moral irredentism and national rejuvenescence" (*Interpreters,* 11). The glaring contrast between image and reality—between text and context—impresses itself upon the observer's mind.

But not only does Segoe see the irony in Sir Derinola's life and death, he also catches a glimpse of contradictions in himself which are potentially dangerous. The narrator steps in to shed light upon Segoe's thinking: "He stayed on only a few minutes later and then, filled with a sudden revulsion for his role—for only now did it leap consciously to his mind that he hung around them because he saw a story in this for his page" (*Interpreters,* 113). Thus, the irony which this interpreter perceives acts as a therapeutic lesson. Segoe's heightened awareness is different from both that of Toundi in *Une Vie de boy* and that of the priest in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* in that he is still physically

[37] Eldred Jones, "Progress and Civilization in the Work of Wole Soyinka," in Christopher Heywood (ed.), op. cit., p. 135.

and emotionally capable of changing and of effecting change. Soyinka's use of irony in this instance helps to point out viable choices that can be made by Segoe and people like him at a time and in a place where the right choice is especially crucial. By suggesting a choice the way he does, the writer introduces an element of optimism into the otherwise disquieting situation he describes.

However, the optimism gained from the knowledge that there are choices to be made is undercut by a vivid picture of ridiculous acting professionals and their spouses at a party in Ibadan. There is a neat switch in authorial stance. Yet, it is in this section of the narrative that the ironical portrayal of behaviour is most successful: the party is transformed into a complete mockery and the people there, with the exception of the interpreters, Segoe, Egbo, Bandele and Kola, are shown to be complete fools. Ostensibly, as a group they have chosen to adopt false examples of Western social behaviour in a *milieu* where such behaviour seems especially frivolous and out of place. Ironically, they remain unaware of what their choices mean. Presented in the form of a scenario, this social happening bristles with contradictions. The contradictions in the behaviour of the participants are made explicit through the complex interplay between three distinct points of view: the narrator's, the interpreters', and the guests'. Soyinka's method is to create a social environment—the party—and then to show how the guests as well as the interpreters function together in the same space. The contrasting ways in which they act and react are analogous to two different and juxtaposed points of view, the result of which is a display of irony. Though an authorial voice *per se* remains silent, its place is taken by the omniscient ironist narrator who functions within the narrative itself as a conscious observer. This narrative stance constantly reinforces that of Bandele and Segoe, thus bringing out the absurdities in the actions of the party-goers.

Irony thus becomes a satirical device, as an example will show. The host and hostess, Professor Oguazor and his "black Mrs. Professor" wife are in the process of separating the men from the women because the time has come for the ladies to go upstairs to powder their noses and for the men to engage in conversation. Professor Oguazor searches out his wife; Bandele and Segoe stand aside to comment and observe; the narrator interjects additional commentary and description:

> 'Cem en der,'... 'we mesn't keep the ladies wetting.'
> 'Why did you bother to attend their party...?'
> 'If I may presume to say so, there didn't seem much strain between them and you.'
> 'That is what is known as civilisation. We are all civilised creatures here.'
>
> The hall was clear. The women crowded the foot of the stairs, awaited the final summons for ascent. The men, house-trained and faultless, had created a Men's Corner at the end of the room. A few did require manoeuvres by the professor, but his suggestions were imperceptible... By tacit understanding, their backs were turned on the stairs until such time as the women would have completely disappeared. (*Interpreters,* 143)

Viewed separately, neither the point of view of Professor Oguazor nor those of Bandele and Segoe show with any degree of certainty that false social behaviour and vacuous mentalities are being made fun of. However, the sardonic voice of the narrator coupled

with that of the two interpreters does manage to convey this impression. Together the two voices successfully put forward yet another idea: cynicism can be healthy, positive and corrective in its thrust if it shows an awareness and a rejection of a way of being. Irony in *The Interpreters* is used as an expression of discontent with the social realities in a newly independent country and as a warning for the future.

In the fiction of Oyono, Beti and Soyinka, irony is realistic in conception in so far as it refers and unmasks in more or less oblique way the contradictions that are really at work in their society, whether under the control of the hated colonial system or whether independence has given power to a new class of black leaders. The methods illustrate a wide spectrum, ranging from the Cameroonians' preference for the innocent narrator to Soyinka's savagely shrewd interpreters. From a less purely literary point of view, however, the most significant difference is in the target and in the timing. Writing on the eve of independence, the Cameroonian novelists were understandably tempted to give free rein to their resentment of and sarcastic contempt for, the colonial regime, the almost naive pretentiousness and the unconscious hypocrisy of its representatives. Nigeria's literature, for its part, emerged once independence was obtained. Her writers had little reason to cast retrospective venom at their former British masters: Thomas Aluko's mildly humorous gibes are apparently the nearest Nigerian writers managed to bring themselves to an imaginative indictment of the colonial era. But as early as 1954, harsh criticism of the new, indigenous ruling class that was in the making had been voiced by Cyprian Ekwensi in *People of the City*, which is thus entitled to a place of its own as a forerunner of Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. And both appear in retrospect to have anticipated the wide stream of critical writing directed against the corruption of the new leaders in several countries that had formerly been part of British Africa, most notably Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya. This kind of questioning did not assume any literary weight in francophone countries until the late sixties and even later, with the emergence of Yambo Ouologuem, Ahmadou Kourouma, Emmanuel Dongala and a few others. By then, however, the pervading atmosphere of rank corruption, the economic unfairness and gaping social inequality in most of the new states, the military coups, the tribal civil wars, everything suggested that the problems of Africa were no laughing matter: both in English and in French, the critical approach tended to substitute merciless realism for more oblique procedures, straight denunciation for irony and, regrettably, pathos for wit.

CHAPTER XIV

WILLFRIED F. FEUSER

FRENCH—ENGLISH—PORTUGUESE: THE TRILINGUAL APPROACH

1. THE RISE OF AN URBAN CIVILIZATION IN AFRICAN FICTION

> Imagine toi bien que notre continent est en gestation violente, les forêts deviennent plus rassurantes que nos villes.
> Alioum Fantouré: *Le Cercle des Tropiques* (1972)

When the Reverend David Hinderer of Schorndorf, Württemberg, approached Ibadan in 1851, the first white man ever to do so, he had to cross an agricultural belt eight to nine kilometres deep where, shaded by giant silk-cotton trees, grew crops of maize, yam, beans, ground-nuts, guinea-corn, cassava and onions, before he reached the city wall. The wall, 27 kilometres in circumference, gave protection to a population of 100,000 —gold, silver- and blacksmiths, weavers, tailors, leather-workers, tanners, dyers, soap-makers, carpenters, potters and oil-millers.[1] But the majority of the inhabitants were farmers, and this demographic distribution was to shift little in the next one hundred years or more.

The city culture of the Yoruba, which was unique in pre-Islamic and pre-colonial Black Africa, was thus essentially physiocratic, based on the use and development of the soil. Its forms of social and political organization, far from disrupting traditional ties and norms, merely served to reinforce them. If we want to see a continent in motion —"en gestation violente"—to study the rise of an urban civilization in Africa as reflected in its fiction, we have to turn our backs on this fascinating but rather isolated phenomenon which is the tradition-directed Yoruba or Hausa city and explore other horizons.

The prototype of the modern city, often begotten in the stench of slave barracoons, is to be found in Africa's coastal belt: Dakar, Accra, Lagos, Luanda, Dar es Salaam. The second generation of cities sprang up, or rose from obscurity in the hinterland under the administrative umbrella of colonialism: Thiès, Bamako, Kaduna, Yaoundé, Kinshasa, Nova Lisboa, Johannesburg, Nairobi. All of them are labouring under the stresses of westernization, evolving a new style of social living and a new personality. As the most regular phenomenon leading to the development of modern cities nowadays is "the

[1] Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country* (London, 1872).

tendency toward geographical concentration of the attributes of modernization":[2] the influx of people from the rural areas wishing to stake a claim in the sharing of these attributes often reaches unmanageable proportions and multiplies the problems already existing.

In delineating these problems and the significant features of the evolving urban life-style in Africa we are compelled by the vastness of the subject-matter to choose carefully the criteria by which to proceed: whether to adopt a historico-chronological sequence, follow the geographical lay of the land, select authors in order of importance or renown, place politico-linguistic factors paramount, or, finally, articulate the major topics and motifs involved. All things considered, it would seem that the last option recommends itself as the most adequate, although we continually have to bear the literary and historical chronology in mind so as to be able to decide whether, and to what extent, in the course of time new attitudes and forms of consciousness have arisen both in the writers concerned and in their subject-matter, the urban African.

Many brutal misstatements of facts by renowned scholars and writers notwithstanding, Afro-Portuguese literature was the first in Black Africa.[3] It also took the lead in introducing urban topics, obviously because, spawned in the "creole islands" of the big cities, it was itself urban in character. Fascination with the urban phenomenon also characterized some of the earliest novels in French and English, for instance Ousmane Socé's *Karim* (1935) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954).

The theme of the first Angolan novel, by Alfredo Troni (1845–1904), serialized in 1882, is that of social climbing. *Nga Mutúri* (lit. Ma'am Widow, in Kimbundu), is the leading character of the short novel which borrowed its title from her name, or rather designation. In a society where social status depends to a large extent on the shade of one's epidermis, the heroine, being a *fula*—light-skinned and with some tenuous claim to European blood—gets off to a fairly good start in life as a white man's concubine. But although she is entitled to be called "Nga Muhatu" (married woman), her doting husband occasionally has her flogged like any ordinary black slave. Only when the *muari* (boss) dies, does she get the upper hand. She establishes her position as the sole heiress by ascending into the marital bed beside the corpse. This shocks the Portuguese *escrivão deputado* (secretary) of the Luanda town council, who has come for inspection, but not the accompanying *escriturário* (clerk), who is a son of the soil: *São os usos da terra, é óbito* (Such are the customs of our land, it's the ceremony for the dead).[4] When the *nojo* (period of mourning) is over, Nga Mutúri proceeds to sell the dead man's bedding and furniture and becomes a prosperous widow.

[2] E. Soja and R. Tobin, "The Geography of Modernization," quoted by Ademola T. Salau, "Towards a Strategy of Controlling the Spatial Dynamics of Development,—Nigerian Approach", *Cultures et développement* (Louvain) 9,1 (1977), p. 82.

[3] "La littérature africaine d'expression portugaise apparaît comme l'une des moins développées" *Dictionnaire des Littératures*, ed. Philippe Van Tieghem (Paris: PUF, 1968), Vol. 1, p. 72. Cyprian Ekwensi in an article on African literature did not even mention Portuguese-speaking Africa at a time when he was not only Nigeria's best-known writer but also the government's Director of Information. See his "African Literature", *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 83, (1964), 294–299.

[4] Alfredo Troni, *Nga Mutúri* (1882), republished with an introduction by Mário António (Lisbon: Edições 70, Colecção Textos Breves, 1976), p. 43.

The satirical tone of the story, which also makes fun of the bowdlerization of language by black Luandans (*o defunto falecido*—the late departed) is by no means restricted to white authors like Troni. We find that sexual relations between white and black, often leading to the social advancement of the black or mulatto partner are accepted as a matter of course, but at the same time ridiculed by the masses. Numerous songs in Kimbundu stemming from the same period and dealing with similar topics, have been collected by Óscar Ribas. There is, e.g., the popular "Madia Kandia", which Ribas dates to 1875. Madia (Maria) is a washerwoman who sleeps with her white master. They get caught by his irate wife, and a Frankie-and-Johnny type of tragedy can only be averted by Madia's instant flight. In another song, "Ximinha" (c. 1887), a Kimbundu woman rejects her daughter's black suitor because she wants to push the girl into the arms of a Portuguese for the sake of the *alembamento* (bride-price). The fact that the white man has two concubines already does not deter her in the least. Black people have to accept a situation in which the white man gets the meat and the black man the bones as the refrain has it. In the end, however, Ximinha's moodiness causes her to be repudiated by her pseudo-husband and she marries her black lover.[5] Here we have some of the motifs which persist in Portuguese African writing. Ximinha, for instance, is revived in Regina, the heroine of Geraldo Bessa Victor's short story "A Filha de Ngana Chica", who suffers an almost identical fate.[6]

This formative period in Luanda's history is also treated in Óscar Ribas' novel, *Uanga* (1951, 2nd edition 1969) set in Luanda in 1882. Uanga (Ouanga in Haiti and Venezuela) means sorcery, juju, and the novel deals in fact with the survivals of ancient beliefs and practices in an urban milieu, and the sufferings of a young married couple under the impact of "Uanga."

This concern with the survival and constant intrusion of supernatural forces which we find in Óscar Ribas is by no means an isolated phenomenon. Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* (1973) is the classical study of a curse leading to sexual impotence. In *Juju* (1977) a young Nigerian novelist, Dillibe Onyeama, sets his story of witchcraft and perversion in the Lagos of the mid-sixties of the present century, although the antecedents of the story are said to go back to the remote past and the genesis of evil can be traced to the country:

> The extraordinary events recounted in this chronicle began towards the end of the last century in Ngwo, Eastern Nigeria, and were to continue thereafter for some seventy years.[7]

The survival of traditions in the urban milieu will therefore be our first topic.

Amusa Sango, the hero of Cyprian Ekwensi's first novel, *People of the City* (1954), is beset by two problems: that of women (and consequently money) and that of his landlord, the greedy, relentless and ever-present Lagos loan-shark Lajide:

[5] Óscar Ribas, *Missosso. Literature tradicional angolana*, Vol. III (Luanda: Tip. Angolana, 1964), pp. 39–41, 46–48.

[6] In: Geraldo Bessa Victor, *Sanzala sem batuque* (Braga: Editora Pax, 1967), pp. 7–26.

[7] Dillibe Onyeama, *Juju* (Akure: Olaiya Fagbamigbe Limited, 1977), p. 11.

> Starting in the hot years of World War II, he had worked himself from a mere watch-repairer at the corner of Broad Street to what he was today—a man with eight wives, two or three houses in the city, an interest in the timber trade and the construction of houses under the town development project.[8]

Despite the makings of a typical *nouveau riche,* business tycoon Lajide, like his Senegalese counterpart El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye in *Xala,* clings to the dearest feature of traditional society, the polygamous household. This bevy of wives notwithstanding, it takes a ninth female, Sango's alienated erstwhile girl-friend Beatrice, to bring him to the brink of financial ruin.

A more aristocratic type of person in the same novel is the man destined eventually to become Sango's father-in-law. He preserves strong links with the past, offering his guest smoked antelope meat for dinner. "Beatrice's father was one of the few old men in the city who believed in bush meat" (p. 205). His belief system also includes the conservative "Realisation Party" and more generally, the values of tradition: "I believe in the past.... It is when you know the past that you can appreciate the present. We need something like the Realisation Party to preserve our kingship, our music, art and religion!" (ibid.).

Obviously the old fellow has strong reservations about Sango's candidature for the position of son-in-law. Imagine a journalist-cum-bandleader marrying into an aristocratic family! For the traditionalist, marriage is a union concluded between two families: "People talk loosely of love! Lovers cannot exist in a vacuum, but in a society." (p. 206).

Like the old man's predilection for antelope meat ("I have my own hunter"), other nutritional and culinary habits are often obstinately preserved in the city or, if previously given up under the pressure of westernization, they may stage a comeback. In Chinua Achebe's urban novel *No Longer At Ease* (1960) the British-trained hero, Obi Okonkwo, and his friend Christopher eat pounded yams and *egusi* soup (a gravy made of pumpkin seed, palm-oil and meat) in a way which would have caused raised eyebrows in Oxford Street:

> The second generation of educated Nigerians had gone back to eating pounded yams or *garri* with their fingers for the good reason that it tasted better that way. Also for the even better reason that they were not as scared as the first generation of being called uncivilised.[9]

In some African countries ancient marriage customs have been preserved in the cities. The Angolan short-story writer Arnaldo Santos describes how a young couple in a modern apartment awaken, after their wedding night, to the stringent demands of the past. Events are viewed through the consciousness of the husband, apparently an intellectual, who after some initial hesitations agrees to subordinate the private mystery of love to the exigencies of the group, the public eye, represented by Vóvó Taxa, an old granny, who insists on the traditional exhibition of the marital sheets. Although profoundly skeptical about publicizing secrets "which nowadays belong to us," the bride-

[8] Cyprian Ekwensi, *People of the City* (London: Dakers, 1954), p. 33.
[9] Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1963), p. 21.

groom accedes to the old woman's request and offers his visitors the traditional wine of welcome.[10] Another story also dealing with this topic is to be found in a volume of short stories by the Congolese writer, Tati-Loutard, but the events described are given a comic twist since the bride is no longer a virgin and the wine of celebration, along with a substantial bonus, is therefore not forthcoming.[11]

"Le salut de l'homme, c'est son prochain." This key phrase in Malick Fall's novel *La Plaie* (1967) could be said to be a basic tenet of traditional African social philosophy. In the urban context this philosophy is often abandoned or perverted. The disruption of traditional norms and behaviour patterns is a constant theme in Flora Nwapa's *This Is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971). Since the city is "not the place where one could survive on wild honey and wild fruit"[12] and honest jobs are few and far between, shady substitutes have to be sought. Alcoholism, crime and prostitution are rampant. While life thus becomes a crude survival of the fittest, death is divested of its mystery in the modern city or exploited by sectarian zealots like the albino preacher—death is whiteness, whiteness is death—in Soyinka's Lagos: "My name is Lazarus, not Christ, son of God."[13] Cemeteries have a low priority in urban renewal, whether in Brazzaville ("Le Cimetière de VIII")[14] or Abidjan, and dying provides only a brief respite to life's problems:

> Le cimetière de la ville nègre était comme le quartier noir: pas assez de places: les enterrés avaient un an pour pourrir et se reposer; au-delà on les exhumait. Une vie de bâtardise pour quelques mois de repos, disons que c'est un peu court![15]

Fama, the aristocratic scrounger in Ahmadou Kourouma's novel, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (1968), who is given to such morbid thoughts, has a Sahelian's hearty contempt for the coastal capital engulfed in sweltering heat:

> Ville sale et gluante de pluie!
> Ah! nostalgie de la terre natale de Fama! (p. 20).

Whatever his vigorous imprecations against the hated city and the regime of pseudo-independence, Fama is nothing but a fossil from the past, a sterile, walking anachronism. As such he is representative of considerable segments of urban societies that still cling to semi-feudal or ethnic codes. A telling example is the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos as depicted in Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*. Its system of kinship loyalties and mutual assistance draped in the trimmings of proverbial rhetoric is in itself admirable but it has to remain restricted to its native habitat. Once it is torn out of its societal context and juxtaposed to newly arising urban or national claims, it may turn fatal. To the protagonist of the novel, the young civil servant Obi Okonkwo, who gets

[10] Arnaldo Santos, "... e um negro-púrpura de jinjimo" in *Tempo de Munhungo. Crónicas* (Luanda: Nova Editorial Angolana, 1968), pp. 83–85.
[11] J. B. Tati-Loutard, "La Virginité" in *Chroniques Congolaises* (Paris: Oswald, 1974).
[12] Godfrey Kalimugogo, *Dare To Die* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972) p. 9.
[13] Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: André Deutsch, 1965), p. 164.
[14] Title of a short story in J. B. Tati-Loutard, op. cit.
[15] Ahmadou Kourouma, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (Montréal: Presses Universitaires, 1968), p. 23.

caught between conflicting demands and codes, it is an incubus which sucks him dry and helps to bring about his downfall:

> Obi was finding it more and more impossible to live on what was left of his forty-seven pounds ten after he had paid twenty to the Umuofia Progressive Union and sent ten to his parents.[16]

No wonder then that some city-dwellers quickly break away from time-honoured customs and don a cast-iron coat of selfishness. In his novel *No Easy Task* (1966) the Malawian writer Aubrey Kachingwe introduces the character of the old war veteran and night watchman Njoka Maki in the imaginary capital city of Kawacha, who has to continue working in his old days but takes the matter philosophically:

> I have many children, some of them important men with good jobs, but few remember I am their father. I don't want to bother them begging them to help me. I have had my time of happiness and it is gone. This is their time. I am happy it is so.[17]

Another rejected father reacts differently. Pa Bulamo in Frank Aigk-Imoukhuede's radio play, *The Family Tree* (Radio Nigeria, January 1978), when denied hospitality by his son whom he came to visit in the city, prophesies that the family tree is doomed to perish: "A tree poisoned to its roots will not last." Moving over to Senegal we find an aggrieved brother coming up against a similar breakdown in traditional norms. In Abdou Anta Ka's short story "La Terrasse," a westernized urban life-style in the figures of Maître Sarr, the successful Dakar lawyer, and his French wife Martine on the one hand, and tradition, represented by Sarr's visiting brother Lamine on the other hand, after the predictable clash merely arrive at an uneasy truce.[18] In figures like the splendidly drawn Gorgui Maïssa, Abdou Anta Ka's socialist countryman Sembène Ousmane pillories the perversions of what at first sight looks like an exercise in primitive socialism but is in fact parasitism pure and simple, a fungus gangrening obsolete social structures which have been cracking up all along under the strains of underdevelopment and postcolonial exploitation.[19] In South Africa with its radical urbanization and its sharp division between tribal reserves (more recently "Bantustans") on the one hand and urban ghettoes on the other, there exists an almost total rift between past and present, although the official policy of the ruling class nowadays is to preserve ethnic identities with a view to setting them against each other. In Peter Abrahams' novel *Mine Boy* (1946) the structures of ethnic solidarity are depicted as being well-nigh defunct, but on the other hand there are nascent signs or inter-ethnic sympathy and a new common purpose in the inhabitants of Malay Camp, Johannesburg. In this city the charismatic

[16] Chinua Achebe, op. cit., p. 88.
[17] Aubrey Kachingwe, *No Easy Task* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1966), p. 112.
[18] Abdou Anta Ka, "La Terrasse" in *Mal* (Dakar/Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975), pp. 23–30.
[19] Sembène Ousmane, "Le Mandat," in *Vehi-Ciosane* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966), pp. 139 seq.

Skokiaan Queen, Leah, describes her alienation to the newcomer from the tribal hinterland, Xuma, in the following terms:

> I come from my people, but I am no longer of my people. It is so in the city and I have been here many years. And the city makes you strange to the ways of your people, you see?[20]

Some of those coming to the city use it only as a stepping-stone to greater opportunities overseas. To young Zito in Geraldo Bessa Victor's short story "O Camboio e o navio" (The Train and the Boat), who runs away from his native Cabiri to take the train to Luanda, his time as a houseboy in the capital is but the preparation for his voyage to "Puto" (Portugal), the land of his dreams.[21] While the majority acquiesce, finding city life on balance preferable to farming in the bush, some do return to their place of origin, either as a desperate last resort, like the young delinquents Maina and Meja escaping, albeit temporarily, from the urban hell which is Nairobi in Meja Mwangi's novel *Kill Me Quick* (1973), or in a Rousseauist quest for nature. The prototype of this yearning in African literature may well be Hipólito Raposo's "Branco Moleque" (1926), a white Portuguese from the Azores who becomes a chieftain in the Angolan hinterland, assisted by his faithful black wife.[22] Maïmouna, the heroine of Abdoulaye Sadji's novel of the same title (1958), finds her way back to the soothing rhythm of village life after a brief, disastrous career in Dakar. So does Mokwugo Okoye's Chidi, who is "fed up with city life," "the shady crimes and white-washed virtues of the noisy city" and the repugnant stench of the Lagos boarding-houses.[23] But a true pioneering spirit and a rare sense of mission in returning to the soil can be found in the title hero of a film, Ola Balogun's *Amadi* (c. 1973): Amadi resolutely turns his back on the slums of Lagos to found a farming cooperative in the Igbo heartland in Eastern Nigeria.

But those who depart are few, and those who arrive are many. They come from villages beset by drought and famine, from villages threatened by the tax-collectors, as here in Kenya:

> The white man has introduced what he calls poll tax, which means that every young man must pay a sum of money to what is called *Gavumenti* and this money will not go out of its way to find you sitting in your sacred village.[24]

Not always is economic necessity the sole motive prompting the prospective migrant. For many the city holds out prestige, as for the man in Onyeama's novel of black magic, who runs to his doom when he leaves the protection of the village. But he is duly warned by a mysterious character named Chuka, who tries to save him and his wife:

[20] Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (1946) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 23.
[21] In Geraldo Bessa Victor, op. cit., pp. 63–71.
[22] In Amândio César, *Contos Portugueses do Ultramars* vol. 1, (Lisbon: Portucalense Editora, 1969), pp. 585–600.
[23] Mukwugo Okoye, "The Son of Spirits" in *Sketches in the Sun* (Enugu: Nwamife Publishers Limited, 1975), pp. 20–21.
[24] Godfrey Kalimugogo, "The Vanished Village," op. cit., p. 170.

> Most people who come to the city come with a genuine hope for the future, for such are their circumstances that the city offers them more opportunities than at home. But with you, Emmanuel, there is nothing you need from the city that you do not already have. You were a successful palm-wine tapper in Ngwo, and you had a farm and live-stock. You could engage in profitable business at the local markets, but instead you wish to waste your time here in Lagos in order to impress people at home that you are in the big city.[25]

The lure of the city, its sheer erotic pull, is beautifully suggested by Cyprian Ekwensi in a quiet story devoid of his frequent sensationalism, "A Stranger from Lagos."[26]

The arrival in the city is like some weird initiation. "He would never forget his initial experience in the big town": this is said about the nameless protagonist of Kalimugogo's rather crude short story, "Dare to Die". Nobody cares for the newcomer to the city, presumably Nairobi. Only two taxi drivers show concern. They nearly come to blows over him but then the novice realizes that they "really wanted his money, not his person". The awesome impersonality of the city, the noise and commotion cause him to feel "his identity diminish."[27] Equally awed is the gullible villager arriving in Kampala in Eneriko Seruma's short story "The Town", but fortunately he has his village to run back to at the first sign of danger.[28]

Xuma's initiation into the life of Johannesburg in *Mine Boy* takes place in two stages. First, when arriving in the city late at night, he meets the inhabitants of Malay Camp, black or "coloured", people like him, and yet totally different from him:

> A strange group of people, these, he thought, Nothing tied them down. They seemed to believe in nothing. (p. 18)

The next day, the very first time of venturing out to look for a job in the mines, Xuma runs into the representatives of the Law, the black Quislings of the white law. This is his initiation into the ritual of intimidating violence that governs the life of every man and woman born with a dark skin. In his naive indignation unhampered by fear or stunted responses Xuma strikes back at a policeman and even gets away with it. The optimistic tone of the novel, despite the humiliations to come and Xuma's tantalizing search for a new awareness, is set.

The young Kenyan author Meja Mwangi has no such optimism at his command. Especially in his novel *Kill Me Quick* (1973) he draws a picture of unrelieved gloom of Nairobi life. The city is an insidious trap in which young innocents from the countryside are invariably caught and turned into delinquents:

> Meja looked this way and that and tried to hide his confusion. He had been in the city for three days and he had not liked anything about it. The busy indifferent people, the multitude of vehicles and the huge buildings had all filled him with fear. To him it all seemed like a new strange world way out of the universe where every

[25] Dillibe Onyeama, op. cit., p. 60.
[26] Cyprian Ekwensi, *Lokotown and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1966), pp. 45–61.
[27] Godfrey Kalimugogo, op. cit., pp. 20, 23, 26.
[28] Eneriko Seruma, "The Town in *The Heart Seller* (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971), pp. 14–18.

human being was a rival, every car a charging beast and every building a mysterious castle. The idea of staying in this heartless place was terrifying.[29]

Meja is so thoroughly traumatized by his archetypal encounter with the city that even as a seasoned delinquent, after having tried in vain to go back to the village, he shudders to return to Nairobi:

> He was attacked by the same kind of terror that assailed him the first time he came, the same kind of fear, fear of the tall buildings, the main streets and the people that dwelt in them. (p. 101)

In analysing the dichotomy of *colonisateur* and *colonisé* Fanon has laid bare the ideology underlying urban planning under colonialism:

> The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity.... No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The settler's town is a strangely built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly-lit town, the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage-cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about.
>
> The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where and how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs.[30]

By and large this description can be applied to the African city, although some modifications have to be made.

"The town *belonging* to the colonized people" would be inadequate to describe the South African situation since the question of any urban property "belonging" to non-whites does not arise under existing laws. Moreover, only in South Africa would the word "reservation", "reserve," in a sense germane to that of "game-reserve," be used in connection with "natives". In other places next to nothing is expressly reserved for the "natives"; in West Africa, for example, "reservations" are meant for the upper classes only: white administrators and businessmen in the colonial era, the black bourgeoisie after independence. Finally, the alleged "superfluousness" of the native sector in Fanon's scheme would seem to be a bit far-fetched: take away the exploited masses and the exploiter becomes expendable.

But *mutatis mutandis* the manichean world evoked by Fanon is the one we find in the descriptions of colonial conurbations by African novelists before independence. The

[29] Meja Mwangi, *Kill Me Quick* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), p. 3.
[30] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 30.

towns of Ferdinand Oyono's, of Sembène Ousmane's novels are all there, and so are Eza Boto's Tanga in *Ville cruelle* (1953), Alioum Fantouré's Porte-Océane in *Le Cercle des Tropiques* (1972) and Benjamin Matip's "deux mondes juxtaposés et qui se regardent comme à travers des lorgnons."[31]

The hybrid character, or lack of character, of a colonial city in Portuguese Africa is stressed by Daniel Severino:

> The older houses are airy, ugly and unhygienic, the modern ones clean, hot and horrible. The city, which is neither oriental nor African, nor even European, hesitates in adopting a style and thus has ended up choosing none. It's something ill-defined, hybrid.

The population of this city, Lourenço Marques, is cosmopolitan to a fault. Residential segregation is not emphasized but the blacks clearly occupy the lowest economic positions:

> Among the population you find all kinds: Indians, Englishmen, Greeks, Chinese, Comoreans, Belgians, French, and even Portuguese and Blacks .... There are also some Spanish ladies who got in through the doors of the gambling casinos and an old Albanian beer-brewer, but that one died in 1949. The natives form the great majority and serve their white, red and yellow guests submissively and disinterestedly.... The Indian traders supply the Blacks with wrappers worth fifty Escudos in exchange for cows worth five-hundred, or they sell them at three Escudos per kilo the same ground-nuts that they bought from them for eighty cents.

And Severino adds sarcastically that apart from 91.5% of the population everybody lives in relative abundance and comfort.[32]

To be fair to the Portuguese colonial administration, it has to be said that the 91.5% referred to by Severino presumably are not all black. In Mozambique to a not inconsiderable extent, and even more so in the urban centres of Angola, particularly Luanda, whites and blacks in the *musseques* (slums) lived in common misery and often grew up with a common consciousness informed by the factor of class rather than of colour. Angola's foremost urban writer, Luandino Vieira (pseudonym of José Graça) is a white product of the Luandan *musseque* of Braga (which, through an urban face lift, later became the Bairro do Café) and can only be understood as such. The camaraderie of white and black is not, however, the exclusive preserve of left-wing writers like Vieira. Even Reis Ventura, a man who defended Portuguese supremacy to the last ditch, with a rabid and unrelenting counter-insurgency mentality, could not afford to be anti-black in the Portuguese colonial context. In his short story "O velho Bernardo" he shows a gentle Uncle Tom praying to the Virgin at Fatima to redeem his erring sons who are fighting on the "terrorist" side. In "Gente de Subúrbio" black and white unite and fight the obtuseness of Luanda's bureaucrats, who cannot keep up with the dynamism of

[31] Benjamin Matip, *Afrique, nous t'ignorons* (Paris: Ed. Renée Lacoste, 1956), pp. 12–13.
[32] Daniel Severino, *O amor e uma cabana*, (Lisbon: Ed Lux, n. d. [1962]), anthologized in Amândio César, *Literatura ultramarina. Os prosadores* (Lisbon: Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, 1972), pp. 119–121.

suburban development and send in bull-dozers to destroy what the people have built.[33] The Portuguese authorities were not altogether happy about the kind of comradeship developing between the poor of all races. Plans were made from time to time to improve living conditions, particularly for whites, so as to restore their injured dignity:

> The problem of housing is at the root of the problem of colonization. This self-evident truth has however been disregarded with serious consequences. The damage already done seems beyond repair and assumes scandalous proportions if we consider that there are new European families living in garages, boys' quarters or even Negro huts. On balance it can be asserted that ongoing construction work is too little, too dear, and badly executed.[34]

The housing situation in Portuguese-speaking Africa, even in the colonial days, was a far cry from what obtained in South Africa. Here common neighbourhood initiatives would be unthinkable because apartheid has been entrenched in this as in other sectors for a long time. There can be no compromise. Again and again in the past the so-called black spots—African townships marked for destruction—were wiped out: "When a black township stands where a white suburb wants to stand, the black one must go."[35] The most traumatizing case was that of sprawling, brawling, vibrant Sophiatown, which is commemorated by the gifted journalist and short-story writer Can Themba in "Requiem for Sophiatown."[36]

Only the most naive would expect any better deal for the non-white element from a regime committed to a policy of "separate development". It is far more depressing to hear that similar conditions, taking a slightly different guise exist in independent African countries. The Fanonian scheme of two nations within a nation seems to have survived with remarkable resilience from the colonial into the post-colonial era, occasionally also referred to as "neo-colonial". The inimitable Fama in *Les Soleils des Indépendances* blames the dichotomy between the gloom of the capital's "quartier nègre" and the glory of its "ville blanche" on the degeneracy of the blacks who have betrayed their old ways:

> Damnation, bâtardise! Les ponts, les routes de là-bas tous bâtis par des doigts nègres, étaient habités et appartenaient à des Toubabs. Les Indépendances n'y pouvaient rien! Partout, sous tous les soleils, sur tous les sols, les Noirs tiennent les pattes; Les Blancs découpent et bouffent la viande et le gras. N'était-ce pas la

[33] Reis Ventura, "Gente de subúrbio" and "O Velho Bernardo" in: *Cidade e muceque* (Braga: Editora Pax, 1970) pp. 67–88, 129–146. Ventura's counter-insurgency mentality is most splendidly demonstrated in the short story "Carabina de precisão" (Sharpshooter's Rifle), op. cit., pp. 159–168.

[34] Manuel Pimentel Pereira dos Santos and Francisco de Assis, "Urbanismo em Moçambique" in: *Sociedade de Estudos da Colónia de Moçambique. Teses apresentados ao 1° Congresso realizado de 8 a 13 septembro de 1947, 1° volume* (Lourenço Marques: Tip. Minerva Central, s.d.), No. 28, p. 5. See also José de Castro Arines, "Urbanismo en África negra" (in Spanish), Interview with the 3rd programme of Radio Nacional de España, Madrid, 30/5/61, printed in *Boletim Geral de Ultramar*, 37 (1961) Nos 434–433, pp. 88 seq.

[35] Ernest Cole, *House of Bondage* (New York: A Ridge Press Book, Random House, 1967), pp. 52–53.

[36] Can Themba, "Requiem for Sophiatown" in *The Will to Die*, sel. Donald Stuart and Roy Holland (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), pp. 102–108.

damnation que d'ahaner dans l'ombre pour les autres, creuser comme un pangolin géant des terriers pour les autres? (pp. 19–20).

The young Kenyan coming to Nairobi in Godfrey Kalimugogo's short story "Dare to Die" is utterly bewildered when asking for directions and being told to take streets with names such as King's Road, Prince Charles Road, Prince Philip Drive, Queen's Drive, Burton Avenue, etc.:

> He had for five or so years known that his country was independent. He had also learnt at school that Queen Elizabeth II was the Queen of England, that Prince Philip was her husband, and Prince Charles their son. Was he then to believe that in this big town of his country roads were named after the rulers of Britain? Of course, he could see tall big buildings, wide straight roads and numerous cars. But he was sure he had come to this town by bus and not by aeroplane. So he could not possibly be in London.[37]

On the one hand, there are towering sky-scrapers while on the other hand, the destitutes in Kenya's shantytown described by Meja Mwangi vegetate in contraptions built of "paper, tin and mud". Back in West Africa, Europeans and the new Nigerian élite in the capital live remote from the sweaty crowd in the pleasurable protective custody of Ikoyi, their properties safeguarded from plebeian interference by a sepulchral segregation. What to the common man is a dreamland, "a romantic place" (Ekwensi), is satirized by Nigeria's two greatest writers in almost identical accents. Soyinka's journalist Sagoe marching in a funeral procession, crosses a bridge leading to Ikoyi cemetery,

> a near symbolic bridge because of its situation, separating the living from the dead. And among the dead Sagoe included the suburban settlements of Ikoyi where both the white remnants and the new black oyinbos lived in colonial vacuity.[38]

And Chinua Achebe:

> Going from the Lagos mainland to Ikoyi on a Saturday night was like going from a bazaar to a funeral. And the vast Lagos cemetery which separated the two places helped to deepen this feeling. For all its luxurious bungalows and flats and its extensive greenery, Ikoyi was like a graveyard. It had no corporate life—at any rate for those Africans who lived there .... Obi Okonkwo, for example lived there, and as he drove from Lagos to his flat he was struck again by the two cities in one. It always reminded him of twin kernels separated by a twin wall in a palm-nut shell. Sometimes one kernel was shiny-black and alive, the other powdery-white and dead.[39]

The new ruling class—Soyinka's black Oyinbos, i.e. black Europeans—live a life of conspicuous consumption, without, however, developing an authentic touch and

[37] Godfrey Kalimugogo, "Dare to Die," op. cit., p. 28.
[38] Wole Soyinka, op. cit., p. 111.
[39] Chinua Achebe, op. cit., p. 18.

sureness of taste. Soyinka is obsessed with the sickening lack of style among the élite in interior decoration, furniture and even the paraphernalia of death, eagerly copied by the man in the street:

> The jutting coffin, a rude, vulgar work ... it was crudely gilt in the cheapest tinsel and shone with wax-polish of a rabid red. It looked like the perfect tongue of a cola-nut addict.... Not that it matters much to the dead man, but need you make death quite so ignoble![40]

The same lack of an authentic culture characterizes the *nouveaux riches* in Sembène Ousmane's Dakar. Everything is imported: fashions, *romans-photo* for one's reading pleasure, plane-loads of fresh meat: "des côtes de veau de France. Les bouchers indigènes ne savent pas découper les animaux." Even the water of Africa is not good enough:

> — Donne-moi à boire! J'ai très soif, dit El Hadji pour faire diversion.
> — Il n'y a pas d'Evian dans la maison. (El Hadji ne buvait que de l'eau d'Evian). Veux-tu l'eau du robinet? demanda Oumi N'Doye, moqueuse, avec un air de défi qui plissait les commissures de ses lèvres.
>
> El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye quitta la pièce. Dehors, il appela le chauffeur, Modu.
> — Patron?
> — Apporte-moi l'Evian.[41]

The "Been-to-cult", the "cargo cult" of bringing back expensive gadgets from Europe, the fake metropolitan accent—all these features make the national bourgeoisie stand out from the rest. The socialist new class, here in Nkrumah's Ghana, is however not exempted from the general condemnation:

> The man, when he shook hands, was again amazed at the flabby softness of the hand. Ideological hands, the hands of revolutionaries leading their people into bold sacrifice, should these hands not have become even tougher than they were when their owner was hauling loads along the wharf? And yet these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who have sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade.[42]

Occasionally the urban bourgeoisie, or rather individual members of it, are jolted into an awareness of their emptiness and parasitical status, like Ousmane Sembène's El Hadji in *Xala,* when he addresses the Chamber of Commerce which is about to expel him as he faces bankruptcy, of Pape, the General Manager of the Senegalese authority for skins and hides, who realizes the vile comprador function which makes him "le nègre de service", and resigns from the company.[43]

The majority of them, however, anxiously close their minds to any twinge of self-criticism and keep on deceiving themselves and others. They form a self-contained

[40] Wole Soyinka, loc. cit.
[41] Sembène Ousmane, *Xala* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973) pp. 87–88.
[42] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 153–154.
[43] Abdou Anta Ka, "Le nègre de service", op. cit., pp. 17–21.

interest group, accumulating the status symbols in vogue and gauging each other's importance by the cubic capacity of their Mercedes-Benz. The Nigerian writer Nkem Nwankwo has published a novel dealing with this syndrome.[44] Ngugi wa Thiong'o feels that the urban élite has severed the roots linking it to the people and now constitutes a new tribe thriving on the exploitation of the weak. This new tribe takes its name from the coveted vehicle: the Wabenzi Tribesmen.[45]

A man's means of locomotion quite definitely distinguishes the proletarian from the black bourgeoisie. This is poignantly demonstrated in Meja Mwangi's novel *Going Down River Road* (1976), although, like Nkem Nwankwo's, this novel deals with low life in the city. Ben, the hero of *Going Down River Road,* a *déclassé* former lieutenant in the Kenyan Army, now one in the anonymous crowd of construction workers spawned by the building boom and epitomized in the metaphorical phrase, "the horny-toed barefoot son of the rusty concrete mixer"—this Ben Wachira plods to work in the morning:

> Ben took a short cut that led him round to the large patch of grassy wasteland that lay between Eastleigh and Kariakor. Most of the paths criss-crossing the dewy grassland were scattered with human excrement. One of those mounds of shit was still steaming in the middle of the path.... Ben stepped over it and followed the general exodus towards the city centre. The whole field was swarming with path-finders walking to their work stations. The cold wet wind that blew across it carried, in the same medium with the smell of shit and urine, the occasional murmur, the rare expression of misery, uncertainty, and resignation. They walked slowly, quietly, their slow tortured boots kneading the mud and shit on the path. Every now and then one of them stopped to add hot urine to the dough. They then resumed their march, the endless routine trudge, the tramp of the damned at the Persian Wheel .... The city streets were bare of traffic.
>
> The drivers of the fast cars were still in bed nestling between the sweaty thighs of their big women.[46]

Thus is the fate of the common man depicted in numerous works of fiction. Not all descriptions are of the same brutal provocativeness. But a quiet note of hidden protest —hidden perhaps because of colonial censorship—can be just as telling, as in a piece by Arnaldo Santos which has the simplicity and tongue-in-cheek naïveté of Brecht's *Geschichten.* It is entitled "Bairro operário não tem luz" (There's no light in the workers' district). A father is going for a walk at night with his restless and inquisitive little son, who asks him "Why hasn't the workers' district got any electric light?" The father's answer that this is the case with all mud-huts does not satisfy the child because he observes that the street lanterns one finds downtown, in the *cidade baixa,* are also missing in the workers' district. The father then ruminates about what would happen if the moon descended, bursting into neon brightness and making the ghostly kerosene lamps redundant. Everybody would run helter-skelter to hide his misery. The spirits of the night and of superstition would scatter. The new brightness would make the worker aware of his

[44] Nkem Nwankwo, *My Mercedes Is Bigger Than Yours* (London: André Deutsch, 1975).

[45] The singular of Wabenzi is Mubenzi. See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Mubenzi Tribesman" in: *Secret Lives and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975) pp. 138–144.

[46] Meja Mwangi: *Going Down River Road* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976) pp. 5–6.

own degradation through squalor, he would start flexing his muscles and the wrath accumulated in him in the darkness of the past would finally erupt. But since this reverie is far too subversive, the father only finds the lame reply, "The district hasn't got any light because it's the workers' district."[47]

Urban society at all levels, although more so in the lower reaches, is exposed to certain pressures which other sections of the national community are frequently exempt from, or which they do not feel with the same intensity. The dance around the golden calf—money and material well being—reaches its most frenetic pitch in the city, and few are the symptoms of a disordered state of society which cannot be adduced to it.

Money, or the lack of it, or the greed for more, leads to the downfall of political regimes in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and Alioum Fantouré's *Le Cercle des Tropiques* (1972); it equally leads to the downfall of individuals, as in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* (1960) and Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* (1973).

Among the symptoms or alarm signals indicating cracks in the social edifice we shall single out drug addiction and alcoholism, dereliction and begging, prostitution, crime, ritualized violence, filth and corruption. All of them are only too richly documented and dramatized in African urban writing.

Alcoholism is more manifest in anglophone and francophone than in lusophone writing. The title of Mário António's *Farra no fim de semana* (1965)—this could be freely translated as "The swinging weekend," and *"um bom farrista"* as "a swinger" —is utterly misleading in this respect, although it has to be admitted that the protagonist imbibes a whisky or two at a private party. In nearby South Africa, despite the government ban on native brewing or distilling, "Kaffir beer" flows freely in the locations and a flowering sub-culture has evolved around the "Shebeen Queens" and their liquid product. People drink themselves into a stupor. Daddy, the pathetic old man in *Mine Boy*, once a proud leader of his race and now a human wreck, gets fatally knocked down by a car while in his usual state of intoxication. Xuma's friend Johannes turns into a roaring lion called J. P. Williamson the moment he is drunk, but becomes meek, weak and humble Johannes, obsequious to his white bosses in the mine, as soon as he has sobered up. Like Daddy, he can only face life through a dense fog of drunkenness. The urban variety of "Kaffir beer" is brewed to stupefy, unlike the rural type, which Xuma tastes with pleasure during a country outing:

> And again there had been the flow of beer. And life was good for the beer was the beer of the farms and not the poison of the city that was only to make you drunk and not to make you happy (p. 139).

But there is worse in South African slums than "Kaffir Beer". Can Themba in a reportage says, "There is a shebeen yard where the people have gone mysteriously mad" and he warns his readers to beware of a brew called Barberton made of bread, yeast and sugar designed to give a "quick kick" which sometimes deteriorates into "kicking the

[47] Arnaldo Santos, "Bairro operário não tem luz", op. cit., pp. 9–12.

bucket."[48] The title story of his posthumous collection, *The Will to Die*, is the analysis of an acute case of alcoholism brought about by frustration.

Moving to Meja Mwangi's Nairobi we find a place frequented by the down-and-out called "Karara Centre" *(Going Down River Road)*. This is not a cultural club as one might surmise, but a place where Karara flows, something vaguely akin to Themba's Barberton, and almost as deadly. Although the vagabonds in Meja Mwangi's other novel, *Kill Me Quick*, prefer *bhang* (Indian hemp, *dagga* in South Africa) to alcohol, the title of the novel appears to be an allusion to another type of drink indulged in by East Africans, which Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls KMK. This corresponds to OHMS in Ekwensi's Lagos, here not signifying ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE but OUR HOME-MADE STUFF, alias illicit gin, *ogogoro, kai-kai* or *akpeteshie*, the latter being the Ghanaian variety. But the worst case of alcoholism in African fiction seems to be that of the narrator-protagonist in Abdou Anta Ka's short story "La Mal-Aimée", whose life—"sa vie mal-aimée"—has become his executioner. This individualist in the lonely crowd, who has almost metaphysical hankering for self-destruction, is best characterized by a little dialogue early in the morning:

> — Où allez-vous?
> — Boire. Comme il aurait dit "au bureau."[49]

Dereliction and begging are found evenly distributed in African fiction without any country holding pride of place. The despised Sahelian beggars—victims of the great 1973 drought, who have found a life of soliciting alms in the rich cities of the coastal countries more attractive than scraping a living back home—although a constant touchstone for angry journalists, have not yet found their way into literature. But we have already met their noble prototype, the *pique-assiette* Fama, and in his wake we find a *cour des miracles* of derelicts, as here in the mosque of the Dioulas in Abidjan:

> Les bas-côtés grouillaient de mendiants, estropiés, aveugles que la famine avait chassés de la brousse. Des mains tremblantes se tendaient mais les chants nasillards, les moignons, les yeux puants, les oreilles et nez coupés, sans parler des odeurs particulières, refroidissaient le cœur de Fama (*Les soleils*, p. 24).

The horror of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch seems to emanate from another scene in the novel, the attack of the beggars and destitutes on their benefactress Salimata, Fama's wife, in the market of the city on the lagoon, when she has run out of food (*Les Soleils*, pp. 54–55).

In Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* the beggar installed near El Hadji's store is a contrapuntal memento of misery in the face of affluence. At the end it is revealed that it was he who put the curse of impotence on El Hadji for his anti-social acts. The invasion of El Hadji's villa by an army of lepers and cripples under the beggar's command, a scene reminiscent of a *danse macabre*, is the metaphorical culmination point of the novel, and

[48] Can Themba, "Boozers Beware of Barberton!" op. cit., pp. 71–73.
[49] Abdou Anta Ka, "La Mal-Aimée," op. cit., p. 5.

is translated into a most effective and overwhelming sequence of images in Sembène Ousmane's film version. The diseased ugliness of the destitutes comes to symbolize a moral canker-worm in the society which derives, ultimately, from the acts of people like El Hadji:

> Debout sur le canapé, le lépreux déclara de son ton nasillard:
> — Je suis un ladre. Je le suis pour moi. Moi, tout seul, mais toi, tu es une maladie infectieuse pour nous tous. Le germe de la lèpre collective (pl. 167).

The symbolic power of destitution and physical deformation such as we find in francophone fiction—in addition to Sembène Ousmane and Kourouma, Malick Fall's *La Plaie* (1967) comes to mind—is hardly equalled in English and Portuguese writings, although in the former the figure of the madman is endowed with a similar symbolic impact. Still, for Chinua Achebe the beggar forms part not only of the topography but also of the moral and symbolic portrait of the city. Bori,—here described by Odili, the youthful challenger of a corrupt regime epitomized in a semi-illiterate Minister of Culture, Chief Nanga, the "Man of the people,"—is a thinly disguised Lagos:

> As dawn came my head began to clear a little and I saw Bori stirring. I met a night-soil man carrying his bucket of ordure on top of a battered felt hat drawn down to hood his upper face while his nose and mouth were masked with a piece of black cloth like a gangster, I saw beggars sleeping under the eaves of luxurious department stores and a lunatic sitting wide awake by the basket of garbage he called his possession.[50]

Beside these representations approaching symbolism the destitutes we find in Portuguese-African literature, as well as in East and South African fiction in English are mostly straightforward products of realism, e.g. the old beggar Januário in Geraldo Bessa Victor's "O pecúlio" (The Nest-Egg), who dies when he is robbed of his savings by his grand-daughter Mariana.[51] In one of Arnaldo Santos' *Crónicas* the antics of a madwoman are interpreted as justified claims on an unjust society.[52]

Prostitution is an all-pervading phenomenon in the westernized urban societies of Africa but only comparatively few writers deal with the economic root-causes that make it an adjunct of destitution. One such writer is Luandino Vieira who, in his first volume of short stories, draws the picture of Marcelina, a mulatto woman in Sambizanga, the most famous slum in Luanda, "squandering herself in a life without any prospects, without open windows."[53] The narrator, who watches Marcelina dancing and laughing with a gayness that rings false, clearly sees her as representative of a group of young women drifting into prostitution to get more out of life, although they hold jobs as seamstresses or factory workers. Another writer who blames the social system, and more

[50] Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (London: Heinemann Educational 1966), p. 79.
[51] Geraldo Bessa Victor, "O pecúlio", op. cit., pp. 35–43.
[52] Arnaldo Santos, "Os calundus de Joana", op. cit., p. 28.
[53] Luandino Vieira, "Marcelina" in *A cidade e a infância* (Lisbon: Edição de Casa dos Estudantes do Império, 1960), pp. 49–52.

specifically South Africa's absurd Immorality Act, for driving a young woman into prostitution is Alex La Guma in his moving short story, "Slipper Satin;"[54] and the shock caused to a rural family, here represented by a sensitive brother who discovers that his sister has become a prostitute in the big city, is masterfully rendered by Ama Ata Aidoo ("In the Cutting of a Drink").[55]

Frequently the prostitute is glamourized, as in Cyprian Ekwensi's novel *Jagua Nana* (1961), where the heroine's life revolves around the "Tropicana Bar" in Lagos, a veritable stock exchange of lust. The prototype of this heroine can be found in Ekwensi's short stories, published later although probably written earlier than the novel, in his collection *Lokotown and Other Stories* (1966). While the highly popular Jagua, like Konni in "Lokotown", is a mature woman, the hallmark of harlotry in Mwangi's Nairobi is youth and beauty:

> It was heartbreaking to see all these pretty harlots while one could hardly lay one's hands on a pretty, decent woman. (*Going Down River Road,* p. 17).

The protagonist, Ben Wachira, then takes up a liaison with Wini, an unwedded mother ("she was one hell of a pretty whore") and becomes a dedicated foster-father to her son, but is duly deserted by her in the end.

Apart from Wole Soyinka's mythical man-eaters (Simi in *The Interpreters* and Segi in *Kongi's Harvest*), the prostitute in African literature by and large is rather superficially drawn, and little attempt is made to analyse the factors that produced her. One elemental feature, however, that distinguishes the fictional African prostitute from those in Western countries is her desire to bear children, evident even in the rather callous, middle-aged Jagua Nana.

Compared with the prostitute, the typology of the criminal is more variegated and a more thorough attempt is made to understand him, possibly because the criminals depicted are mostly men, as are the overwhelming majority of writers. However, apart from little thumb nail sketches like that of Dennis in *Jagua Nana* (where, as often happens, crime and prostitution are linked) and Noah in *The Interpreters* who from petty thief turns *aladura,* apostle washing sinners' feet), as well as an abundance of brief episodes depicting political murders (Freddie and Uncle Taiwo in *Jagua Nana,* Max in *A Man of the People*) there are few noteworthy images of criminals in African urban literature—leaving aside perpetrators of *crimes passionels*—until we turn to East and South Africa. With all the crude rhetoric at his command, Godfrey Kalimugogo, in *Dare To Die,* impresses upon us the equation urbanization = criminalization, given the high hopes for white-collar jobs with which young school leavers come to the city, only to run into a solid barrier inscribed HAKUNA KAZI—No Vacancy. Meja and Maina, the two juvenile characters in Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* encounter the same problem. They have the choice between joining up with "thieves and robbers" or living in, and

[54] Alex La Guma "Slipper Satin," in *Quartet. New Voices from South Africa,* ed. Richard Rive (London: Heinemann Educational, 1965), pp. 67–73.

[55] Ama Ata Aidoo, "In the Cutting of a Drink," in *No Sweetness Here* (London: Longmans, 1970), pp. 30–37. I have been unable to secure a copy of Okello Oculi's novel, *Prostitute* (Nairobi: EAPH, 1968).

feeding from, the dustbins in Nairobi's backstreets, like some truncated characters in Samuel Beckett. As it is, they first recoil from crime but then graduate from the backstreets when Maina meets "Razor", the gang-leader. Meja later catches up with his friend and becomes the notorious "Barracuda." Both meet in cell 9999 of Nairobi prison, "the den of the most crooked ruffians in the country" (p. 117). In Mwangi's other novel the situation obtaining in Nairobi is aptly summed up in the statement: "Organized crime is on the up and up" (*Going Down River Road,* p. 169). Here as in many other African cities an industry of fear provides burglar-proofing, alarm systems and night-guards to the wealthy, all of which are of comparatively little avail because the covetousness of the battered *lumpenproletariat* grows at an even quicker pace.

In this respect the South African situation is the one most highly charged with criminal violence. Alex La Guma dissects the criminal mind in his novella, *A Walk in the Night* (1962), and in numerous short stories from prison life, in which the prison is a refracted image of South African society at large. In one of these, "Blankets", the gangster Choker is being taken to hospital in an ambulance, preserving amidst the throbbing pain the experienced knifer's professional pride. Through a series of flash-backs touched off by the rough feel of the blanket the reader is admitted into the secret recesses of Choker's mind and some understanding, although it remains short of sympathy, dawns in him. For La Guma is completely unemotional and unsentimental, and the story ends with the words:

> Choker felt the vibrations of the ambulance through his body as it sped on its way. His murderous fingers touched the folded edge of the bedding. The sheet around him was white as cocaine, and the blanket was thin and new and warm. He lay still, listening to the siren.[56]

In *A Walk in the Night,* Michael Adonis who kills an old white derelict more by accident than by design, accepts responsibility for his act in an almost Wrightian gesture of defiance. The book's environmental perspective of utter hopelessness is reminiscent of Wright's *Native Son.* In a few masterful strokes La Guma reveals the tortured anatomy of the South African slum.

The same nexus between slum environment and delinquency can be observed in Can Themba's sketches, reports and short stories, like "Kwashiorkor" and "The Urchin". In "The Urchin", ten-year old miniature ruffians gain experience in the art of pilfering and march like soldier-ants into small-scale gang battles in preparation for a life of delinquency:

> They swaggered along Victoria Road, filling it from pavement to pavement as if they were a posse. Silent. Full of purpose. Deliberately grim. Boys and girls scampered for cover. Grownups stepped discreetly out of their way. Only the bigger tsotsis watched them with pride, and shouted encouragements like, *'Da men who rule da town! Tomorrow's outees'*[57]

[56] Alex La Guma, "Blankets," *Black Orpheus,* No. 15 (August 1964), 58.
[57] Can Themba, "The Urchin" op. cit., p. 31.

The *tsotsi,* South Africa's asphalt cowboy using the switch-blade instead of the gun, is only one step from the full-time gangster. According to Lewis Nkosi, the gangster acts out the fantasies of revenge of the silent black majority against the apartheid establishment: "It is not by accident that in South Africa the Black middle class, including intellectuals and artists, accord the criminal who murders and robs white people the status of a hero."[58] And in his obituary for the prematurely deceased Can Themba, writer of the city and for the city, Nkosi pays homage to him declaring:

> He lent to his thoughts the same vivid imagery, sharp staccato rhythm of the township language of the urban *tsotsi,* because he himself was the supreme intellectual *tsotsi* of them all.

In addition to crimes of violence fuelled by the lust for political or material gain we occasionally find a ritualized type of violence practised by governments in the form of public executions. In Lagos, where convicted men are privileged to face the guns in the saline breeze of the Atlantic, this kind of exercise is popularly known as the "Bar Beach Show". The agony of death becomes a spectacle for sensation-starved onlookers and the firing squad a new kind of national ballet. The Nigerian writer Nkem Nwankwo has caught the spirit of *panem et circenses* prevalent on such occasions in a short story which contains these critical comments:

> The three year civil war had almost killed good public entertainment.... The government saw that the people very much needed a diversion from the strains of peace.[59]

Although impressive, Nwankwo's story "The Scapegoat," which deals with the judicial murder by firing squad of an innocent man sandwiched between two thieves —the biblical allusion is obvious—is structurally somewhat disjointed. The Kenyan, Leonard Kibera, has perfect artistic control over his own tale[60] dealing with an identical topic—a crowd "dying to send a man to his death". When a little girl places flowers at the feet of the condemned man, the blood-thirstiness of the mob abates. Kibera's story thus contains that other element which the historian Johan Huizinga has pointed out in his unsurpassed analysis of the medieval mind:

> The cruel excitement and coarse compassion raised by an execution formed an important item in the spiritual food of the common people.[61]

Beside those crimes which find retribution through the report of guns and the sporting delights of mobs in ebullition, other shady activities in the urban milieu—in

[58] Lewis Nkosi, "Alex la Guma", in *The Transplanted Heart* (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1975) pp. 109–110.

[59] Nkem Nwankwo, "The Scapegoat," in *Okike,* No. 9 (December 1975), 10. A story with a similar topic, Anele O. Ebizie's "Death at Dawn" had been published in *Okike,* No. 4 (December 1973), 37–46.

[60] Leonard Kibera, "It's a dog's share in our Kinshasa," in Leonard Kibera and Samuel Kahiga, *Potent Ash* (Nairobi: EAPH, [1967]), p. 17.

[61] J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 11.

trade and industry, in contract and job procurement, in government offices and schools —appear less dramatic, although they are likely to be far more pernicious. The wheeling and dealing of corruption is like a mildew on society and it is often castigated by African writers. Sagoe the journalist in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* finds out that he can only secure employment if he panders to the greed ot the great Sir Derinola, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the newspaper he is applying to. Achebe's Obi Okonkwo succumbs to the pressures of the city and from starry-eyed idealist sinks to the level of a bribe-taker. The atmosphere of greed and corruption is aptly conveyed by Soyinka's excremental Lagos imagery—"typhous as ever, unified in monochromatic brown" (p. 108). Ayi Kwei Armah sets the stage of moral rottenness in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by describing a signboard left over from the last clean-up campaign:

KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN
BY KEEPING OUR CITY CLEAN (p. 8)

But the area around the signboard is overflowing with garbage, and what begins in gargabe ends in the flatulence of fear when after the overthrow of the regime Koomson, the once powerful minister, has to flee through the dark recesses of a bucket latrine.

Have the strains and stresses of urban life reduced African man to a neurotic animal crouching between fear and desire? The physical odds against him are indeed terrifying as a soulless, mechanized civilization is thrust upon him, systematically killing all spontaneity and calling for programmed responses:

> His eyes roved indifferently over the polychromous surface of the new buildings. Without a thought. He had so got used to that vertical indifference of reinforced concrete that he had no words to express it. Monsters suspended by invisible forces with bullet-holes in their flanks. Not a semblance of life. A dumb show... When he entered the new buildings he would feel as in a cinema, in an atmosphere of lies so depressing that he might have been on another planet.[62]

But the same city, viewed here by Mário António in its supermodern centre with all its withering inorganic monstrosity, has also inspired the warmest expressions of partisanship by those coming from its bustling slums, as epitomized in the dedicatory inscription at the beginning of Luandino Vieira's first book:

PARA TI
LUANDA

[62] Mário António, "Um rapaz de pouca sorte" (1962) in Amândio César, *Antologia do conto ultramarino* (Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1972), p. 121. The theme of isolation in the urban world is more poignantly developed in Mário António's subsequent *Crónica da cidade estranha* (Lisbon: Agência-Geral do Ultramar, 1964).

From the moment he adopted the name Luandino, José Graça has been celebrating the spirit of this city and the companions of his youth, the slum kids undergoing survival training, mentioned in the second part of his dedication:

> Para vocês
> Companheiros de Infância.

Angolan writers like Costa Andrade, later a famous guerrilla poet, joined him in this sacred fraternity to commemorate the time

> when we swore "never again to mention the colour", of all men.... This [Luandino] is your message of love which nobody will destroy, as there is no power in the world to do so.[63]

The same spirit that informed the rather callow and raw stories in *City and Childhood* (written 1954) persevered in the works of Luandino Vieira's maturity, beginning with his famous *Luuanda* (written 1963). Arnaldo Santos, that other writer of suburban youth in Luanda is given a hearty accolade: Luandino's volume of stories *No antigamente na vida* (Earlier in our Lives, 1974) is dedicated to "John (the Evangelist), W. Shakespeare, E. Salgari and Arnaldo Santos of Kinaxixi fame". The Angolan writers' myth of the city is all the more powerful as it combines the urban theme with that of the lost paradise of childhood where they roamed as *nosso grupo de cóbois,* —a paradise wiped out by the so-called urban renewal. The mystical spirit of oneness which pervades Angola's urban writing of the fifties and sixties re-echoes in the revolutionary rhetoric of the present reconstruction phase, e.g. in Jorge Macedo:

> It was Africa that taught communism to the world.... When the radio speaks of the Workers' and Farmers' Republic it never forgets to mention that our beloved Angolan people is one..[64]

A new urban consciousness, a new feeling of life is also evolving, however hesitantly, in francophone and anglophone fiction but it is most pronounced in South Africa. In Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* (1945) despite the incessant boozing, whoring and knifing that goes on in the slum you feel wrapped up in

> the warmth of life, throbbing, of hearts pounding, of silence and of sound. Of movement and of lack of movement. A warm, thick, dark blanket of life. That was Malay Camp. Something nameless and living. A stream of dark life (p. 112).

This new feeling is painfully present in the language of Can Themba (for urbanization in Africa also means a boiling cauldron of linguistic processes), in the stories of La Guma, in the writings of Ezekiel Mphahlele, whose autobiography *Down Second Avenue*

[63] Luandino Vieira, dedicatory note in *A cidade e a infância.* Costa Andrade, "Preface," ibid.
[64] Jorge Macedo, "Querido povo angolano um" in *Gente de meu bairro* (The folks in my neighbourhood) (Lisbon: Edições 70, 1977), pp. 131–139.

(1959) is as close to the urban Richard Wright of *Black Boy* as it is distant from the pastoral Camara Laye. It is unambiguously expressed in the defiant statement of Richard Rive:

> I have been through Africa, and in the places where I have been to, the interesting thing was that I felt as foreign there, in spite of my colour, as I felt in Italy or France or anywhere else. I did feel that this was not a sense of belonging at all. I coudn't function as a writer in these countries, the whole situation was completely different I am not an Ethiopian, I am not a Ugandan, I belong to the southernmost tip of the Cape Province and from there I function, I am urban South African, and I do not wish to be anything else.[65]

But the angst and expectation of the urban African's stance between the conflicting claims of past and future has been most poignantly expressed, despite the occasional mixed metaphor, by the young Kenyan, Leonard Kibera, in an open letter to the past:

> I know we have failed you. The reality of the urban day alive with anxiety, idleness and ignorance, the grandeur of the nocturnal neon and the brothel harlot for the escapist—those have yielded in my fellow urban youth a certain barrenness, a lamentable moral depravity for which you now indict me. I do not mean to exonerate them. But as they experiment and play the forlorn beat generation to the tune of the imported leather jacket, the tightness of the wee knee-high skirt, and the skin lightening cream of the ashamed,... I know that somewhere deep inside lurks the reservoir of good craving for an outlet, a direction, but only untapped in the brainwashing escapism of ephemeral novelties.[66]

They may not yet be the BEAUTIFUL ONES but a new breed of men searching for new values is emerging from the African city.

[65] *African Writers Talking*, ed. D. Duerden and C. Pieterse (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), p. 159.

[66] Leonard Kibera, "Letter to the Haunting Past" in L. Kibera and S. Kahiga, op. cit., p. 222.

2. ASPECTS OF THE SHORT STORY

> Racontons des histoires. Elles n'ont pas grand-chose à voir avec cette sacrée réalité, mais c'est un plaisir...
>
> J. M. C. Le Clézio, *Le procès-verbal*

> Nous ne sommes pas les hommes de la danse, nous sommes les hommes de la misère.
>
> Sembène Ousmane, when watching the Senegalese National Ballet at the Ife Festival of the Arts, 1970.

Every art form has, at least potentially, two inherent tendencies: one that transcends the humdrum concerns of everyday life by idealizing things, and another that seeks out the rough and tumble of human existence in passionate involvement. The short story in Africa is no exception to this rule. It entertains and instructs, it amuses and moralizes, it soars to high heaven and comes back to earth.

The short story in Africa is new like the novel. It is an imported genre whose European origins date back to *Il Novellino* (c. 1250) and Boccaccio's *Decamerone* (1348–1353) in Italy; Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387) in England; the "fables" and *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles* (1462) in France; and Trancoso's *Contos e histórias de proveito e exemplo* (1575) in Portugal.

Although new in its modern manifestations, it is at the same time as old as the hills in its powerful African substratum, the folk tale, which in turn goes back to the primeval utterances of myth if we accept Senghor's definition of the folk tale as "mythe désacralisé." We shall see later that in some instances the African short story has achieved a perfect blending of the old and the new.

Whether looked at in the European or the African context, the short story has been much scorned and underestimated. It is often viewed as a stunted novel, an embryo that never reached fruition, the risible maiden flight of the fledgling writer from one branch to the next whereas once grown into an eagle, he soars to the golden gates of the novel. Guy de Maupassant, perhaps the most perfect practitioner of the genre that ever was, found himself admonished by a school-masterly Zola to try his hand at something more substantial. Zola referred to his own short story production as *"fatras"*, rubbish, and he felt that "he was blowing soap-bubbles, when he would rather have been carving some granite monument."[67] A special prize for the *nouvelle* was not created by the Académie Française until 1971[68] and whilst in Germany books on *Novellentheorie* abound, the first monograph on the *nouvelle* as such (and not just a single author or period), by a Belgian scholar, was not published in France until 1974.[69]

Among African writers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote the inevitable batch of short

[67] F. W. J. Hemmings, "Through the Foothills of Zola," *TLS*, September 14 (1976), 1213.

[68] The first winner of the "Prix de la nouvelle" was Daniel Boulanger. See Etiemble, *Essais de Littérature (Vraiment) Générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 205.

[69] René Godenne, *La Nouvelle Française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974).

stories at Makerere before publishing *Weep not, Child* and *The River Between*. Chinua Achebe, when asked by Lewis Nkosi in an interview in 1972 about his literary beginnings, did not even bother to mention the stories he had written at the University of Ibadan, twenty years earlier, but launched straight away into a discussion of his first two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer At Ease*.[70] Apparently to him, at least at that stage, writing meant novel-writing.

A similar underestimation of the short story can be found in anthologies and scholarly works on African literature. In the former, the dividing line between short stories and novel extracts is often not strictly drawn. In Janheinz Jahn's anthology *Das junge Afrika* (Munich 1963), for instance, out of 41 prose pieces referred to as *"Erzählungen"* (tales, narratives) only 16 are short stories in the strict sense of the word. The remaining 25 are extracts from novels, or in a few cases, non-fiction. The first major work of critical scholarship bringing together the modern literatures of anglophone, francophone and lusophone Africa, O. R. Dathorne's *The Black Mind* (Minneapolis, 1974), fails to accord systematic treatment to the short story. It shows the "short story to novel" syndrome current in most criticism, and a reviewer of the book, although he overshoots the target in claiming that the genre is completely omitted, is partly justified when he says:

> Dathorne's failure to deal with the short story and its relationship with the folktale is a good example of the effects of not following through on the African writer's artistic heritage from the oral traditions of folk art. Clearly, a thorough-going analysis of the storyteller's oral art simply demands some follow-up, however cursory, with reference to the incorporation of traditional storytelling techniques within the work of short story writers like Ghana's Aidoo.[71]

The wide-spread notion of the short story being a kind of apprenticeship through which the novelist has to pass is borne out by further facts. Wole Soyinka's first public performance, at the age of seventeen, was the airing of a short story, the title of which he does not even remember, by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. Cyprian Ekwensi's first novel, *People of the City* (1954), is "a little thing I turned out based on a number of short stories I wrote for Radio Nigeria."[72] Mongo Beti, under his original pseudonym Eza Boto, wrote his short story, "Sans haine et sans amour," before attempting his first novel, *Ville Cruelle*. (1954).

Without necessarily trying to establish a rigid pattern, we may find some significance in the observation that the reverse is also possible. The Angolan Óscar Ribas published his first long works of fiction *Nuvens que passam* (Passing clouds, 1927) and *O resgate de uma falta* (A fault redeemed, 1929), twenty years before his various volumes of stories, starting with *Flores e espinhas* (Flowers and thorns, 1948). In general, the writer of short stories *("contista")* or novelas *("novelista")* is just as highly regarded as the novelist *("romancista")* in the Portuguese tradition, although presumably all three

[70] *African Writers Talking*, ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), pp. 3–4.
[71] Lloyd W. Brown in *Research in African Literatures*, 6,1 (1975), 76.
[72] Duerden and Pieterse (eds), op. cit., p. 78.

"ficcionistas" would cede the crown to the *"poeta,"* given the singular role of lyricism in lusophone literary culture. The tiny island world of Cape Verde, for example, has witnessed an exceptional flowering of the short story without a resultant rise in the number of novels produced. A prose anthology edited by Baltasar Lopes in 1960, which covers works published between 1944 and 1959 as well as previously unpublished material, contains 23 entries, the majority of them (18) *do difícil género que é o conto* —"in the difficult short-story genre"—as the editor puts it. In addition there are 2 *noveletas,* but only three extracts from novels.[73] Some of the original contributors, like Henrique Teixeira de Sousa and Gabriel Mariano, have remained faithful to the *conto* and can rightly be considered, along with the Angolans Luandino Vieira (pseudonym of José Graça) and Arnaldo Santos, and the Mozambican Luis Bernardo Honwana, as Africa's foremost present-day short-story writers, rivalled only by a few Francophones (among them Olympe Bhêly-Quénum of the Republic of Benin, whose volume of short stories entitled *Liaison d'un Eté* (1968) made Robert Cornevin in *L'Afrique Contemporaine* comment on his "talent de nouvelliste qui nous est montré ici dans toute sa variété"), by Ghana's Ama Ata Aidoo, Nigeria's Amos Tutuola and I.N.C. Aniebo, Kenya's Leonard Kibera and Samuel Kahiga, and southern Africa's formidable phalanx ranging from Peter Abrahams to Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer.

The impressive showing of the lusophone writers is partly explained by the fact that their literature was the first to emerge in Africa, which in turn was due to an intricate combination of factors, among them the high premium placed in Portuguese culture on literary endeavour, especially in poetry and short fiction; long-standing contacts with Europe; the Portuguese tendency to establish settler colonies *(colonias de povoção)* only paralleled by the cases of Algeria and Kenya in French and British colonization, respectively; and, last but not least, an early urbanization accompanied by selective literacy.

If we restrict ourselves to the short story, leaving aside individually published work and picking the first three published volumes of stories, we obtain the following picture:

1. Lusophone Africa:
   Henrique de Vasconselos (Cape Verde), *A mentira vital* (The vital lie, 1897)
   João Albasini (Mozambique), *O livre da dor* (The book of sorrow, 1925)
   Castro Soromenho (Angola), *Nhari; o drama da gente negra* (1938)
2. Francophone Africa:
   Badibanga (Zaïre), *L'éléphant qui marche sur des œufs* (1931)
   Maximilien Quénum (Benin), *Au pays des Fons* (1938)
   Julien Alapini (Benin) *Contes dahoméens* (1941)—all these are folk material.
3. Anglophone Africa:
   M. I. Ogumefu (Nigeria), *Yoruba Legends* (1929)
   Peter Abrahams (South Africa), *Dark Testament* (1942)
   Ezekiel Mphahlele (South Africa), *Man Must Live and Other Stories* (1947)

[73] *Antologia da ficção cabo-verdiana contemporânea,* selecção de Baltasar Lopes, introdução de Manuel Ferreira, comentário de A. A. Gonçalves (Achamento de Cabo Verde: Edições Henriquinas, 1960).

From the point of view of socio-literary analysis, it is, however, not so much the volumes of short stories that matter as the scattered material appearing in the news media, particularly the daily and periodical press.[74] Since the development towards a mass readership in the media is much more dynamic than in the book trade, the number of readers they are able to reach far exceeds those who care or can afford, to purchase books. To a mass audience, literate but adrift from the moorings of the traditional village community, the press, and in particular the short stories it reproduces, may be said to take the place of the ancient story-teller, while the introduction of television since the early sixties has given a similar fillip to drama. The same can hardly be said of the novel. It is more or less excluded from the media, except in book reviews or in a truncated or dramatized form. In Nigeria with its mass-circulation press, the publication of novels in instalments virtually does not exist, while in francophone countries the French model of the *roman-feuilleton* may be more closely followed to this day.[75] The short story appears with the swiftness of reportage close on the heels of actuality: four months after the end of the Nigerian Civil War, in May 1970, an ex-Major in the Biafran Army, the short-story writer I.N.C. Aniebo, who had been called "the only serious practitioner of this very important art form in the country,"[76] published a story on the war in the Lagos *Sunday Times*.

Many aspiring African writers have made their debut with short stories in campus magazines such as *Penpoint* (Makerere), *Sokoti* (Ife), *The Horizon* or *Idoto* (both Ibadan). Neither should we forget the catalytic role played by the numerous short-story competitions organized in Africa or overseas by various bodies: the Ghana "Creative Writing Conference" for Training Colleges, the B.B.C. and O.R.T.F., the journals *African Arts/Arts d'Afrique* (Los Angeles), *Preuves* (Paris) with its "Prix de la Nouvelle Africaine," *Bingo* (Dakar, with its "nouvelle du mois," the bulletin *Cape Verde* (O melhor contista) and the mass circulation magazine *Drum* (Johannesburg, Lagos etc). "Drum's great short story contest" held in 1961 attracted 1,500 entries from Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, one of them by a blind man, written in Braille. Some of the winners, namely Nkem Nwankwo, Kunle Akinsemoyin and A.G.S. Momodu (all Nigerians) have now made their reputations as short-story writers. The chairman of the jury was Cyprian Ekwensi, then Director of the Federal Information Service. His "Artistic Hints" addressed to competitors tell us a great deal about possible Euro-American influences on the short story in Africa:

> Read the stories of the best world short story writers. (A good novelist is not necessarily a good short story writer). In Russia Chekhov and Pushkin, in France Guy de Maupassant, in Britain H. E. Bates, Katherine Mansfield, Somerset Maugham,

[74] One possible exception is the pamphlet or market literature in Ghana and Nigeria based on the Money/Sex/Crime syndrome and catering to popular taste with titles such as "£75,000 and 7 years Imprisonment," "Drunkards Believe Bar As Heaven," "Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny," "The Roaming Sisters: a story of three school girls who for ambition desired hotel-life and two of whom eventually ended in tears and sorrow," or "The Complete Story and Trial of Adolf Hitler." Although some of them like the last title mentioned, are referred to as "imaginary drama," they could rightly be defined as novelettes.

[75] I have before me a copy of *Daho-Express, Organe de la révolution* of 21/6/74, containing the bourgeois relic of a roman-feuilleton by Innocent Datondji entitled *Le Dernier Voyage*.

[76] P. O'Malley in *Nigerian Opinion* (Ibadan), 3,4 (1967).

> Allan Sillitoe, in America Ernest Hemmingway [sic!], Stephen Vincent Bennet [sic] to mention only a few. For style, the Bible has no rival.

With such a purely Eurocentric outlook, it is small wonder that the range of themes treated was rather conventional. Cyprian Ekwensi commented:

> Reading the final 90 stories (Nigeria 65, Ghana 19, Sierra Leone 4, Cameroon 1, Volta 1) I got a comprehensive picture of the social life and problems of West Africa. Themes varied: the dilemma of the black man in the modern world, romance, African customs, adultery, education, husband-and-wife relationship, ambition, fantasy, sex.[77]

In my own investigation, which covered 497 short stories mostly produced during the last twenty years, including a sizeable proportion published in newspapers and magazines, the thematic spread is somewhat larger. Of particular interest is the strong preponderance of the folk tale, as can be seen from the following table arranged in order of frequency:[78]

1. Folk tales retold or adapted.
2. Problems of love, marriage, fertility.
3. Critique of colonialism and missionary activity.
4. The macabre, the mysterious, the supernatural.
5. Economic and financial problems and their solution.
6. The Old versus the Modern.
7. Childhood.
8. Crime.
9. War and inter-ethnic rivalry (especially Nigeria and Angola).
10. Mother and child.
11. Strains and stresses of adolescence
12. The *révolté*, the misfit, the madman.
13. Racial strife (particularly South Africa, Kenya).
14. Exile and return.
15. Old age and death (particularly Portuguese-speaking Africa).
16. The sexual exploitation of women, prostitution and incest.
17. Traditions and customs, village life.
18. The politics of independent Africa.
19. Criticism of the new ruling class and the insolence of office.
20. Search for a philosophy of life or a religious meaning.
21. Inter-racial love (primarily South Africa).
22. Political and social corruption.
23. Short stories in the experimental vein.
24. The plight of the mulatto (Portuguese-speaking Africa only).
25. The lure of the city.

[77] Cyprian Ekwensi, "How I Judged the Contest," undated *Drum* pamphlet (1962 ?).

[78] Ezekiel Mphahlele gives a similar summary of themes for the African novel in his article, "Writer and Commitment," *Black Orpheus* (Lagos), 2,3 (n.d.), 37.

26. The artist/writer: Search for identity and purpose.
27. Fantasies of escape from the environment (primarily Cape Verde).
28. The positive hero, his probity and strength.

The most striking feature of this thematic analysis is the preponderance of material based on the oral tradition, by no means entirely restricted to the first category, which would have been further subdivided into thematic groupings and formal patterns if it were not for lack of space. By virtue of being reduced to writing, moreover, in an alien linguistic medium, the oral tradition sheds of course much of its spontaneity and primal purity. One is inclined to say it loses its *raison d'être*.

Not content with the blatant contradiction in terms which is the much belaboured "oral literature", we now superadd the act of writing: "written oral literature." However that may be, something good has demonstrably come out of this fusion and confusion already, and something even better might ensue, just as out of the vernacular scribblings of medieval monks fatigued with copying the Latin Vulgata arose the national literatures of Europe. We shall, therefore, single out the nexus between the oral and the written as it affects the short story, and make it our special area of study.

The case of Amos Tutuola is significant in this respect. His use of folk tales has been far from sufficiently scrutinized but a comparison of some of his writings with those of the Yoruba novelist Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa (1903–1963) clearly shows that despite Tutuola's much-vaunted imagination he clings more closely than his elder to the traditional sources which both of them appear to have used. His treatment of the theme of the monstrous child prodigy, well-known in West and Central Africa (cf., e.g., Bernard Dadié's "L'enfant terrible" and Guy Menga's "Le Bébé adulte") in his short story, „Ajantala the Noxious Guest," differs from Fagunwa's in one important respect. This becomes apparent right from the opening of Tutuola's story:

> Once there lived in a village, a hunter, who had a wife. When she was under pregnancy old people of the village worried. "It is time now for you to suspend of killing bush animals, or if you continue to do so you will kill the baby that your wife is going to deliver when it is time and she will deliver of a terrible creature in form of a baby when it is time for her to deliver." "That is a superstitution", the hunter said after the people had gone back to their houses.[79]

Compare this with Fagunwa's manner of launching *in medias res* when presenting the same episode.

> A woman once gave birth to a child, a lovely boy. Strangely enough the baby started talking right after his birth and said: "Ah, so that's the way things are here! Why on earth did I come into this world? etc.[80]

[79] Amos Tutuola, "Ajantala the Noxious Guest" in *An African Treasury*, ed. Langston Hughes (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960) p. 121. Tutuola had previously used the Ajantala myth—a magnified version of Tom Thumb—in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). Zurrjir, the drinkard's monstrous son, has in fact originated from his mother's thumb.

[80] Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa, "Der erste Tag bei Iragbedsche, dem Siebenaugigen," trans. from *Ogboju ode ninu igbo irunmale* (The bold hunter in the forest of the 400 spirits) by Tunde Folarin and Willfried Feuser in Janheinz Jahn, *Afrika erzählt* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1963), p. 46. See also Wole Soyinka's translation, *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (London: Nelson, 1968) p. 106.

Fagunwa makes no reference whatsoever to the antecedents of the strange birth of this baby Gargantua. They remain veiled in mystery. Whether this reticence is due to his Christian missionary upbringing or whether he takes it for granted that his Yoruba audience is conversant with a system of cultural reference in which phenomena like the *abiku* (the „child born to die") or the *emèrè* (the trouble-making child that develops malice into a work of art) are accepted articles of faith, cannot be decided here. At any rate it seems to me that Tutuola is far more communicative and less inhibited than his countryman when it comes to discussing totem and taboo:

> "Doubtless, this is not a real baby but a spirit or one of the animals killed," the people were saying so on their ways when returning to their houses ("Ajantala," op. cit.)

Incidentally, the only other African writer who can be compared with Tutuola both in his unself-conscious use of unorthodox English and in the liberties he takes with ancestral taboos is Richard Ayebermo Freeman, a poet and teacher of Izon (Southern Ijo in Nigeria's Rivers State). In his short story "The Poor Man and the Water Man" the miserable human protagonist concludes a Faustian pact with the weird lord of the deep, who thereupon turns him into the richest man on the island of Okrika. When Poorman's time is up, his dedicated wife saves him by an ingenious use of woman's most powerful secret weapon:

> At midnight, she bent backward to touch the ground and opened her two legs, and the private part was exposed to the atmosphere widely in the bright moonlight. It was too red and blooming that even ordinary person could not withstand it, the eyesight could be bad immediately.[81]

When the Water Man, rigged out in uniform and "danger cap", comes for Poorman, he is side-tracked by the "red object" and discovered floating dead on the water the next morning. Lured into breaking the most powerful taboo of all, his end was inevitable.

This most extraordinary blending of elements, chaste matrimonial love and shameless abandon, characterizes the resourcefulness of the poor in overcoming their plight and fighting to stay out of penury by fair means or foul. This brings us back to Amos Tutuola, whose hero Ajayi and his wife in the short story "Ajayi and the Witch Doctor" are of a similar disposition.[82] A brief summary of the story will prove this point. It will also throw light on the nexus between Tutuola's short fiction and his better known long fiction.

Ajayi is afflicted with poverty from his birth since even his father "was really created with poverty by his creator". Before his father's death, Ajayi marries, obtaining the

[81] Richard Ayebermo Freeman, "The Poor Man and the Water Man," *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 105, June/August 1970, 123–127.

[82] Amos Tutuola, "Ajayi and the Witch Doctor," in *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1959. Published for the first time in Nigeria in *Black Orpheus*, No. 19 (March 1966), 10–14. Although not exactly new, this story was reprinted again in *Festac Anthology of Nigerian New Writing*, ed. Cyprian Ekwensi (Lagos: Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information, 1977), pp. 98–104.

bride-wealth by pawning himself and his labour to a rich man. In order to give his father a decent funeral, he has to pawn himself a second time; then, when his poverty becomes more and more abject, a third time, at his wife's insistence, to raise the consultation fee for a witch-doctor who will agree to look into the root causes of Ajayi's condition and advise on measures to improve it. The witch-doctor's prescription is that Ajayi's father's spirit has to be propitiated by a sacrifice of nine rams, to be deposited on the grave. When the first instalment of six rams has no effect, Ajayi grows desperate, fills two of the remaining sacks with earth and hides in the third with a sharp matchet to remonstrate with his dead father. But he finds himself instantly translated from the grave to the house of the witch-doctor, who had also stolen his previous sacrificial offerings. Pretending to take the quack to be his father's spirit, Ajayi forces him, matchet in hand, to surrender his riches: six hundred pounds. Thus the problem of a life-time, nay, of two generations, is solved.

The theme of divinely pre-ordained poverty was later treated by Tutuola at greater length in his novel, *Ajayi and His Inherited Poverty,* published in 1967. In the novel, the protagonist's father sees the family's wretchedness worsen in direct proportion to their dogged attempts to combat it:

> Well, maybe as we are working very hard in the farm it is so our poverty is growing up like a tree. You should not be discouraged by that. But I will advise you now that you should continue to work hard.[83]

The novel and the short story which both bear Ajayi's name in their titles obviously are closely related, the main difference being that whereas the short story is told in the third person, the Ajayi of the novel has turned narrator. Except for some minor changes in *personae* and events, the story corresponds to chapters 1, 2 and 16 (the concluding chapter) of the novel. Chapter 16 is significantly entitled " The witch-doctor and I in my village." In determining the nature of the relationship between story and novel, further evidence, both external and internal, has to be taken into consideration: (1) A short story by Tutuola entitled "Remember the Day After Tomorrow," again with some changes of names and *personae* but otherwise corresponding to chapter 3 of *Ajayi and his Inherited Poverty,* was published in 1969, it had been received from the author in 1965. (2) A third short story by the author entitled "Don't Pay Bad for Bad" had been published by *Présence Africaine* (Vol. 2, No. 3) as early as 1960 and taken up by Frances Ademola in her anthology *Reflections: Nigerian Prose and Verse* (Lagos, 1962) in an expurgated version, i.e., Tutuola's English had been polished so as to look more "correct." Apart from some minor alterations it is identical with chapter 6 of the novel, likewise entitled "Don't Pay Bad for Bad." In view of these facts it can safely be assumed that the novel developed from the short story of a similar title (or that Tutuola "serialized" his novel in the form of short stories before publishing it in a definitive form). This expansion theory is validated in an amusing way if we compare the amount of money realized by Ajayi in his encounter with the crooked witch-doctor in the two versions.

[83] Amos Tutuola, *Ajayi and His Inherited Poverty* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 14.

In the short story, it is £600, while the relevant passage in the novel reads: "But when my wife and I counted all, it was more than six thousand pounds" (p. 233).[84]

It would appear that the episodic character of the folk tale lends itself more readily to adaptation in the short story than in the novel where it can only be a minor component. Tutuola the novelist "quotes" Tutuola the short-story writer but has to do a lot of padding to arrive at a full-length work of fiction. One wonders whether he always succeeds in weaving the single incidents of his various tales into a coherent whole. In the novel, he is more at leisure to philosophize. Moral injunctions are turned into chapter headings (Don't Pay Bad for Bad). They alternate with proverbs, those repositories of folk wisdom, used in a profusion of supporting mottoes ("A tormentor forces his victims to be hardy," "A born and die baby makes the doctor a liar"). This nexus between fiction and proverb can be explored in a short story by Chinua Achebe entitled "The Madman."

"The Madman" is one of several pieces of writing dealing with an identical theme. Thus a poem by Emmanuel Obiechina, another by Achebe ("We Laughed at Him"), a short story by Nathan Okonkwo Nkala[85] and, of course, Soyinka's play *Madmen and Specialists*—all of them related in some way or other to Nigeria's political and spiritual crisis of the late sixties.[86]

In Achebe's story, on the Igbo market day *(Èke)* a respected citizen, Okafo Nwibe, takes a bath in a little stream, leaving his loin-cloth behind on the bank. It is snatched up by a madman, one of those creatures "drawn to markets and straight roads," who sees in Nwibe the incarnation of all evil interference with his own peaceful concerns. Nwibe runs after him stark naked, shouting, "Hold the madman he's got my cloth." In this hot pursuit, the roles of hunter and hunted, of sane man and madman, are subtly and imperceptibly inverted, and when some neighbours finally catch up with Nwibe in the crowded market square, he has gone insane.

A Kafkaesque parable on the infectious spread of frenzy, of the vulnerability of man? An individual case of mental disarray symbolizing the collective madness of a people in the throes of civil war? Maybe such interpretations of this beautifully controlled and concise piece of writing would stand scrutiny, but they would leave out some fundamental aspects of the story related to what Lionel Trilling has called "the hum and buzz of cultural implication." The story gains an entirely new dimension if we hearken back to the wisdom of Igbo proverbs:

1. If a madman takes away your gown while you are having a bath, and you run after him, you will yourself be considered a madman.
Igbo version: Onye arā bịa chịrị ūwe nà akwà gị m̀gbè ị nà-àsa āhụ, o bụrụ nà ị chụsòo (chụwa) yā m̀gbè ahụ̀, gị ònwe gībù̀ onye arā.

[84] Amos Tutuola, "Remember the Day After Tomorrow," in *Africa in Prose*, ed. O. R. Dathorne and Willfried Feuser (Harmondsworth: Penguin African Library 1969), pp. 271–277.

[85] Chinua Achebe, "The Madman," Nathan Okonkwo Nkala, "G. B.'s Dance," both in Chinua Achebe et al., *The Insider. Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria* (Enugu: Nwankwo-Ifejika, 1971). There is a longer version of Achebe's story in his book, *Girls at War and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972).

[86] This does not mean that the metaphor of the Madman is necessarily restricted to Nigeria. Cf. Birago Diop's "Sarzan le Fou," Cheikh Hamidou Kane's "Fou" in *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Houngbé in Bhêly-Quenum's *Le Chant du lac* and Sembène Ousmane's demented Tanor Ngone Diob in *Vehi-Ciosane*, discussed in W. Feuser, "Le Chant du Lac" (review article), *Le Français au Nigeria*, 5,2 (1970), 7–9.

Meaning: (i) If you do not wisely deal with a dangerous, foolish person when he provokes you, people will blame you for any harm or disgrace you may suffer by him. Be wise (exercise some patience) in dealing with a devilish person who challenges you.

(ii) Don't allow yourself to be laughed at for behaviour for which you laugh at other people.

(iii) You are not better than the person you allow to provoke you.

(iv) Never allow yourself to be rushed into a hasty action when involved in a delicate matter.

The connection between this proverb and the first part of the story seems fairly obvious. But how to explain the following passage from the central section of the short story—its narrative apex—apart from some vague approximations:

> Farther up the road on the very brink of the market-place two men from Nwibe's village recognized him and, throwing down the one his long basket of yams, the other his calabash of palm-wine held on a loop, gave desperate chase, to stop him setting foot irrevocably within the occult territory of the powers of the market. But it was in vain. When they finally caught him it was well inside the crowded square. (p. 6).

Why are the men so desperate? In addition to the internal evidence in the passage ("powers of the market"), a second Igbo proverb can enlighten us:

2. When madness reaches the market place, it becomes incurable.

Igbo version: Mgbè ara fụ̀rụ̀ (pùrù) amia, ò nweghị ngwọta.

Meaning: (i) There is no solution to a problem which increases beyond all reasonable efforts to settle it.

(ii) It is dangerous if something goes beyond its natural limit. There is a limit beyond which a joke cannot be tolerated.[87]

Achebe's short story can thus be read at several levels, depending on the reader's system of cultural reference. The second proverb explains most succinctly why for Nwibe the market place-becomes the point of no return. In the light of this exegetic knowledge it would seem, however, that Achebe spoils his ending by having Nwibe eventually cured, although he will never be the same man again. But this is a case of the dialectic relationship between the determinism of tradition and the author's belief in personal choice.

Just as Tutuola has been seen to treat short stories as the stuff of which novels are made, so to Achebe proverbs are not only "the palm-oil with which words are eaten" but occasionally also the mustard seeds from which stories grow. The modern writer is adopting here a transfer of function one would normally consider restricted to the oral tradition, and which has been defined by Roland Colin thus:

[87] Transcription and interpretation of proverbs by Mr. A. A. E. Ahumanya. The second proverb was communicated to me by my colleague Dr. Chidi Maduka.

> Il y a donc une sorte de réversibilité du proverbe au conte. Le proverbe est souvent l'essence d'un conte, le conte est souvent l'illustration d'un proverbe. Cette proche parenté n'est qu'un aspect de la solidarité interne des genres littéraires noirs.[88]

Other writers use folk material in similar ways. Taban lo Liyong of Uganda in one of his short stories achieves a vigorous stylistic effect by adopting patterns of repetition common in Luo oral narrative:

> On the day appointed all the one hundred and fifty-one sons started off early for Kigali. These fat children of Usumbura. They ran part of the way. These expectant sons of Usumbura. Instead of taking two days to reach Kigali they did it in one day. These impatient and obedient sons of Usumbura....[89]

While this antiphonic underscoring serves as a running commentary on the story, rendering the misery more miserable, and human folly more foolish, Taban lo Liyong's flippant, lively and up-to-date treatment of the "deceived deceiver" theme in another story eventually turns insipid because a certain comic device is constantly overdone: "Wey," Master Hare said, "if you jonch wanchchu speak chu me, yeave my hanj."[90] The trickster-hare, who feasted with impunity for a long time on the peas stolen from the farm of his friend the elephant, is here finally caught red-handed by the effigy of a beautiful girl made of bees' gum and placed amidst the peas. He pleads: "If you don't want to speak to me, leave my hand." For pages and pages on end he lisps in the same outrageous way—obviously because he has a hare-lip.

The hare, of course, appears in numerous traditional and modern tales from Senegal to Angola, as does the tortoise who is the traditional hero of its own body of prose tales (e.g. in Yoruba: Aló Ijàpá—tortoise tales). Following in the footsteps of Héli Châtelain's great collection of Angolan folk tales, but ironically adopting the terminology of contemporary psychology, Angola's most sophisticated writer, Mário António, has retold several traditional stories like that of the contest between Senhora Lebre and Senhor Cágado (Hare and Tortoise) to find the swiftest runner. The slow tortoise wins by adopting a similar stratagem as the German *Swinegel* (hedgehog) in Grimm's fairy-tales, pretending to appear in two places at once by bringing in his identical-looking wife.[91]

Just as many of these folk tales have graduated into modern adaptations in the

[88] Roland Colin, *Les Contes Noirs de l'Ouest Africain* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1957), p. 57. For the reverse process see Adebimpe Adeyanju's Yoruba text *Itan d'owe* (The story becomes a proverb; Oyo, 1962). In addition to Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi could be studied in this context. His short story "Ikolo the Wrestler" is based on the proverb "A man does not challenge his *chi* (tutelary spirit) to a wrestling match"; his novel *Beautiful feathers* is an expansion of the proverb, "However famous a man is outside, if he is not respected inside his own home, he is like a bird with beautiful feathers, wonderful on the outside but ordinary within."

[89] Taban lo Liyong, "The Old Man of Usumbura and His Misery" in *Fixions* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969), p. 4.

[90] Taban lo Liyong, "Ododo pa Apwoyo Gin ki Lyech, the story of Master Hare and his friend Jumbe Elephant," op. cit., p. 73.

[91] In the Nigerian context; these context tales have been analysed in a chapter entitled "Das Wettmärchen" in Tunde Okanlawon's important dissertation, *Volkserzählungen aus Nigeria: Analysen. Gattungskriterien* (Frankfurt/Berne/Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1977), p. 165.

African continent itself, they can occasionally be found in the New World. A book of Yoruba divination tales from Bahia containing a great deal of fascinating material on Saints *(orishas)*, animals and men, is in preparation at the Ife University Press.[92] Even in the asphalt jungle of North America's black diaspora the African hare has survived in the guise of Brer Rabbit. In a recent novel a young Negro in Chicago who wants to try his luck at the horse races ruminates:

> My luck? Out of the sacrificially deep psychic past of my Afro-American history a thin fur rabbit dashes meaningfully from left to right across my lucky path.[93]

Numerous modern versions of African folk-tales are thinly disguised attacks on an unjust social or political order. A brilliant example is Mário António's story of the little and the big chief, which pillories colonial brutality.[94] The Nigerian Obioma Eligwe (*Beside the Fire*, Washington, D.C., 1974) and the Congolese Guy Menga (*Les Indiscrétions du Vagabond*, Ottawa, 1974) write in a similar vein. Even more explicit is Jomo Kenyatta who, helped by his training as an anthropologist, brings in the entire bestiary of the folktale to mock colonial justice. A man has been dispossessed by intruding animals, led by the Elephant. When he complains they promise to set up a commission of enquiry. Man, the former master of the land, is, of course, African man:

> The following elders of the jungle were appointed to sit in the commission: (1) Mr. Rhinoceros; (2) Mr. Buffalo; (3) Mr. Alligator; (4) The Rt. Hon. Mr. Fox to act as chairman; and (5) Mr. Leopard to act as Secretary to the Commission. On seeing the personnel, the man protested and asked if it was not necessary to include in this commission a member from his own side. But he was told that it was impossible, since no one from his side was well enough educated to understand the intricacy of jungle law.[95]

Some writers of short stories employ very short forms based on mythology or animal fables. One of them is Rasheed Gbadamosi, a one-time Commissioner in the Lagos State Government and a seasoned craftsman of short story writing; another is the dramatist Ola Rotimi, who has not only a penchant for the short story—his delightful "Di Man and di Black Mosquito" comes to mind—but also for contemporary spoken idiom, as evidenced by his comedies (e.g. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, 1977) and his yet unpublished *Dictionary of Nigerian Pidgin*. A recent thumbnail story intended for the daily press deserves to be quoted in full:

[92] *Dilogun: Brazilian Tales of Yoruba Divination*, collected in Bahia by Pierre Fatumbi Verger, edited, translated and annotated by Willfried F. Feuser and José Marianno Carneiro da Cunha, *Ife Comparative Studies*, (forthcoming).

[93] Clarence Major, *All Night Visitors* (New York: Olympia Press, 1969), p. 175.

[94] Héli Châtelain, *Folk-Tales of Angola. Fifty Tales with Kimbundu Text* (Boston, 1894). Mário António, "Memória do Senhor Cágado" and "Um pequeno, um grande chefe" in *Makezu; tradições angolanas* (Lisbon: Serviço de Publiçãoes Ultramarinas, 1966), pp. 9–15, 61–70.

[95] Jomo Kenyatta, "The Gentlemen of the Jungle" in Tom Hopkinson, "Deaths and Entrances; the Emergence of African Writing," *The Twentieth Century* (London), 165, No. 986 (1959), 340.

Sounds of Forest Brothers

And the mice of the forest found courage in the oneness of voice. Then from a nervous distance, the mice of the forest called out to the lions of the forest:

Kuronama, O! Kuronama!
Possessors of power, habah!
Pray, let brothers blessed
With the claws of Power
Show some restraint,
For it is better
To be LOVED
Than FEARED.

But lo! In that instant, a fresher dread overcast the forest and sank into the earth. The mice stood tense, confounded, for they could not tell whether the lions heard their strident plea. But the trees heard. The grass too heard the sounds of helpless desperation. And hearing, grass and trees both stirred and swayed—for more than this they could not do—stirred and swayed in the pregnant stillness that now engulfed the forest world.

This one-sided dialogue between the meek and the mighty has a timeless quality. And yet, something may be gained in placing it in the temporal and spatial context in which it was conceived. Ola Rotimi wrote it on 10 May 1978, barely three weeks after the shooting of unarmed demonstrating students by the Nigerian army and police. The same incident prompted Wole Soyinka at Ile-Ife to stage a one-man demonstration in his jeep carrying posters with the inscription MURDER MURDER MURDER (*Daily Times*, Lagos, 27 April 1978). A weekend of desperate rioting in Lagos followed, but "Law and Order" were gradually restored and the universities reopened after a considerable time lapse. It was this intervening period of "pacification" characterized by the effective silencing of radical intellectuals, that prompted Ola Rotimi's allegorical protest story.

"Kuronama" is the Ijo word for lion, "habah" an interjection in Hausa expressing dismay and disgust. The tone of resignation which informs the third part of the tale —a tale with a political moral—is particularly depressing. The animals in power have changed, the mechanics of power remain the same. Less openly satirical than Jomo Kenyatta but hardly less effective than Ola Rotimi is Paul Lomani-Tshibamba of Zaïre, who in his novella *La Récompense de la cruauté* (Kinshasa, 1972) tells the story of a gigantic wild animal whose true nature eludes the "prelogical mentality" of the native population, as the author says with heavy irony, but equally the glib rationality of the colonial masters, who first send in the anti-Demon task force of the Catholic Church and then, when cassock and holy water are routed, organize a military column to overcome the monster. Like Horatio they are unable to see that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy," and since the monster defies definition by Western science ("un corps de dinosaurien surmonté d'une tête humaine ornée de crêtes d'iguanodon", p. 27) they slay it, a poor victim, "criminelle pour avoir été créée autrement", (p. 32). Although initially inoffensive, the monster in the throes of death manages to strike the expeditionary force deaf, dumb and blind. Turned to stone

by the dinosaur's fiery breath, the soldiers "étaient devenus une partie intégrante du piton de la butte la plus élevée de Kilimani" (p. 40).

Here we have a modern realistic short story about a punitive expedition growing into an allegory of *colonisateur* and *colonisé* and ending, like a true folk tale, in the mode of a "conte de science fantaisiste."[96]

All things considered, it may be averred that a certain morphological distinctiveness discernible in a sizeable proportion of modern African short stories derives either from the oral tradition as such or from an emphasis on oral communication rediscovered in the detribalized milieu of urban Africa.

The modern type of oracy has been emphasized by Ezekiel Mphahlele, himself a case study of the urbanized writer, who thinks that *"There's going to be a wide gap, for a long time between oral literature, traditional literature, and modern African literature."* But he is fascinated by the idea of carrying the short story to a mass audience by modern means of communication, especially the radio, which he considers "a tremendous medium for Africans to be able to use. And I think, for radio, Africans will want to write something in terms of which they think of their audience much more closely as a literate or semi-literate and illiterate audience who just sit there and listen."[97] The language of the urban milieu, generously blending diverse linguistic elements, such as English and Afrikaans, Portuguese and Kimbundu, has in fact deeply affected realistic writing in Southern Africa and revolutionized its form, most radically in the short stories of Angolan writers like Luandino Vieira and Jorge Macedo, while some of the Cape Verdean short stories of Manuel Ferreira, informed like those of Vieira by the common concept of *Neo-Realismo,* are ballad-like examples of pure oracy suffused with the rhythm of the *morna,* the Cape Verdean dance, e.g. *"Belinha foi ao baile pela primeira vez"* (Belinha went to the dance for the first time) and *"O cargueiro tornou ao porto"* (the cargo-boat sailed into port).[98]

A strongly tradition-oriented type of oracy, maybe the most striking of its kind, underlies the short stories of Ama Ata (formerly Christina) Aidoo, which are often written entirely in dialogue and therefore approach drama. The Ghanaian authoress rejects any hierarchical principle that would set literature above orature or consider the latter a developmental step relegated to the past: "There is a present validity to oral literary communication." To her a story—a modern short story—is not something to be read privately but to be enacted, narrated to an audience "in one *communal* sitting", as one is tempted to say, with due respect to Edgar Allan Poe. She presents her views so forcefully, and convincingly, that one feels she ought to be allowed to have the last word in this discussion:

[96] F. V. Equilbecq, *Contes populaires d'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, re-issue of 1972), p. 35.

[97] Duerden and Pieterse (eds), op. cit., pp. 106–107 [Emphasis mine].

[98] Volumes of short stories by the lusophone authors mentioned are: José Luandino Vieira, *A cidade e a infância* (1960), *Luuanda* (1964), *Vidas novas* (written in prison 1962, published first in clandestine editions, then officially in 1975), *Velhas estórias* (1974), *No antigamente, na vida* 1974), *Nós, os do Makulusu* (1975); Jorge Macedo, *Gente de meu bairro* (1977); Manuel Ferreira, *Terra trazida* (1972).

In fact I pride myself on the fact that my stories are written to be heard, primarily... We cannot tell our stories maybe with the same expertise as our forefathers. But to me, all the art of the speaking voice could be brought back so easily. *We are not that far away from our tradition.*[99]

[99] Duerden and Pieterse, op. cit., pp. 23–24. Most of Miss Aidoo's early short stories have been published in the volume *No Sweetness Here* (London: Longmans, 1970) [Emphasis mine].

CHAPTER XV

SHAPES OF FRENCH WRITING: BLACK AFRICA, NORTH AFRICA AND THE WEST INDIES

GERALD MOORE

1. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE MAGHREB: LITERARY FORM IN PROSE FICTION

> Ainsi avais-je perdu tout à la fois
> ma mère et son langage, les seuls trésors
> inaliénables—et pourtant aliénés![1]
>
> Thus I lost at a single stroke both my
> mother and her language, the only
> inalienable treasures—yet taken from
> me nevertheless!

These words, which conclude Kateb Yacine's novel *Le Polygone étoilé* (1966), might equally well form an epigraph for the whole of francophone African literature. For there is no major writer of either the Maghreb or West Africa who has French as his mother tongue, or whose mother's tongue is French. Every step deeper into the language, which was for most of them the sole one available for academic education, was simultaneously a step away from the mother and from her tongue. This wound is one which the writer may seek to heal either by a national movement backwards (the classic example being Sédar Senghor and his "Kingdom of Childhood") or by a movement forward into a newly structured situation. The writer either seeks to recreate imaginatively the world of his childhood when—or so he now imagines—there was no alienation, no tug-of-war along the umbilical cord between ambition and mother tongue; or he strives towards a new world, in which the alienating effects of political and linguistic colonialism will be cancelled out by the demands of a recreated social order.

It is along the lines of this proposition that I wish to make certain comparisons within the francophone fiction of the whole Maghrebine and West African area. The method of comparison will be neither chronological nor regional; works will be freely selected insofar as their structure seems to illustrate one of these two major tendencies.

Perhaps the simplest way of re-entering the Kingdom of Childhood is to carry the reader back into it, whilst rejecting any pretence that it still exists, other than as a memory or an idea.

One of the earliest examples of such a work was Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953), in which the tone is frankly elegiac throughout, and in which we perceive the

[1] Kateb Yacine, *Le Polygone étoilé* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 182.

tug-of-war actually beginning, growing ever fiercer as the book progresses, until on the last page it tugs the writer out of Africa altogether, leaving both mother and Malinke language torn and bleeding. There can be no doubt that Laye does recreate for us a traditional childhood in remote Upper Guinea, in the twenties and thirties of our century. But we are always aware, and are intended to be aware, that there is already a veil between the narrator and the world he describes. The elegiac tone is not merely retrospective; the grieving for that world must have begun in the heart of the child himself, for what he describes was (for himself) already only a fragment of a traditional childhood, where the schoolroom was early substituted for the forge. This is in part why Laye's book is such a good one, and why the charge of nostalgia is misplaced. The special value of Camara Laye's work is that it embodies, in a unique degree, that quality of 'self-apprehension' which Wole Soyinka has recently[2] singled out as the most precious in the African writer of our times, who is besieged by demands to apprehend himself in the terms dictated by others.

If we take *L'Enfant noir* as being a classic example of what we may call "the pastoral tradition" in African fiction, it will not be hard to see that Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961) has much in common with it. Kane's novel is, of course, far more philosophical and even theological in emphasis, far less anecdotal and particularized, than Laye's. But it too traces the advent of a decision (never the writer's own) which tears him from the harsh but protective world of the Master's Koranic School and thrusts him along the path which leads to the loss, not only of his original identity, but of his faith and his will to live. The Fool who brings about his death is like an externalized conscience, measuring him always by the old criteria of the Master, and finding him always wanting. Although *L'Aventure ambigüe* includes the movement of Return (the return to Africa) which is missing in Laye's book, the main emphasis of the novel is certainly upon that childhood which was at first undivided, but was increasingly dominated by a division which eventually separated the grown man completely and irrevocably from his original self.

It is almost a condition of pastoral fiction of this kind that the hero (usually an autobiographical one) should fail in his attempt to rediscover fully and re-enter that childhood world which most of his life has been leading away from. This failure is not crucial, because the main burden of the fiction is to recreate that world, rather than to claim that it still exists or that the writer still belongs to it. The irrecoverable nature of the past is evoked with particular grief by the Algerian novelist Mouloud Mammeri in *La Colline oubliée* (1952). This tragic novel traces the fortunes of a group of friends and contemporaries who grow up in the Kabyle village of Tasga in the years before World War II. The security and solidarity they knew as children is symbolized by the tower Taasast, highest point of the narrator's house and of the village, where they all spent happy hours of play, speculation and adolescent romance, confident of a future which will hold them together:

[2] *Myth, Literature and the African World*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), pp. xi–xii.

> From there, we commanded the whole of Tasga. Even the minaret was not higher than we. We saw in front of us as we entered the long crater of Iraten... towards the east another mountain with the Kouilal Pass, towards the west the village of Aourir and behind us the mosque, whose minaret hid part of the mountain. Seen from anywhere in Tasga, our tower stood upright against the sky, dominating the low houses of the village, like a shepherd in the midst of his flock. That's why we christened it Taasast: the watchman.[3]

From the very beginning of the novel, the friends are driven towards separation by the demands of work, education, conscription, war and even marriage. For marriage brings out the stark differences of wealth between them, which their youthful days in Taasast could to some extent ignore. The locking of the tower and the subsequent loss of the key when, years later, they want to reopen it for the dying shepherd of the family, express the sense of loss which grows steadily stronger as the story progresses. The narrator, Mokrane, has been married to his childhood sweetheart Aazi, but allows the hostility of his mother (occasioned by the young woman's seeming barrenness) to sever them until they become strangers in the same house. Ironically, she bears his son only when she has been repudiated and he is away, fighting the Germans in Tunisia. His attempt to rejoin her by crossing the snow-blocked pass of Kouila costs him his life, and he joins the beloved shepherd in the cemetery. The hurricane of change continues to blow the others apart:

> In a world where the changing fortunes of war placed everything in question and which had been profoundly shaken by the universal upheaval, everyone sought the way towards a new salvation: some vaguely haunted the memory of the ancient grandeur of Islam and dreamt of discovering new means of reaching it; some, having worked in factories alongside French workers, conceived of a union of all the world's proletariat; some thought of nothing; some just made money.[4]

It is the sickness of Mouh, the handsome shepherd, which first touches the group with death, with the sense of final loss, with the realization that they can never again be reunited in Taasast—an event for which they have always vaguely postponed its reopening:

> My father proposed that we should arrange Taasast for him [Mouh], where we had thrown various useless jars, broken furniture and other old things which had become unserviceable by reason of wear or simply because, for no precise reason, they had been replaced. Since the distant days when we had stopped using it, we had never reopened it; Aazi and I by a tacit accord; the others, because they never had need of it. In any case, Aazi had the only key to the place, if she hadn't already lost it.[5]

[3] Mouloud Mammeri, *La Colline oubliée* (Paris: Plon, 1952), p. 28.
[4] Ibid., pp. 80–81.
[5] Ibid., p. 157.

After Mouh's death, the disintegration of the old village community grows even faster. The resumption of war, following the Allied invasion of Algeria, sweeps away all the young men, some of them never to return. Those who do have already lost their taste for the old life. They move to the cities, to the mines, to France, or into the *maquis,* where they will await the outbreak of guerilla war nine years later. Mammeri's novel is remarkable for the sharpness of its pain, its acute sense of place amid the enclosing mountains of Kabylia, its tracing of the ravages of time in a small community which once believed it could despise them.

With the next category of fiction I want to consider, what I will call the Novel of Return, the failure to rediscover or reintegrate with the hero's natal culture is much more significant, since the whole object of the return to Africa is to achieve just that. In the two examples I want to deal with, one Algerian and the other Senegalese, the movement of return is complicated because the hero brings with him a hostage from that European world he is supposed to be quitting, a hostage in the shape of a white wife. If the Fool was an externalization of Samba Diallo's conscience in *L'Aventure ambiguë,* then the white wife becomes in these cases an externalization of what the hero has not in fact quitted, but has insisted on bringing with him.

In *La Terre et le Sang* (1953), by the late Mouloud Feraoun of Algeria, the strain of adjustment for both is all the greater, because the natal village is small and remote, shut in by the high bare mountains of Kabylia, abandoned by the young and riven with clan feuds between the old. But, after a long period of trying vainly to combine his roles of faithful husband and dutiful son, the hero, Amer-ou-Kaci, is almost too successful in reintegrating himself with his society. He does so at the cost of neglecting his wife, of indulging in a property intrigue with his uncle Slimane whilst having a secret affair with Slimane's wife, and of floating with the current of village land-feuds rather than attempting, as some one who has lived in a larger world, to transcend them. He re-enters the village as it is: corrupt, abandoned and ripe for the revolutionary change which began only one year after this novel was published. He does not, like our next hero, strive to move the society in a certain direction, so that he can reintegrate with what it will become, rather than what it is. And he pays the price of this particular kind of weakness, being murdered by the jealous Slimane at the very time when his own neglected wife is quick with child by him. If the unborn child represents, in some sort, the future, than Amer has failed to make any rendezvous with it. Instead we see a kind of complicity arise between the two women whose demands have pulled Amer apart, his mother Kamouma and his wife Madame. In the closing pages of the novel they stand by the body of their man while his Kabyle mistress enters:

> Suddenly, Kamouna felt Madame take her hand and place it on her belly. Then she trembled.
>
> "Did he move?" she asked.
>
> "Yes, when Chabha came in."
>
> "God be praised, my daughter. We shall have an heir."
>
> Then she stooped to pick up the swooning young woman.
>
> She forgot for a moment her son, her sorrow and her anger.

"Tomorrow", she thought, when they seized her anew, "Madame will throw her red flannel belt over her husband. And the world will know that her breast is not empty."[6]

Amer's failure is all the more ironical because of his belief that he has measured and judged this village world to which he returns and which soon swallows him. Contemplating the chaotic fortnightly assemblies of the men at the mosque, he reflects:

> He understood his own people perfectly and was greatly amused by their peculiarities, for he detected among most of them the same superficial attitudes and behaviour: an illusory self-respect, a churlish obstinacy, a simplistic logic, a peevish mistrust, not to mention jealousy, egotism and fear .... Real children, in fact. "Easily led, really, but sulky, always sulky." There were perhaps a few chiefs, a few usurers, a few cunning elders: people with foresight who knew how to set a snare. All the rest were as manageable as a flock. He was proud of rumbling them and of sometimes upsetting their calculations. He felt himself far above them.[7]

At the centre of the moment of return stands the figure of the mother. She frames the story, buries the dead son and consoles the neglected, pregnant wife.

This is equally true of Sembène Ousmane's novel *O pays, mon beau peuple!* (1957), despite the apparent contrasts of heroic characterization. For Sembène's hero, Oumar Faye, is the usual harsh iconoclast so common in his fiction, a returning hero who refuses to accommodate himself to the reality of his society and bends all his efforts to transform it according to his own prescription. In the process, he leaves much of his own society behind him, as well as the once-loved Parisian girl whom, like Amer, he brought back to Africa with him. The similarities of structure extend to his leaving his pregnant wife more and more to her own devices, whilst starting an affair with the local mulatto girl Désirée; to his being murdered by jealous rivals at the height of his apparent success; to the shadows of estranged wife and mother drawing together at last over his mangled body, which acts as the coil through which a current of sympathy at last flows between them.

At this point, one recalls a strikingly similar tableau at the end of D. H. Lawrence's beautiful story, "Odour of Chrysanthemums." There too, although the bereaved wife has borne other children, her figure is "just rounding with maternity" when her dead husband is carried in. There too, the tension between wife and mother-in-law is discharged as they lay their hands on the body of the man who has always stood between them. And there too, the tableau seems to transcend the normal limits of realist fiction, taking on the darker, more mythological character of a sacrifice. In that sacrificial rite, both mother and wife are but aspects of the goddess. The seed of the slain god is already quickening within her as the goddess prepares his burial.

In Sembène's novel, however, Oumar Faye is a hero who makes trouble for himself by refusing to belong, rather than by getting too deeply involved in the petty intrigues of his society. From the start, he expects nothing from the elders, from his family or from

[6] Mouloud Feraoun, *La Terre et le Sang* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1953), p. 254.
[7] Ibid., pp. 163–164.

the white administration. According to his ideas, his family owes total allegiance to the choice of wife he has made and to his long absence, but he owes nothing to their prejudices, their expectations or their difficulties of adjustment. After a single night under his parents' roof, Faye parts from his mother Rokhaya with this bitter exchange:

> "I have given more than a thousand women give to have a child. I have longed and still long that you might have the things which none of your comrades can have. I will offer them to you. But oh my son, I beg you to stay here...."
>
> She was tired with standing. She let herself fall on a root, crossed her legs, refilled her pipe and lighted it, still gazing at Oumar. Her eyelids were swollen. She let out a long puff of smoke.
>
> "Mother, it's getting late, I must go now," said Oumar. The old woman had closed her eyes, Brutally, she stood up.
>
> "I hate your wife! I hate all her people. I shall have no more rest as long as they live here!" she cried. "As long as I look towards the east and the sun rises there, I shall have no repose. They have taken you away from me."
>
> She went close to Isabelle and sized her up, then turning towards her son, spoke to him again: "She has made you eat her menstrual blood."[8]

The real irony of this painful scene is not immediately apparent, for it is not Isabelle who eventually takes Oumar away from his family and leaves him exposed to his enemies, but his own ruthless desire to impose change. This same desire also leads him to neglect his wife and to ignore any rational assessment of his own prospects or interests.

Abandoning his hereditary skill as a fisherman, and thereby offending his uncle Amadou, the one member of his family who refuses to break with him, he insists on becoming a cultivator (it is not clear why this choice is considered ideologically superior). In his efforts to get established, he reads the elders a little lecture on the value of land, scarcely appropriate in the mouth of a "been-to" and one whose family has no traditional association with it. Throughout the novel, this hero contributes to his own difficulties by unnecessary harshness and pride, yet we are left with an uneasy feeling that Sembène, whilst recognizing these qualities, does not share our assessment of them. Whereas Feraoun, in the passage quoted above, can ironize his hero, Sembène has put too much of himself into Oumar to be able to do so. Instead, he mars the closing pages of his novel with a piece of romantic inflation. While the old sorceress Rokhaya calmly appropriates Isabelle's unborn child (as a replacement for her lost son), the author is at pains to tell us the social meaning of Oumar's death:

> Oumar Faye was certainly dead and laid in the earth. But the criminal arms which struck him down missed their mark. It was not the tomb which held him, but the hearts of all the women and all the men.... He ran before the planting, he was present in the rainy season and he kept company with the young during the harvest.[9]

Feraoun's novel, although written on the eve of revolution, does not prefigure it or breathe the spirit of its inevitability; he is more concerned with showing us the old

[8] Sembène Ousmane, *O pays, mon beau peuple* (Paris: Amiot Dumont, 1957), pp. 58–59.
[9] Ibid., pp. 233–234.

Kabylia, as it was at the time of writing. Sembène's novel does breathe that spirit; it is full of impatience for everything that, as he sees it, holds his people back from radical, secular change. But it is marred by a romantic individualism which makes Oumar seem doomed, and perhaps rightly doomed, from the start. Hence, Sembène shies away from ending his novel with the strong tableau used by Feraoun, although it might have been rendered all the stronger here because Rokhaya, while slightly softened by the presence of death, nevertheless indicates to Isabelle that she should return to France and leave her unborn child behind.

Not until his next novel, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), did Sembène discover a fictional form which would enable him to break free from individualism. In that much-praised novel, the epic dimension of Sembène's narrative is achieved partly by the sheer extent of the railway strike in time and space, and by the size of the cast of characters which he manipulates in order to emphasize that extent. There is still a trace of self-identification in Bakayoko, the tireless organizer of union action. But, unlike Oumar, Bakayoko appears to owe his success in that capacity to his harshness and even coldness in personal relationships. And Bakayoko is often kept discreetly in the background, since we are to feel that it is the people themselves, in action and movement, who form the hero of the novel.

In Sembène's next attempt at the open, epic form, *L'Harmattan* (1964), he offers much more concentration on a single group of characters, fighting for a 'No' vote in the Gaullist referendum of 1958. And in this novel the chief iconoclast is no longer a man, but the young girl Tioumbé, who defies every traditional restraint in order to throw herself into the struggle. Unlike the conventional heroine of romantic-individualist fiction, Tioumbé does not make this gesture for the sake of true love, but in order to serve her political ideas of socialism and independence. At the end of the book, she renounces not only her parents but her lover Sori, whom she refuses to follow to Guinea, and whom she even strengthens in his resolve to depart:

> "Why, why was it always me who asked questions before? Do you think I'm so different from other women? I'm like all the others. In all our seeming diversity, we all welcome love in the same way. What differentiates us is our window upon the future."[10]

Given the central role of Tioumbé in the novel as the iconoclast who has the most difficult idols to break—those of family obligation and of love—it is inevitable that the crucial relationship with the mother is hers, rather than that of any male character. Although her mother gives her covert support in her more violent confrontation with the father, who beats her and ties her up in his despair of disciplining her in any other way, Tioumbé feels that the gulf dividing her from her mother is just as deep:

> The mother and the daughter no longer inhabited the same world. The mother could understand nothing but the uniformity, the laws of the time, her time—a time which

[10] Id., *L'Harmattan* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1964), pp. 297–298.

was passing. Tioumbé could no longer accept that uniformity or those laws of a spent age. She rejected them in order to give birth to another world and a new age.[11]

And this gulf, already wide, is deepened when her mother discovers her in bed with Sori, ironically enough, at the very moment when she has decided to let Sori go out of her life.

The greater concentration of effect in *L'Harmattan* makes the book a greater artistic success than *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*. Sembène's treatment of history, already fairly free in the earlier novel, is here representative rather than documentary. As he remarks in the introduction,

> The conception of my work flows from that precept: to keep as close as possible to reality and to the people. *L'Harmattan* does not take place in any of the states of so-called Francophone Africa, I take from each of them a fact, an event of urban life. My intention is that everyone should discover himself there, should see a little of himself, according to the life he leads.[12]

And what of the link between mother and language? Tioumbé's dedication to a Panafrican ideal might seem necessarily to distance her from any relatively restricted language, of Senegal or elsewhere. But Sembène's own increasing determination to develop alternatives to French shows in the direction of his work since 1966. He has published only one further novel, but has made a number of films with dialogue entirely in Wolof or Diola, using sub-titles for English, French or other audiences. And he has acted as the guiding inspiration for *Kaddu*, the first literary journal written in Wolof. The overall direction of his work would then seem to be: first, the painful break with the personal mother and other personal ties; then the epic struggle based on commonly lived and discovered comradeship; finally, the move back to a kind of idealized mother—the soil and tongues of Africa—so that the artist is reintegrated with his culture, not as a static entity which remains where he left it, but as a changing organism which now demands new things of its children.

It is a construct of this kind which unifies all the work of Sembène's contemporary, the Algerian novelist and playwright Kateb Yacine. As Yacine himself remarks, the same principle of organization can be found in his early poem *Nedjma* (1957), his play *Le Cadavre encerclé* (1954), the novel *Nedjma* (1956) and the later novel *Le Polygone étoilé* (1966). This organization rests on a symbolic presentation of Algerian history, character and identity, contained in the mysterious, elusive woman Nedjma ("Star" in Arabic). All his male characters stand in some indefinable relation to her, and all are more or less obsessed by the pursuit or possession of her. This pursuit gives a certain pattern and unity to actions and events spread over many years and many places, extending to France as well as Algeria. Yacine treats the conventional chronology and causality of fictional plot with cavalier indifference; the structure of his work is something we perceive only gradually, as we finish reading or as we reread it. The novel *Nedjma*, for

[11] Ibid., p. 244.
[12] Ibid., p. 1.

example, actually begins and ends with the same chapter but when we reread that chapter at the end, it falls into place and enables us to assess the structure of the whole work anew. The effect is both cyclical (because we end where we began) and progressive (because we now understand where we are).

Kateb's work also abounds in passages of hallucinatory intensity; in dissolves, cross-cutting of images, flash-backs and other cinematic devices. He frequently moves out of normal fictional prose to give us long passages of poetry or dramatic dialogue which offer another way of approaching the experiences presented in the text. An example of this is the beautiful poem which he interpolates on pp. 168–172 of *Le Polygone étoilé,* a lament for a father and for all the fierce ancestors who launched Algeria upon her bloody destiny of successive conquests and liberations, stretching from the Carthaginians through the Romans and Visigoths to the Arabs, the Turks and the French. The last lines of the poem may give some notion of its range and method, as the narrator remembers his father's death and how it plunged him into new responsibilities:

Cinq femmes
Dont j'étais désormais responsable
Enfouies dans un camion
Avec une auge en bois
Et un pilon de cuivre
Et la folle espérance
De renouer avec Nedjma
A sept avec l'étoile
A jamais assombrie

Vingt
Quand il mourut
Mon unique
Acte d'homme

Vautour empoisonné
Déplumé en plein vol
J'allais encore perdre
Et mon travail au port
Et la folle espérance
De renverser l'étoile
En ce vent de naufrage
Sur la stèle grise inclinée

Une fois
La tombe
Paternelle
Marquée
D'une pierre
Grise
Inclinée
Quel vent
Et quel naufrage!

Sous le soleil de juin
Et face à la vallée
Lointaine de Soumam!

Une fois la tombe paternelle marquée d'une pierre grise inclinée
Sous le soleil de juin et face à la vallée lointaine de Soumam![13]

Five women
For whom I was henceforth responsible
Stuffed into a lorry
With a wooden trough
And a brass pestle
And the wild hope
To reunite with Nedjma
At seven with the star
Forever darkened

Twenty years
When he died
My single
Act of manhood

Vulture poisoned
Deplumaged in mid-flight
I was going to lose again
My work at the port
And the wild hope
To overturn the star
In this shipwrecking wind
Over the leaning grey stone

Once
The paternal
Tomb
Marked
With a grey
Stone
Leaning
What a wind
And what shipwreck!

Under the sun of June
And opposite the distant
Valley of Samoum!

Once the paternal tomb marked with a grey stone leaning
Under the sun of June opposite the distant valley of Samoum!

We can see how Yacine uses space in the poem to juxtapose lines which can be read either across the page or down it. He also jumbles and rearranges certain refrains which run all through the poem, such as the lines: "J'avais vingt ans quand il mourut" and "Mon unique acte d'homme/Avait été de lui offrir/Sa chaise longue de moribond." The vulture is the symbol of the ancestors (more specifically, of Keblut, founder of Constantine), whereas Nedjma the star (hence the title) symbolizes the unattainable, ideal Algeria for which all the main characters, including not only the Arabs, but the Corsican Marc and the mysterious Negro who at one time guards Nedjma in a cave, are striving. The

[13] Kateb Yacine, *Le Polygone étoilé* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 171.

complexity of the poem's structure actually helps us, in a curious way, to understand the structure of the work as a whole, with its refrains and juxtapositions of theme in space and time.

We are never quite certain of Nedjma's parentage (did she really have a French mother?) and there is an odour of incest about the mother–mistress relationship she seems to bear towards all her pursuers. Thus Yacine has progressed from the primal break with the mother and the mother-tongue, cited at the beginning of this chapter, to weave a single pattern out of all the wanderings of himself and his fellow Algerians; out of the agonies of exile, war and revolution; to give us a sense that the Algerian nation exists, at least potentially and imaginatively, after all the ravages of her conquerors and converters. It is hard to believe he could have done this in any other way than in the radically new form of fiction he has written. Like all the best symbolic writing, this resists all attempts to interpret it literally and fragmentarily; its meaning is in its organization rather than its details. But on occasion he can write directly and with magnificent power, summarizing the meaning of his title in a few lines:

> They never lacked space to conquer, and everything had to be dug up, begun again, lifting the mortgage from this doubtful earth which had attracted soldiers and locusts, whose owner had been killed, dispossessed, thrown in prison and had undoubtedly emigrated, leaving to his successors an old illegible act indicating nothing but a polygon studded with charcoal, apparently uncultivated and almost empty, immense, inaccessible, and with no limits other than the stars, the barbed-wire, the bare earth, and the sky on the loins, in memory of the rebel faction, irreducible in its coils and to its very root, rude Promethean humanity, virgin after every rape, who owes nothing to anyone; Atlas himself had here laid down his burden and declared that the universe could carry itself otherwise than on his shoulders.[14]

I will describe novels like *L'Harmattan* and *Le Polygone étoilé* as having an open form, because they are pointed towards the future. Within the limits of the novel itself there may be failure, as there is the failure of the Referendum campaign in *L'Harmattan*. *Le Polygone étoilé* though published in 1966, does not expatiate upon the Algerian victory of four years earlier, but sets the whole tragic struggle in the deepest context of Maghrebine history. In both cases, the novelist does not have to show his characters triumphing in some objective and definitive way; he is content to show them moving, ineluctably and irreversibly, in a certain direction. The goals towards which they move may well lie beyond the limits of the novel itself.

Exactly the same formula can be applied to another major African novel of recent years, Mongo Beti's *Remember Ruben* (1974). To write his epic novel about the Cameroonian struggle for liberation (incidentally, *L'Harmattan* is dedicated to the hero of that struggle, Ruben Um Niobé, whose name is the banner of Beti's title), the novelist has resorted to the classical form of the epic, complete with superman hero, mysterious birth, period of rejection followed by prolonged exile, and final triumphant return to the

[14] Ibid., p. 144.

community which once rejected him. To this he has added the formal device of the dual hero which figures in the earliest epic of which we have record, the Sumerian tale of Gilgamesh, first written down some 3,600 years ago. There are even some formal resemblances to *Gilgamesh* in *Remember Ruben,* but these are probably coincidental. Beti would not have needed to look so far afield in order to find the dual hero model, and he had already begun exploring the idea in his earlier novel, *Mission terminée* (1957), where Medza and Zambo emerge together from the village of Kala to embark upon the adventure of exile and political struggle, with Zambo as the paragon of strength and other village virtues, but Medza as the more reflective and ruthless of the two. At the end of this novel, Beti refers briefly to the epic adventures lived through by his two heroes during the long years since their youthful escapades in Kala:

> It turned out to be a life of endless wandering: different people, changing ideas, from country to country and from place to place. During these peregrinations my cousin Zambo and I stuck together, like two limbs attached to the same body.[15]

The scope of *Remember Ruben* lies somewhere between that of the other epic novels discussed; between the free-ranging Yacine, who takes all Algerian time and space as his province, and the concentration of Sembène upon the 1958 Referendum as an adequate index of the alternatives still facing the African peoples today. Beti's novel gives us, in literal terms, perhaps forty years of Cameroonian history (roughly 1920 to 1960), but the earlier chapters in the forest town of Ekoumdoum are invested with a legendary character which befits the epic treatment of Mor-Zamba and Abena in those pages. As the novel moves nearer to modern times and to the great urban centres, so the treatment becomes progressively more naturalistic; the mists of legend still cling around both the epic heroes, but their feet are very much planted in contemporary reality.

Both heroes quit Ekoumdoum for a prolonged period of wandering, but neither is estranged in any definitive sense from his mother tongue. Neither is elitist, either in formation or achievement. Indeed, Mor-Zamba does not learn any French until he has been long in the city. This is important to what he represents, for the wild man who came out to the forests, with no known antecedents, to become both the champion and the pariah of Ekoumdoum, then lives an Odyssey of obscure suffering and struggle which can stand as typical of the thousands who followed the inspired leadership of Ruben Um Niobé. As long as that struggle remains primarily civil, Mor-Zamba rightly dominates the foreground of the novel; with the transformation to guerilla warfare, Abena draws nearer and nearer to the Cameroons and to his lost brother, until they are reunited in the closing pages. By then the exchange of roles is complete. Abena has become the outsider, nineteen years absent from his homeland and returning with a changed identity as "Ouragan-Viet": the mysterious, half-legendary leader of the guerillas in the forest. Mor-Zamba, on the other hand, is now ripe for return to Ekoumdoum with his newly discovered identity as a son of the soil and his patiently forged reputation as the man

[15] Mongo Beti, *Mission terminée* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957), p. 250.

of integrity, strength and goodness. This pattern of reversal is completed by Mor-Zamba's belated discovery of his dead mother's identity, and hence of his own as the rightful chief of Ekoumdoum. For whereas Mor-Zamba discovers his mother at the end of long rejection and suffering, Abena has long forsaken his, in order to remake himself as a pure weapon of revolt, mobile, ruthless and free of compromising entanglements. Looking back over the epic reach of the novel, we perceive how this reversal was foreshadowed in Part I, subtitled "Everything for a wife, nothing for a gun": there, Mor-Zamba became all intent upon his courtship of a wife who would represent his final acceptance into the clan, whereas Abena was already intent upon his search for a gun, with which to break the mould of a tired society he no longer wished to belong to.

Mongo Beti has thus manipulated the classical machinery of the epic to produce a work which is both modern and revolutionary. Of all the open-ended novels discussed here, his, with its strong narrative line, is perhaps the easiest to assimilate and the most radical in its commitment to a new society, lying beyond the limits of the work itself.

What this exercise in comparison teaches us, however, is that the three categories of novel analysed here: the pastoral novel, the novel of return and the open-ended novel which both celebrates and formally expresses change, are all ways of manipulating a situation of initial alienation. Does the novelist move back from that situation to try and rediscover the society, the mother/language he left behind? Does he return to that society in the imaginative present, bringing with him a white wife as hostage from where he has been and talisman of what he has become? Or does he altogether reject romantic individualism and the élitist posture it implies, subduing himself into characters whose struggle may be obscure and unrewarded, but who share a common vision of the future and are interested only in belonging there?

It may be hoped that the comparison also demonstrates that it is possible, indeed profitable, to consider African literature as a continental phenomenon, rather than viewing apart, as is usually done, "Black Africa" and "North Africa". Despite recent attempts—notably by Yambo Ouologuem and Ayi Kwei Armah—to depict the Arabs as the first and worst of Africa's colonizers, the francophone literature of the Maghreb both merits and rewards comparison with that of Black Africa, especially that of the Islamic areas. Not only do both literatures reflect the impact of French colonial rule and assimilationist policy, of attempted conversion to Christianity, of the rise of a new French-educated *élite* to challenge the traditional Islamic *literati*, but both also illustrate the ultimate irreconcilability of Western secular materialism and Islamic/African fatalistic spirituality, whatever moral each author may choose to deduce from that. The wound to the mother and the tongue strikes as deep in Constantine as it does in Ziguinchor or Ekoumdoum.

The impulse towards a change which will heal that wound in society at large as well as in each particular author, seems to dictate a move towards what I have called the epic form in fiction. But it is perhaps significant that the achievement of that form often seems to herald a move out of fiction altogether, towards modes of communication more consistent with social and political radicalism. Sembène's film-making is matched by Kateb Yacine's recent development as a dramatist using popular Arabic. It is notewor-

thy that in anglophone Africa Ngugi wa Thiong'o has charted a similar course from the romantic individualism of *Weep Not, Child* (1964) to the epic form developed in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977). He too has followed this achievement by a move into the vernacular which has deepened his influence and rendered more acute his confrontation with authority.

Does the novel, by some irony, seal its own fate by evolving a form apparently more effective to its purpose in these post-colonial societies? Fourteen years of silence preceded *Remember Ruben;* ten years separated *Nedjma* from *Le Polygone étoilé* and *A Grain of Wheat* from *Petals of Blood*: this is suggestive of the effort necessary to evolve a form of fiction which would leave the reader himself to judge the trend of events through the collective struggle of characters who are carefully *not* identified with the author. But that very evolution of fiction which makes it as expressive as possible of the people's struggle also points to its limitations as a medium of communication: those who have given most to the development of truly engaged African fiction may well be the first to forsake it.

JACQUELINE LEINER

2. AFRICA AND THE WEST INDIES: TWO NEGRITUDES

Whether in Africa, in America or in Europe, few words have provoked, and still provoke today, as many heated polemics as the word negritude, with its manifold controversial dimensions and connotations. It means "plus ou moins confusément, à la fois l'ensemble des hommes noirs, les valeurs du monde noir et la participation de chaque homme et de chaque groupe noir à ce monde et à ces valeurs."[16] Negritude is a concept, a political ideology and a literary school all rolled into one. It is viewed in turn as a form of racism, a reactionary doctrine, a liberation and protest movement, an incoherent system, a mystifying philosophy. Attacked, at times vilified, by some (Stanislas Adotevi,[17] Maryse Condé,[18] Marcien Towa,[19] René Ménil,[20] Ezekiel Mphahlele,[21] Wole Soyinka,[22] to list but a few), defended by others (Jean-Paul Sartre,[23] Alioune Diop,[24] Sheikh Anta Diop,[25] Lamine Diakhate[26] and especially Léopold Sédar Senghor,[27] one of the founders of the movement), negritude has become the source of numberless gnoses, theses,

[16] Albert Memmi, *L'Homme dominé* (Paris: Payot, 1958), pp. 43–46: "more or less and at the same time all black people, the values of the Black world and the participation of each Black man and each Black group in this world and in these values." In order to clarify the debate, Memmi suggests using words such as "négricité," "négrisme," and "négrité" to express these different notions.

[17] S. Adotevi, *Négritude et négrologues* (Paris: Union générale d'Editions, 1972).

[18] Maryse Condé, "Pourquoi la négritude? Négritude ou révolution?," *Les Littératures d'expression française. Négritude Africaine. Négritude Caraïbe* (Paris: Editions de la Francité, 1973), pp. 150–154; and "Négritude césairienne, négritude senghorienne," *Revue de littérature comparée*, 48 (1974), 409–419.

[19] M. Towa, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Négritude ou servitude?* (Yaoundé: CLE., 1971).

[20] R. Ménil, "Une doctrine réactionnaire: La Négritude," *Action* (1 August 1963), 37–50.

[21] E. Mphahlele, "La négritude en accusation," *La Vie africaine*, No. 12 (March 1961), p. 5, and *The African Image* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

[22] Soyinka was responsible for the famous saying, "A tiger had no need to proclaim his tigritude, he pounces," recorded by Janheinz Jahn, *A History of Neo-African Literature* (London: Faber, 1966), p. 265.

[23] J.-P. Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Préface to L. S. Senghor (ed.), *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. IX–XXIV.

[24] A. Diop, "Discours d'ouverture" (to the first International Conference of Black Writers and Artists, Paris, 1956), recorded in special issue of *Présence Africaine*, N.S., 8–9–10 (1956), 9–18, and "Discours d'ouverture" (to the Second Conference, Rome 1959), in special issue of *Présence Africaine*, N.S. 25–35 (1959), 40–48.

[25] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et cultures* (Paris: Editions africaines, 1955).

[26] Lamine Diakhate, "Négritude et Modernité," Lecture delivered at the University of Fès (Morocco) in 1976 (mimeo).

[27] L. S. Senghor, *Liberté 1. Négritude et humanisme* (Paris Le Seuil, 1964); *Liberté 3. Négritude et civilisation de l'Universel* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1977).

exegeses,[28] talks, colloquia and pamphlets. "No other word annoys me as much as negritude," cried Césaire in Dakar in 1966 although he himself coined the term some thirty years earlier: he strongly disapproves of what has become of this concept which today seems to him to lead to division since "toute théorie littéraire, mise au service d'une politique, devenant infiniment contestable."[29]

At a symposium held at the Paris-Nord University in 1973, Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou proposed to substitute, for the *Petit Robert* dictionary definition, which he found "degrading"—"Négritude: ensemble des caractères, des manières de penser, de sentir, propres à la race noire: appartenance à la race noire"—the following formula: "*mouvement littéraire* de libération des peuples noirs, dû à une prise de conscience, manifestée entre 1930 at 1940, par réaction contre l'esclavage et le fait colonial. On désigne par extension, par le terme Négritude, les caractères, les manières de penser, de sentir propres à la race noire."[30] Originally, indeed, negritude was above all a literary movement and as such can be defined by its manifestos and its praxis, its thematics and its aesthetics. If we study the texts, we notice two different styles within the movement: Caribbean negritude and African negritude. Lydie Goré[31] was among the first ones to try to pinpoint their specificity. In order to do this, it is imperative to place them in their historical contexts.

The movement started in Paris in the 30s from the anguished questioning by some students from Guyana, the West Indies and Africa who were influenced by the surrounding racism. They adopted as their own André Breton's obsession in *Nadja*:

> Qui suis-je? Qui je hante? Par-delà toutes sortes de *goûts* que je connais, d'*affinités* que je me sens, d'*attirances* que je subis, d'*événements* qui m'arrivent et n'arrivent qu'à moi, par-delà quantité de mouvements que je me vois faire, d'*émotions* que je

[28] Among the most important works are: Dorothy S. Blair, "Négritude: 1 (Black Renaissance)," *Contrast* (Cape Town), 1,2 (1961), 38–48, and "Négritude: 2 (Black Orpheus Arising)," *Contrast*, 1,3 (1961), 38–49; Thomas Melone, *De la négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962); Lilyan Kesteloot, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française: Naissance d'une littérature* (Brussels, Institut de Sociologie, 1963); L.-V. Thomas, "Panorama de la Négritude," *Actes du Colloque sur la Littérature Africaine d'expression française, Dakar, 26–29 mars 1963*, (Dakar: Faculté des Lettres 1965), pp. 45–101; A. Gérard, "Origines historiques et destin littéraire de la négritude," *Diogène*, No. 48 (1964), 14–37; Abiola Irele, "Négritude, Literature and Ideology," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3 (1965), 499–526 and his dissertation, *Les origines de la négritude à la Martinique. Sociologie de l'œuvre poétique d'Aimé Césaire* (Université de Paris, 1966); Marcien Towa, *Négritude de Césaire à Senghor* (Université de Paris-Sorbonne; unpublished dissertation, 1966); Gregory Urban Rigsby, *Negritude: A Critical Analysis* (Washington, D. C.: Howard University dissertation, 1968); René Depestre, "Les métamorphoses de la négritude en Amérique," *Présence Africaine*, N° 175 (1970), 19–33; G. R. Coulthard, "Negritude. Reality and Mystification," *Caribbean Studies*, 10,1 (1970), 43–51; *Les Littératures d'expression française, Négritude Caraïbe* (Paris: Editions de la Francité, 1973). For further bibliographical information, see Jahn and Dressler, *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* (1971), pp. 25–33, and the relevant items in the African section of the *MLA Annual Bibliography*.

[29] Aimé Césaire, "Discours sur l'Art africain, Dakar, 1966," *Etudes littéraires* 6,1 (1973), 102; "any literary theory which is given a political aim becomes extremely objectionable."

[30] "Black peoples' literary movement of liberation brought about by an awareness which expressed itself between 1930 and 1940 as a reaction to slavery and the colonial situation. By extension, this term refers to the characteristic ways of thinking and feeling typical of the Black race." If the word negritude was created by Césaire round 1936, it was soon used by L. S. Senghor in one of his first poems, "Le Portrait," published only in 1964, in *Poèmes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil; cf. Michèle Dorsemaine, "Catalogue de l'exposition L. S. Senghor," Bibliothèque Nationale, 1978, Notice N° 128).

[31] See her introduction to *Négritude Africaine, Négritude Caraïbe* (1973).

> suis seul à éprouver, je m'efforce par rapport aux autres hommes, de savoir en quoi consiste, sinon en quoi tient ma *différenciation*. N'est-ce pas dans la mesure exacte où je prendrai conscience de cette différenciation que je me révélerai ce qu'entre tous les autres je suis venu faire en ce monde et de quel *message unique* je suis porteur pour ne pouvoir répondre de son sort que sur ma tête?[32]

In this climate of metaphysical unrest, the salon of the Martiniquans Paulette, Andrée and Jeanne Nardal (who founded the *Revue du Monde Noir* with Doctor Sajou) and that of René Maran, a West Indian brought up in France, author of *Batouala* and *Le Livre de la Brousse*, "véritable roman nègre,"[33] seem to have played a crucial role as intermediaries between French-speaking black students and black American students. The former, thanks to the latter, discovered the works of Black Renaissance authors such as Langston Hughes, Claude Mackay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown. Senghor regularly read Black American journals like *The Crisis* (dedicated to the advancement of coloured people) and *Opportunity*; he knew Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes personally. Hughes' manifesto, published in the journal *Fire* in 1926,—

> We, makers of the new black generation, want to express our black personality shamelessly and fearlessly. If White people appreciate it, we are delighted. If they do not, we do not care—

probably influenced Black French-speaking youth in their determination to be "Black Africans." So did the *Revue du Monde Noir* (November 1931–April 1932) by informing them about black literary movements in the West Indies, in the U.S.A. and about the black man's condition generally. Indeed, its goal was described as:

> l'éveil, chez les noirs, de la conscience de leur race, la connaissance et l'approfondissement de l'histoire, du passé des peuples noirs pour tirer parti des richesses qu'offraient le passé et le continent africain, la résurrection de la culture africaine."[34]

This journal was largely controlled by Haitians. Coming from the very first Black republic, which had gained its independence in 1804, the Haitian people had never accepted the American Marines' landing of 1915. This infringement on their independence marked the beginning, among intellectuals who were "frustrated in their freedom as human beings, and in their dignity as Blacks", of a renewed and violent awareness

[32] See Richard Howard's translation of A. Breton, *Nadja* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 11, 12–13: "Who am I? ... Whom do I haunt? Over and above the various prejudices I acknowledge, the affinities I feel, the attractions I succumb to, the events which occur to me and to me alone—over and above a sum of movements I am conscious of making, of emotions I alone experience—I strive, in relation to other men, to discover the nature, if not the necessity, of my difference from them. Is it not precisely to the degree I become conscious of this difference that I shall recognize what I alone have been put on this earth to do, what unique message I alone may hear so that I alone can answer for its fate?"

[33] In his preface to *Batouala*, 1921 Goncourt Prize winner, René Maran had had the courage to write: "Civilization, civilization, the European's pride...you build your kingdom on dead bodies." Although he protested against the unjustices done to his race, he nevertheless stood on the side of those called "civilized."

[34] "To awaken among the blacks an awareness of their own race, deeper knowledge of their past in order to take advantage of the riches that the African past, the African continent and the rebirth of African culture had to offer."

of their origins. In the nineteenth century, budding Haitian writing had often produced a "littérature de revendication en faveur d'Haïti et de la race noire"[35] but at the beginning of the twentieth century, this preoccupation seemed to have vanished completely. As a reaction against the new invader, however, the writers paid renewed attention to their national culture (mores, beliefs, popular tales). As early as 1927, the journal *Indigène,* one of whose founders was Jacques Roumain, rejected white criteria and extolled black culture; the *Revue des Griots,* (the title comes from Africa where the word *griot* designates a kind of troubadour or chronicler), with Carl Brouard as its editor, wished the Haitian griots to sing the beauty of their country and of their women as well as their ancestors' high deeds. The new trend found its most eloquent mouthpiece in Dr. Jean Price-Mars, who was one of the contributors to the *Revue du Monde Noir.* A physician and a diplomat, founder of Haiti's Institute of Ethnology, Price-Mars proclaimed and encouraged this awareness through his lectures, his books and other publications. In his essay *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (1928), he insisted that Haitians are not coloured French people "but people born under specific historical conditions and endowed with a double ancestry. If they want to be themselves, they must not reject any part of their ancestral heritage which is for the greater part a gift from Africa." Price-Mars viewed folklore, dialect and religion as the essential elements with which "the race would be able to regain the deep sense of its genius and the assurance of its indestructible vitality." This programme which, in embryo, already heralded Césaire's and Senghor's, won him the name of "Father of Negritude": it was in this capacity that he delivered the opening speech at the convention of black artists and writers in Paris in 1956.

In this Parisian atmosphere where Afro-American and Haitian manifestos came to light and were discussed, a little magazine, *Légitime Défense,* of which there was only one issue, was born in June 1932. Founded by a group of West Indian students[36] gathered around Etienne Léro, the journal, whose title was borrowed from André Breton and which took some of its inspiration from the surrealist movement and Communism,[37] attacked Western society and its slavish Caribbean imitators. It urged them to follow the Haitian example in their creative writing, and to express and assert themselves, their race, their bodies, their specific and fundamental passions. In other words, it asked them to create a black literature which would turn away from the Western world and stop trying to be "un bon décalque d'homme pâle." In order to reach that goal, the

[35] Numerous examples of this are given by Henock Trouillot in his article "Deux concepts de la négritude en Haïti," *Présence francophone,* No. 12 (1975), 183–194. Thus, the baron Vastey, one of King Christophe's close collaborators, tried to recreate Haïti's history, not only in order to defend the Northern Kingdom against the Western republic, but also in order to vindicate Haïti's black people against European racism. In *Le Cri de la nature,* Juste Chanlatte defends the black man intellectually, racially, psychologically and physiologically. As early as 1885, Anténor Firmin argued for racial equality; using data from prehistory and biology, he demonstrated that the black man is not congenitally inferior. Even the question of language, so often debated today, was raised: Inginac Nau confessed to being ill at ease "when having to translate into French Creole phrases expressing feelings and sensations." See also Ghislain Gouraige, "Haïti, source de négritude", in *Littératures Ultramarines de langue française. Genèse et Jeunesse,* ed. Thomas H. Geno and Roy Julow (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1974), pp. 58–67.

[36] Thelus Léro, René Ménil, Jules-Marcel Monnerot, Michel Pilotin, Maurice-Sabas Quitman, Auguste Thésée, Pierre Yoyotte.

[37] Several journals published in France, like *La Voix des Nègres* (1927), *La Race Nègre* (June 1927–April 1931), *Le Cri des Nègres* (November 1931), were already more or less Communist sympathisers. They may have had a greater influence on the negritude movement than is generally thought.

collaborators of the journal accepted "without reservations surrealism with which they aligned their future" (the whole programme of *Tropiques*, which was edited by A. Césaire and R. Ménil from 1941 to 1945, was already contained in these words). For all their bold theories the contributors to *Légitime Défense* produced no original works of their own.

It was not until March 1935, in the first (and apparently only) issue of *L'Etudiant Noir*, journal of the Martiniquan students in France,[38] that the names of Césaire and Senghor, who were to create the literary movement known henceforth as *Négritude*, appeared for the first time. With the exception of Senghor, all the contributors came from the Caribbean, the West Indies or French Guyana.[39] Far from being inspired by the same line of thought, the articles displayed deep divisions which were later to mark the West Indian literary movement. Some like Henry Eboué ("Language et Musique chez les Nègres du Congo"), confessed that "it is hard to rise above the influences of the environment when trying to assess objectively an African civilization", other than that of the West Indies! Others, like Sainville, wondered if it was not "somewhat snobbish to claim that these islands are peopled by blacks and thus to claim for them a kind of black civilization?" As to Gilbert Gratiant ("Mulâtres... Pour le bien et le mal"), he believed that for the Martiniquan people the real tragedy lay "in being, both completely French intellectually, emotionally and culturally, and sincerely though confusely but often movingly black, negro, African". In "Guignol Ouolof", Paulette Nardal showed that there existed between West Indians and her short story's black hero "a visible solidarity based on colour, if on nothing more real." This a far cry from Césaire's negritude, which will be unconditionally black.

Undoubtedly, the two most interesting articles as far as the history of the literary movement is concerned are those by A. Césaire and L. S. Senghor, in which the two founders of negritude expressed the nucleus of their philosophy and art. In "Négreries, jeunesse noire et assimilation," Césaire, aged 22, raised the problem of black identity in a non-discursive, spontaneous and often explosive manner which already foreshadowed an aesthetics based on a jagged discontinuity: "Black youth does not want to assume any role, it wants to be itself. To the old men who say 'assimilation', they answer back 'ressurection!'" At that time, Césaire believed in an unchangeable black nature (we are tempted to say: an essence). Talking about those people in Martinique who try to assimilate, he wrote: "nul ne peut changer de faune, c'est méconnaître altérité qui est loi de nature". And he set forth a platform which his whole work was later on to illustrate:

> La jeunesse Noire veut *agir* et *créer*. Elle veut avoir ses poètes, ses romanciers, qui lui diront à elle, *ses malheurs à elle*, et ses *grandeurs à elle*; elle veut contribuer à *la vie universelle*, à l'*humanisation de l'humanité;* et pour cela encore une fois, il faut se conserver ou *se retrouver:* C'est le primat du soi.[40]

[38] President: Aimé Césaire; Vice-President: Aristide Maugée; Treasurer: J. Sauphanor.

[39] A. Maugée, R. and J. Sauphanor, A. Charpentier, G. Midas, Henry Eboué, A. Césaire, Paulette Nardal, L. Sainville, Ch. Branchi and Gilbert Gratiant.

[40] "Black youth wants *to act* and *create*. It wants its own poets and novelists who will tell *its own misfortunes* and *its own achievements;* it wants to be part of *the universal life*, and contribute to the *humanization of mankind;* and to accomplish this, let us repeat, man has to go on as usual or discover his essence again. The self is supreme."

As to Senghor, then 29 years old, he was undoubtedly drawn by his friend Césaire into that Caribbean ship. His essay on "René Maran, l'Humanisme et nous" served as an excuse to put forward thoughts which later on would give rise to the Senghorian ideology. Using a didactic, professorial tone, nurtured by Latin authors, relying as well on expansive, rythmical sentences, in the tradition of classical eloquence, he celebrated the Noble Savage. "For to be a negro is to recapture what is human under the rust of artificiality and of inhuman conventions or rather it is to be human since the black man has remained a man" (in other words, only blacks could be men!). We see here implicitly all the *characteristics of the Black soul* and its aesthetics as they will be defined in the decades to come by Senghor in his essays and talks: intuition, a keen feeling for what is well expressed, elegant concision, a taste for alliteration and onomatopoesis, for redundancy and repetition of words. Using a quotation from Césaire, Senghor explained that Maran's inner life was "a tragedy, a duel between Reason and Imagination, Spirit and Soul, Black and White."[41] He added that Maran managed to reconcile them because there was no fundamental contradiction involved: again we are far from Césaire's choice! Then Senghor defined "humanism, (which must result in the discovery and knowledge of the self in black humanism)" as "a cultural movement whose goal is the black man, and which uses the western reason and the negro soul as tools of research; both reason and intuition being needed". What is here being sketched is the beginning of Senghor's theory of cultural cross-breeding. According to Senghor, Maran followed "with interest, the slow intellectual ascent of his race, to which he contributes in such an efficient way. But he remembers that isolation means impoverishment; consequently, he often goes back to the old classical authors who shaped his mind and allowed him to discover his own riches." Maran's case possibly influenced Senghor's negritude more than current exegesis leads one to believe. Apparently his role was not limited to that of an intermediary between black Americans and French-speaking blacks, though more and more critics seem to reduce it to that.[42] Maran who had already realized in himself the syncretism towards which all of Senghor's thought was to turn, may have contributed to the making of the latter's thought, a thought very different from Césaire's and his radicalism. (All this did not prevent Maran from confessing that the significance of the negritude movement was not clear to him!).

For the study of the genesis of the Caribbean and African literary negritudes, *L'Etudiant Noir* (an exclusively cultural periodical, as opposed to *Légitime Défense* which expressed political views) is an invaluable document. Although Césaire's and Senghor's blacks ("L'Esprit de Brousse") are both abstract blacks who often resemble the mythical Noble Savage, the ways in which the two writers tried to revive what seems to be his immutable essence (probably more psychological than biological) are very different. Césaire referred to the "law of nature" without saying precisely what he meant:

[41] Martin Steins notes that these antinomies, in use "since Gobineau and the beginning of colonial literature around 1900, fill all the books written about and by blacks, on both sides of the Atlantic, and that Paul Morand had made them threadbare." See "Jeunesse Nègre," *Neohelicon*, 4,1/2 (1976), 115.

[42] Michel Fabre, "Autour de René Maran," *Présence Africaine*, N.S., No. 89 (1973), 196–198 and "René Maran, Trait d'union entre deux Négritudes," in *Littératures d'expression française. Négritude Africaine. Négritude Caraïbe* (1973), pp. 55–61; see also Femi Ojo-Ade, *René Maran* (Paris: Nathan, 1977).

his later works enable us to understand that he was thinking of Orpheus descending to discover the black soul in himself. Senghor, on the other hand, used African and Western tools of research. These two radically different methods did not fail to influence deeply the two writers' aesthetics. One was an aesthetics of separation (revolution), the other of conciliation (evolution). One meant choice, the other totality. But both tended to transcend a black resurrection and to culminate in a true humanism, a humanism of the oppressed with Césaire, a humanism of the universal with Senghor. We may wonder if Senghor's thought did not first take shape in the meetings of the Association of West Indian Students. He may have borrowed from Césaire (whom he had known since their days at the Lycée Louis-Le-Grand) the notion of a universal black man, who was to become the Senghorian Negro-African, and from some West Indians (notably P. Nardal and G. Gratiant), especially from Haitians whom he met in Paris, the idea of a reconciliation of both the African and the European, an ideal shared by many of them and which he had found in Maran's work. All that is original in Senghor's thought may have sprung from these experiences.

The two negritudes, which had come from the same Caribbean and Parisian stock, were to diverge radically from each other in the years to come: after *L'Etudiant Noir*, praxis was to replace theory for a while and negritude, still unnamed, was to be embodied in literary works.

Léon Gontran Damas published his first poems as early as 1934 in the journal *Esprit*; Senghor translated Serer poems for black American journals and his original works appeared in the *Cahiers du Sud* in 1938 as well as in the journal *Volontés* in 1939. But the two most important literary works (which went more or less unnoticed in France) are undoubtedly Damas' *Pigments* (1937), printed manually by Guy Lévi-Mano —for here for the first time, a black man was drawing attention to the colour of his skin —and Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* published by *Volontés* just before the war, in 1939.

Pigments, as we shall see later, was implicitly the true manifesto of this literary movement which was still without a name; it already contained all the themes of Caribbean negritude (frustration—uprooting) expressed through an astonishingly new aesthetics in which rhythm becomes the most important element: one can dance to the words: "fini le règne de l'imitation métropolitaine et de la décalcomanie". This work illustrates what Damas made clear in 1938 in *Retour de Guyane*, namely that Africa's original traditions have survived on American soil. Thanks to this collection of poetry, Damas may rank as yet another father of negritude; to quote his own whimsical words at the Vermont Conference in 1971: "Who is the father of negritude? I am fed up of *[sic]* all that. I don't understand why negritude needs so many fathers. Perhaps I am the Holy Spirit."

It was Césaire who coined the word which was later on to have such a controversial and eventful life. Already in this first work, the term negritude is polyvalent since it can either mean *all black people* (Haïti, where Negritude stood up for the first time) or the *experience of being black:*

My Negritude is not a stone, its deafness
thrown against the clamor of the day.
My Negritude is not a speck of dead water
on the dead eye of earth.
My Negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral

or *a certain way of being black*:

I say Hurrah! The old Negritude
progressively disintegrates[43]

Around this time, in "Que m'accompagnent kôras et balafong," a poem composed in 1939 and printed in *Chants d'ombre* (1945), Senghor used it as meaning simply blackness:

> Night which resolvest all my contradictions, all contradictions in the primeval unity of thy negritude

In order to understand fully the whole literary significance of negritude, it is advisable to examine both its conceptual forms and its praxis, i.e. both the theoretical statements and the creative works that it inspired. This is an easy task as far as Senghor is concerned. Most of his speeches, articles, and essays on the subject were gathered in *Liberté 1, Négritude et Humanisme* (1964) and in *Liberté 3, Négritude et Civilisation de l'Universel* (1977). In the case of Césaire, who, as we saw, actually coined the term, the problem is much more complicated. He did not make an ideology out of it, especially not a political ideology. Today, his interest in negritude seems to have evaporated. Unlike Damas, he did not attend the Dakar symposium on Negritude organized in April 1971 by the Union Progressiste Sénégalaise. Still, it is possible to gain a sharper understanding of his thought through texts and interviews scattered in numerous journals. Here is a list of the most important texts: the magazine *Tropiques*,[44] "Sur la poésie nationale,"[45] *Discours sur le Colonialisme*,[46] *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*,[47] "Culture et Colonisation,"[48] "L'Homme de culture et ses responsabilités,"[49] "Discours sur l'art africain" (Dakar, 1966),[50] "Société et littérature dans les Antilles" (Québec, 1972)[51] and the interviews with Jacqueline Sieger,[52] Lilyan Kesteloot,[53] Jacqueline Leiner,[54] and

[43] Emile Snyder's translation of Aimé Césaire, *Return to My Native Land* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), pp. 66, 116, 146.
[44] *Tropiques: Revue culturelle*, Fort de France, Nos 1 to 14, April 1941 to September 1945.
[45] *Présence Africaine*, N.S., No. 4 (1955) 39–41.
[46] Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955.
[47] Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956.
[48] *Présence Africaine*, N.S. No. 8–9–10. (1956), 190–205.
[49] Ibid., 24–25 (1959), 116–122.
[50] Repr. in *Etudes Littéraires*, 6,1 (1973), 100–109.
[51] Ibid., pp. 9–34.
[52] *Afrique*, (5 October 1961), 64–67.
[53] in L. Kestellot and B. Kotchy, *Aimé Césaire l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973), pp. 227–244.
[54] In a reprint of *Tropiques*, (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978), I, pp. V–XXIV.

Keith Walker.[55] On the whole, Césairian negritude seems better defined, more concrete, more dynamic, yet less well worked out theoretically than the Senghorian.

To Césaire, negritude is "la conscience d'être noir, simple reconnaissance d'un fait qui implique acceptation, prise en charge de son destin de noir, de son histoire, de sa culture; elle est affirmation d'une identité, d'une solidarité, d'une fidélité à un ensemble de valeurs noires."[56] Césaire favours negritude as a literary movement and as a code of personal ethics, but is against any ideology based on it.

As a trained grammarian, Senghor starts by explaining negritude through its etymology: "objectivement un état, c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des valeurs de civilisation du monde noir et subjectivement une passion, la manière de vivre cet état, cette situation du Nègre dans le monde. Cette définition de la Négritude est si peu artificielle qu'on trouve dans les langues négro-africaines, comme le peul, deux substantifs distincts pour exprimer les deux sens objectif et subjectif, du mot français."[57] Close examination of Senghor's and Césaire's dealing with the discursive definition of negritude brings out similarities as well as fundamental differences between them. Senghorian and Cesairian negritudes claim to be, above all, an *awareness,* an *assertion* of oneself which is not hatred of the Other, but "a way of being, a way of being more fully what one is". Since they were influenced in the beginning by Frobenius' romantic thought,[58] by Lévy-Bruhl's early writings,[59] and in Senghor's case, by Gobineau,[60] critics too often detect in them a form of racism or a reaction against exoticism. It is natural, however, that the black man, whose only image of himself was that given by the Other, should at first have wanted to rehabilitate his race in the eyes of the Other who had stamped down on it; it is also natural that he should have been attracted to the opposite views. The aim of Césaire and Senghor was to show that African values are neither superior nor inferior to European values, but simply different, and that "black is right and beautiful." There is no racism involved in such a position: it is only self-defence. For after all, who created the concept of race, if not the enemy? Obviously, a certain romanticism permeated the rehabilitation of black values; and the Africa alluded to by Césaire in *Tropiques* or by Senghor in *Négritude et Humanisme,* is somewhat mythical and often resembles Paradise lost. Such an attitude is psychologically understandable given the period; it was the heyday of the colonial system, and man always tends to embellish what he no longer possesses.

[55] In K. Walker, *La cohésion poétique de l'œuvre césairienne,* Tübingen and Paris: G. Narr, J.-M. Place, 1979) p. 2.

[56] Ibid.: "the awareness of being black, just the recognition of a fact which implies acceptance, responsibility for one's fate as a black, for one's history and culture; it is the assertion of one's identity, of one's solidarity, of one's loyalty to a set of black values."

[57] See L. S. Senghor in *Littératures Ultramarines de langue française* (Ottawa, 1974), p. 10: "Objectively, it is a condition, i.e. all the values of black civilization, and subjectively, it is a passion, i.e. the way black people live their condition, their situation in the world. This definition is so natural that some Negro-African languages, like Fula, have two separate nouns to express the objective and subjective meanings of the French word."

[58] Leo Frobenius, *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936).

[59] Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Morceaux choisis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), pp. 23–27.

[60] Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Paris: Didot, 1853–1855). In *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme,* p. 65, Senghor writes that, "according to Gobineau, the negro is, of all creatures, the one who is most sensitive to artistic emotion."

Whereas Senghor insists on essentially black characteristics (because of which he was to be accused of racism), he often calls black civilization what we would call an agrarian civilization and always talks of a generic black man. On the contrary, *Tropiques* contributors (except for Suzanne Césaire who devoted an article to Frobenius and the African man as a "plant-man", a man of emotion and feeling)[61] care more for the black man in his social and historical situation, as a cane-cutter or a proletarian. While Senghor's black man does not appear to be the product of a definite culture, but seems to partake of some permanent essence—a European manner of thinking which was very common during Senghor's youth when much was made of the "genius" of France or Germany—Césaire's black man is above all an oppressed man, a victim of history. Césaire's awareness is a sense of belonging to the black man's specific condition. But both try to make black culture meaningful in the world of today and to assume the whole of the black race. Their negritude claims to be a humanism,[62] an affirmation of brotherhood,[63] a procedure to bring together heterogeneous civilizations. To both writers negritude, although deeply rooted in a specific context, also goes beyond this, opening out into a civilization of the Universal[64] which would be a sum of all the particulars[65] and not an abstract, disembodied universal. Negritude is thus retrospective and prospective, growth and freedom. Its aesthetics will "allow initiative and mistakes,"[66] adds Césaire, who is always more realistic than Senghor and who, while not rejecting it, "sees negritude with a very critical eye"[67] because he fears it might lead to a new mystification similar to the Duvalier doctrine in Haiti. In order to avoid such a danger, Césaire remains deliberately concrete. In 1971, he told Lilyan Kesteloot that his idea of Negritude was not "biological"—as was suggested by a sentence in *Tropiques* where he expatiated on "le dynamisme spécial de la complexe réalité biologique" of the Martiniquan people[68]—but "cultural" and "historical".[69] Senghor for his part never mentions the specificity of Africa's socio-historical situations; his theory of negritude therefore often leads to a certain amount of confusion.

Césaire feels that his first duty is to Martinique, then to the black man, and mankind "A la limite, l'Antillais n'a rien, ni langue véritable ni religion, ni histoire. Le poème, par le retour aux sources qu'il nécessite, peut être une tentative de repersonnalisation."[70] All of Césaire's works, and especially the journal *Tropiques* with its innovative research, aim at making Martinique become aware of herself; recalling that "en 1939 aucun Antillais aux Antilles ne se déclarait Nègre", Césaire strives for the "rétablissement de l'homme dans ses appartenances et ses relations fondamentales avec sa terre, avec son

[61] "Leo Frobenius et le problème des civilisations," *Tropiques* reprint, 1, pp. 27-36.
[62] Cf. Senghor, *Liberté 1, Négritude et humanisme*, passim, and Césaire, "Discours sur l'Art Africain (Dakar, 1966)."
[63] Ibid.
[64] Cf. Senghor, *Liberté 1: Négritude et Humanisme*, and *Liberté 3: Négritude et civilisation de l'universel.*
[65] Cf. Césaire, "Discours sur l'Art africain (Dakar 1966)" and "Société et Littérature dans les Antilles."
[66] Cf. Césaire, "Sur la Poésie nationale."
[67] Kesteloot and Kotchy, op. cit., p. 236.
[68] "Que signifie pour nous l'Afrique," *Tropiques*, No. 5 (April 1942), 62.
[69] Kesteloot and Kotchy, op. cit., p. 236.
[70] Interview with Jacqueline Sieger, *Afrique* (1961): "All things considered, the West Indian possesses nothing, no true language, no religion, no past. Since poetry demands a return to one's roots, it may help the black man rediscover his own identity."

pays et avec son peuple".[71] All of his activities thus tend toward the exploration and revaluation of the West Indian's being. Such a preoccupation remains completely unknown to Senghor since he was born in Africa. Consequently, he is not doubly alienated like the West Indian, who was not only subjected to colonialism, but was torn away from the Black continent in the first place. Thus, while Senghor emphasizes the benefits of cultural cross-breeding,[72] Césaire emphasizes the search for the black man's lost identity. It is in this respect that both differ deeply. Senghor never experienced total assimilation; his assimilation was of his own choice, a painful choice at times but still his own: in other words, he assimilated but was not assimilated. He thus can praise the merits of mulatto civilizations; to him, colonization is just the contact of two civilizations, a form of cultural cross-breeding. Césaire, who has experienced unconditional European domination, obstinately seeks to recover the "West Indian self" smothered by colonization. He cannot view the latter as a valid manner of establishing contact between cultures; in fact "la colonisation ne réussit qu'à déciviliser le colonisateur" as well as the colonized.[73] The radicalism of Césaire and of the *Tropiques* contributors, which is characteristic of a number of West Indians, stands in stark opposition to the Senghorian compromise—which is not necessarily African. Since they sprung up from different historical conditions, it is not surprising that Césaire's and Senghor's negritudes should show a deep divergence, even though they stem from the same root: the black intellectuals' self-awareness that emerged in Paris in the thirties.

To Lilyan Kesteloot who was interviewing him, Césaire made the following statement: "En littérature, je ne crois pas beaucoup à la valeur des théories, je crois qu'il s'agit de faire, c'est pour moi la chose la plus importante."[74] In order to define the two negritudes with any degree of precision, instead of getting lost in misty abstractions as did many critics, it is therefore absolutely essential to scrutinize the praxis, i.e. the poetic movement that they inspired.

On the whole, this movement is the work of the two founders who prophesied the world to come. One, Césaire, heralds the salvation of a suffering mankind, brought by a black hand stretched out to "all the wounded hands in the world." The other, Senghor, forecasts the redemption of the white race by black Africans' blood. Both resemble these seers "whom Africa keeps nourishing and worshipping, because she discovers in them God's messengers".[75] God's messengers, indeed, since they possess what Africa traditionally considers the most important art, the gift of the word. As Jahn put it, "en Afrique, la parole exprime la force vitale ou *Nommo*, eau, feu, sang et sperme, puissance

[71] Césaire, "Société et Littérature dans les Antilles": "In 1939, no West Indian living in his own country would have described himself as black." "The restoration of man's deepest affiliations and relationships with his land, his country and his people."

[72] Cf. "De la liberté de l'âme ou éloge du métissage," in *Liberté 1. Négritude et humanisme*. Senghor often reverts to this idea in later talks.

[73] Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme:* "Colonization can only succeed in de-civilizing the colonizer."

[74] Kesteloot and Kotchy, op. cit., p. 235: "I don't believe much in the value of theory in literature, I believe in making; that is to me the most important thing."

[75] *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme*, p. 218.

charnelle et spirituelle qui meut toute vie et agit sur les choses. Elle en est la forme."[76] Senghor and Césaire share this belief: as genuine African poets, they create with words a new mankind that rises up from the ashes of the old one: in other words, they transform the world by using the power of the Word ("le Verbe"). This poetry of the Word which creates, conjures up, commands, often uses the imperative mode in both Césaire and Senghor. But the commanding self is not an individual personality: it is a higher self which is beyond, which is not out to express itself, but to express something.

The Word rejects the anecdotal; it originates "in the very heart of man, in the effervescent depth of his fate": "in black African ontology, Man is the centre of the universe which has no other goal than to strengthen his power, to make him more alive, to make him live more fully." But at the same time, the Word uses fables without which, according to African tradition, speech generates boredom. The two prophets' gift of imagination creates myth—in this case the myth of the redeeming black race—which is "the natural vehicle of black African thought". This myth takes us—all the way with Senghor, part of the way with Césaire—to the "ultimate point" mentioned by André Breton, where reality and imagination, past and future are no longer felt as being contradictory, where the antinomies of the one and the other, of the Self and the Universe seem resolved (as in the African cosmogony, which is characterized by a global view of the world and which perceives each thing as part of a set of correlations and meanings). These dream-poems, these prayer-poems, resulting from the creative act, express a participation in and identification with the cosmic forces, in conformity with Senghor's definition of Negro-African poetry as fundamentally a committed and functional art.

But this myth of a redeeming Africa takes on different forms in Senghor and Césaire. It is in this respect that their negritudes differ, despite the important similarities that have just been noticed.

Senghor's Africa is a warm, colourful, sensuous continent, a truly experienced Africa, which the poet gives us "to see" and even more "to feel." Whether it takes the form of a complex patchwork of childhood memories *(Chants d'ombre)* or of mature experiences *(Hosties noires)*, or again of a calling up of ancient values *(Ethiopiques)*, his work is steeped in emotion and aims above all at a re-assessment of black culture, a return to the sources. This movement back to the origins was to become one of the most important themes of African literary negritude with Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié, who translated popular tales into French, with Ibrahim Issa and Djibril Tamsir Niane who transcribed traditional oral epics, with the historical novels of Paul Hazoumé and Nazi Boni, with Camara Laye's *l'Enfant noir*. In Senghor, this movement is often closely associated with the Kingdom of Childhood. Although he may not have been fully aware of it, his wide-ranging defence and illustration of the black world's cultural values is basically a defence and illustration of Serer civilization in its fundamentally agrarian character. Senghor's geographic domain hardly reaches beyond the limited coastal area

[76] J. Jahn, *Muntu* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1961), p. 116: "In Africa, words express the vital force or *Nommo* —water, fire, blood and sperm, power of the flesh and of the spirit—which moves all life and acts upon all things. They embody it."

where his Christian ethnic group settled in order to escape Islam's domination. His work, which is elegiac, nostalgic, sensuous, feeding on childhood memories and the riches of his native soil, portrays an Africa that is real, no doubt, but at the same time mythical and romantic. The younger generation did not fail to criticize Senghor's idealization of Africa's spiritual values and to remind him that black kings took an active part in the slave trade.[77] They attacked his notion of an immutable black essence and branded him as a racist, frequently forgetting that, as Albert Gérard writes "la doctrine senghorienne...n'en fut pas moins un moment historique déterminant pour la valorisation des cultures africaines, pour la cristallisation, chez les intellectuels africains, du sentiment de leur identité raciale et de leur dignité humaine, pour la validation de la thématique africaine dans les littératures naissantes."[78]

It is not surprising that Senghor, a poet of ancient values like the *griot* (called *djali* in Serer), should have chosen traditional African aesthetic forms to express himself. His originality consists above all in translating these into French, at a time when the mother country's aesthetics was regarded as a law, especially by the colonized. His conservatism, his conformity, his acquiescence in the rural, patriarchal order of traditional African society (so often criticized in today's African novels) endow his poetry with an archaic, almost biblical structure, which re-creates the past splendour of a bygone Africa. The binary rhythm, characteristic of Gregorian chant, which prevails especially in *Ethiopiques*, is the very rhythm of the vital forces, it recalls that of Claudel and Saint-John Perse: it is the rhythm "of days and seasons, ebb and flow, of heart beats, of breathing, walking and loving".

Senghor, poet of the "eternal return," masters time by channelling it into cyclical forms. His coherent, well-ordered work is an harmonious architecture, an arabesque of sounds, where the different parts correspond to one another, balance one another, become intertwined and merge in the "Finale," restoring to our ears and eyes the "recovered oneness" of African cosmogony, that is, as he likes to put it, "l'idée liée à l'acte, l'oreille au cœur, le signe au sens." "Ce qui fait la Négritude d'un poème, c'est moins le thème que le style," he claims: this is why in his determination to revive the African poem, he even indicates below the title which musical instruments should accompany the lines since, in traditional Africa, a poem could not be perfect unless it was sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. This revaluation of African aesthetics, as exemplified in the poem entitled "Femme noire," can be fully appreciated through an understanding of the oral tradition from which it sprang. Influenced by traditional Serer songs, its polyphony is largely indebted to Serer and sometimes to Wolof with regard to style, syntax and linguistics.[79] Many of Senghor's images do not derive from Breton's typology, or from some desire to exhibit the highest degree of

[77] On this point, see especially Maryse Condé in *Négritude Africaine. Négritude Caraïbe.*

[78] Albert Gérard, "Introduction aux littératures de l'Afrique noire," in *L'Afrique noire: Histoire et culture*, ed. Pierre Salmon (Brussels: Meddens, 1976), pp. 149–174; "Senghor's theory was nevertheless a decisive historical moment in revaluating African cultures, in crystallizing the African intellectuals' sense of their racial identity and human dignity, in validating African themes in the emerging literatures" (p. 153).

[79] Two revealing dissertations on this important point are: R. Tillot, *Le Rythme dans la poésie de Senghor* (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979), and Gusine Gawdat Osman, *L'Afrique dans l'univers poétique de L. S. Senghor* (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines 1979).

arbitrariness: they truly hold many echoes that can be deciphered only through intimate knowledge of African culture.[80] Thus, "Night more truthful than the day" ("A New York") is not a gratuitous surrealist image. At night the trees cut down for tattooing are consulted; at night the "xooy" takes place, this important meeting of the Serer *saltigués* organized each year before the first winter rains; and above all, at night the initiation ceremony, a death and resurrection ritual which ensures the passage to adulthood, a true physical and spiritual rebirth, a beginning which conditions and helps in the perfect fulfilment of the individual, is enacted in the sacred forest.

Likewise, such often cryptic images and phrases as "Les croupes ondes de soie," "les seins de fer de lance," "les ballets de nénuphars et de masques fabuleux," "les panaches de sorciers," "l'unité retrouvée," "la réconciliation du Lion, du Taureau et de l'Arbre," "les fleuves bruissants de caïmans musqués et de lamantins aux yeux de mirages," these and many others are synthetic constructions which globally express and reflect a certain civilization. For example, "spearhead breasts" in "A New York" corresponds to a definite moment in the sword dance (*laga* dance), marking the end of the excision rite among the young Dan girls who move holding spears, a symbol of maidenhood, at their breasts' height. God's creative laughter ("Dieu qui d'un rire de saxophone") intimates an African cosmogony: it is a particular aspect of *Kuntu*, the modal force which includes laughter and Beauty; it is just a specific utterance which, flowing untamed like a torrent, breaks and throws aside all chains.

To Senghor, a "peasant from West Africa" and an *agrégé de grammaire*, these images have their own life and radiate their meanings in both cultures. Most often, they are surrealist only insofar as African surrealism meets European surrealism, when the latter reaches what Rimbaud called "le point nègre."

Whereas Senghor depicts, although in an idealized form, an Africa which he has truly experienced, Césaire can only offer a crucified and bookish Africa. The former identifies with an idyllic Black continent, the latter with the suffering island, Martinique, with the real "pock-marked" West Indies, at the heart of which he eagerly searches for a hidden Africa with its greatness and its failures *(Cahier d'un retour au pays natal)*. In this quest, he is accompanied by many Caribbean writers such as Damas, Depestre, Paul Niger, Jacques Roumain, Guy Tirolien, Jean Brierre, etc. Feeling enslaved and uprooted, Césaire is tireless in his search for roots:

> Afrique! Aide-moi à rentrer, porte-moi
> comme un vieil enfant dans tes bras[81]

The problems of the journal *Tropiques*, which he edited with René Ménil from 1941 to 1944, can be reduced to a tragic search for identity, to an ingenious need to reach his true "repressed, mutilated, denied personality". *Corps perdu*, "Débris", *Cadastre*,

[80] Cf. Jacqueline Leiner, "Etude comparative des structures de l'Imaginaire d'Aimé Césaire et de Léopold Sedar Senghor dans 'Pour Saluer le Tiers Monde' et 'A New York'." *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises*, No. 30 (May 1978), 209–25.

[81] Aimé Césaire, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963), III, p. VII:

> Africa! Help me to come back, carry me
> In your arms like an old child

Ferrements, Soleil Cou-coupé, "Dit d'errance"—all these titles bear witness to his anguish as against Senghor's serenity; the poems are inspired by Africa but also by other branches of the black Diaspora (Bahia, Haïti, Cuba). His Caliban, a scion of the Yoruba gods transmitted through African and Afro-American songs, is not Senghor's abstract Negro-African; he stands for the oppressed people of the whole world:

> my Negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral
> it thrusts into the red flesh of the soil.[82]

In order to recover his negritude, Césaire had to probe the depths of his being. In his view, surrealism, which means liberation of the spirit and re-integration of the psyche, is the right method through which he can answer his obsessive questions: Who am I? Who was I centuries ago? Whom do I haunt?

In a first stage, then, Césaire tries to get to know himself, his West Indian identity, through words which to him represent "une sorte de *Noria* qui lui permet de râcler les profondeurs et de les faire remonter au jour."[83] His poetics, a method for probing and recovering the self, had to invent its own language in order to express the unknown, i.e. the darkness of his experience as a Martiniquan. A unique situation gave rise to a unique syntax and a unique vocabulary.[84] He experimented with words, "des mots, leur frottement pour conjurer l'informe,"[85] in order to decipher the palimpsest of his West Indian soul and translate it into the French language.

What came out was an astonishingly new and original work. The colony's cultural confusion and the conflictive vision of the colonized world were molded into an open, anarchic form; overflowing excitement counterbalanced the nothingness which was that world's fate. Césaire's work was an anguished yell, governed by a jagged syntax: suppression of conjunctions; interrupted, sometimes unfinished sentences; combinations of assonances and dissonances. In a poem like "Désastre," some obsessive words stand out as a result of typographical arrangement, for Césaire starts with the word and goes on to the idea. We feel we are witnessing thought in the making and not the rendering of thought, as with Senghor.

Although Césaire's language has a life of its own, independent of the realities and collective referents of France, his personal mythology—which is easily deciphered through the superposition of texts, as Keith Walker has convincingly demonstrated, —shows[86] a remarkable cohesion of imagery, and so a remarkable cohesion of thought. As the Zaïrian scholar Georges Ngal observed, "Nothing in Césaire is gratuitous. Everything comes from his condition as a man exiled from his own land." Consequently, his violent desire to possess a land of his own gives birth to an imagery connected with mating and coitus. Because of his need for roots, he gives special attention to the vegetal,

[82] Snyder's translation, op. cit., p. 116.

[83] Cf. interview with Jacqueline Leiner in *Tropiques* (reprint of 1978), pp. V–XXIV: "a kind of noria which enables him to scrape the depths within him and bring them back to the surface."

[84] Jacqueline Leiner, "Césaire et les problèmes du langage chez un écrivain francophone," *L'Esprit Créateur*, 17,2 (1977), 133–142.

[85] From "Séisme": "rubbing theam against one another in order to exorcise formlessness".

[86] K. Walker, op. cit.

especially to the tree, so deeply rooted in the soil.[87] His suffering, his revolt as a former slave—"nègre, nègre, nègre depuis le fond du ciel immémorial"—gives rise to images of fire and blood as in Depestre. Spittle, rotting matter, drool, poisoned marshes convey the moral decay in the world of the colonized and the colonizer. Senghor gives us a picture of African civilization as it was deliberately ignored by the colonizer, Césaire uncovers the unconscious of the colonized slave, equally neglected by the selfsame colonizer.

Rhythms, visual or auditory images from Europe, Africa and America spring forth in Césaire's work, born at the crossroads of the three continents. Although the rejection of the principle of non-contradiction (the silence roars, the night is lit) and of the identity principle (man becomes a dog, a bear, a fox, a hyena, a wolf, a jackal) may express the menacing universe of colonization, it also announces the possibility of changing the world through the amazing metamorphoses which it makes possible. In *Ethiopiques* ("L'Homme et la bête") Senghor shows man conquering the beast in himself and becoming a New Man by enacting the initiation ceremony which in Africa implies death and rebirth. Césaire, although sharing his African beliefs, accepts the destruction of the self in order, as he put it in "Armes miraculeuses", to expand it into the ultimate Reality ("s'élargir jusqu'à l'ultime Réalité"). For negritude-as-knowledge, with its deep introspection directed towards self-discovery, Césaire substitutes later negritude-as-construction which means the extrovert projection of a new world:

> and with the insolent spurt of my wounded
> and solemn shaft
>
> I shall order the islands to be[88]

Césaire was to achieve this through drama. With *Et les chiens se taisaient, Une tempête, La Tragédie du roi Christophe, Une saison au Congo,* he gave negritude its common, lowly heroes (The Rebel, Caliban, Christophe are former slaves, Lumumba a former postman and a union leader) with whom the people can identify. This drama is essentially didactic: *Une Tempête* is intended to expose the good master/humble slave myth; *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* reveals a revolutionary leader's weaknesses and errors, so as to help build the future. Although the protagonist is defeated by the colonialist or neo-colonialist forces, his death is not brought about by fate as in Greek tragedy: it is a death–rebirth which will create tomorrow's world. This drama, written for all colonized peoples is very popular in spirit; every character speaks the language of his own class (we are very far from Senghor's dramatic poem, *Chaka,* a kind of oratorio that only the "happy few" can appreciate); it is designed to be understood in the Middle East, in Africa, in the West Indies, in Canada. Rooted in social and political reality, Césaire's drama goes deep into history and makes it meaningful again. Its

[87] See G. Ngal, *Aimé Césaire, un homme à la recherche d'une patrie* (Dakar, Nouvelles Editions Africaines), 1975.

[88] "Disembodied," translated by Emile Snyder and Sanford Upson, in *Cadastre* (New York: The Third Press, 1973), p. 120.

fundamental theme is "the black man, i.e. the oppressed man fighting for a brighter future." Bernard Zadi's recent research[89] has shown the "fundamentally black" character of the rhythmic core in Césaire's poetry. Others, like Barthélémy Kotchy, Thomas Hale, Ivor Case, or Lilian Pestre de Almeida substantiate the "Africanity" of Césaire's drama—and even more so, its "Haitianity," for, to Césaire, Africa is above all Haïti.[90] In 1973, Césaire declared: "I would like to make black culture relevant again, in order to assure its permanence, so that it could contribute to the making of a new world order, a revolutionary order within which the African personality could blossom." The fact that Africans are intensely moved during the performances of his plays, i.e. that they find an image of themselves in them, is clear evidence that Césaire has been successful: he has been called "the father of modern African drama". Where only "the exotic cruelty of the curio shops was to be found"—i.e. in West Indian literature slavishly aping French writing—he created a theatre and a culture, he revealed the collective soul of a nation, he gave rise to a world which "reconnects the thread of History broken by the slave trade and colonization, which becomes the foundation of native resistance and the basis for a future social and political liberation of the Third World":

> Ma bouche sera la bouche des malheurs
> qui n'ont point de bouche, ma voix, la liberté
> de celles qui s'affaissent au cachot du déses-
> poir.[91]

The dream of his youth is being realized today.

There are, then, two negritudes, deriving from two different existential problems. On the one hand, there is the mystique of Senghor's negritude, an epiphany reaching towards ancient roots:

> Voici revenir les temps très anciens, l'unité retrouvée la réconciliation du Lion du Taureau et de l'Arbre[92]

On the other hand, there is the magic of Césaire's negritude, with its unshakable determination to build up a new society:

[89] B. Zadi, *Césaire entre deux cultures* (Strasbourg University: dissertation, 1975).

[90] L. Kesteloot, and B. Kotchy, *Aimé Césaire, l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973), pp. 127–198; Thomas Hale, "Sur *Une Tempête* d'Aimé Césaire," *Etudes Littéraires*, 6 (1973), 21–34; Ivor Case, "Sango Oba ko so: Les Vodoun dans *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*," *Cahiers césairiens*, 2 (1975), 9–24; Lilian Pestre de Almeida, "Rire haïtien, rire africain (le comique dans *La tragédie du roi Christophe* de Césaire)," *Présence Francophone*, 10 (1975), 59–72; and "Christophe, cuisinier entre nature et culture," *Conjonctions*, No. 130 (1976), 33–61.

[91] Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, See Snyder's translation, op. cit., p. 60: "My tongue shall serve those miseries which have no tongue, my voice the liberty of those who founder in the dungeons of despair."

[92] L. S. Senghor, "A New York", See John Reed and Clive Wake's translation, "New York," in *Senghor: Prose and Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 157: "See, the ancient times come again, unity rediscovered, the reconciliation of the Lion, the Bull and the Tree."

Tout ce disjoint, oh! mettre tout cela debout!
Debout et à la face du monde et solide.[93]

Here a contemplative soul, there a builder, who both want to change the world of today. The contemplative Senghor lives in a land which he loves, which he wants to rehabilitate; he generally has no use for violence, except in a very few poems ("A l'appel de la race de Saba," "Perceur de Tam-Tam", the "Poème liminaire" to *Hosties noires,* "Elégie pour Aynina Fall"), where he denounces and fights French domination. Pulled between colonizing Europe and oppressed Africa, he forgives, and dreams of a hybrid culture which would be a fusion of Africa and the West; he celebrates in turn the black woman and the white woman. Césaire, the builder, dragged away from the country of his origins, deprived of everything, even of his true name, wants to "inventer le pays, inventer l'homme" for the slaves, "the damned of the earth."

Senghor re-creates Africa and its mythology in order to make them known and valued especially in the white reader's eyes. Césaire *invents* his own mythology, rediscovers himself, in order to give, through language, a motherland to the deprived ones. These are two different goals which shaped two different conceptions of poetry: one based on order, the other on dislocation. Senghor favoured the formal cyclic poem which is contemplation and consent; Césaire opted for the anarchic poem which is illumination, revolt and conquest. One accepted the traditional culture, the other shunned the master's alien culture to invent his own. But the latter did not commit himself to an impossible negritude by rejecting the European heritage altogether; rather he transmuted the values and symbols of the Western legacy, for example, holding a dialogue with Shakespeare in *Une Tempête.*[94] On one hand, we are in the presence of a fulfilled negritude, on the other of a negritude which cries for fulfilment. Orpheus, in his descent, discovers here Eden and childhood, and there Hell and banishment. But both of them, thanks to the alchemy of the Word, the *Nommo,* which creates countless images and metaphors, transcend the "physical environment" in order to find its meaning and its finality in the world beyond (which may be the world of tomorrow), as in traditional African culture.

These two deeply structured negritudes lead our feelings to the world of the intellect, but they are also faithful reflections of the inner selves of both writers. On the one hand, the Christian African who views the world globally, believes in redemption (not in predestination) and in salvation for all of mankind; on the other, the ex-colonized who ends up accepting what Albert Memmi described as the manichean division of colonial society—and consequently of the whole world—and who seeks to save "only all the wounded hands of the world."[95]

[93] Aimé Césaire, *La tragédie du roi Christophe.* See Ralph Manheim's translation in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 32:

All this, oh! to set it upright!
Upright in the face of the world, and solid!

[94] Cf. Jean Bernabé, "La négritude césairienne et l'Occident," in *Négritude Africaine, Négritude Caraïbe,* (1973), pp. 110–117: Bernabé brings to light some of these meeting points where Western works and Césaire's early ones come together.

[95] Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957; repr. 1973), p. 159.

Césaire and Senghor, French in language but not in sensibility, have succeeded in finding a language which does not transform the privileged values of French culture into normative archetypes for African culture—as Sartre convincingly demonstrated in "Orphée Noir."[96] Their language does not endlessly reflect the Other (i.e. the French colonizer) as such, but themselves at long last; it penetrates the darkness of their experience as a cultural half-caste on the one hand, and as a bastard on the other, i.e. as an African and a West Indian living out their own historical situations. The Senghorian and Césairian negritudes have been called by extrapolation African and Caribbean negritudes since these poets' thematic and aesthetic preoccupations can often be traced in literary works from these two parts of the world, Senghor's traditional art being shared for example by Cheikh Hamidou Kane or Camara Laye, and Césaire's unusual art by René Depestre, Frantz Fanon or René Belance. But thanks to their intrinsic originality, Senghor and Césaire have brought a "frisson nouveau" into black French-language writing. And above all, they have defined the black problem, they have awakened the black man to his own self, and they have made it possible for all black men to experience their own world as a brotherhood.[97]

(Translated from the French by Camille Garnier)

[96] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée noir," preface to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948). See also Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), p. 50.

[97] See interview with L. Kesteloot in Kesteloot and Kotchy, op. cit., p. 238.

CHAPTER XVI

AFRICA AND THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

MICHEL FABRE

1. RICHARD WRIGHT, NEGRITUDE AND AFRICAN WRITING

Although, from *Native Son* (1940) to *The Long Dream* (1957), many black protagonists in Richard Wright's fiction are seen to cling to the prevalent stereotype of Africa as the "dark continent," these negative views of Bigger's or Fishbelly's teenage friends by no means reflect the author's own position. As early as 1940, in his biting answer to David L. Cohn's criticism of *Native Son,* Wright declared that, although what culture the Negro could boast of when torn from Africa had been taken from him, the Negro "possessed a rich and complex culture when he was brought to these alien shores. He resisted oppression."[1] Even though Wright did not believe in the practicality or desirablility of Marcus Garvey's movement, he had shown an interest in African culture, which he also expressed during his 1946 visit to France, long before he could contrast his expectations and the African reality of his 1953 stay in the Gold Coast. He was not, however, a believer in "negritude"; his conceptual approach to Afro-American culture through the perspective of the Chicago School of Social Research led him to emphasize, with E. Franklin Frazier, the relative lack of "African survivals" in the United States in opposition to the theses developed in Melville Herskovits' *Myth of the Negro Past*. From the start, he thus tended to stress differences, rather than kinships, between Afro-American and African cultures. For personal reasons, especially due to the oppressive role of religion in his childhood, he also tended to consider religious beliefs as shackles to individual freedom. Moreover, in the literary field much of his writing reflected his opposition to the stereotypes of the "noble savage" extolled during the Harlem Renaissance which emphasized a somewhat mythical bond with African origins. As a result, Wright's initial view of African culture was that of a Western-educated, Marxist-oriented agnostic, quite conscious of the differences between Afro-American and African social, political and cultural conditions of life.

Before going to France, Wright had never read anything by an African writer and he did not know of "negritude" as a literary movement. It was Léopold Senghor, who

[1] "I Bit the Hand That Feeds Me," *Atlantic Monthly,* 155 (June 1940), 827. The best study of the image of Africa in Wright's fiction is Jack B. Moore's "Richard Wright's Dream of Africa," *Journal of African Studies,* 2 (1975), 231–245. In *The New World of Negro Americans* (New York: Viking, 1964), Harold J. Isaacs contrasts Wright's reactions to Africa with those of other writers like Langston Hughes. See pp. 247–260 especially.

sought him out by invitation on June 24, 1946, and introduced him to Césaire shortly after. At that time, Wright could not feel close to either man: as an agnostic, opposed to institutionalized religion, he could not share Senghor's Catholic views; as an ex-Communist, he did not trust Césaire, a member of the French Communist Party, which was then vehemently attacking Wright and the Existentialists, with whom he associated. Wright's first major contact with French-speaking African intellectuals was established in 1947 through Jean-Paul Sartre. Alioune Diop, who was then launching the magazine *Présence Africaine,* wrote to Wright on October 2, 1947: "Sartre assured me that you'd agree to be counted among our sponsors." Together with Senghor, Paul Hazoumé and Césaire (who was shortly afterwards asked to withdraw by the French Communist Party), the sponsoring committee already numbered half a dozen French progressive intellectuals. Wright agreed at once and sent his novella "Bright and Morning Star," for publication in the first issue; he recommended Gwendolyne Brooks' "Ballad of Pearl May Lee" which was also printed in the same issue in mid-November. From the start, then, Wright played a part at *Présence Africaine* not only in the exchange of views which preceded the writing of the editorial arguing for cultural orientation and ideological freedom, but also as a sort of representative of the English-speaking members of the black diaspora.

In February 1948, on the suggestion of Camus, Wright and Leiris, it was decided that an association, the Friends of *Présence Africaine,* would be launched in France partly on the model of the one existing in Dakar, open to all "who had faith in the future of the Black man and were ready to work for the evolution of Africa by setting forth examples to its youth." As a sponsor of the magazine, Wright participated less in its lecture series than in its funding campaign, contacting such potential patrons as Baroness Rothschild. The magazine was going through financial difficulties because Senghor's withdrawal from its committee, on July 8, 1948, cut the funds it received indirectly from the French government. Senghor disagreed "on moral grounds." As he saw it, the magazine no longer worked for the cultural restoration of Africa which, he believed, should be its aim.

The magazine continued as a quarterly and Wright recommended the publication of pieces by Horace Cayton, Samuel W. Allen, E. Franklin Frazier and others, although he apparently preferred to have his own articles appear in *Les Temps Modernes.*[2] He saw *Présence Africaine* primarily as serving the needs of French-speaking Africans and he did not find in the aims and principles of negritude, as far as he construed them, an echo of his own preoccupations. Interestingly enough, Wright did not, at the time, have any contacts with Aimé Césaire or Senghor, for the reasons already mentioned; it was Alioune Diop who, in an effort to befriend him, sought his company with the aim of deepening their mutual understanding. In 1949, Diop sent Wright a long letter which

[2] On Sept. 3, 1949, Diop wrote to Wright, congratulating him for "I Tried to Be a Communist": "What you said opened my eyes. And it will be a still deeper revelation for young Africans. You should educate them. I'll tell you how." Diop's long, undated letter also quoted was probably written in December 1948 or January 1949. (All unpublished letters addressed to Richard Wright are quoted here with Mrs. Wright's permission. Translations from Diop's and Senghor's letters are mine.)

indicates how much he looked up to Wright who was, at the time, hailed in Paris as one of the most important new American writers. Diop began:

> Before sharing some reflections and problems the Negro question evokes in me with the authority and competence of a man who lived, and is still living, the intensely specific drama of the American Negro with such manly passion for human freedom, I should like to say that these reflections of mine can only have meaning concerning the African world, since I am too ignorant of the Negro American universe to be able to speak of it. On the contrary, I expect that you will shed light upon that world across the Atlantic which fascinates my imagination as much as it surprises and puzzles my mind. (p. 1)

Diop proceeded to recount his intellectual growth and arrival in France in search of answers. Concerning colonization, he had found no other explanation than "the conflict of two types of genius"; although he did not underestimate Communist action in favour of blacks, Marxism offered, in his eyes, no sufficient explanation. Starting from the ideas Placide Tempels had recently outlined in *Bantu Philosophy*, he developed an African world-view that insisted on vital forces and ancestor worship. Such ontology accounted for the African's cult of authority and explained that "neither revolution nor progress have real meaning for us" (p. 9). The European considered freedom as an end, not a means, while the African valued happiness more; he had been colonized "because he prefer[red] the succulence of life to freedom" (p. 12). Diop considered history, he said, as a fatality which was bound to happen unless some general catastrophe occurred. He believed, however, that "the Black man must acquire intellectual, manual, social and spiritual reflexes that would be just as quick and efficient as those of Europeans, which means that he should become alienated like the workers drugged by work on the assembly-line" (p. 13). The black man would have to test his faith in the abstract idea, whether explicative or constructive, seemingly "necessary to the acquisition of such reflexes as aimed at production only" (p. 13).

Diop sounded quite ready to learn and he asked Wright to enlighten him and correct his errors; he especially wanted the "Negro American problem" to be explained to him and hinted at a community of views between him and Wright, declaring himself ready to tell him his true feelings about Sartre's "Black Orpheus," which "[he] could not express publicly because [they] need[ed] Sartre" (p. 15).

It is important that Wright's first real contacts with "negritude" should have taken place through Diop because Diop, although he shared a number of beliefs and perspectives with Senghor, was somewhat distrustful of the dichotomy between the rational and the intuitive which Sartre, after Senghor, tended to emphasize. Wright's secular, Marxist views did not make him see history as fatality nor did they explain colonialism primarily in cultural terms, but Diop's belief that blacks should also make use of the concepts of the West was one of Wright's favourite themes. In his July 1946 letter to *Les Nouvelles Epîtres* he even saw Afro-American adaptation from feudalism to industrialization as a symbol of the social and personality changes which could illuminate the path to be taken by Africa and Asia:

> Negro life in the U.S. dramatically symbolizes the struggle of a people whose forefathers lived in a warm, simple culture and who are now trying to live the new way of life that dominates our time.... What happens between Blacks and Whites in America foreshadows what will happen between the colored billions of Asia and Africa and the industrial Whites of the West.[3]

Diop's influence on Wright's approach to African realities remained slight, however; Wright became acquainted with the problems and evolution of Africa through personal contacts with English-speaking blacks. Very soon after his arrival in Europe, he felt more inclined to get information from and to exchange views with the South African Peter Abrahams and Caribbean George Padmore.

Wright had met Abrahams in Paris in 1946. The young South African was then "poor as hell, literally starving and freezing in London."[4] He had asked Wright to read some work he had done and the latter started helping him to get it published in the United States: he sent the manuscript of *The Path of Thunder* to his friend Ed Aswell, an editor at Harper's, who submitted it for the Harper prize, which it won for 1947. Wright's correspondence with Abrahams continued until the latter's divorce in mid-1948 and it is worthwhile to remark on the literary, rather than political, interchange that took place between them.

Wright's achievement was, of course, used as a yardstick to measure Abrahams'. When the *Birmingham Post* wrote of *Mine Boy:* "Books written by Negroes often have peculiar clarity and strength. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* was a case in point, and now Peter Abrahams gives a warm, vital picture". Abrahams commented, "I felt very flattered at the association."[5] Because Wright had set an example with *Black Boy,* Abrahams was prompted, to some extent, to write *Tell Freedom* the way he did. In October 1946, he wrote to Wright that he had been working intermittently on it, retracing "the making of me which is intimately tied up also with the making of my generation of black men in South Africa, and also with my definition of Freedom which, if well done, should at once be the definition of a group." Both Wright and Abrahams were the products of resistance to white oppression, both had somehow cut loose, as Abrahams exclaimed: "I feel like you, uprooted, with nothing to go back to."[6]

Like Wright, Abrahams felt drawn towards a series of conflicts having to do with the meaning and decline of civilization. First came the struggle of man against nature in order to survive, in which he personally felt more involved because it was the struggle of his people; then the class struggle; finally the particular problem of the intellectual, i.e. "the struggle to retain his individualism in a society which frowns upon it.... Moral and philosophical values are important to him because he is a thinking man."[7] The two men differed, however, in their estimate of their original group culture. Although Wright

[3] This appeared in English in "A World View of the American Negro", *Twice A Year,* No. 14–15 (Fall 1946–Winter 1947), 348.

[4] Peter Abrahams to Wright, September 28, 1947.

[5] Abrahams to Wright, July 22, 1947. Wright was then ready to leave the U.S. again for self-exile in France.

[6] Abrahams to Wright, March 17, 1947.

[7] Ibid.

sometimes looked back with some nostalgia upon the organic world-view of Southern black life, he generally denounced its subservience, deprivation and stagnation. For him, reading and learning had been a way out of a straitjacket of religion and custom. Not so for Abrahams who, as an African, questioned the meaning of "Western civilization":

> The only places where I have found that simple human dignity, that respect for the other man, and the gracious feel of tolerance and humanity have not been either among the heroes of the class-struggle or the "thinking men" but among my simple "backward" people. My contact with the West has convinced me that there is something much more vital, much more dynamic and creative among the Africans I have grown up with than in all the thought processes that I have passed through in the West.... What will happen to this with the advance of "civilization"? Must simplicity and humanity go under in the interest of progress? What is the most important component of civilization, is it human or mechanical? Must thought processes become involved and insincere? Must the class-struggle warp those who are involved in it?[8]

Not that Wright had not, by the mid-forties, questioned the pseudo-spiritual values of the United States whose materialism and consumerism he was denouncing in much the same way as Henry Miller in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. But Abrahams went further than Wright in questioning the very value of "education". In a discussion of his new novel, Abrahams declared that Lanny, his protagonist and mouthpiece, was suspicious that education would not solve everything:

> Old Woman Fieta tells him to go away because education would only bring unhappiness to his people, would raise new desires that cannot be satisfied and thus bring unhappiness and trouble.... Since all he can give them is education, he wants to do so. But most certainly he is not aware of the implication of education either for himself as an individual or for his people.[9]

Abrahams posed the problem of education in relation to social awareness: "Positive social awareness among the South African educated half-caste is zero. Teaching is a mechanical job. The best way of earning a living."[10]

Mine Boy had surprisingly been chosen by the South African press as one of the three best books for 1946, possibly because it illustrated the wonder of a black boy being able to write. In a way, Abrahams therefore could represent in Wright's eyes the sort of man he himself had been (or could have been) in segregated Mississippi and this led him to see South African developments as paralleling recent Afro-American history. However, Abrahams' sense of African identity and his faith in the organic world-view of common folk somewhat challenged Wright's conviction that the future of Africa lay in her confronting the West on equal terms. This conviction of Wright's grew out of his own experience but even more out of his increasingly close relationship with George Padmore, by then the foremost proponent of Panafricanism. At that stage, politics

[8] Ibid.
[9] Abrahams to Wright, April 14, 1947.
[10] Ibid.

certainly became for Wright more important than literature or culture where Africa was concerned.

Padmore was in London when Wright stopped there on his way to the U.S. in early 1947 and it was he who initiated Wright into the complexities and intrigues of the tactics of decolonization. Padmore's Panafricanism, which inspired Nkrumah's tactics for the liberation of the British Gold Coast roughly amounted to steering a course close to that of socialism, keeping clear of the Communists while using them against the colonial powers. As ex-C.P. members who had remained Marxists, the Caribbean activist and the Afro-American novelist had much in common.

Padmore apparently influenced Wright towards a distrust of lyrical African literature and the primarily moral-cultural approach then advocated by Senghor, and also towards an increasing suspicion of French-educated black intellectuals who, he claimed, always finally turned out to be more French than black. This partly explains why Wright became more interested in the reality of African life than in theories about it. With Padmore's help, he undertook a six-week trip to the Gold Coast where he collected material for *Black Power, A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954). It is not our purpose here to analyse Wright's reactions to Africa as a Western black: he was able to understand much, yet unable to feel certain spiritual realities and to sympathize with them; and the sincere expression of his astonishment was more illuminating than any superficial professions of kinship and "togetherness."

In spite of his own reservations concerning the usable past, Wright expressed some distrust about the possible consequences of "developing" Africa along the lines of modern, technological societies. He had called the land pathetic in its brooding atmosphere of superstitious fear and dark poverty, but would not the pathos be even greater if such an organic universe were suddenly replaced by the broken-up one of the metropolis?

> What would be the gain if these benighted fetish-worshippers were snatched from their mud-huts and their ancestor idolatry and catapulted into the vast steel and stone jungles of cities, tied to monotonous jobs, condemned to cheap movies, made dependent upon alcohol? Would an African, a hundred years from now after he had been trapped into the labyrinths of industrialization, be able to say when he is dying, when he is on the verge of going to meet his long-dead ancestors, those traditional mysterious words:
>
> "I'm dying
> I'm dying
> Something big is happening to me"?[11]

Wright did not avoid the question of the cultural choices of soon-to-be independent African countries, yet, in the light of Nkrumah's experiments with democracy as Gold Coast Prime Minister, he concluded *Black Power* with the strong note that African effort should be militarized, that the fight against colonialism should be first and foremost

[11] *Black Power*, p. 227.

economic and political, and therefore that any element in traditional culture making for the furtherance of European domination should be eradicated.

Whereas, up to Bandung, Wright seemed little interested in the cultural policy of *Présence Africaine,* although it gradually became more politically committed,[12] and whereas he applied to the Congress of Cultural Freedom to pay his fare to the Spring 1955 Conference of Third World countries,[13] the impact of Bandung undoubtedly prompted him to help to reproduce, on the cultural level, what had been accomplished there in the political field.

The initial committee set up to organize a conference which would be the cultural counterpart to Bandung consisted, as of July 12, 1955, of Diop, Maran, Césaire, Senghor and Wright, whom Paul Hazoumé joined a week later. Early themes suggested comprised black contributions to culture, the styles of thinking characteristic of black people, and their relationship with white intellectuals. Wright participated in all meetings enthusiastically. He helped prepare the definitive version of an appeal calling all black writers and artists without any ideological discrimination to define and assert a non-Western cultural consciousness. Aware of the urgency of knowing each other before revealing themselves to the world, Negro men of culture would examine their situation and responsibilities, while describing and defining the genius of their peoples.

On November 22, 1955 Wright was requested to give a paper "dealing with one of the major cultural problems of [his] country, in order to establish a link between the French-speaking and English-speaking African public."[14] During the March meetings of the committee, he helped to cut down to ten the fourteen major topics considered, taking into account the advice of George Padmore. His friend was ready to cooperate "but with a long spoon", finding the proposals for the conference confused and "typical of these French boys who are great talkers". Voiced by Wright, Padmore's suggestions, which were also taken up by Dorothy Brooks, the British S.A.C. representative, were finally adopted: a short manifesto stated the appeal in simpler terms without alluding specifically to politics; a statement of the main topics to be discussed was organized around three points; reports were invited on all the topics, leading to a general discussion by delegates from the floor; chairmen for each session would be selected.[15] As a result, firstly, an inventory of the cultural situation would be made under the responsibility of

[12] When the magazine was reorganized in the early 1950s, the sponsoring committee, of which Wright was a member, disappeared and Afro-Americans were represented on the editorial committee by Césaire and René Depestre. Partly due to the initiative of African students who had voiced their grievances against French colonialism in a special issue, the Spring 1955 editorial for the new series sounded a new militant note: "All articles will be published provided... they concern Africa and do not betray our anti-racist, anti-colonialist aims, nor the solidarity of colonized peoples."

[13] As a result the magazines of the Congress for Cultural Freedom had exclusive rights to publish Wright's impressions of Bandung; this may explain why he did not meet a July 1, 1955 request by *Présence Africaine* to give them his views on the significance and possible consequences of Bandung on all levels and, particularly, how it could benefit African liberation.

[14] Mrs. Diop to Wright, November 22, 1955.

[15] Padmore to Wright, March 13, 1956. Padmore was wary of possible French official reactions and he added: "Don't announce the names of our delegates for fear the French stop them at the border.... Beware and don't have your name officially identified with the conference. These French can go 'Dutch' and plan with the crackers to get you out."

Senghor for French-speaking African countries, of Dr. Busia for English-speaking ones, and of Eric Williams for the Americas. The second point, a denunciation of Western cultural imperialism would be taken care of by Césaire for non-autonomous countries and a denunciation of racial discrimination by E. Franklin Frazier. The third point, "Perspectives," would deal with industrialization, with Wright as a coordinator, and with nationalism. Diop would provide a synthesis. Meanwhile workshops would be held on religion, history, literature and the arts.

At that stage Wright committed himself to a contribution and he suggested, as possible American delegates, the names of Dean Dixon, E. Franklin Frazier, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Chester Himes, Joel A. Rogers and Melvin Tolson; he also agreed to contact the N.A.A.C.P. for non-writers. Dean Dixon was ill and could not come; executive secretary of the N.A.A.C.P. Roy Wilkins suggested contacting John A. Davis, the director of the American Information Committee on Race and Caste, which could provide the funds for four additional delegates. It was planned by the committee that, among the seventy-odd speakers, Josephine Baker could speak on the black artist and his international audience, Paul Robeson on song in black folk culture, Langston Hughes on poetry and racism, William E. B. DuBois on the cultural experience of Afro-Americans, and Wright on modern structures and the reality of nationalism. Papers would be sent in advance so as to allow questions from other participants. Wright decided to base his paper on "Tradition and Industrialization", the topic about which he was to prepare a synthesis for the third section of the conference.

Only by mid-September 1956, did Wright learn that the Afro-American delegation would comprise John A. Davis, president of Lincoln University, Horace M. Bond, *Crisis* editor, James W. Ivy, William T. Fontaine of the University of Pennsylvania, Mercer Cook, professor of Romance Languages at Howard and "perhaps Ralph Ellison."[16] Of the initial list, many like Josephine Baker were engaged or, like E. Franklin Frazier, could not come for personal reasons.[17] George Padmore, too ill to travel, sent a message stressing his hope that the conference would "take into account the political aspirations and demands of Africans and peoples of African descent."[18] W. E. B. DuBois' message was more disturbing: he had been refused a passport as a Communist and he stated that "any Negro-American who travels abroad today must either not discuss race relations in the United States or say the sort of things which our State Department wishes the

[16] Ellison did not come. Since *Présence Africaine* could pay only 8.430 F to those delegates who gave a paper, plus 10 shillings per printed page, practically no delegate could come from abroad without another subsidy. All Afro-Americans read papers: Bond on West African nationalist movements, Fontaine on segregation and desegregation in the U.S., James Ivy on the N.A.A.C.P., while Cook's and Davis' articles were printed in the June 1957 issue of *Présence Africaine*.

[17] He sent a message, stressing perspectives quite close to Wright's outlook: "a world revolution is in progress... the culmination of the changes which were set in motion by the scientific discoveries which led to the industrial revolution and the economic and political expansion of Europe... As a result of two world wars there has been a shift in the power structure of the world and Asia and Africa are beginning to shape the future of mankind. In Asia and in Africa, where the impact of European civilization uprooted the people from their established way of life, new societies are coming into existence." *Présence Africaine*, 8–10 (June–November 1956), 380.

[18] *Présence Africaine*, 8–10 (June–November 1956), 384.

world to believe."[19] Not only the Afro-American delegates but Wright himself as well felt compelled to state their independence from any official American view.

During the conference, Wright got somewhat acquainted with the latest African writing in English, when Davidson Nicol spoke at length about Amos Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard,* Ekwensi's *People of the City* and Mbonu Ojike's *My Africa,* which he compared to Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* and contrasted with Wright's and Abrahams' "sombre, violent and corrosive" autobiographies.[20] Wright could also listen to Frantz Fanon's contribution on "Racism and Culture", which summed up research largely prompted by and based upon Wright's own writings.[21] He only responded specifically, however, to Senghor's paper on "The Laws of Black African Culture". During the evening debate on September 19, he posed the question of cultural kinship between members of the black diaspora; both he and Senghor were black, yet one was American and the other French: "There is a schism in our relationship, not political, but profoundly human.... Where are the instincts that enable me to understand and latch onto this culture?....I cannot accept Africa because of mere blackness or on trust." And he questioned the role of African traditions during colonization:

> Might not the vivid and beautiful culture that Senghor has described... have been a fifth column, a corps of saboteurs and spies of Europe?....The ancestor cult religion with all of its manifold, poetic richness that created a sense of self-sufficiency—did not that religion, when the European guns came in act as a sort of aid to those guns? Did that religion help the people to resist fiercely and hardly and hurl the Europeans out? I question the value of that culture in relationship to our future; I do not condemn it, but how can we use it?
> Must we leave it intact, with all the manifold political implications involved in that, or must this culture suffer the fate of all cultures of a poetic and indigenous kind and "go by the board"?....I want to be free and I question this culture, not in its humane scope but in relationship to the Western world as it meets the Western world.[22]

A partial answer was given to Wright's first question. Senghor spoke of an African cultural heritage which Afro-Americans should rediscover and study especially in their folk culture because it was a component of their temperament: classics for Black Americans should be looked for in Africa, not in the Greek tradition. Then Stephen Alexis, from Haiti, rephrased Wright's question as if the latter's problem had been one

[19] *Présence Africaine,* 8–10 (June–November 1956), 383.

[20] "The Soft Pink Palms," *Présence Africaine,* 8–10 (June–November 1956), 115. Wright's interest in English-speaking West African literature remained very slight, however; he acquired *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in 1953, but no other book of the kind.

[21] On January 6, 1953, Fanon had written Wright a fan letter: he had all of Wright's books in French and even *Twelve Million Black Voices* in English. He had tried to show the systematic mutual ignorance between whites and blacks in *Black Skins, White Masks* and was working on a study of "the human scope of [Wright's] works." What attracted Fanon so much in Wright's depiction of Negro masses was his exploration of their revolutionary potentialities. Besides, Wright had used the concept of the Afro-American group as an internal colony, in his July 1946 letter to *Les Nouvelles Epîtres.* In *Black Power,* he had caught "the challenge of the barefoot masses against the black aristocracy and middle class", as Padmore assured DuBois on December 10, 1954, thus antedating and possibly inspiring some of Fanon's theories on Third World revolution.

[22] *Présence Africaine,* 8–10 (June–November 1956), 68.

of belonging to American culture or to black African culture first; and the second of Wright's questions remained ignored as a result.

In "Culture and Colonization," however, Césaire himself had partly answered it when, at the end of his paper, he stated that the problem was too easily summed up as a necessary choice between indigenous tradition and European civilization. One could no more reject indigenous civilization as childish and inadequate than one could refuse European civilization in order to preserve one's indigenous cultural heritage. Yet the new African culture could not shun tradition completely in the name of rationalism since the destruction of taboos had also turned out to be a form of cultural subversion facilitating colonization through missionary effort.

Wright's contribution on "Tradition and Industrialization" has been well-known since its inclusion in *White Man, Listen* (1957); seen from the distance of two decades, it reflects Wright's hopes and preferences rather than offering an objective analysis of the situation. Wright started by defining himself as a black Westerner, detached from the West because of racial conditions, yet with Western reactions when confronting those regions of the coloured world where religion dominated; he equated Westernness with a secular outlook upon life and a belief that human personality is an end in and for itself. Placing his own situation in the context of intellectual post-Reformation Europe, he saw as a central historical fact the destruction of the irrational ties of religion and custom in Asia and Africa by an irrational West. As a result, the élites of the Third World were the freest men in the world, and the best thing the West could do was to help these Western-educated leaders modernize their countries without questioning their methods. In the light of Padmore's *Panafricanism or Communism,* Wright's plea was for enlightened Panafrican political orientations. He remarked, however that, day after day at the conference, he had witnessed the ever-living importance of the religious and traditional outlook and, when he spoke, he interspersed his paper with such remarks as: "I was hoping and dreaming for black freedom but... I wonder now if I can say that the African élite is more secular-minded than the West."[23]

In social and intellectual terms, Wright's position concerning the changes brought about by colonization came close to that of E. Franklin Frazier, as expressed in his message to the Conference; emotionally, it was more akin to Padmore's, who had written to him, after the publication of *Black Power:* "It needed saying and it is best that you said it. It will find popular endorsement among the younger Africans who haven't got a vested interest in all this mumbo-jumbo. The ju-ju won't work on people like us—detribalized blacks."[24]

Needless to say, Wright's perspectives were opposed, for political reasons more than for literary ones, to "negritude" which was being made into a kind of ideology or mystique. He was not far from espousing the strategies expounded by Padmore: "Only Stalinism can smash this mess [tribalism] and liberate these people. After that it will be time for de-Stalinism and democracy. [Kwame Nkrumah] feels the same way but has

[23] *Présence Africaine,* 8–10 (June–November 1956), 356. These extempore remarks do not appear in the version of "Tradition and Industrialization" printed in *White Man, Listen.*

[24] G. Padmore to Wright, May 1954.

to pay lip services to Western clap-trap."[25] At the same time, Wright shared Padmore's and the Afro-American delegation's distrust of the French-educated Africans' apparent lack of pragmatism and love of brilliant talk.[26]

The final resolution passed at the Conference must have seemed militant and political enough to Wright. It concluded that "the growth of culture is dependent upon the termination of such shameful practices in the twentieth century as colonialism, the oppression of weaker peoples and racialism." Among other things it urged intellectuals to create "the practical conditions for the revival and growth of Negro cultures". Wright himself corrected a draft of its translation for final publication in English in *Présence Africaine*.

His own reactions to the problems raised by the Conference are reflected most clearly in a list of some twenty-five points he jotted down, possibly for a letter to John A. Davis. In his eyes, in spite of the absence of Muslims, which indicated African conflict, the level of the Conference had been higher than that of Bandung, with a real though hidden political aim, and Europe suffered a defeat as a result of it. The views of the European academic world had been challenged, and this should entail an immediate broadening of its outlook on Africa in terms of new concepts. Besides, white participation should be shorn of all psychological projection, for the European and the African were only too prone to lean on each other for emotional support and dependence.

Concerning African culture, he recorded how his own questions, following Senghor's analysis, had been evaded throughout the entire meeting. He believed a corps of experts should make a survey of Africa to ascertain what was left of tribal cultures, what was usable in them, what short-cuts to modernization would be valid. Due to the state of mind of the French Africans and to the African's preoccupation with the past and his sense of blood and kin, Wright thought that the Western world's past relationship with Africa was basically responsible for the difference between Afro-Americans and Africans. In bidding with the Communists for the loyalty of Africa, non-Communist Pan-africanists or westernized élites (with whom he sided) were handicapped by racial feelings and mental projections, but Africa was close and there was a religious tie, Christianity, although this was being re-examined as tainted through alliance with racism and should perhaps be de-europeanized. The Communists would be freer in overhauling their concepts, but black nationalism was gaining over pro-Red sentiment as was shown by the case of Césaire who had just left the French C.P. in protest against Stalinism.

Wright expressed his concern about the attitude of U.S. Negroes. The reaction of the U.S. delegation to DuBois' message and to Aimé Césaire's speech indicated that it was afraid of Communism. The U.S. delegation should act with care, bearing in mind

[25] G. Padmore to Wright, January 29, 1957.

[26] Padmore wrote, for instance: "I want this book *[Pan-Africanism or Communism]* in the hands of black Frenchmen. They need this ideology to help them break away from Thorez [Communist] influence. I can see them striving but Senghor and these boys can't help because they're too confused... We've already entered the 21st century and these boys are still in the Middle Ages, with their damn culture-drums and skulls." (To Wright, January 29, 1957.) Or, "Senghor... is a typical black Frenchman playing National Assembly party politics. We can expect nothing from these café intellectuals with their corrupt politics." (To Wright, October 19, 1955.)

the complexity and ambiguity of its relationship with Africa. Criticism levelled against the Africans must be levelled from within or distrust would result on their part: this is why he had slightly changed his paper when reading it at the Conference. He wanted continued Afro-American participation inside the organization in order to influence it, but participation in terms of identification and sympathy. This is why he had inserted a "racialist" note at the end.

This interesting document reveals Wright's choices and sheds light on the role he played at the time as a sort of intermediary and mediator between Africans and Afro-Americans. He tried to dispell both the fear the Afro-American delegation had of the Communist-oriented members of *Présence Africaine* and Diop's distrust of what he construed as a drive towards assimilation, not only integration, on the part of American Negroes. In late 1957, he went so far as to advise James T. Harris, John Davis' assistant at the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) that the inculcation of the concept of black nationalism would help to establish more efficiently the intellectual framework within which the Africans and the Afro-Americans could achieve their common aims. Because he had often experienced the distrust which Western ideas roused in African circles, he saw cultural "racialism" as tactically advisable, although he believed that experience of white oppression was the only real feature common to Africans and Afro-Americans. The AMSAC, however, was not ready to share such views, even though Samuel Allen could convincingly speak of the relevance of negritude for Afro-American literature.

Although he often worked to dispell misunderstandings and promote co-operation between the two groups, Wright himself had misgivings concerning an allegedly pervasive Catholic influence in the circles of *Présence Africaine*. When his proposal that the Second Conference should take place in Bonn, Germany, was voted down in favour of a Rome meeting, he refused to attend because he feared that the proceedings would be placed under the aegis of the Vatican. He did not even send a message. However, after being re-elected in absentia to the Executive Council of the International Society of African Culture, he accepted the position in June 1959.

According to Alioune Diop, Wright did not attend the Rome conference because he wanted to preserve his freedom of speech; yet he made efforts not to cut himself off from the *Présence Africaine* group and when Wright died Thomas Diop, who had often served as an interpreter for them all, was invited to make the funeral oration.[27] Amadou Hampaté Ba, the Mali delegate to UNESCO, similarly wrote a moving if somewhat high-flown piece, "Richard Wright, my brother", expressing widely felt dismay:

> The death of my friend and brother Richard Wright is a heart-rending experience for Alioune Diop and Aimé Césaire, to mention only two among so many Blacks.[28]

[27] Interview by M. Fabre, March 1971. In an October 17, 1959, letter to the Ghanaian ambassador, Wright stated however: "I consider the ideas of this magazine and the gentlemen who run it to be highly dangerous. They are strongly hostile to the idea of Black nationalism. And there is a strong but hidden Jesuit influence in the group of men about this magazine."

[28] *Democratie 60*, No. 59 (8 December 1960), 26.

To the end, Wright showed interest in African culture, although his approach remained far more political, or at any rate cultural than literary. True, he read an English translation of *Batouala* before coming to France in 1945 and he sponsored the African Popular Theatre group in 1958, but he apparently never bought any other African literary work than Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard*. Meanwhile, in 1959, he desperately tried to obtain funds from cultural organizations and foundations in order to perform in French-speaking Africa the kind of inspired reporting job he had done about Ghana with *Black Power*. In vain: the Congress for Cultural Freedom appeared to be linked with the CIA; the Ford Foundation would not help; AMSAC feared that, once the book was written, they might not want to be associated with it.[29] Senghor was the only one to offer governmental help on behalf of the Federation of Mali but he understood that Wright's desire to be independent from any government was a basic condition.[30]

Senghor, who greatly admired Wright, apparently never despaired of bringing him to see African realities in a perspective closer to his own. On receiving *White Man, Listen,* he congratulated Wright for having spoken a number of salutary truths, but he expressed one reservation:

> You cannot conceal your distrust of Christianity in general, of Roman Catholicism specifically. I can explain your distrust by your situation as an Afro-American, as a man of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture. I do not believe, however, that such distrust is justified. The facts are proof that the Catholic church has made, since the Liberation of France, a great effort to decolonize. To such a degree that a colonialist was able to use *The Vatican against France* as a title for one of his books.[31]

Again, when responding to Wright's desire to visit French-speaking Africa, he expressed his hope that he would meet him there: "This would enable me to make you feel certain realities."[32] And Senghor's final impression of Wright, reflecting as it does his own outlook, is not wide of the mark:

> He was a rather secretive man, considering he had an intense inner life. His whole life and work tend to be proof that he was a torn man, very much like me, all things considered. A man torn between the past and the future of his race, between the values of Negritude and those of European civilization. It is significant that he should have preferred to live in Europe, in France. I believe he was literally obsessed with the racist atmosphere of American civilization and that he wanted to escape from it as from some ghetto. It is significant, also, that he misunderstood the Movement for African liberation. He tended to consider it too much as antiracist racism, not as a de-alienating phenomenon.... At any rate, I always had the highest admiration for him as a writer and as a man. Because, at heart, he was the very expression of black "passion", which may well be the most meaningful fact of the second half of the twentieth century.[33]

[29] John Davis to Richard Wright, May 23, 1959 and Wright to Davis, June 3, 1959. See Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (New York: William and Morrow, 1973), pp. 490–491.
[30] Senghor to Wright, July 28, 1959.
[31] Senghor to Wright, July 21, 1959.
[32] Senghor to Wright, July 28, 1959.
[33] Senghor to M. Fabre, February 28, 1964.

A number of African writers have expressed, over the years, similar views of the appeal which Wright's writings, especially *Black Boy,* had exerted upon them as a significant example of the universality of black themes and as a model of ethnic self-expression. This was the case for Peter Abrahams and Ezekiel Mphahlele, not to mention West Indian writers like George Lamming or Joseph Zobel. Probably better than any one else, Camara Laye expresses the exemplary quality of Wright's attempt when he declares that: "Wright gave the American public an example of the life led by millions of black children in America" and that his own "*L'Enfant Noir* translated the life common to African children just as *Black Boy* related what is collective in the black American experience." Speaking of *Black Power:* Laye adds:

> There were certain uniquely African problems that escaped Wright, not because of any failure of perception but because, coming from America, he had not lived the African experience despite the fact that he was a black man. Within this context I talked about Wright's concept of the African revolution, if you want to call it that. He believed that Africa and the black man throughout the world should form a philosophical unity, and we were in agreement on this. But he did not fully understand the African experience and African civilization.... In Africa, the problem is not our achieving equality or civil rights: we are not concerned with any sort of integration with a white society. Although we aspire to modernity we do not want to become Europeanized, or white, and risk losing what is typically African.[34]

In 1959 pro-integrationist Afro-Americans, like the AMSAC delegates, considered premature and ill-advised Wright's resorting to black nationalism as a meeting ground between Africans and the black diaspora. On the other hand Wright's proposal that traditions be abolished when they made for stagnation was often interpreted by Africans as pregnant with the danger of Europeanization and a menace to their African identity. Wright stood at best half-way between integration and negritude, attempting at times to mediate between the aspirations of two different and often diverging groups. African writers generally saw him as the American he never ceased to be. It is significant that his deepest influence on non-U.S. black writers should have been exerted on Frantz Fanon, whose West Indian heritage made him, more than any African, aware of the complexities of the black Western intellectual caught between white masks and black skin.

[34] "The Writer and His World," interview with Camara Laye by Steven Rubin, *Africa Report,* May 1972, 24.

LEMUEL A. JOHNSON

2. ANTI-POLITICS AND ITS BOURGEOIS REPRESENTATION IN CUBAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE: EDMUNDO DESNOES AND AYI KWEI ARMAH

> A civilization becomes transformed .. when its most oppressed element —the humiliation of the slave, the work of the modern worker—suddenly becomes a *value*, when the oppressed ceases to attempt to escape this humiliation, and seeks his salvation in it, when the worker ceases to attempt to escape this work, and seeks in it his reason for being. The factory, which is still only a kind of Church of the catacombs, must become what the cathedral was, and men must see in it, instead of gods, human power struggling against the Earth...
>
> André Malraux.[35]

When the writer assumes the role of revolutionary in the vigorously written last chapter of East African critic Micere Githae-Mugo's *Visions of Africa,*[36] what results seems to be a somewhat unambiguous transfiguration. The convergence may nonetheless belie the aesthetic anomalies and psychological tensions which can result when literature and revolution (or the idea of revolution) combine to fashion the narratives that we have in Edmundo Desnoes' *No Hay Problema* (1961) and *Inconsolable Memories* (1967) and in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* (1973).[37] In these novels we are for the most part invited to consider a generation of young men, Sebastian, Sergio, Francisco (Desnoes) and Modin, Sogo, Jorge Manuel, and Esteban Ngulo (Armah), whose roles and dilemmas fashion the major theme here: the anomalous spectacle of the emergence of, or the insistence upon, a literature of the nihilistic temperament in Cuban and African contexts which are dedicated to or ripe for revolutionary transformation. A special kind of "fellow-travellers-of-the revolution" literature emerges, presumably because we are given characters who are simultaneously blessed with and plagued by a certain kind of political consciousness.[38] This is a stage at which the sense of oppression and humiliation

[35] André Malraux, *Man's Fate* (1933), trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Vintage, 1967).

[36] Micere Githae-Mugo, *Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Lawrence, Elspeth Huxley, Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978).

[37] Page references are to the following editions: Edmundo Desnoes, *No Hay Problema* (La Habana: Ediciones Revolución, 1961) and *Inconsolable Memories,* trans. Desnoes (New York: New American Library, 1967), and Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor, 1973). *Inconsolable Memories* is Desnoes' own translation of *Memorias del Subdesarrollo.* In an expanded version it is also a screen play: *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* "depicts a bourgeois intellectual's reflections on the demise of capitalism and his conversion to socialism. His thoughts illuminate the evolution of Cuban culture" (*Vision* review, Mexico City; cited in *Atlas World Press Review,* September 1979, p. 58). The film script provides the title for and is included in Michael Myerson's *Memories of Underdevelopment: The Revolutionary Films of Cuba* (New York: Grossman, 1973).

[38] As used here "Fellow-Travellers of the Revolution" is not necessarily negative. In Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution,* second chapter, the term is, in fact sympathetic. The writers he discusses were

> all of them impossible without the Revolution.... They know it themselves and do not deny it.... They do not belong to the literary job-holders who are beginning little by little to "picture" the Revolution.... In general their literary and spiritual front has been made by the Revolution, by that angle of it which

in the Cuban and African man's fate is both *"a value"* and "self-hugging pathos."[39] We get this impression, moreover, in narratives that are torn between "proletarian" and "bourgeois" cults of felicity and progress, and the kinds of orthodoxy which each one seems to call for.

In Ms. Githae-Mugo's "Evaluations" the focus is on the writer, and his point of view is, moreover, teleologically explained. He thus operates from a vantage position which frees him from the crisis of allegiance and identity which both quicken and enervate his characters:

> The militant African writer has become quite a formidable figure among the ruling elite and such a force in society that he is beginning to unsettle apathy and complacency at many levels... . Achebe's position is well known. The Nigerian writer considers his place in the African revolution as 'right in the thick of it—if possible, at the head of it. ....A writer in the African Revolution who steps aside can only write footnotes or a glossary when the event is over' (p. 68)

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) may, according to Jonathan Kariama, be "an unsettling testament of the burnt out case," but Githae-Mugo insists on purposeful discrimination: Armah can be an example of "the critical African writer... full of wrath [who] has not altogether lost hope, or he would not be striving so hard to change the status quo" *(ibid.)*. Revolution in politics and nihilism in literature are thus resolved in much the same way that Charles Glicksberg, for example, resolves tensions in the existentialist and European modernism which he discusses: "The phrase *the literature of nihilism* is actually an oxymoronic coinage, for literature and art, even tragedy, as Nietzsche maintained, is intrinsically the negation of the nihil".[40]

On the other hand, the Caribbean confidence of Derek Walcott's "The future of West Indian militancy lies in art"[41] is immediately tempered by an observation which underscores the embryonic stage of consciousness that we find in Desnoes and Armah's novels: "All revolutions begin amateurishly, with forged or stolen weapons." The perception of value in the convergence of literature and revolution is, of course, affected by the kind of judgement which one brings to bear on the inspiration behind and the purpose of those "forged or stolen weapons." The "Literary 'Fellow-Travellers' of the Revolution" chapter in Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1924) is, for example, a strong review and defence of a literature which may arguably be seen as a testament of false consciousness and its artistic concomitant: an aesthetics of naive or amateurish

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caught them, and they all have accepted the Revolution, each one in his own way.... They are not the artists of the proletarian Revolution, but her "fellow-travellers", in the sense in which this word is used by the old Socialists (p. 57).

The word more generally identifies false or untrustworthy revolutionary sympathies, failures which eventually result in backsliding. Cf. reference in text, below, to Cuban magazine *Lunes de Revolución* in light of Trotsky's view of "fellow-travellers."

[39] Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1970).

[40] Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Literature of Nihilism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975), pp. 28–29.

[41] Walcott, p. 18.

radicalism.[42] Elsewhere, in the Chinese context of Malraux's and Lu Xun's narratives for example, the categories of analysis are similar enough even though the particulars are different.[43] Thus, Lee Ou-Fan Lee's discussion of Lu Xun's leftist years, 1927–1936, provides us with a framework with which to confront a phenomenon which may be baldly stated. In this statement of the case, stolen or forged weapons coalesce into an unstable, experimental instrument which a by now inchoately revolutionary writer uses to excoriate his own class or past. He does so on behalf of an ambiguously represented radicalism, one which is aimed at the jugular of his erstwhile identity or allegiance—be it that of Confucian literocrat, European middle class, or African or Caribbean "Westernized successes" (Armah, p. 161). Writers like Lu Xun, or like Armah and Desnoes, therefore give us protagonists who are driven and yet are constrained by heritage and disgust to mount a "rearguard action" for a revolution whose positions they cannot articulate in positive terms. This "'branching out' of a part of the intelligentsia against their own class thus becomes a first step" toward feeling the "pulses of revolution". In his day, and in what reads like an apologia, Lu Xun therefore concludes that

> In present-day Chinese society, what is likely to emerge is rebellious or exposé literature written by members of the petit-bourgeois class in revolt. Because they have grown up in a class on its way to extinction, they have acquired a more profound understanding and a greater hatred, and the knives with which they pierce into it are more fatal and powerful.[44]

Lu Xun had himself written an appropriate first story, "A Madman's Diary" (1918), which, as Ranbir Vohra puts it in *The Chinese Revolution: 1918–1950*, "embodies the two new trends of the revolutionary age: it is written in *pai-hua*, and it attacks the oppressive and exploitative nature of Confucianism which had fostered a 'man-eating' society behind a cloak of lofty concepts of ethics and morality."[45]

That the intelligentsia is artistically protecting "the nascent forces of the revolution from the rear" is thus an alternative interpretation of a literature which may arguably be seen as nihilistic, as the testament of the burnt out case. Or else as anarchic banality, this being the view that we get when Marx and Engels, for example, contrast art and declining classes in two European literary periods:

[42] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975).

[43] A very good bridge is provided by certain sections in Lee Ou-Fan Lee's essay "Literature on the Eve of Revolution: Reflections on Lu Xun's Leftist Years, 1927–1936," *Modern China*, Literature and Revolution Issue, 2,3 (1976). Cf. "New Trends from Russia: Marxist Aesthetics and Soviet Literature" and "Plekhanov, Lunacharsky and Marxist Literary Criticism." "Writers and Revolution in Russia" focuses on Lu Xun's intellectual debts to Trotsky.

[44] Quoted in Lee, p. 286. Cf. Lu Xun's defense of the committed man of letters in light of Achebe's, especially when Lu Xun does so by way of Karl Radek's "In an era of great social transformation, men of letters cannot afford to be bystanders" (Lee, p. 284).

[45] *The Chinese Revolution: 1900–1950*, ed. Ranbir Vohra (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1974), p. 62. Re the vernacular *pai-hua* which displaced the classical literary language in a literary revolution, see, for example, the following from point number two (of eight) in Hu Shih's 1917 *New Youth* article "A Preliminary Discussion of Literary Reform": "I have always held that colloquial stories alone in modern Chinese literature can proudly be compared with the first class literature of the world. Because they do not imitate the past but only describe the society of the day, they have become genuine literature. ..." (Cited in Vohra, p. 59).

> If the decline of earlier classes, such as the medieval knights, provided the raw material for magnificent and tragic works of art, that of the petty-bourgoisie characteristically gives rise to nothing but impotent expressions of fanatical ill will and a collection of Sancho Panzaesque saws and maxims.[46]

In somewhat similar fashion, Chinua Achebe is not at all inclined to be patient with the Armah of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. He notes with some irritation that at the Writers' Conference in Kampala "the whole generation of young people...said, 'Oh, he is committed, he is a committed writer.' This was going on for some time, so I asked, 'What is he committed to?' ". The implication is that a literature of discontent and prickly sensitivity is not the same thing as revolutionary literature.[47] In effect, the most polemical of novels may be nothing more than what Walcott has called "a comfortable, self-hugging pathos".

In the final analysis then, the convergence of literature and revolution can engender conflicting visions of the human condition and demand contradictory techniques for expressing these visions. A sense of the implications for the man of letters and for literature, on the eve of revolution especially, may therefore be deduced from the source of our epigraph—Malraux's "account of a crucial episode in the early days of the Chinese revolution." *Man's Fate* thus foreshadows the contemporary world of our texts, which seek to understand the meaning of the revolutionary impulse in terms of the individuals involved. *Man's Fate* is, in our reading, a narrative of intellectuals and underdevelopment, as well as "a study of conspiracy and conspirators, of men caught in the desperate clash of ideologies, betrayal, expediency and free will."[48] It is in image clusters which focus on narcissism, "bourgeois" allegiance, and sexuality that the several issues thus far introduced assume particular emphases and coloration in the Cuban and African novels of Desnoes and Armah.

The heading of section two, part one, of Seymour Menton's book on revolutionary Cuban fiction is "Exorcism and Existentialism: 1961–1965." It is an apt enough heading which gives us alternative terms with which to postulate and examine expressions of liberation and "self-hugging pathos" in our novels. In that context, the significance of the term "exorcism" in the creative and critical canon of Cuban fiction during the years covered by Desnoes' novels cannot be overlooked. Menton indicates that as late as 1966, Cuban critic José Rodriguez Feo was still pondering over the scarcity of works dealing with the post-1959 revolutionary change. Feo's partial explanation and use of the word *exorcismo* have been accepted and repeated by subsequent critics. Desnoes himself uses the term.[49] Although Feo refers specifically to the short story, Menton finds that his words are totally applicable to the novel:

[46] Maynard Solomon (ed.), *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* (New York: Knopf, 1973), p. 64.

[47] Chinua Achebe, "Literature and Commitment in South Africa," Panel Discussion in *Issue: A Quarterly Journal of Africanist Opinion*, 6,1 (1976), Achebe also describes Armah's *The Beautyful Ones...* as "a cold, uncommitted indictment of Nkrumah, of the only serious political experiment that has ever been attempted in Ghana. So what sort of commitment is that?"

[48] Malraux's novel is thus aptly condensed on the back cover of the 1969 Vintage edition.

[49] See Myerson, op. cit.

> Many revolutionary writers have not yet touched many of the revolutionary themes that are waiting for them. But I insist that one of the reasons is that strong desire to liquidate the past, to settle accounts with a situation that still lingers in our memories like a nightmare. A large part of our literature is an exorcism of that terrible past which many of us had the ill fortune to live through.[50]

The other half of Menton's equation, "existentialism", carries a dual charge—at one pole is the psychological profile which it suggests; at the other is the implied irrelevance of poses and techniques borrowed from a eurocentric avantgardism. In either case, the term may be subsumed for our purposes in other terms like "guilt" and "nihilism." Or else in the peculiarly archetypal imagery of Ernesto Che Guevara's "the feeling of guilt of many of our intellectuals and artist stems from their original sin: the are not authentic revolutionaries". Guevara's "testament of the burnt out case" approach is echoed in the analysis which we get in José Caballero Bonald's 1968 study of the prose fiction of the Cuban revolution. The "original sin" is now a narcissistic, and so self-serving, mortification. As a result of "cautious inhibition or a harmful self-censorship, ... a contradiction of the true revolutionary spirit", what emerges is a literature which "systematically avoid[s] an overall picture of the present and limit[s] itself to sketching denunciations of the bourgeois world that the Revolution had taken apart at the seams."[51]

On the other hand, Guillermo Cabrera Infante suggests, from exile, other reasons why the convergence of literature and revolution can and does result in certain kinds of "exorcism and existentialism," or in anomalies which in themselves need not be inevitable. The key factor is ideological terrorism. In effect, without acts of terrorism such as the decision "that *Lunes de Revolución* should disappear," some three years into the revolution, "it's only necessary to browse through some numbers of *Lunes* to understand how it was possible for the revolution; culture, and freedom of expression to coexist." There was, he insists, a forum for "liberation, tolerance, and ideological and literary experimentation" before, as the author of *Tres Tristes Tigres (Three Trapped Tigers)* not surprisingly puts it, his country became "totally totalitarianly communist."[52] Briefly stated, it is against this background of anomalies, self-motivated or otherwise, in a politically plagued or inspired literature that we now turn to our principals.

There are generic and cultural reasons, "memories of underdevelopment," for example, which make for similarities in Desnoes and Armah. The strategic use of the stamp collection in *No Hay Problema* is an *a propos* resort to symbolic and cultural statement in both an absolute Cuban as well as a comparative Afro-Cuban sense. The bridge is fairly obvious when Sebastian, the protagonist, comes across his father's stamp collection. It includes stamps from Africa to which Sebastian responds with a cynically bemused and, as it turns out, self-deceiving question:

[50] Seymour Menton, *Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 10.

[51] Ibid., p. 11.

[52] Interview of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, in *Seven Voices: Seven Latin American Writers Talk to Rita Guibert*, trans. Frances Partridges (New York: Knopf, 1973), pp. 348–355. For Wole Soyinka's succinctly stated view of ideological terrorism and literature—"The danger which a literary ideology poses is the act of consecration—and of course of excommunication"—see his *Myth, Literature and the African World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 61.

> ¿Qué importancia podían tener en aquella tranquila casa burguesa los sellos de una colonia africana explotada por los ingleses? (p. 130)

(What possible significance could the stamps of an African colony exploited by the English have in that tranquil bourgeois household?)

Additionally, the convergence of literature and revolution does provide us with a framework with which to develop the Cuban-African connection, just as it allows for a generic understanding of the state of consciousness which Sebastian's question represents.

There are differences, of course, between the Cuban and African realities of the novels. Desnoes' protagonists temporize, posture, and seek liberation from a world which the Revolution is already taking apart at the seams. A revolution, historically manifest in Word and Deed, thus forms the moral and dramatic backdrop against which narrative is fashioned and psychological portraiture is effected. *No Hay Problema* makes the case rather pointedly:

> Había que actuar como Fidel Castro. Pero vivir así era arriesgarse a morir y Sebastián prefería seguir medio vivo, o medio muerto. (p. 88)

(One had to do what Fidel Castro was doing. But that way one risked one's life and Sebastian preferred to continue living, half-alive—or half-dead.)

Armah, on the other hand, is predictably driven to provide us with a bitter and eschatological politics which has always given a special depth to his novels and to the psychological traumas of his characters. In *Why Are We So Blest?* Modin's self-hugging, enervating introspection is pointedly related to "the chronic inability of African leaders to create the indispensable *maji,* a workable one."

> The maji. That special something Africans needed to neutralize the material destructiveness of Europe.
>
> The maji is not something existent, waiting to be collected and used. It would be something to be created, an antidote to the potent poison of European penetration. But those of us who get into a position to find out the composition of the European poison absorb so much of it ourselves, we become completely incapable of creating a real, workable *maji.* (p. 222)

It is an intensely felt absence—one which provokes violent, even gothic, extremes in Armah's protagonists. Theirs is a corrupting and trauma-filled exile in a politics of anxiety and strain: the body politic seems a wasteland. Still, there is a common ground shared by Desnoes and Armah, given their protagonists. The revolutionary Word and Deed, *Fidelismo* and *Maji,* threaten to become for our protagonists "the devil of the stairs who wears / the deceitful face of hope and of despair." As a result, to continue in the language of T. S. Eliot, "Against the Word the unstilled world still whirl[s]."[53] It is in that shared context of inconsolable memories of underdevelopment that Armah

[53] T. S. Eliot, "Ash-Wednesday" (1930).

and Desnoes force their characters to confront the implications of the ironic question "why are we so blest?"

Given the premise established above, from Lu Xun especially, the question itself implies a "branching out" against the past—no matter how "amateurishly" the weapon of disenchantment is used:

> The middle class here is like a meringue on the door of a school, as they say, a meringue on the door of the revolution. *(Inconsolable Memories)*
> Naita is right. The educated Africans, the Westernized successes are contemptible worms.... The end of Western education is not work but self-indulgence. An education for worms and slugs. *(Why Are We So Blest?)*

The cumulative effect of words like "nightmare", "hatred" "pierce", "fanatic ill will" does prepare us for the aggression in the above expressions of revolt from Sergio and Modin. In any case, as Sergio further explains, "I can't think of the Cuban bourgeoisie without foaming at the mouth. I hate them with a tenderness" (p. 29).

Because we are dealing with a literature of narcissistic self-mortification, however, the seeming ambiguity of "I hate them with a tenderness" is really no ambiguity at all. Narrative strategies in Armah and Desnoes underscore the point. The novels are offered as "bourgeois" points of view, in privileged and alienated forms. In Armah, we have, in effect, a series of diary, first person confessions of aggression and inadequacy; they follow a pattern of dissipations and failed exorcisms. Desnoes, for his part, explores moral ambivalence and political paralysis through the posed insouciance of Sergio's first person "diary" (p. 133) (narrative in *Inconsolable Memories*) as well as through the ostensibly reported but really claustrophic *ensimismamiento,* concern with self, that we have in the focus on Sebastian in *No Hay Problema.* These direct and indirect first-person narratives give the novels an intense, psycho-analytic character, and, therefore, a much too implosive privacy. Against this, Desnoes and Armah show a marked preference for a politics whose moral and cultural emphasis on "We" creates problems for that antipolitics of "I" in which their protagonists seek an ambivalent refuge.[54]

This is all of some significance because there lurks at the edges of the high-strung narcissism of characters like Modin and Sebastian a certain kind of fear, an "alien's" fear. The inconsolable memories of underdevelopment which plague them may therefore be linked, at least in part, to that view of alienation which Connor Cruise O'Brien gives

[54] In *The Long Revolution* Raymond Williams points out that in the European Middle Ages the word "individual" meant "inseparable." "The complexity of the term is at once apparent in this history, for it is the unit that is being defined, yet defined in terms of the membership of a class. The separate entity is being defined by a word that has meant 'inseparable'.... The crucial history of the modern description is a change in emphasis which enabled us to think of 'the individual' as a kind of absolute, without immediate reference... to the group of which he is a member." Williams is cited in the long introduction that Eric and Mary Josephson, editors, provide for *Man Alone; Alienation in Modern Society* (New York, 1962, p. 19). There is a sense then in which *Inconsolable Memories* ends on a quite appropriate and strategically parenthetical note: "Things around me and fear and desires choke me. It's impossible.... Man (I) is sad, but wants to live.... Go beyond words" (p. 154). Cf. Armah's "In place of isolate bodies, greedy to consume more privileges to set us above, apart from others, there would be community.... Outside community, what justification in life?" (p. 114).

us in "The Anti-Politics of Simone Weil". O'Brien quotes from Weil's *The Need for Roots* to make the point:

> The intelligence is defeated as soon as the expression of one's thoughts is preceded, explicitly or implicitly, by the little word "we". And when the light of intelligence grows dim, it is not very long before the love of good becomes lost.[55]

Our texts, in their Third World political and cultural contexts, grant and mock the *Angst* which such a *Weltanschauung* breeds in their Cuban and African characters. Desnoes is rather heavy-handed when Sergio indulges in a cynical and bathetic celebration of his *up*-rooted tastes:

> If instead of black beans (always thick and diabolical) it had been mutton, truffled quails, pheasant, salmon, cheese souffle, I don't know, or even apple pie and strawberry Jell-O, any other dish except black beans, it wouldn't have destroyed my *Weltanschauung*. (*Memories*, p. 27).

The anti-politics of rootlessness is handled in a less noisy but racially significant way in *No Hay Problema*. The Afro-Cuban dance in celebration of La Virgen de Regla is at once *costumbrismo* (local color effect) as well as a "we" challenge to Sebastian, a challenge which he fails. Since he can only "falsificar unos pasos torpes" ("shuffle through with awkward dance steps"), his response, in effect, is stumbling and awkward in the face of what the ritual and dance demand: acknowledgement of old racial ties and recognition of a new class pluralism. And yet, in the very same episode, he is driven by the mirror image of himself which he sees in Nancy, his white American fiancée, to the outburst, "Mi abuela era negra", ("My grandmother was black", p. 149).

Alternative image clusters, from the gastronomic ("truffled quails") to the erotic (lipstick collection and cunnilingus) recur in the novels to identify other forms of "pluralism" which have been fashioned by bad faith and insecurity and which are therefore inauthentic. For example, what may be called, inelegantly, a "literocratic" cluster amply "justifies" the existentialist *Angst* introduced earlier. It is not without strategy, and one suspects a good deal of malice, that Armah and Desnoes make their Cuban and African characters readers of Nietzsche, Carson McCullers, Kierkegaard *(Fear and Trembling)*, Ayn Rand, and, inevitably, Sartre *(The Age of Reason)*. Appropriately, Armah's Modin is at once paralyzed by and ragingly lucid in his concern with assimilation (pp. 102, 207):

> The whole world is covered with the hell of Europe. True. The whole of the world I know. At home the rule of this hell is so thorough most feel a greater closeness to the brighter fires as peace. So they—we—integrate into the center of the European sun. (p. 60)

[55] Connor Cruise O'Brien, "The Anti-Politics of Simone Weil", *New York Review of Books*, 12 May 1976.

As he later puts it, "We have swallowed the wish for our destruction" (p. 159). Sergio is predictably self-serving and ambiguous when he re-states the case: "The mediocrity of my whole class has been rammed into my stomach" (*Memories*, p. 39). In this respect, Desnoes' own explanation of Sergio's character is an effective summary of the origins and nature of the "anti-politics" about which we are talking:

> Sergio's criticism is never revolutionary, it is only an escape valve to strengthen the established order; but that order is dead. That is the tragedy of Sergio; his irony, his intelligence, is a defensive mechanism which prevents him from becoming involved in the reality.... The key of the character is that he does not assume his historical involvement. He cannot accept underdevelopment but is incapable of facing the necessary risks to overcome it. The character's world is closed; the revolution, however, is open to everybody.[56]

Armah's statement of the case is a clever one that introduces us to the "terrible tropisms" which shape narrative and control character development in *Why Are We So Blest?* Modiń tells us: "I see destruction ahead. I see I should turn away. I do not turn away" (p. 164). He gives us here a very clear expression of the contradictory impulses which fashion our literature of "terrible tropisms"—one which condemns Armah's and Desnoes' protagonists to their special original sin and Limbo: "We float between the blessed and the damned" (p. 208). Access to the Word has an effect, of course, on the limits of terror and tropism. Because Armah's vision is deadly and bitter, Modin's retreat from tropism—

> No tropism. If you see destruction ahead, and you know there is destruction behind, it's no mere tropism to go ahead. There are more directions than ahead and behind

—is fated to remain an idle even if elegant proposition. He pays for it. He is condemned to live out the ineluctable logic of his paralysis, ending up the victim of a blood-soaked castration in the African desert, an appropriate enough end for those "who know the disease; [but] the only cure they know is the disease itself intensified. It is the ultimate addiction" (p. 163). There is the same suggestion of "ultimate addiction" in Desnoes although his context resists Armah's extreme pathology. Thus, Sergio's addiction to his inconsolable memories is succinctly explained by "Pain is sweet" (*Memories*, p. 133). By the same token, Sebastian, like Modin, finally comes to understand that the anti-politics of his physical and cultural exile from Word and Deed in Cuba is a form of castration: "me sacaron de Cuba para castrarme" ("Leaving Cuba was castrating myself", p. 217). It is only then that he begins to understand the Fidelista toast which Francisco had earlier proposed on behalf of a Cuba anchored to and yet liberated in its "underdevelopment": "Brindemos por una Cuba Libre sin Coca Cola" ("Let us drink to a free Cuba safe from Coca Cola", p. 164). Francisco, the novel makes clear, thereby proposes a state of consciousness in which the oppression and the humiliation of memories of under-

[56] Myerson, op. cit., pp. 45–46.

development, in the words of Malraux "suddenly becomes a *value*". The toast represents the Word which liberates a Francisco from the seductive and terrible tropism of "pain is sweet"—a particularly important release because Armah and Desnoes will later underscore the power of that seduction by way of cunnilingual act and image respectively.

There is, on the other hand, a peculiar air of unreality about Francisco. He seems to be little more than a near-formulaic and revolutionary "talking head". For the most part, this is so because we invariably see him through a character like Sebastian, a character in whom he provokes bad faith and a false consciousness. This also holds true in *Inconsolable Memories* whenever the image of the revolutionary depends on what for all practical purposes is Sergio's self-congratulatory impotence and moralising exoticism:

> Revolutionaries are the mystics of this century: willing to die for an implacable social justice. I'm a mediocre man, a modern man, a link in the chain, a worthless cockroach. (*Memories,* pp. 151–152)

The novels do not support the view of the "modern man" or of the "revolutionary" behind which Sergio seeks refuge from political involvement. Armah and Desnoes incorporate such definitions in their works to suggest that Sergio, for example, extols virtues from an unfamiliar distance, at the same time that the "nausea" (Sartre) in his Kafkaesque self-deprecation ("cockroach") suggests too much of a willingness to "integrate into the center of the European sun where the rule of hell is so thorough it resembles peace" (Armah). Anti-politics in Sergio and Sebastian thus originates in and is sustained by two contradictory forces: the seduction of dystopian cynicism and the romance of a utopian reflex. Desnoes has already given us the consequences for character development: "the key to the character is that he does not assume his historical involvement." For his part, Armah is sharp and succinct when *Why Are We So Blest?* blunts the forged and stolen weapons with which Modin seeks to be simultaneously revolutionary and existentialist at the headquarters of the Bureau of the People's Union of Congheria, somewhat heavy-handedly located at "1, Rue Frantz Fanon." Modin is told that "in spite of all your philosophy, revolution is not the same thing as suicide... This is the bureau of the UPC. It is not the Salvation Army" (p. 255). In sum, characters like Modin and Sergio escape from privileged alienation only to seek refuge in a pluralism which lacks depth and relevance. Armah and Desnoes insist on linking this tropism to "Westernized successes"trapped in "tranquil bourgeois households" of Cuba and Africa.

The term "bourgeois" as used or implied by Desnoes and Armah is interestingly unstable. The image cluster in the various uses or echoes of the term does not immediately resolve itself into one orthodox meaning, such as a privileged economic class. Underdevelopment and a second generation of inheritors, in Desnoes especially, determine where and how "bourgeois" is valued in the novels. This is in addition, of course, to the various orthodoxies fashioned by the convergence of literature and revolution.

Roland Barthes' discussion of the term "bourgeois" in *Mythologies* (1957) is per-

tinent here.[57] His semiotic approach illustrates the strategic instability which the term, or its cluster of images, assumes in novels like the ones that Armah and Desnoes give us. According to Barthes, "as a political fact, the bourgeoisie has some difficulty in acknowledging itself". This "difficulty," an "ex-nominating phenomenon", has important implications for hegemony. "Politically, the hemorrhage of the name 'bourgeois' is effected through the idea of *nation*." In the special circumstances of Desnoes' *pre-Fidelismo* Cuba the nation is "the tranquil bourgeois household" from which all allogenous elements and what they imply (black grandmother, colonial stamps, beans) have been excluded or otherwise neutralized. Or else, in the absence of the restraining power of Armah's "Maji," a "bourgeois" commodity millenialism is "ex-nominated" and substituted for the idea of nation. The image cluster here transforms the national household into a "bourgeois" emporium, for example, *Memories'* and old Havana's *El Encanto* (discussed below), which is well stocked with and by the *Weltanschauung* of privileged consumption: from Kierkegaard to truffled quails, from lipstick and "shitty corks" to, in both Armah and Desnoes, The Great White Goddess. In effect, in the absence of a counter word, "bourgeois" can therefore spread over everything and in doing so appear to lose its name, but not its influence and power. "It can ex-nominate itself without restraint" (Barthes). One moral and psychological "terminus" of unrestraint is, of course, Armah's "adventures with hedonistic bodies": adventures which, to anticipate our cluster of sexual images, finally and "callously mutilate the embryo of the future country" (p. 13).

Interestingly enough, when Barthes introduces this "ex-nominating" phenomenon into our convergence of literature and revolution, the result is just as symmetrical with what the image clusters collectively dramatize in Armah and Desnoes. Barthes gives us, not surprisingly, an analysis of ambiguity and ambivalence which parallels the issues discussed in the first section of this essay, and which fashion some of the terrible tropisms of our novels:

> It is remarkable that the adversaries of the bourgeoisie on matters of ethics or aesthetics remain for the most part indifferent, or even attached, to its political determinations. Conversely, its political adversaries neglect to issue a basic condemnation of its representations: they often go so far as to share them. This diversity of attacks benefits the bourgeoisie, it allows it to camouflage its name. For the bourgeoisie should be understood only as the synthesis of its determination and representations. (p. 139)

Barthes thus describes a world in which the powerful instability of signs subverts revolutionary behavior. And so in the "fellow-travellers of the revolution" radicalism of a Modin or a Sebastian we are likely to be faced with a "conjuring trick", whether voluntary or not. Their use of stolen or forged weapons can only produce "the inverted image of an unchanging humanity, characterized by indefinite repetition of its identity"

[57] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 138–139.

(Barthes). In Desnoes' clearer statement, "Sergio's criticism is never revolutionary, it is only an escape valve to strengthen the established order."

Both Armah and Desnoes thus introduce a measure of fatalism into their works. Desnoes' fatalism strains against a manifest revolution, and is most clearly shown in minor characters whose view is, in fact, determined by a raw sense and suspicion of an unchanging humanity. Its anti-politics is the anti-politics of frustrated expectations. In *No Hay Problema* these minor characters betray a fierce and earthy self-interest in contrast to the almost disinterested and alienated cynicism that we have in a Sergio and a Sebastian—a disinterest and cynicism which their origins in "bourgeois" privilege may explain. By contrast we have Manuel, angered by memories of how his hopes of profit from the revolution of the Machado era had been dashed:

> Tu quieres saber cómo acabé? Acabé vendiendo billetes por la calle....¿ A dónde crees que me llevó todo eso? A ninguna parte.

(Do you know how it all turned out? I ended up in the street selling tickets... And where do you think that's going to take me? Nowhere, that's where")

He rejects the temptation of a new historical involvement for what are to him axiomatic reasons:

> Cuba no va a cambiar ni la cabeza de un guanajo.... Nadie puede cambiar a Cuba. Cuba es una puta que necessita que la metan en cintura. Batista es lo mejor que le ha pasado a este país. (p. 101)

(Nothing is ever going to change Cuba one bit.... Nobody can change Cuba. Cuba's a whore that needs to be tied up. Batista is the best thing that's ever happened to this country).

A chorus of voices joins him in expressions of a fatalism from which hardly any aspect of Cuban life is exempt.

> Todo esto es una farsa. Batista, Prio, todos son iguales. (p. 18)
> Casarse o no casarse no cambiaría nada (p. 154)
> Aquí nada puede cambiar. (p. 163)

(It's all a farce. Batista, Prio, they're all the same.... Getting married or not getting married won't change a thing.... Nothing's ever going to change here).

Sebastian is, of course, not really free from somewhat the same cynical fatalism, although its origins are not as strongly identified with materialistic self-interest. *No Hay Problema,* in fact, virtually opens with a statement of the burnt out case that Sebastian is and remains until he recognizes the symbolic castration of his exile at the end of the novel.

> La rebeldía que animó su adolescencia quedó asfixiada. Todo era indiferencia o corrupción. Nada cambiaría, nada: lo único era seguir viviendo. (p. 11)

(That spirit of rebellion which animated his adolescence had been snuffed out. Indifference or corruption, that was all there was. Nothing was ever going to change, nothing; the only thing left was to stay alive).

He holds on with embittering self-mortification to that point of view, partly because of a fear of revolutionary "conjuring tricks". He is nonetheless quite conscious of the reductive consequences:

> Se sintió perdido, otro peatón más andando por la calle, sin identidad y sentido. (p. 104).

(He felt lost, one more body walking down the street, without identity or meaning.)

His retreat into existentialist ruminations is in this context a mirror of his society's populist descent into hedonism (laughter, rumba and conga) to drown its frustrations:

> Los cubanos reían y bailaban la conga y la rumba mientras quedaban en el fondo un sedimento de frustración, la frustración de un país sin destino. (p. 87)

(Cubans, laughing and dancing to conga and rumba and deep down living with a sense of frustration, the frustration of a country without purpose).

The novel's title, *No Hay Problema,* is, of course, quite ironic, prefiguring and later undercutting the cynical or despairing insouciance of Desnoes' major and minor characters. "No Hay Problema", is repeated at least five times. Its use ranges from Manuel's calculating foreplay in his desperate and tawdry passion for Narma—

> Tendrás las dos cosas, el reloj y el apartamento, ya verás.... No hay problema" (p. 76)

(You'll have both things': the watch and the apartment, you'll see... There's nothing to worry about.") —

to suicidal self-delusion in a "bourgeois" household. We get this with Sebastian's father. He has a cancerous tumor, but decides to put his faith in quackery since he is afraid of any radical treatment. Desnoes' intention is rather transparent, of course. The "bourgeois" nation, a cancer in the Cuban context, is itself dying of a moral and intellectual cancer. It is, however, too cowardly to submit to therapy. Thus, Sebastian's father decides to go to "Pro Vita" (the irony is perhaps heavy-handed); in doing so he avoids treatment which needs to be radical if it is to save him:

> Sí, Pro Vita.... Sí, ha habido muchos casos como el mío... curados sin tener que operar ni nada... Esa gente sabe mucho. Con ellos no hay problema. (p. 136)

(Yes, Pro Vita.... Yes, there's been lots of cases like mine... cured, all of them, without any surgery at all.... Those people know what they're about. In their hands, you've got nothing to worry about.)

In an appropriate enough way, he, the bourgeois patriarch, dies of internal hemorrhage, "murío de una hemorragia interna" (p. 220). In an ironic and deadly twist Desnoes thus makes the "bourgeois" the "locus of an unceasing hemorrhage" (Barthes, p. 138).

Armah's treatment of the "bourgeois" image cluster is similar to Desnoes', although *Why Are We So Blest?* more glaringly reflects Barthes' skepticism about the redemptive possibilities in and of revolutionary types. To entrust the "revolution" to Jorge Manuel, Esteban Ngulo, and Solo Nkonam, which the novel does with a great deal of bitter irony, is to offer as custodians of the *Maji* "adversaries to the bourgeoisie on matters of ethics, aesthetics and politics who are, in fact, attached to its determinations and representations" (Barthes).

No Hay Problema makes an unseen Fidel Castro and an unambiguously radicalized Francisco its revolutionary principals. In *Why Are We So Blest?* a trio, itself the locus of an unceasing moral, racial and cultural hemorrhage, has constituted itself into the matrix of "revolutionary" consciousness at "1, Rue Frantz Fanon." At that address, Armah gives us Jorge Manuel, who has, "apart from the ordinary Freedom Fighter, a more important title. He is Foreign Minister of the Congherian Government in Exile." He sits as custodian of the revolution in "the upper office":

> The floor there is covered completely with a thick blue carpet. There is no desk —only a set of deep armchairs around a polished table. On the wall across from the entrance is a painting. It is a Parisian scene, a bridge in the twilight. The left wall has a bar, beneath which is a refrigerator. (p. 50)

The triumphant "ex-nomination" of bourgeois which Armah intends could hardly be more obvious—given this vision of the revolutionary as conjuring trick (Barthes). Additionally—and our next segment will stress its significance for Armah and Desnoes, —Manuel's "hidden" mistress is a "cadaverous white-haired woman" (p. 229).

In the lower office of the Bureau is Esteban Ngulo, self-effacing and self-effaced: "the lighter brother drank spirits upstairs with suave travelers, while down below the black one licked the tasteless backs of stamps" at 1, Rue Frantz Fanon. The racial "bloodletting" or hemorrhage is unambiguously explained:

> So the awareness would not bury itself, that here, too, was a division that would exist even when the last Portuguese had left Congheria, the ambiguous freedom of Esteban Ngulo to serve while Jorge Manuel consumed the credit and the sweetness. Man and his shadow, I began to call them in my mind. (p. 52)

The voice that records the above is Solo's—a character driven by awareness and impotence to that self-hugging bitterness which we have seen in Desnoes' Sebastian. Solo's "goal is littleness itself: to fill time, to survive emptiness" (p. 232). As may be expected, the malaise is more intensely at work in *Why Are We So Blest?:*

> In my mind there is no space left for flight. This filth is no mere station. It is my terminus. The journeys that should have meaning are behind me. Here is physical space to wander in, space not for life's movement, space in which to turn in circles, again, again, again.
>
> Where in confident youth we said we would go after the long preparation in the slavers' world, I have been. I had not the courage to stay. I came back denuded of my lies, my head stored with nightmares, my remnant energy drained into endless, useless contemplation of my single, personal life. (pp. 84–85)

Thus, Solo with his despairingly lucid but "non-revolutionary criticism", his failure to "assume a historical involvement", and his "closed world" (Desnoes), is a more deeply and acidly etched copy of Sergio with his inconsolable memories of underdevelopment:

> If I still believed in or could even create my illusion about the counterrevolutionaries, it's all over now, it's gone to hell. Nothing in their heads, no dignity, no backbone; the middle class here is like a meringue on the door of a school, as they say, yes, a meringue on the door of the revolution. (*Memories,* p. 38)

It is, of course, in Modin that all these terms of reference—castration, mortification, impotence, hemorrhage—reach a dreadful climax. His fate powerfully illustrates the "sexualization" of those issues raised here by the convergence of revolution and literature.

Even a casual reading of the Desnoes and Armah novels under consideration reveals image clusters which underscore the importance, erotic and mythical, of sexual passion. The dilemmas and tragedies of individual, class, and nation are ultimately related in genesis and psychopathology to sexual attraction, consummation, and violence. The image clusters develop and expand in ways that illuminate cultural and racial ambiguities in Cuba and Africa. Thus Sebastian is a half-caste in a way that reflects polarities in the history of Cuba. His grandmother was black. His attitude toward the stamp collection may now be seen as a sterile attempt to deny ancestry and procreation, in addition to the more obvious moral and political meaning. Sebastian's father is Cuban and his mother *norteamericana.* Sebastian himself is involved, first, with his family's ex-maid, the mulatto Norma—much to his mother's displeasure, who does not know it is Norma but objects to Sebastian's affair with *una mujer de color.* Sebastian then resumes a relationship with Nancy, an American white, with whom he eventually travels to Miami. Significantly, the decision he makes to leave her follows an epiphany whose expression depends on the sexual motif. Sebastian leaves because he fears castration: "me sacaron de Cuba para castrarme." Until this action is taken, he suffers from lack of proper identity. Luis says to him" "Tu ves, hasta las putas se creen que eres un americano" ("See, even the whores take you for an American"). To which Sebastian replies, "Eso es natural, ni yo mismo sé bien lo que soy" ("Naturally—and why not? I don't even know

myself who I am") (p. 108). The language of the novel is itself called into service to illustrate this dimension. The Spanish is punctuated by English phrases in a sustained penetration that threatens mutation or bastardization. It is nonetheless significant that the last manifestation of the phenomenon also signals withdrawal:

> *Good bye,* Nancy—dijo Sebastian—para romper lo que le rodeaba. Para acabar de una vez. (p. 224)

(Goodbye, Nancy—Sebastian said—to break himself free from entanglement. To end it all once and for all).

All these wider implications cluster in the quiet clarity of a statement made very early in the novel and fully explored by the end: "Dos idiomas en la cabeza confunden mucho" ("You can't carry two languages in your head without a great deal of confusion", p. 25).

In *Why Are We So Blest?* Jorge Manuel is half Portuguese. Like Solo, he had had a university education in Lisbon (p. 50). As in Desnoes, only more brutally, Armah insists in violent and dramatic sexual imagery that "dos idiomas en la cabeza confunden mucho." Solo's near catatonic bitterness and melancholia ("I regret the wholeness I lack", p. 232) originate in traumas associated with Sylvia, who, white and Portuguese, is the Nancy of his experience. The two women play a parallel but considerably less violent Circean role than that which Aimee, white and American, is given in Modin's life:

> I think of Sylvia. The old regret is buried, but I have earned no peace of mind. There is doubt, there is certainty, that my love too was that same ancient call of death, mine, his [Modin], the death of our people, gilt with all the sweetness of the force itself of life, affection. What a destiny, this destruction. With what gladness all these my smiling brothers jump, dance, race, to get consumed. (p. 150)

> I was lucky. Sylvia was passive; the American girl [Aimee] is the hyperactive embodiment of that energy, that hatred that has impelled Europe against us all. And that cadaverous white-haired woman, Manuel's hidden mistress—what is her species of love but the same ancient white hatred of Africa, taking rotten form in her dry, decayed body? (p. 229)

We are now in a better position to understand and revaluate the preoccupation with appetite in Armah and Desnoes—from ingestion to vomit. We are dealing, in yet another mode of our image cluster, with a class of protagonists in whom the appetite has turned fetishistic, and so treacherous. The attribution of profound consequences to such a distortion of the unavoidably sensuous and natural ("the force itself of life") is understandable—and most suitably dramatic. It is a drama which appropriately reaches its climax in the literal sexualization of taste.

A fairly early stage in the drama involves an acquisitive distortion of cultural and biological needs. It is thus a response by violation to certain first principles of "the force itself of life"—such as Henri Chambre cites from Marx:

> To live, is first of all to eat, drink, house and clothe oneself and several other things besides. The first historical fact, therefore, is the production of material life itself, and this really is a historical fact, the fundamental basis of all history.[58]

Taste without cultural and moral vision, Armah and Desnoes thus suggest, degenerates into indulgence. Armah speaks directly: "The end of Western education is not work but self-indulgence." There results, in a Cuban and an African victim, a concomitant fear of living at a level of "underdevelopment" too far from gratification and indulgence. We see this illustrated in the carping intensity which Sergio brings to bear on a pocket comb:

> I needed a pocket comb.... I asked at several tobacco counters and they said, "all gone, *no hay*, sorry." I went into the old five-and-ten and no luck either, "*se acabaron*, just ran out of them." We need so many things to keep our stupid lives going. (*Memories*, p. 18)

It is, of course, not surprising that absence of gratification can and does engender trivial cataclysms: Sergio feels that "We're living suspended over an abyss" for want, among other things, of a cork:

> For the past few weeks there hasn't been a soft drink to be had anywhere. I never thought that the manufacture of soft drinks could be paralyzed just because there was no cork for the caps.... That shitty cork I used to scrape off when I was a boy. (*Memories*, p. 18)

The marketplace is thus a relevant feature in the image cluster at work here: seduction, delight, and irony of course, are fittingly expressed in the name El Encanto. To these are added the wider Latin American and "underdevelopment" implications of Sergio's lament over "the big department store":

> Since El Encanto, the big department store, burned down, the city hasn't been the same. Havana today looks like a town in the interior, Pinar del Rio, Artemisa, or Matanzas. It no longer looks like the Paris of the Caribbean, as the tourists and whores used to call it. Now it looks more like the capital of a banana republic in Central America, one of those dead, underdeveloped cities like Tegucigalpa or San Salvador or Managua. (*Memories*, p. 20)

Here, as in *Why Are We So Blest?* 's "Upper Office," consciousness has been reduced to the level of merchandise. The horror in all this, as Solo comes to bitterly understand, is that gratification can often "bring a peace indistinguishable from triviality" (p. 115).

It is in the sensualization of this consciousness, "in adventures with hedonist bodies" (Armah, p. 160), that the novels move to climactic statements. Armah shifts downward into a passionate corruption, "All my apertures ran with fluid, living and dead, escaping

[58] Henri Chambre, *From Karl Marx to Mao Tse-tung, A Systematic Survey of Marxism-Leninism*, trans. Robert J. Olsen, (New York: Kenedy, 1963), p. 12.

a body unwilling to hold them: blood, urine, vomit, tears, diarrhea, pus" (p. 114). In Desnoes, one of Sergio's adventures with the hedonistic involves his wife Laura's belongings. She has left him, opting for life in the United States. He goes through her lipsticks, stockings, perfume in a way that brings to his aroused senses the warning of a "damned Catholic fanatic": *"La sensualità provocata dalla donna,... una delle prime cause della putrefazione e morte dell'anima"* ("Sensuality provoked by woman,... one of the prime causes of putrefaction and of death in the soul", p. 25):

> I counted eighteen different lipsticks. And she said there was nothing left in Havana these days! That's not counting the ones she took with her. Some of them are almost all used up but others are brand new. I started to turn one of them in and out, in and out; I don't think there's anything more obscene than a lipstick. The names of the shades are really exotic: Black Magic, Cafe Espresso, Mango Sherbet, Pink Champagne, Aqua Rosa, Pastel Red, Chianti.... (*Memories,* p. 23)

Merchandise and eroticism thus converge in our texts in a manner that echoes Werner Sombart's treatise of 1913 which "in numerous passages reveals a knowledge of the mechanism and varieties of sensual gratification as well as of compensatory sexual sublimation that immediately brings Freud to mind":[59]

> In the last analysis, it is our sexual life that lies at the root of the desire to refine and multiply the means of stimulating our senses, for sensuous pleasure and erotic pleasure are essentially the same. Indubitably, the primary cause of the development of any kind of luxury is most often to be sought in consciously or unconsciously operative sex impulses.[60]

It is precisely through such a relationship that Armah and Desnoes eventually lead us to the White Goddess image at the heart of our cluster. The mythic underpinnings of that image are suggested by the Calypso-Siren-Circe roles given to Laura, Nancy, Sylvia and, of course, to Aimee. Aimee will later be transfigured into "an object, destructive, powerfully hurled against [Modin] from the barrel of a powerful, destructive culture" (p. 115). Sergio lessens the intensity of Solo's Circean vision by re-stating it in Hollywood terms. The wide, hemispheric impact which nonetheless results is of some significance:

> Ava Gardner has huge feet, almost all American females have huge feet, and that used to bother me when I was an adolescent, when I would use pinup girls for masturbation. That's our underdeveloped lot, beating our meat while we look at ravishing female stars of the world. I'm sure the only contact that thousands of Bolivians, Venezuelans, Mexicans, and Argentinians have had with a White Goddess is through a picture of Marlene Dietrich and her dazzling legs, insured for something like a million dollars, or Ava Gardner's. (*Memories,* pp. 58–59)

[59] Philip Sieligman Introduction to Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism,* trans. W. R. Ditman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. xx.

[60] Sombart, op. cit., pp. 60–61.

The implications are clear enough in such use of our image cluster. It is, in effect, not all surprising to find in, say, the comic poignancy of Manuel Puig's *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* (1968) that screen dreams feature decisively in the life of the novel's small and provincial towns ("dead, underdeveloped cities", to borrow from Sergio) in Argentina. We come across Toto in his awakening sexuality in a therefore predictable way. As every day in their celluloid dream the line between fantasy and reality grows thinner and thinner for Puig's characters, Toto plots how he would handle Rita Hayworth ("she sings in Spanish in *Blood and Sand*")[61] so that she would never betray him:

> I'am going to write in big letters the R of Rita and H in big letters, for background. I'll draw a mantilla comb and some castanets. But in *Blood and Sand* she betrays the good boy. I don't want to draw R. H. in big letters.

This seductive power in "white-framed sunglasses" and in the "policy of Hollywood Cosmetics" (*Betrayed,* p. 43) had, of course, earlier provoked a determined and materialist dream in Luis of *No Hay Problema.* Posed in the dark sunglasses which distinguish incognito film producers, he announces to Sebastian that he will forsake sugar and cattle for screen gold and goddess: "Quiero ser una especie de Carlo Ponti cubano y casarme con Sofía Loren" (p. 199).

The vision is decidedly apocalyptic when the White Goddess image cluster appears in *Why Are We So Blest?* Since it all adds up, in Modin's case and fate especially, to a "love the daughter of a race of destroyers" theme (p. 149), Puig's comic poignancy and Desnoes' broad satire are dispensed with when that "ancient call of death" is heard in Armah's novel. The erotic passions in *Betrayed...* and *No Hay Problema* are consequently dealt with in the light of Solo's and Modin's horrified fascination. As he watches a photograph, Modin turns to romance and eschatology to explain "the root of the fatal attraction":

> In the center the young bride is the focus of a self-created drama. This is youth searching for the excitement of life at the level of its culture's basic myths. My new friend is the Western European Damsel in distress, the valued prize after the conflict between dragon and knight. But the conflict now grows in complexity. There is no knowing who the knight might be, and who the dragon, for this is one of history's crossroads, and old values may or may not get changed. Standing at the crossroads, Sandra, the American youth, prize after the great cataclysm, from which she would be the only gainer. (p. 157)

Edmundo Desnoes has said, speaking in the Cuban context, that "Art today in the Revolution is also exorcism to untangle the present from the past."[62] Sebastian's liberation from the past comes at the lowest point of his descent into exile. We see this in the climactic pool scene with Nancy in Miami. There, given our image clusters, he appropriately reaches the nadir of delight in subjugation. He asks Nancy, in the pool,

[61] Manuel Puig. *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth,* trans. Suzanne Jill Levine (New York: Avon, 1973), see pp. 68, 70.

[62] Myerson, op. cit., p. 46.

to open her legs. He dives into and swims between them in a scene highly suggestive of cunnilingus, of a retreat into the womb, and of drowning. All the while, he feels as if an invisible anchor had been tied to his ankle. There is a sense then in which his act is the fullest expression of what Modin refers to as the "search for self-annihilation": the "extreme pleasure offered, taken, and tested."

> Cuando reapareció empezó a salpicar el embarcadero. Sebastián vaciló antes de lanzarse detrás de ella. Algo se movió debajo del agua o en el fondo de su pensamiento.
> — Abre las piernas—Sebastián le pidío sonriendo.
> — Para qué?
> Sebastian se hundió. Nadó entre quellas piernas borrosas, casi *sintiendo un ancla invisible tirandole del tobillo.* Debajo del agua se fragmentaba y las distancias se encogión y estiraban. (*No Hay Problema,* p. 215; emphasis mine.)

(When she reappeared, she began splashing water against the platform. Sebastian hesitated before diving in after her. Something moved beneath the water or was it in the depth of his own mind? "Open your legs," Sebastian said, smiling. "What for?" Sebastian dove in. He swam between those blurred legs, feeling almost as if an invisible anchor pulled him under. Beneath the water things were fragmented—the distances flowing back and forth).

Five pages after this scene, Sebastian's father dies the "bourgeois" death earlier referred to. Sebastian has an uncomfortable dream about New York, and comes to the awareness that "Aqui, no vivo, aqui me siento impotente. Me sacaron de Cuba para castrarme" (There is no life for me here. I feel impotent. Leaving Cuba was castrating myself"). He acts in the light of this awakening, bids Nancy good-bye and boards a plane to return to a Cuba still in the hands of Batista supporters who had earlier tortured him. The novel ends with two significant words as he looks down on the island: "Quería atterizar" ("He wanted to land").

Modin comes to virtually the same awareness, in virtually the same words, as Sebastian. "This place is a graveyard for my spirit" (p. 159), he says in his American exile. As with Sebastian, he has engaged in a search for self-annihilation: "I have wanted to destroy myself, but so well hidden has the desire for suicide been, its temptations have always looked like extreme pleasure offered, taken, tasted" (p. 158). The nadir of delight in subjugation is again expressed in an act of cunnilingus, between Modin and Aimee; but this time the act is fiercely unambiguous in its violence and ecstasy:

> She was still expressionless as we got into bed. I kissed her thighs, searched for her clit, this time with no help from my fingers. My tongue found it and played with it, stroking it in tight recurring circles. Then, taking care to catch it firmly between my front teeth, I bit it.
>
> There was a contradiction in her body. She had felt the pain. Her hips pressed into the mattress beneath, catching my head between her thighs and belly, and I lost the clit. Then, even more swiftly, she was thrusting herself against my face again, craving a renewal of that first sharp contact. (p. 195)

Modin's descent, unlike Sebastian's, is too deep, and does not allow for redemptive epiphany or effective exorcism. There is, in any case, no workable *Maji* in Armah's Africa, at 1, Rue Frantz Fanon, for example, to which a revolutionary return can be made. The search for self-annihilation is threateningly absolute:

> My periods of dissipation have been a dispersal of myself. I throw out pieces of myself, some I fling dangerously wide indeed, then after reaching exhaustion I need to bring the pieces, if I can find them, back together. (p. 158)

Because the novel's vision is unyielding in its pessimism, Modin is condemned to further dismemberment in a negation of the triumphant "gathering" in the Osirian myth which his words above bring to mind. So he returns to Africa, Aimee in tow; he is rejected for revolutionary service at 1, Rue Frantz Fanon. He heads out into the desert, with Aimee, and there they are accosted by four white French soldiers. All six characters then move to act out the climax of that ecstatic nihilism all along implicit in our image clusters. First, the soldiers rape Aimee. (Their inability to bring her to a climax is interpreted in terms of her American hardness: "the driver wanted to make me come. He had to give up too. He said, 'Elle est dure, eh?' The one with the gun said: 'Ah, pour ça, les Américaines.'") There then follows what must surely be one of the most brutal of literary codas, one in which all the various levels of signification we have thus far developed are pushed to their narrative, aesthetic, and conceptual limits:

> They began the same thing, but this time they made me come close enough to Modin each time so his prick touched the hair on my cunt. The third time they drew me back several paces. Modin's erect prick stood straight out.... The driver joined his friends. He threw the gun down and put a hand back to his eye.
>
> "J'peux plus supporter ça," he said. Then he climbed into the jeep and came out with a length of thin wire. He made a knot in the middle and gave one end to the man who had given him the gun. The noose in the middle they slipped around Modin's prick, made it tight, then the remaining two brought me back and began their torture again. I thought I could break loose, but the first time I tried their hold on me was firm.
>
> They used me to get Modin hard. The wounded man [the driver] gave a yell of pain and pulled hard on the wire. First his friend was surprised, then he too pulled. The snapping off of the tip of Modin's prick was slow. I thought it would fall just like that, but the wire cut into his flesh and then in spite of all that tension nothing seemed to happen. Modin did not scream. I was thinking the wire had broken when the tip of his penis snapped off and hung by just a bit of skin from the bottom.

The suggestion of vampirism thus far latent in the Calypso-Siren-Circe motif (and so in the relationship between the Third World and Euro-America) is given direct and gothic expression:

> Modin started bleeding. The blood curved out in a little stream that jerked outward about every second. I reached him and without thinking of what I was doing kissed him. His blood filled my mouth. I swallowed it. (p. 288)

This effective and powerful scene is thus a coda of sorts for the imagistic thrust in Desnoes' "Lipstick" scene, Lu Xun's "the knives with which they pierce into it are more fatal and powerful", Feo's "desire to liquidate the past, to settle accounts with a situation that still lingers in our memories like a nightmare," and Barthes' heretofore semiotic "haemorrhaging." In Armah the excoriation of class and caste thus reaches an intensity which Desnoes' world resists. Desnoes seems willing to believe that the revolutionary Word and Deed, Cuba's at any rate, do not converge in a mere conjuring trick. For Ayi Kwei Armah, on the other hand, it does seem brutally clear that "the beautyful ones are not yet born." We therefore move from the bloody violence which ends *Why Are We So Blest?* to the inconsolable memories which open *Two Thousand Seasons:*

> Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction.

CHAPTER XVII

AFRICA AND ANCIENT GREECE: EURIPIDES, SOYINKA AND THEIR BACCHANTS

DANIELLE BONNEAU[1]

1. FROM MYTH TO RITE

Wole Soyinka had already made his name as a dramatist when he was commissioned by the National Theatre of Great Britain to write an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*.[2] It is the only one of his plays which is not rooted in an African context, and one may wonder what had stirred the Nigerian playwright's imagination in this classical tragedy.

As Henri Grégoire pointed out in the Introduction to his own edition, Euripides' *Bacchae* is the only remaining Dionysian tragedy, since all others, including Aeschylus', have been lost. And the Belgian Hellenist endorsed the traditional theory that Greek tragedy as such emanated from the cult of Dionysus, under whose aegis it was to remain: "la plus ancienne tragédie devait chanter ou mimer les aventures ou les 'avatars' de Dionysos, un dieu qui avait souffert la persécution, peut-être le martyre, et qui ne s'était pas imposé sans douleur ni lutte."[3] If this is accepted, Euripides' late play must reflect to some extent the most ancient subject matter and indeed the very essence, of Greek tragedy. On the other hand, the hypothetical "la plus ancienne tragédie" was bound to echo the deepest preoccupations of early Greek society in a period of fast change and growth. It is at least conceivable that this archaic aspect of a play which, by its very nature, illustrates the passage of a society from mythical belief to ritual drama, was the element that most appealed to the African dramatist.

Soyinka's version preserves in broad outline the contents of the classical play, which deals with an episode related to the introduction of the myth and cult of Dionysus from Asia into Greece. Thebes and particularly the royal family, with the exception of the old king, Kadmos, who has abdicated in favour of his grandson Pentheus, deny the divine origin of the "other grandson", Dionysus, son of Semele and Zeus. In order to avenge this insult, the rejection of his cult and the maltreatment inflicted upon his companions, the Asian Bacchants, the god roused the women of Thebes, led by the three princesses, Agave, Ino and Autonoe, to bacchanalian frenzy. In spite of the advice and solemn warnings given by Kadmos, by the soothsayer Tiresias and by the god himself—dis-

[1] The original French version of this paper, which was read at the XVth Conference of the Société Française de Littérature Générale et Comparée (Limoges, 1977), is available as "Du mythe au rite: Soyinka et *Les Bacchantes* d'Euripide," *Afrique Littéraire et Artistique*, 54/55 (1979/80), 81–88.

[2] Page references are to "*The Bacchae* of Euripides" in Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), vol. 1, pp. 233–307.

[3] *Euripide: Les Bacchantes* ed. Henri Grégoire (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961), pp. 207–208.

guised as high priest of his own cult—Pentheus sacrilegiously puts Dionysus into prison. When the latter escapes miraculously the king turns against the Bacchantes. For punishment he is torn to pieces by the Theban women, led by his mother Agave, while he is spying on the bacchanalian mysteries from a tree on Mount Cithaeron. His fate is repeatedly compared to that of Actaeon, son of Autonoe, who was torn to pieces by his dogs for defying Artemis.

Soyinka acknowledges that his adaptation is largely based on two earlier English translations and the main episodes of the play are preserved faithfully enough: the initial appearance of Dionysus, who explains the situation; the discussion between Tiresias and Kadmos, advocates of the new cult; the confrontations between the two old men and Pentheus and between the latter and Dionysus; the miraculous liberation of the prisoner and the trick played by the god, who escorts Pentheus dressed as a Bacchante to the heights of Cithaeron; the scene in which Agave appears with the head of the "lion" and proclaims her victory. He reproduces the two long soliloquies of the messengers who describe—in the middle and at the end of the play—the awakening of the Bacchantes and the death of Pentheus.

The style of the dialogue in the adapted passages is, however, more commonplace, less high-flown, sometimes nearly irreverent, as if rejecting the tragical tone. The free mixture of genres operates in the same way: Soyinka invents droll or frankly comical episodes, like the telescopic thyrsus of Cadmus (pp. 254–255), the first marriage pantomime (pp. 285–286), the confrontation between Cadmus and the priests of Eleusis (pp. 238–239), the black humour in Tiresias' reproaches to his scourgers (p. 241).

Another obvious stylistic change works in a completely different direction. Soyinka introduces long lyrical passages, borrowing some lines from his *Idanre*,[4] "a Passion poem of Ogun" (we shall come back to this Yoruba god). These passages are mainly praise songs or *oriki*, a traditional Yoruba poetic form, a typical example of which comes from the leader of the slaves:

> Come, god
> Of seven paths: oil, wine, blood, spring, rain
> Sap and sperm, O dirge of shadows, dark-shod feet
> Seven-ply crossroads, hands of camwood
> Breath of indigo, O god of the seven roads
> Farm, hill, forge, breath, field of battle
> Death and the recreative flint. (p. 295)[5]

Furthermore, Soyinka gives an important role to the plastic elements—pantomime and dance—and to music. The musical theme of Dionysus is a genuine *leitmotiv*, acting as a symbol for the triumph of the god and even for the god himself. It enables the dramatist to avoid the conventional *deus ex machina* in the final scene. This theme is

[4] *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967), pp. 57–88. The lines in the play beginning "Where do we seek him?" (p. 296) and "Night, night, set me free" (p. 291) are borrowed from pp. 75 and 83 of *Idanre*, respectively. The poem mentions silex several time, e.g. "Creative flint" (p. 82): this too is taken over in the play (see pp. 251, 295, etc).

[5] This develops two lines from *Idanre*, p. 83.

sometimes combined with the traditional chant of the chorus, but the style is deliberately eclectic:

> Music. It has the strange quality—the nearest familiar example is the theme-song of *Zorba the Greek*—with its strange mixture of nostalgia, violence, and death. The scene which follows needs the following quality: extracting the emotional colour and temperature of a European pop scene without degenerating into that tawdry commercial manipulation of teenage mindlessness. The lines are chanted, not sung, to musical accompaniment. The Slave Leader is *not* a gyrating pop drip. His control emanates from the self-contained force of his person, a progressively deepening spiritual presence. His style is based on the lilt and energy of the black hot gospellers who themselves are often the first to become physically possessed. The effect on his crowd is, however, the same—physically—as would be seen in a teenage pop audience. (pp. 248–249)

As Agave celebrates her victory, her trophy in her hand, the Bacchantes start a dance around the thyrsus, graceful at first and then more and more frantic (pp. 302–303). The character of this "Maypole" dance is half popular, half ritual. As for the dance of Dionysus, it is a sacred dance of possession. The audience measures the influence of the god over Pentheus as the king marches towards his destiny, dancing what he believes to be the steps taught by his drill-master to the army horses (p. 293). Tiresias explains the deep significance of the dance to Kadmos:

> When you step into the dance you'll lose all your silly notions. You accept, and that's the real stature of man. You are immersed in the richest essence of all—your inner essence. (p. 255)

This also applies to the bacchanalian dance of the bridegroom in the first pantomime, through which he rejects a union imposed upon him.

The scenic effects punctuating the chorus which precedes the murder of Pentheus are, however, clearly modern: one part of the chorus of slaves howl symbolically, while the Bacchantes chant "Bromios!" in an ascending counterpoint. Another section of the group of slaves moves across the stage for a similarly symbolic union with the Bacchantes, while three or four of the women give a highly stylized mime of Agave's "Chase" (p. 294).

The most important pantomimes are those illustrating the past and future of the Dionysian cult for the benefit of the hypnotized Pentheus: the irruption of the god, wearing the mask of Aphrodite, into an ancient wedding, here made to appear conventionally bourgeois, and the intervention of Christ, changing water into wine at the marriage of Cana (pp. 285–287). The *dénouement* refers back to the pantomime again, recalling certain elements of the episode with Christ.

Although dance, pantomime, music and singing are essential to African pre-theatrical performances, whether sacred or secular,[6] it is obvious that Soyinka has not resorted

[6] On sacred and secular pre-drama, see Alain Ricard, *Théâtre et Nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), pp. 55–61 and J. P. Clark, "Aspects of Nigerian Drama," in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed. G. D. Killam (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973), pp. 19–32.

to these elements just to be "African". He is interested in their dramatic power—the condensing of the story in the pantomime, the suggestiveness of the dance—and in their symbolic role. As we have seen, he is open to all traditions, from African and European folklore to more contemporary cultural traits: pop and gospel song, cinematic techniques which have a distinct influence on the recurring musical theme as well as on the flash-back and flash-forward of the pantomimes.

The only palpable element of africanization is the introduction of the chorus of slaves, expecially of their leader, for whom Soyinka recommends a definitely negroid type (p. 234). In fact, while he retains the classical chorus, he adapts it to the demands of the modern theatre. It is a mixed chorus: in moments of tension, the two groups—Bacchantes and slaves—express themselves in dialogues or alternate invocations. This procedure may reduce the solemnity of the choral passages, but it gives an essentially "dramatic" character to a somewhat rigid convention. The role of chorus leader devolves on the Slave Leader. In Soyinka's version, sentences which are part of some soliloquy or of the chorus of Bacchantes in the Greek original are often transferred to the dialogues and even attributed to different characters. The presence of the chorus of slaves, though, has a special function: it strengthens the image of a political regime indifferent to all humanitarian concerns, which considers the slaves as mere objects. In this way, Soyinka's adaptation adds an element of socio-political satire—one of his favourite themes—which is absent from Euripides'play.

The portrayal of Pentheus reveals the same satirical intentions. The character is already a tyrant in the Greek play; Soyinka turns him into a militarist who knows very little about his country (p. 288), a guardian of public and moral order: "I shall have order! ... order and sanity ... I've returned to re-impose order. Order!" (p. 254). He is, as Dionysus says, a "man of chains" (p. 284), who is afraid of freedom both for others and for himself. For this kind of person, whoever opposes his will or his repressive actions is necessarily a traitor: this was the reaction of King Mata Kharibou towards his captain in *A Dance of the Forests* (1960). In 1967, it was the reaction of the Federal Government of Nigeria towards Wole Soyinka's attempts to avoid a civil war, which brought him two years of solitary confinement for "pro-Biafran activities"; here, Dionysus is a spy, a subversive agent in the service of a foreign power (p. 284). In short, Pentheus belongs to that type of military dictator—sometimes crowned—which is only too familiar in Africa.

But Pentheus is more than just that: he is the anti-Dionysus. The Greek play is mainly about the clash between two personalities and two principles. No doubt, the dramatic character of this conflict interested Soyinka, although the outcome is known beforehand. But above all, the original play and its adaptation have in common an acute perception of the significance of the myth of Dionysus and the value of his cult. When the god appears in Thebes, the town is spiritually dead: as the Slave Leader puts it, "The air of Thebes is sterile. Nothing breathes in it. Nothing—really—lives," (p. 237). It is Pentheus who is to a large extent responsible for this sterility, this fossilization. Like Oedipus, he is the source of the evil gnawing at the city, the evil from which it has to be delivered. He does not respect Dionysus, but then he has no sense of the sacred at all, and no sense either of traditional values, such as the respect which is due to old age:

he rebels against his grandfather Kadmos. Nor is this balanced, as it is towards the end of Euripides' play, by the old man's tearful emphasis on the more attractive aspects of Pentheus' personality:

ᾧ δῶμ' ἀνέβλεφ', ὃς συνεῖχες, ὦ τέκνον,
τοὐμὸν μέλαθρον, παιδὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς γεγώς,
πόλει τε τάρβος ἦσθα· τὸν γέροντα δὲ
οὐδεὶς ὑβρίξειν ἤθελ' εἰσορῶν τὸ σὸν
κάπα· δίκην γὰρ ἀξίαν ἐλάμβανες.
(11. 1308–1312)

ὦ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, καὶ γὰρ οὐκέτ' ὢν ὅμως
των φιλτάτων ἔμοιγ' ἀριθμήσει, τέκνον,
οὐκέτι γενείον τοῦδε θιγγάνων χερί,
τὸν μητρὸς αὐδων πατέρα προσπτύξει, τέκνον,
λέγων· τίς ἀδικεῖ, τίς σ' ἀτιμάξει, γέρον;
τίς σὴν ταράσσει καρδίαν λυπηρὸς ὤν;
λέγ', ὡς κολάζω τὸν ἀδικοῦντά σ', ὦ πάτερ.
(11. 1316-1322)

To thee our house looked up, O son, the stay
Of mine old halls; my daughter's offspring thou,
Thou wast the city's dread: was none dared mock
The old man, none that turned his eyes on thee,
O gallant head!—thou hadst well requited him.

O best-beloved!—for, though thou be no more,
Thou shalt be counted best-beloved, O child,
Thou who shalt fondle never more my head,
Nor clasp and call me "Mother's father," child,
Crying, "Who wrongs thee, ancient?—flouts thee who?
Who vexeth thee to trouble thine heart's peace?
Speak, that I may chastise the wrong, my sire."[7]

By the simple device of deleting the last important speech of Euripides' Kadmos, Soyinka manages to present Pentheus in a uniformly negative light. One of the latter's most typical actions occurs when he orders the destruction of Tiresias' hut and, when the old slave timidly objects, he beats him, arousing general disapproval.

All this enables Soyinka to demystify "civilization," through the opposition of the seeming barbarity of the slaves and the real barbarity of Pentheus:

Age is holy
To hit an old man
Or demolish the roof of a sage?

[7] Arthur S. Way's translation in the Loeb Classical Library, pp. 112–113.

Yet we are the barbarians
And Greece the boast of civilisation.
We are slaves and have no souls. (p. 264)

While Pentheus represents a negative principle, which denies the human—the values of civilization and humaneness—as well as the divine, Dionysus is the "new god" of a barbarian cult which the sensible king resists; he is the incarnation of "the new order": fertility, joy, liberation of instinct—a sort of vital impulse whose irresistible power leads up to Freedom. This accounts for the fact that the slaves and their leader spontaneously side with the god (pp. 292–293).

The emblem of Dionysus is the vine and its wine, which he bestowed on mankind for the exhilaration of the spirit as well as for ritual libations. The most famous passage in the Greek tragedy, the exhortation of Pentheus by Tiresias, must have had special appeal for Soyinka, with its identification of wine and god:

οὗτος θεοισι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς,
ὥστε διὰ τοντον τἀγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.
(11. 284–85)

He is the Gods' libation, though a God,
So that through him do men obtain good things.[8]

This is transposed as follows:

Is it not customary to pour libations
At the altar of Apollo? This is
to pour the body of god itself and through
His intercession win the favour of heaven. (p. 260)

That year was a vintage one. Sensual imagery in the herdsman's description of the bunches of grapes reinforces the theme of fertility: "each cluster ... (his hands shape them) pendulous breasts of the wives of Kronos, bursting over with giant nipples" (p. 237). The wine he secretly brings to the slaves has a taste of freedom. Dionysus himself calls it the "sacrament of life" (p. 236). In the pantomime of the first marriage, the wine drunk by the bridegroom gives him the courage to reject hypocritical conventions and be himself again, free at last to dance, laugh and choose a wife who is not just respectably plain.

Euripides does insist on the positive, fertilizing and liberating aspects of the Dionysian cult, although liberty is not the main issue in the Greek play. But Soyinka's adaptation is consciously syncretic: in his preliminary note, he describes the Yoruba god Ogun as an "elder brother to Dionysus." In the pantomime of the marriage at Cana, Christ obviously appears as one of the latter's incarnations or at least as his younger brother. The writer's attitude towards religion was already conspicuous in *A Dance of the Forests*, in connection with which Alain Ricard, quoting Roger Bastide, pointed to

[8] Ibid., pp. 26–27.

the creative power of the Yoruba religion: it lends itself to syncretic interpretations as in some Brazilian cults where Ogun is identified with Saint George and Eshu, the malevolent god of fate, with the Devil.[9]

Like Ogun in *A Dance of the Forests,* Dionysus becomes the representative of deities favourable to mankind, of beneficent forces. He has Ogun's characteristic duality, the double polarity of creation and destruction: the Yoruba god of war is also the protector of blacksmiths and artists, including Soyinka. These contradictory and complementary qualities of the god are reiterated as an essential aspect of Dionysus, which he himself proclaims on his first appearance: "I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and kind" (p. 235).

The season of Ogun is that of the harvest monsoon and rainfall: Soyinka makes Dionysus appear in the atmosphere of harvest: "A smell and sweat of harvest. Ripeness" (p. 235). The Greek god as we have noted, also represents fertility and joy. In this he is similar to another important Yoruba god, Obatala,[10] who moreover, like Dionysus and Christ, was made a prisoner, and combines humility and power.

Dionysus and Christ share not only their softness and humility but also the power to reconcile everything and everybody: "his mesh of elements/Reconciles a warring universe" (p. 251).[11] Like the miracles performed by Christ, the freeing of Dionysus can only be achieved through the faith of his disciples (pp. 274–275). The pantomime in which Jesus appears amalgamates different episodes of the New Testament: Mary Magdalene anointing Christ's feet, the scene with Martha and Mary, and of course the marriage at Cana. Christ wears an "ambiguous crown," made of thorns and of ivy, the latter a symbol of Dionysus. They are both gods of love annihilating social barriers, which accounts for their popularity with the slaves.

In order to stress the universal value of the Dionysian cult, Soyinka goes even further than Euripides, who only suggests its origins. Obviously, the rites are agrarian: by means of a real or symbolic sacrifice, they aim at ensuring the necessary renewal of mankind and nature. Indeed, Soyinka has Tiresias explain the myth of Dionysus' birth in terms of impregnation, not unlike the way in which Paul Claudel had talked about Creation in *Figures et Paraboles*. This becomes even clearer in the more stylized version of the Slave Leader:

> For he is the living essence of whom, said heaven
> The seed is mine, this seminal germ
> Earthed in sublimation of the god in flesh
> The flesh in god. I bind my seed in hoops of iron
> And though all seek him, safe I hold him
> Safe in the loins wherefrom he sprang.
> Let all revere the gracious earth,
> Womb of the infant deity. (p. 248)

[9] Ricard, op. cit., pp. 144–146. See also Roger Bastide, *Les Amériques noires* (Paris: Payot, 1967).

[10] Another point of similarity is that a buck, one of Dionysus' sacred animals, is sacrificed to Obatala, god of creation and peace.

[11] cf. *Idanre*, pp. 68 and 71.

Soyinka is familiar with purification rites: these provided him with the subject of *The Strong Breed,* where he had illustrated possible variants of these rites, the "carrier" of the evil of the previous year being sometimes a volunteer. In *The Bacchae,* the Nigerian playwright compresses the action of Euripides' play to one single day, the "first day of [the god's] homecoming" (p. 297), but in the context of the annual feast of Eleusis, meant to purify Thebes. This enables him to expand the theme of the ritual sacrifice considerably. Between the first appearance of Dionysus and the dialogue between Tiresias and Kadmos, a long scene is inserted, showing the procession of Eleusis with priests dressed in black, the vestal virgins in white gowns, the "carrier" clad in sackcloth and sprinkled with ashes every three or four steps, while four men in red flog him:

> A small ceremony of 'cleansing' is performed on the palace gate. The priests take branches from a bundle borne by the two leading girls, symbolically scour the gates with them, then pile the used twigs on the bunch already borne by the Old Man. He is sprinkled and flogged as before. (p. 238)

Before the ceremony, the significance of these annual rites is explained by the herdsman and later on by Tiresias: "The city must be cleansed. Filth, pollution, cruelties, secret abominations—a whole year's accumulation" (p. 242). If the high priest of Thebes has chosen to become a flagellant, it is not so much for political reasons and out of friendship for Kadmos as in order to experience in his own "flesh", "the taste of blood" and "the ecstasy of rejuvenation". He knows that, without the intervention of Dionysus, he could have been flogged to death but he would then have passed into the "universal energy of renewal", like many other battered gods and heroes. Here again, Soyinka accounts for the myths of dismemberment—one thinks of the Egyptian god Osiris—in terms of fertility rites: at this point, Dionysus promises a sacrifice to Thebes and grants Tiresias the ecstasy he was trying to obtain from the bacchic dance when he was surprised by Kadmos.

The god takes things in hand. He had announced the transfer of powers with his first words at the procession: "Sing Death of the Old Year, and—welcome the new god" (p. 238), while his music was replacing the priests' litany. It does not take long before his victory is endorsed by the flight of the priests and by the homage the mesmerized vestals pay him. At least one of them, who dances to his music in a sort of hypnotic trance by which the Slave Leader is carried away, will later take part in the chorus of Bacchantes.

A rite of death, reflecting the nature of political power, a cold, repressive religion which sacrifices the slaves and brings profit to no one but the powerful—the Slave Leader protests against this: "Why us? Why always us? ... the rites bring us nothing! Let those who profit bear the burden of the old year dying" (p. 237)—will be replaced by a rite of life in which everybody, slaves and free men alike, will take part.

As if in answer to the reproaches of the slaves' protest, it is the king himself who will be sacrificed, purging Thebes of the evil of which he was the symbol. In allowing himself to be carried away by his anger, in raising his hand against the old slave, he violated a taboo of the purification day:

— This is filth, stain
— Smear, decay.
— Abomination. (p. 263)

The god's vengeance shifts to the background: the main point is no longer to punish the royal family. Actually, in contrast to Euripides, Soyinka does not represent the daughters-in-law of Kadmos as guilty of disbelief: he omits the final scene, with the curse laid on the royal family condemned to exile.

The old slave who had originally been chosen as sacrificial victim for the feast of Eleusis, draws the first lesson from Pentheus' ritual murder, from the necessity and the horror of it:

The ways of god are hard to understand
We know full well that some must die, chosen
To bear the burden of decay, lest we all die. (p. 300)

Tiresias will develop this lesson by way of conclusion, after Kadmos has asked a question which Agave significantly answers in terms identical to the herdsman's in the opening scene. For all its brevity, the reply "Why us? Why not?" (pp. 237 and 307) is a call of the heart epitomizing man's universal attitude in the face of disaster and the inscrutable ways of the godhead whatever its name:

Understanding of these things is far beyond us.
Perhaps...perhaps our life-sustaining earth
Demands...a little more...sometimes, a more
Than token offering for her own needful renewal.

O Kadmos, it was a cause beyond madness, this
Scattering of his flesh to the seven winds, the rain
Of blood that streamed out endlessly to soak
Our land. (pp. 306–307)

In Pentheus' death, Soyinka mingles the spiritualities of agrarian rites and of the eucharistic mystery: Pentheus' blood regenerates and redeems Thebes, Greece and the earth. But it is wine, not blood, that gushes forth from the orifices in his impaled head in the final scene. Soyinka has called his play "a communion rite": everybody, starting with Kadmos and Agave, "celebrates communion" by drinking what Dionysus called "the sacrament of the earth". The play ends in peace and reconciliation—as in the Cana pantomime—not in despair and divine malediction. The effects are identical with those of the miracle at Cana where Christ changed water into wine, but the episode is even more strongly reminiscent of the Last Supper and the Passion of Christ. Through this invocation of an essential aspect of the Dionysian myth, rite triumphs over tragedy, or rather the tragedy has become a ritual again.

Soyinka's adaptation is extravagant, more abundant, more baroque, less tragic than the Greek play. It is a sort of "optimistic tragedy", transcending the myth in order to recapture both the ritual origins of the Dionysiac cult and the universal character of its

rites. On the plane of individual experience, Pentheus' death is certainly horrible but it is also revealed to be the occasion for an alliance—in the biblical sense of a Covenant —between the god and the community. In spite of its ambivalence—death being represented as essential to fecundity—the new cult is in the first place a cult of life. Like the death of Christ, the death of Pentheus will not be repeated concretely but symbolically, in a ceremony centred on the communion of wine.

The Nigerian play recalls and clarifies the ritual origins of all drama, classical, European or African: from the *Bacchae* to the medieval passions and mysteries, and to the Yoruba "passions" of Obatala. It also emphasizes the fact that the performance of this kind of play, half-way between ritual and drama, partakes in itself of a rite inasmuch as it commemorates and re-enacts the original ritual of purification and renewal. All of these sacrificial plays are in the first place occasional works, initially put together to be performed at the time of some particular feast.

The African playwright's interest in *The Bacchae* can probably be accounted for by his personal attitude towards the essential value of rite as generator of myth: it should be recalled that Soyinka took it upon himself to organize the rites of the Harmattan solstice at the University of Lagos on 6th June, 1966. No less important is the fact that in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, the position of drama is close to what it used to be in Ancient Greece: the rites are still alive and can be regarded as a kind of pre-drama: they provide an occasion for ceremonies that recall some mythical event in stylized manner, the actors being the priests and the community. They have also given rise to vernacular plays dramatizing the same myths: those of Obatala, or of Shango, god of thunder and third king of Oyo.[12] Nigerian drama in English seems to embark more and more willingly on this course: because of the way it uses and transcends Greek, European and African traditions—in meaning as well as in form—Soyinka's adaptation of Euripides *Bacchae* is a prime example of the return to the origins of the drama.

(Translated from the French by Dominique Mys)

[12] See notably Duro Ladipo's Yoruba "opera," *Oba kó so* transcribed and translated by R. G. Armstrong *et al.* (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, 1968). English adaptations of this and two other plays by Ladipo have been edited by Ulli Beier in *Three Yoruba Plays* (Ibadan: Mbari Publications, 1964). It is also noteworthy that a Nigerian dramatist, Oba Balogun, actually wrote two such plays in French: *"Shango" suivi de "Le Roi-éléphant"* (Honfleur: Oswald, 1968).

André Lefevere[13]

2. CHANGING THE CODE: SOYINKA'S IRONIC AETIOLOGY

Think in concentric circles: in the centre is the play that must be translated: the source text. Through its linguistic elements it belongs to the source language, and through that source language it partakes of the whole of the source culture. It also belongs to the source literature which has a code all its own, a repertory of literary procedures.

There are various possible strategies for translating this complex given. One may —and this has been the case until quite recently—consider the original play translated if one has managed to render the source text's linguistic circle into an acceptable target text. A step beyond this is the attempt to translate not only the linguistic circle but the cultural circle and the circle of literary procedures as well. This strategy seems currently in the ascendant and it probably comes closer to the ideal of an acceptable translation: the kind of translation that supplies its readers with the most numerous and soundest possible materials for the reception of the source text. But one can also take yet another step: one can try to influence either the linguistic circle (by reshaping the language as in Browning's *Agamemnon*) or the cultural and/or the literary circle, by reinterpreting the source material so as to reflect the translator's own view of the source, and, more than that, to reflect his own aesthetic and ethical philosophy of the world he himself inhabits.

Soyinka's *Bacchae* is an example of the latter strategy which tends to arise when the source text, the life of the author of the original, or both, assume some kind of paradigmatic significance for the translator's own work, whether he happens to be what has traditionally been called "a writer in his own right" or a "mere translator"—for "only a writer is a translator, and whether translation constitutes the whole of his writing, or whether it is integrated into the rest of his work, he is that creator who could not be perceived by an idealization of creation."[14] Soyinka unashamedly concentrates on the cultural and the literary circles: he admits in his "author's acknowledgement" that "a twenty-year rust on my acquaintanceship with classical Greek made it necessary for me to rely heavily on previous translations for this adaptation of *The Bacchae*. Two versions which deserve especial mention, in that I have not hesitated to borrow phrases and even lines from them, are those by Gilbert Murray ... and William Arrowsmith."[15]

[13] Reprinted from *Babel*, 25, 2 (1979), 80–86, by kind permission of the editor.
[14] H. Meschonnic, *Pour la poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 354.
[15] Wole Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. i. Page references are to this edition.

Upholders of what used to be called "fidelity" in translation would presumably be rather shocked at this admission, but their presumed anger may be seen as totally irrelevant in the light of what Soyinka is trying to do, which brings us to one of the sore points of translation criticism. Even the recent past is still riddled with examples of the kind of "criticism" in which the critic simply establishes his own set of norms and then proceeds to damn the translator for each and every deviation he or she has made from those norms. A more fruitful exercise would be for the critic to try to establish the norms that have guided the translator, and then to criticize the translator for not having adhered to his own norms. In this way we would eventually arrive at a poetics of different translators and different schools or styles of translating, which would be rather more valuable than a series of unexplicated apodictic approaches to the phenomenon of translation.

What are the paradigmatic elements for Soyinka in Euripides' *Bacchae?* Euripides wrote his play in some kind of exile at the court of the king of Macedonia; Soyinka himself is no stranger to exile and various sorts of prosecution. "Euripides tends to mix together, or syncretize, the ecstatic cults."[16] Soyinka attempts syncretization in a much more comprehensive way. Euripides' *Bacchae* was written against the background of the last years of the Peloponnesian war, which put an end to the colonial expansion of Athens. Soyinka's *Bacchae* is written against a background of post-colonial wars. The "θεοἰξενικοί," the strange gods who "invaded" Athens "during the Peloponnesian War —probably as a result of the social stresses which it generated,"[17]—find their counterparts in the introduction of "strange gods" in Africa in the nineteenth, and in Europe, North and South America in the twentieth century. In Euripides' time "the sophistic movement evinced a strong preoccupation with comparative ethnology and the collection of details about foreign lands and customs, partly with the intention of showing that 'law' is a relative concept."[18] Soyinka writes in a similar climate of cultural relativism. Finally, both Euripides and Soyinka are concerned with the fate of the "near and distant dispossessed" (p. 7). Soyinka's dispossessed are emphatically made to include Africa and the Third World in general, without excluding the dispossessed in the developed nations, as witness the production note that "the slaves and the bacchantes should be as mixed a cast as is possible, testifying to their varied origins" (p. xiii).

But Soyinka also reinterprets the paradigm, and nowhere more obviously than in the ending of the play. Not only does he reject "a total tragic vision, the doom of repetition, which the Western tragic concept or outlook from the Greeks right down to our present time, entails":[19] he is also dissatisfied with "the ending" of Euripides' *Bacchae,* especially "the petering off of ecstasy into a suggestion of a prelude to another play" (p. xi). In this he undoubtedly overlooks the point that Euripides' ending is logically though not obviously connected to the rest of the play, although the "detailed

[16] G. S. Kirk, *The Bacchae by Euripides* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), p. 35.
[17] E. R. Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. xxiii.
[18] Kirk, loc. cit., pp. 26–27.
[19] Kofi Awoonor, "Tradition and Continuity in African Literature," in *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature,* ed. Rowland Smith (London: Longman, 1976), p. 169.

... statement of the future fortunes of the surviving characters" is "to the modern reader very curious" indeed![20] Yet it can be connected with the same aetiological tendency that manifests itself earlier in the play (when Tiresias tries to explain why Dionysus was born from the thigh of Zeus) and that also, in a more ironic guise, pervades Soyinka's own *Bacchae*. "Euripides seems to have been responding to a common aetiological taste that was particularly marked in the latter fifth century B.C. and had been accentuated both by the sophists and by the growth of local history."[21]

Soyinka's Shavian introduction to his *Bacchae* is the literary procedure through which he expresses his reinterpretation of the cultural circle most clearly. He points out that "Land, the primary economy and primary stimulant of communal labour, its mystery of seasonal fluctuation, dearth and bounty is the natural base of vegetation religions. Material (harvest) benefits which derived from land were identified with spiritual rewards. Where the ritual responsibility for land renewal lay with a small élite, the economic powers of such a minority were limitless. A religion which transferred its ritualism to communal participation and identified self-renewal with the truth of land-renewal and food production fed ... on a long repressed reality" (pp. ix–x). This is a slightly more pointed restatement of the consensus of classical scholars, who hold that "Dionysos is a democratic god: he is accessible to all, not like Pythian Apollo through priestly intermediaries, but directly in his gift of wine and through membership of his thiasos. His worship probably made its original appeal mainly to people who had no citizen rights in the aristocratic 'gentile state' and were excluded from the older cults associated with the great families."[22] Soyinka moves towards a more personal interpretation when he compares the yearly fertility rites to an "effort to stimulate growth," that "must have struck the oppressed groups as hardly different from the 'public deterrent'—public flogging, breaking on the wheel, etc. etc.—meted out to the mine-worker who had ruined a piece of machinery, attempted to foment unrest or reduced the week's profit in some other way. Both forms of imposed penance were designed to stimulate greater productivity. What the class-conscious myths of Dionysos achieved was to shift the privilege for the supply of scapegoats to the classes which had already monopolised all other privileges. The magic munificence of Nature requires both challenge and sacrifice in all nature renewal myths; Pentheus, the aristocrat, provides both in the highly seditious version by Euripides" (p. x).

The theme of syncretism is gradually introduced by means of statements like "the Dionysiac is present, of course, in varied degrees of spiritual intensity in all religions" (p. vii) and "the definitive attachment to a suitable deity—in this case Dionysus—was nothing more than the natural, historic process by which populist movements (religious or political) identify themselves with mythical heroes at critical moments of social upheaval. Myth is part wish-fulfilment through hero projections" (p. viii). The theme is boldly stated when Soyinka evaluates Agave's behaviour at the end of the play as an "admission of her lost, aberrant mind after the enormous psychic strain of wilful challenge (also a necessity for evoking maximum powers) this last in-gathering releases

[20] Kirk, op. cit., p. 134.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Dodds, op. cit., pp. 127–128.

the reluctant beneficence of Nature" (p. xi). This statement is very closely paralleled and further explicated in what Soyinka has to say about Dionysus' Yoruba counterpart Ogun: "rupture is often one visage of the Ogun destructive–creative unity ... offences even against nature may in fact be part of the exaction by deeper nature from humanity of acts which alone can open up the deeper springs of man and bring about a constant rejuvenation of the human spirit.... Such acts of hubris compel the cosmos to delve deeper into its essence to meet the human challenge. Penance and retribution are not therefore aspects of punishment for crime but the first acts of a resumed awareness, and invocation of the principle of cosmic adjustment."[23] Soyinka constructs his *Bacchae* around precisely this principle, which is symbolized by Ogun, the "god of metals, creativity, the road, wine and war" (p. vi), who "is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean values.... Ogun stands for a transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative justice."[24] Dionysus' "thyrsus is physically and functionally paralleled by the *opa Ogun* borne by the male devotees of Ogun" (p. vi), which explains why the role of Euripides' Bacchantes is to a large extent taken over by male slaves in Soyinka's *Bacchae*.

The "principle of cosmic adjustment" operates on the three levels on which Yoruba culture is organized: the individual, the social and the cosmic. Throughout what follows it must be borne in mind that these three levels are inter-related, even if they are discussed separately here. Individual adjustment takes place in the case of each of the major human characters, even if they have to pay for it in terms of murder (Agave) and death (Pentheus). This adjustment also comes to Tiresias, who is transformed from "the type of mind which would harness to the cause of doctrinal conservatism the spontaneous emotional forces generated by a religious revival: he would not reject the new foreign cults.... but he would hellenize and rationalize them"[25] into the Tiresias who can lyrically describe wine as

> the sun that comes after winter, the power
> That nudges earth awake. Dionysos comes alive in us.
> We soar, we fly, we shed the heavy clods of earth
> That weigh down the ethereal man
> To that first principle. Balance is the key. (p. 30)

No such similar transformation is obvious in Euripides.

The beginning of the play emphasizes social adjustment: the first scene takes place against a background of crucified slaves. The new religion will also bring political liberation. Also on the social level Dionysus will be acknowledged by his own family. On the cosmic level Dionysus is indeed *Phleus* or *Phleoos,* the abundance of life. "His domain is, in Plutarch's words, the whole of the ὑγρὰ φυσίς—not only the liquid fire in the grape, but the sap thrusting in a young tree, the blood pounding in the veins of

[23] Wole Soyinka, "Drama and the Revolutionary Ideal," in *In Person,* ed. Karen L. Morrell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 68–69.
[24] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), p. 141.
[25] Dodds, op. cit., p. 91.

a young animal, all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature."[26] But Soyinka's Dionysus is more: "He has broken the barrier of age, the barrier of sex or slave and master" (p. 26). Through him "flesh is transcended" (p. 31). He is "the great joy of union with mother earth / And the end of separation between man and man" (p. 38). To resist Dionysus is therefore much more than—in purely Hellenic terms—"to repress the elemental in one's own nature; the punishment is the sudden complete collapse of the inward dykes when the elemental breaks through perforce and civilization vanishes."[27] In Soyinka's *Bacchae* both crime and punishment are rather different: the crime destroys the "mutual correspondence" between "the world of the unborn, the world of the dead and the world of the living,"[28] which together make up the totality of man's world.

In his play crimes against Dionysus seem to be limited to the personal and the social levels, both mere symptoms of resistance on the cosmic level: Kadmos' decision to retire ("It is wrong to wait for death isn't it", p. 24) and Pentheus' political arguments which have a very familiar modern ring about them, from "I shall have order!" (p. 27) to "Thebes shall stop at nothing to preserve her good name / Faded with anarchy and indecency" (p. 19), the notion that "power / Is all that matters in the life of man" (p. 33) and the "duty to preserve / The territorial integrity of Thebes" against "alien monsters / Who have invaded Thebes" (p. 66). The punishment, on the other hand, takes on the character of grace: wine springs in red jets from the head of Pentheus, and everybody partakes in the final "communion rite" announced in the subtitle of the play.

Soyinka's Shavian introduction is followed by what is, in essence, a Shavian historical play, which also displays certain affinities with the historical reinterpretations that Max Frisch and especially Friedrich Dürrenmatt used to produce in the fifties and early sixties. The main mode is one of "ironic aetiology," which Euripides himself is not without in many of his own plays. The mode puts historical and/or mythological events, or, in Soyinka's case, the whole of the original text, at a distance and manipulates them in such a way that the spectator or reader is not only invited to share the playwright's interpretation of the material, but also prepared for often striking departures from that material, which reflect the playwright's own vision. Yet this vision is never (as in Brecht's case) stated in very explicit ideological terms. Soyinka's contribution to the genre appears to be most significant in the revaluation of gestural, theatrical elements. His manipulation of the material is not limited to the verbal level. It also extends to the use of elements taken from other theatrical traditions. There is, e.g., the essentially music-hall scene, which is also reminiscent of the revue elements traditionally present in Yoruba folk opera: rather obviously intended to dramatize the point that Dionysus' thyrsus is, first and foremost, a fertility symbol. Kadmos shows Tiresias his latest contraption: "the first collapsible thyrsus in Attica" (p. 25). The thyrsus keeps collapsing, a fact probably not unrelated to Kadmos' advanced years, and Tiresias finally advises him to "put it back in your trousers" (p. 26). Kadmos obliges, but not without observing that "I should

[26] Ibid., p. xii.
[27] Ibid., p. xvi.
[28] Soyinka in Morrell, op. cit., p. 117.

have let the joiner show me how. But it could only make him cocky" (p. 26), at which the two old men exeunt, guffawing.

Similarly, Pentheus' absurd narrow-mindednees is described by Dionysus in a speech reminiscent in style of the theatre of the absurd:

> You, Pentheus, because you are a man of chains. You love chains. Have you uttered one phrase today that was not hyphenated by chains? You breathe chains, talk chains, eat chains, dream chains, think chains. Your world is bound in manacles. Even in repose you are a cow chewing the cud, but for you it is molten iron issuing from the furnace of your so-called kingly will. It has replaced your umbilical cord and issues from this point. (pp. 65–66)

Much of what the chorus says appears closer to the African praise song—Soyinka himself points out that "some lines in this version... come from traditional praise-chants" (p. vi)—than to the traditional diction of the Greek chorus. And yet here too the affinity with Greek tragedy in its nascent state is greater than one thinks at first sight: here too "the forms that have newly entered are not something the author has thought of by chance or invented freely; rather they are drawn into tragedy from the various realms of religion, the state, custom and morality. They are then filled with a particular action and as it were individualized."[29]

It might similarly be argued that the scene in which the slave leader becomes possessed harks back to scenes of possession in the Engungun rituals, in which a man becomes "possessed, as we say, by a spirit or a daemon; and in this state he works out his own salvation, as it were, while the audience of initiates is drawn through empathy with him into communion with the daemon, till they ultimately reach that state of ecstatic release which constitutes the objective of the ritual."[30]

The playwright himself has, of course, no absolute control over the devices he makes use of. They are as it were codified, they become part of a poetics and, as such, develop their own momentum. Soyinka's *Bacchae* begins with a speech by Dionysus, just as Euripides' *Bacchae* does. This kind of Euripidean opening soliloquy is traditionally equivalent to an introduction of the setting and to what would in our theatres be conveyed in the form of programme notes. The effect of Soyinka's opening speech, however, is harder to assess against the background of a repertory that has come to include Brecht's alienation devices.

The liturgical procession (whose *stasima* again point to nascent Greek tragedy) with which the play opens is designed to dramatize several of the points made in the introduction. It is part of the old aristocratic religion, the fertility festivals in which a scapegoat —invariably a slave, which adds to the political tensions of the moment—is ritually flogged to death, to symbolize the demise of the old year. Because of the volatile political situation Tiresias has taken the place of the slave.

Tiresias' outburst against the slaves who have been flogging him—"Can't you

[29] *Wege zu Aischylos*, ed. H. Hommel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), pp. 118–119.

[30] J. C. de Graft, "Roots in African Drama and Theatre," *African Literature Today*, 8 (1976), 5.

bastards ever tell the difference between ritual and reality" (p. 9)—neatly dramatizes what has been written on page x of the introduction, just as his remark to Dionysus —"a priest is not much use without a following, and that's soon washed away in what social currents he fails to sense or foresee" (p. 11)—dramatizes the argument advanced on page ix.

When Dionysus appears he breaks up the old liturgy, or rather makes those who are enacting it abandon their roles, priests and vestals alike, and the slave leader states both the social and cosmic dimensions of the play:

> This master race, this much vaunted spawn
> Have met their match. Nature has joined forces with us.
> Let them reckon now, not with mere men, not with
> The scapegoat bogey of a slave uprising
> But with a new remorseless order (pp. 7–8)

The two scenes in which Dionysus shows the doomed Pentheus what his powers will be able to achieve in the future are rooted in another theatrical tradition, that of the mime, often used, as here, to introduce other "times" or "places" into the body of the play in a very condensed form. The two scenes also serve to reinforce the theme of religious syncretism: in the first scene "a movement (of light?) turns our attention to the bust of Aphrodite. The face is coming off. Underneath, the mocking face of Dionysos" (p. 67) and the scene ends with "a snap black-out, except on the altar of Aphronysos" (p. 68). In Euripides' *Bacchae* Pentheus also makes the connection between Aphrodite and Dionysus (l. 221–225), but in words only. In the second scene a Christ-like figure is seen changing water into wine, but "his halo is an ambiguous thorn-ivy crown of Dionysos" (p. 68).

Even where Soyinka does not directly "quote" from other theatrical traditions, he still emphasizes the gestural. Word and gesture are considered equivalent in Yoruba drama, both in the traditional Alarinjo theatre and in the Yoruba folk opera. Soyinka uses gesture to convey his interpretation of Euripides' words to the spectator or reader.

This procedure can be observed most clearly in the translation of Euripides' interjection, "A" (l. 810)—often regarded as the turning point in the play, when Dionysus has finally made up his mind to punish Pentheus—into "Dionysos is holding out a cup (the same as last seen) to Pentheus" (p. 69). The cup has been used in the interpolated mime scenes to dramatize Dionysus' future power. Pentheus "slowly, dreamily, raises the cup to his lips" (p. 69) and we witness "the beginning of a psychic invasion, the entry of the god into his victim, who was also in the old belief his vehicle."[31]

Sometimes the "gestural" encompasses a whole scene, as in the possession scene culminating in orgasmic self-release, the scene in which Kadmos and Tiresias compare their clothes, the scene in which Dionysus begins to dress Pentheus in women's clothes, and the scene in which the slaves enact "a terse series of dramatic motions which takes its motif from the following invocation, the decisive gesture of throwing their lot with

[31] Dodds, op. cit., p. 172.

the Bacchantes, the casting off of the long vassalage in the House of Pentheus" (p. 79). The most "theatrical" of the gestural scenes is probably the one in which Dionysus' followers invoke the god and almost force him to bring about his own liberation.

Sometimes the gestural is confined to a slight detail, as when "an officer salutes and exits" (p. 27) after Pentheus has given the order to hunt down the Bacchantes. Sometimes it consists of the introduction of a few more silent characters to underscore a point: when Dionysus is brought in, a captive, for his first confrontation with Pentheus, "three or four Bacchantes are with him, their hands similarly tied" (p. 39). The gestural also assumes the shape of a stage effect, a contemporary equivalent of the Greek *deus ex machina,* through the use of light at the end of the play. There are precedents in antiquity: "any place (or person) struck by lightning was felt in antiquity to be uncanny, a point where the natural world had been touched, by the supernatural."[32] In Euripides' *Bacchae,* "again [when Pentheus is discovered], as when the divine voice was heard before, there is a supernatural increase of light. Then, the fire by Semele's tomb blazed up; now there is something like a flash of lightning, but one that seems more than momentary."[33] Soyinka transforms this into: "the theme music of Dionysos wells up and fills the stage with the god's presence as a powerful red glow shines suddenly as if from within the head of Pentheus, rendering it near-luminous. The stage is bathed in it instantly" (p. 97).

The gestural is sometimes combined with music, as in Dionysus' theme music described above and the music made by slaves and Bacchantes, but more often with words. A poignant example of this procedure is the ending, when Agave calls for a ladder to put Pentheus' head on the palace walls. The slave leader executes her command, she rushes up the ladder and puts the head where she wants it, whereas in Euripides' *Bacchae* she merely cradles the head in her arms in the scene of her madness. Similarly, while they are waiting for the news of Pentheus' death, slaves and Bacchantes enact "a stylised mime of the hunt. It ends just before the 'coup de grace' at the entry of the officer" (p. 80) who then proceeds to tell his story. The most obvious example is the translation of Kadmos' "ὃ μὴ πάθῃς σύ, δεῦρό σου στέψω κάρα/κισσῷ (11. 341–342; "Lest such be thy fate, let me crown thine head / With ivy")[34] as:

> Misjudging the thoughtful distant mood of Pentheus, he thinks he has at least mollified his stand. He removes the wreath from his own head.
>
> Kadmos: Here, take mine. Let me wreathe
> Your head with leaves of ivy. (pp. 34–35)

Switches in register also serve to put across Soyinka's interpretation of his original. The most obvious switch is that from blank verse, usually reserved for those passages in which the influence of the god Dionysus is more obviously apparent, to prose. The scene in which Kadmos and Tiresias dress to go dancing for Dionysus provides several

[32] Ibid., p. 62.
[33] Kirk, op. cit., p. 14.
[34] Arthur S. Way's translation in the Loeb Classical Library.

examples: Kadmos' "Thebes has fallen out of love with our fossilized past and needs to embrace new vitality" (p. 23) is followed by his putting on his crown, saying "What do you think? Not too ... dashing is it", to which Tiresias replies "A bit fanciful for your age" (p. 23). The dialogue then modulates back to Tiresias' observation: "Pentheus doesn't know his own flesh. And when he does he'll think he's duty-bound to cut it out of himself" (p. 24), which is in turn followed by:

> Kadmos: Here's your crown. Trad or trendy?
> Tiresias: We-e-e-ell, one is madness two is fashion. (p. 24)

The switch in register often modernizes and clarifies by means of amplification. Euripides' "ὃς ἐκπυροῦται λαμπάσιν κεραυνίαις/σὺν μητρί, Δίους ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο" (244–5; Loeb: "Who, with his mother, was by lightning flames/Blasted, because she lied of Zeus's love") is translated as

> a brat who got roasted
> Right in his mother's womb, blasted by the bolts
> Of Zeus! The slut! Slandered Zeus by proclaiming
> The bastard's divine paternity. That myth be instantly
> Exploded in her womb, a fiery warning against all profanity.
> (p. 28)

Similarly, Dionysus' tere "ὁρῶν ὁρῶντα, και δίδωσιν ὄργια" (I. 470; Loeb: "Nay, eye to eye his mysteries he bestowed") becomes:

> Will you reduce it all to a court
> Of enquiry? A fact-finding commission such as
> One might set up to decide the cause
> Of a revolt in your salt-mines, or a slave-uprising?
> (p. 41)

Sometimes the explanation becomes rather obvious, as when Tiresias tells "Kadmos, in Greek the name Pentheus signifies Sorrow. Does that mean anything? Let's hope not" (p. 36), or when the herdsman likens the sleeping bacchantes to "a scene just like a painting on a vase" (p. 58).

Verbal interpolations also play a structural part. Dionysus' "μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·/τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὓς ἐχρῆν." (963–964; Loeb: "Alone for Thebes thou travailest, thou alone/Wherefore thee wait struggle and strain foredoomed") has to become

> Yes, you alone
> Make sacrifices for your people, you alone.
> The role belongs to a king. Like those gods, who yearly
> Must be rent to spring anew, that also
> Is the fate of Heroes (p. 78)

to prepare the spectator or reader for the communion rite at the end of the play. Similarly, the irony which is present in Euripides' *Bacchae* in the many references to Actaeon, another member of Kadmos' family who was torn limb from limb for offending the gods, is given added poignancy in Soyinka's play in that it is Pentheus himself who mentions the name: "The nearest fate I can devise to Actaeon's/Piecemeal death at he jaws of his hunting hounds" (p. 35).

Both gesture and language contribute to reinforce the impression of religious syncretism: a Maypole dance evolves when Agave whirls the thyrsus (p. 90); the Bacchantes' invocation has summoned Dionysus, very much in the way incantation is supposed to summon the power invoked in African religious practice: "You willed him, / Summoned him, your needs / Invoked his presence" (p. 54); and some of Dionysus' attributes are rather obviously Ogun's: it is Ogun who "made an anvil of the mountain-peaks / Hammered forth a thunderous will" (p. 21), who sees to it that "the fire is tamed in new greenery of life" (p. 21), and who has "limbs of mahogany" (p. 50).

Finally, both language and gesture are responsible for a certain africanization of the Greek original, whether it be more obvious as in Tiresias' "Dionysos I presume" (p. 10) and the noise the Bacchantes make when Dionysus is chained, "a kind of ululating which is found among some African and Oriental peoples and signifies great distress, warning, or agitation" (p. 46), or more subtle as when "the holy hills of Ethiopia" (p. 18) are included in Dionysus' travels or when an African proverb surfaces in the officer's story: "You know that saying—a man the people seek/To roast rubs himself in oil, crouches beside an open fire/Moaning, I have a chill" (p. 85)—a rather more vivid image than the blindness with which Zeus used to smite his victims in Greek antiquity.

For all its brevity, this comparative discussion may have shown how a truly creative writer can most satisfactorily translate the three concentric circles of text, language and culture involved in any work of literary art. It may be that Soyinka's enormous talent is not solely responsible for such success, to which other elements—social, cultural, religious—must have contributed. After all, not so long ago the Yoruba formed a conglomeration of small, pre-industrial, mutually competing city states as did ancient Greece. In Attica, creative writing had been initiated barely a century before Euripides arrived on stage, although the writing skill had been practised in the Greek world for a considerably longer period. Much of classical Greek drama derived from pre-existing oral traditions dealing with religious mythology and mythified history, and so does much of the literary and theatrical output of the Yoruba, whether in English or in their own language. The extraordinary vitality of Yoruba beliefs and myths is further evidenced by the fact that they have spread through large segments of the black Diaspora, especially in Brazil and the West Indies, somewhat in the same way as Greek myths and legends have provided literary inspiration throughout the Western world to this very day. Soyinka's version of Euripides' *Bacchae,* therefore, should not be viewed in isolation: it is just one indication of some not yet unravelled deep kinship between ancient Greece and modern Africa—an indication to which scholars might profitably give more attention.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFRICAN LITERATURE AND SOCIALIST SCHOLARSHIP

VLADIMÍR KLÍMA

1. AFRICAN LITERATURE RESEARCH IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES: A BRIEF SURVEY

The modern literatures of Africa developed as part of the continent's general struggle to free itself from colonial bondage, racial oppression and the capitalistic exploitation of its natural resources and cheap manpower. They were bound, therefore, to arouse much interest in the socialist countries. A great many African literary works, not only prose fiction but also much poetry, have been translated into the languages of Eastern Europe. The works of the most prominent writers of Black Africa have been translated into several languages of the USSR (not only Russian, but also White Russian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Georgian, Lithuanian, and even Kirghiz, Moldavian and Uzbek), of Yugoslavia (Serbo-Croatian, Slovene and Macedonian), and of Czechoslovakia (Czech, Slovakian). There are Hungarian, Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian translations of the most important African novels and collections of short stories, and even Albanians can read works by Peter Abrahams, Amos Tutuola and Sembène Ousmane.[1] It is no exageration to say that the works of anglophone African writers are more easily available in Russian than in French. In the socialist states, official support has been freely given as an expression of international solidarity.

Popular interest was accompanied by a growth of scholarly attention, the way for which had been paved by widespread research into Africa's traditional oral art. While Hungarian scholar Pál Páricsy could remark, in 1972, that "In Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria there appears to be only marginal interest in African literature,"[2] there are some signs now that in Yugoslavia at any rate African studies are on the increase, and it is an established fact—even though, owing to language problems, it is not always fully recognized in the West—that countries such as the USSR, the German Democratic

[1] A convenient index to translations of African writings is to be found in Janheinz Jahn and Claus Peter Dressler, *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* (Nendeln, 1971), pp. 386–395. For more details concerning Soviet editions of African literary works see V.A. El'vova, *Xudožestvennaja literatura stran Afriki v sovetskoj pečati, 1965–1974* (Imaginative writing from African countries in the Soviet press, Moscow, 1976, 304 pp.). Although this bibliography covers only one decade, the more than 3000 items show how active Soviet publishing has been in this field. It should further be noted that many African literary works have appeared in Russian (and other Soviet) translations in journals whose character is not primarily literary.

[2] Pál Páricsy, "Research in Black African Literature in the European Socialist Countries," *Research in African Literatures*, III, 1 (1972), 26–50. This highly informative bibliographical essay also deals with studies in oral art and in vernacular writing.

Republic, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia have already made major contributions to this new area of literary research.

Ever since the fifties, socialist scholars have tended to view Africa and its literature as part of the vast awakening of the Third World. Problems of creative writing in Africa and Asia have been discussed jointly at several conferences such as those that took place in Moscow (1965), Tashkent (1968) and Erevan (1973). Specialists from the socialist countries refuse to be confined to strictly intrinsic, textual or structural analysis of literary works, to a limited aesthetic approach that disregards the social and ideological implications of literary production. As a result, such topics as the inter-relations between literature and revolution, traditional and modern elements, the so-called cultural heritage, social and political commitment have been studied in great detail. The methods are those that have been evolved by dialectical and historical materialism.

By sheer size and numbers alone, the Soviet Union holds pride of place in the development of African literary studies. Efficient team-work and consistent application of progressive scientific methods have been facilitated by strong institutional support. Whereas in the sixties research centred round the Africa Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., since the early seventies it has been carried out mainly at the Institute of World Literature under the leadership of I. D. Nikiforova.

Early criticism of modern African literature took the form of forewords, introductions and postfaces accompanying anthologies or translations of individual works.[3] Systematic study began in earnest with two articles by E. Galperina: "Problemy realizma i modernizma v sovremennoj literature Afriki" (Problems of realism and modernism in the contemporary literature of Africa), published in *Voprosy literatury*, 12 (1959), 67–86, and "Literaturnye problemy v stranax Afriki" (Literary problems in African countries), published in *Sovremennaja literatura za rubežom* (1962), 164–208. Previously, literature had been discussed only as a marginal topic in publications that focused on ethnography, culture, ideology, and the arts of Black Africa.

But in the early sixties, African literature courses were introduced into the curricula of Soviet universities, and Galperina's pioneering articles were soon followed by four important collections of essays, which laid the foundations of Soviet literary research concerned with Africa: *Literatura stran Afriki* (The Literature of African countries, Moscow, 1964, 199 pp.),[4] *Essays on African Culture*, which was printed in French and English (Moscow, 1966, 204 pp.), *Aktualnye problemy izučenija literatur Afriki* (Topical problems of African literary studies, Moscow, 1969, 168 pp.), and *Folklor i literatura narodov Afriki* (Folklore and literature of the African peoples, Moscow, 1970, 398 pp.). While it is important to note that a number of essays in those collective works were

[3] The best source of information for the beginnings of Soviet research in African literatures is G.I. Potexina's "L'étude des littératures africaines en Union Soviétique," which was published in the journal *Œuvres et Opinions* in 1966. An English version appeared in *Soviet Literature*, 1967, No. 1. Professor Potexina has been working for the African Department of the Institute of General History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. I am much indebted to her for information and bibliographical data. See also V. Klima, "Soviet Essays on Modern African Literatures," *Archív Orientální*, 40, 4 (1972), 354–357.

[4] The second volume (Moscow, 1966, 278 pp.) contained translations of French, English and Arabic writings. The foreword and comments on authors were by F.M. Breskina.

devoted to such topics as oral art, African vernacular writing and the theory of creative literature in developing countries, the studies of African writing in European languages were contributed by F. M. Breskina, V. V. Ivaševa, V. N. Vavilov, S. P. Kartuzov and a few others.[5]

Breskina's "Nekotorye voprosy razvitija afrikanskix literatur" (Some questions on the development of African literatures, 1964, pp. 5–38) offered a critique of negritude based on her thorough analysis of its ideological aspects. She defined the fundamental tasks of African literary research in "O samobytnosti sovremennyx afrikanskix literatur na evropejskix jazykax" (On the individuality of contemporary African literatures in European languages, 1969, pp. 69–79). In "Tema stolknovenia epoch v proze zapadnoj Afriki" (The theme of the clash of epochs in West African prose, 1970, pp. 301–329), she presented her "clash of epochs" theory. Breskina was chiefly concerned with West Africa. She stressed the fundamental unity of form and content, literature and politics, aesthetic and social values in West African prose. In this respect, she severely criticized the conservative attitudes of Western analysts of African literature. Breskina also offered interesting ideas in her article "Samobytnost' i novatorstvo" (Individuality and innovation), *Azija i Afrika segodnja*, 1, (1968), 40–41. In her foreword to the anthology *Golos Afriki* (Voice of Africa, Moscow, 1969, pp. 3–14), she dealt with modern techniques in African poetry.

After her informative essay "Roman sovremennoj Nigerii" (The contemporary Nigerian novel, 1964, pp. 39–74), V. V. Ivaševa published "Problema tradicii v formirovanii metoda sovremennyx literatur stran Afriki južnee Saxary" (The problem of tradition in forming the method of contemporary literature in sub-Saharan Africa, 1969, pp. 63–68), which deals with the methodological problems resulting from the integration of tradition into modern writing. She did not contribute to the other two volumes, but she authored a monograph entitled *Literatura stran zapadnoj Afriki: Proza* (Literature of West African countries: Prose writing) (Moscow, 1967, 257 pp.). She was primarily concerned with critical realism in West African prose fiction, and drew revealing parallels between European novelists and the works of such African writers as Achebe, Ekwensi, Beti, Oyono and Conton. She detected elements of socialist realism in the novels and stories of Sembène Ousmane. While stressing authentic creative merit and universal critical standards, she also commented on the well-known problem of the African writer's audience, which had been discussed earlier from a sociological angle by S. Ibraxima in her article "Pisatel bez čitatelja" (Writer without a reader) printed in the journal *Za rubežom* (1965), 44, 30–31.

Mention must also be made of some at least of V. N. Vavilov's numerous essays, such as "Literatura Gany" (The literature of Ghana, 1964, pp. 75–90), "Žurnal Čornyj Orfej" (The journal *Black Orpheus*, 1964, pp. 91–109), "Nigerian Literature and Reality" (1966, pp. 155–163), "Stanovlenie romana Nigerii" (Emergence of the Nigerian novel, 1969, pp. 85–95), and "Rol' folklora v stanovlenii nigerijskogo romana" (The role of folklore in the emergence of the Nigerian novel, 1970, 330–349). His "Nigerija: roman

[5] In the discussion of individual contributions to these four collections which follows, the date following the title of an essay indicates the volume in which it appeared.

i vremja" (Nigeria: Novel and time), issued in the journal *Voprosy literatury*, 15, 6 (1969), 164–181, was followed by a monograph on Nigerian prose writing: *Proza Nigerii* (Moscow, 1970, 160 pp.). More recently, Vavilov has commented on the evolution of the African novel in the seventies in "Novye cveta vremeni" (Time's new colours), published in the journal *Inostrannaja literatura* (Foreign literature), 10, 1974, 200–207. While warning African authors against propaganda writing, Vavilov rejected the notion that the individuality of African art and literature could be found in some conservative, religious and mystical quality which a number of critics regard as "eternal," and he emphasized the significance of the urgent social topics which the best West African, and especially Nigerian, novelists have chosen to handle.

While Breskina, Ivaševa and Vavilov were chiefly concerned with West African writing, South Africa was the province of S. P. Kartuzov in "Literatura protesta v Južno-afrikanskoj respublike" (Protest literature in the R. S. A., 1964, pp. 147–177), "Some Problems of Modern Prose in South Africa" (1966, pp. 138–154), "Značenie literaturnyx svjazej v sovremennoj proze Južno-afrikanskoj respubliki" (The importance of literary links in contemporary prose writing of the R.S.A., 1969, pp. 128–136), and "Evolucija geroja v sovremennoj proze Južno-afrikanskoj respubliki" (The evolution of the hero in contemporary prose writing of the R.S.A., 1970, pp. 375–398). Kartuzov viewed South African protest writing very broadly as democratic literature opposed to reactionary colonial literature. He stressed the significance of the positive hero as an aesthetic ideal, whose presence enhances the educational function of imaginative writing. Black South African writing was also the subject of two short essays published by L. B. Saratovskaja in the Tashkent Journal *Zvezda Vostoka*: "Ljudjam byt' vmeste" (People must go together, 1970, 10, 181–184) and "V izgnanii ... literatura" (In exile ... literature, 1974, 1, 165–170).

The 1970 volume also contained two essays by G. I. Potexina: "Kolonial'nye režimy i kul'tura na primere literatur Zapadnoj Afriki" ("Colonial regimes and culture as exemplified in the literatures of West Africa", pp. 289–300) and "O jazyke sovremennyx literatur Afriki" (On the language of contemporary literatures of Africa, pp. 184–191), the former of which had been published previously in *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 4, 1968, 108–116, and in *Zarubežnye literatury i sovremennost'* ("Foreign literatures and the present day," Moscow, 1967, pp. 367–381). She has published several other essays, whose approach is largely philological, in such periodicals as *Narody Azii i Afriki*, *Inostrannaja literatura* and *Azija i Afrika segodnja*.

Until 1974, the so-called "Portuguese provinces" were, with the exception of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and South Africa, the last vestiges of the colonial system: it is not surprising that their literature received more sustained attention in the USSR than it did in the West. It was chiefly studied by L. V. Nekrasova in "Poezija Angoly i Mozambika" (Poetry of Angola and Mozambique, 1964, pp. 110–146) and "Veduščije idejnye tečni v literature Angoly i Mozambika" (Main ideological trends in the literature of Angola and Mozambique, 1969, pp. 96–105), and by E. A. Rjauzova in "Rol' zarubežnyx tradicij v formirovanii literatur Afriki na portugal'skom jazyke" (The role of foreign traditions in the development of African literatures in Portuguese, 1969, pp. 106–115). Rjauzova has since become the most prominent specialist on African writing

in Portuguese with such articles as "Učit'sja slušat' narod" (Learning how to listen to the people), in *Voprosy literatury*, 8 (1969), 118–135, "U istokov portugalo jazyčnyx literatur Afriki" (At the sources of lusophone African literatures) in *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 3 (1970), 93–103; "Literatura borjuščejsja Afriki v SSSR" (Militant African writing in the U.S.S.R.) in *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 8 (1973), 72, and especially her comprehensive monograph, *Portugalojazyčnye literaturi Afriki* (African literatures in Portuguese, Moscow, 1972, 264 pp.).

A significant methodological contribution was "Problema regiona v izučenii afrikanskix literatur" (The problem of the regions in the study of African literatures, 1969, pp. 153–158) by I. D. Nikiforova, who came back to this important topic in *O regionalnoj specifike zapadnoafrikanskix literatur* (On the regional specificity of West African literatures, Moscow, 1970, 136 pp.).

Nikiforova was later to contribute the introduction and the conclusion to the most ambitious venture yet initiated by a team of Soviet specialists: *Sovremennye literatury Afriki* (The contemporary literatures of Africa). This comprehensive work covers the literatures of North and West Africa (Vol. I, Moscow 1973, 392 pp.) as well as those of East and South Africa (Vol. II, Moscow 1974, 311 p.). Apart from Rjauzova, who contributed two chapters on lusophone writing, and Nikiforova herself, who dealt with Madagascar, the work signalled the emergence of new Soviet scholars, such as N. D. Ljaxovskaja, who dealt with writing in French (including Zaïre and Rwanda), E. Ja. Surovcev, who commented with V. N. Vavilov on English writing in East Africa, and V. V. Ošis, who co-operated with S. P. Kartuzov to produce a long chapter on South African literature.

Systematic team-work and this translingual, Panafrican, comparative approach remained the fundamental features of Soviet scholarship in the field. At the turn of the decade, they were illustrated in a handbook of literary history, *Literatury Afriki* (The literatures of Africa, Moscow, Visshaia Škola, 1979, 335 pp.) which is partly devoted to a "medieval" period covering Egypt, Ethiopia, the Maghreb and the Swahili coast from the fourth to the nineteenth centuries; in the part describing Africa's "modern" literature, due account is taken of Arabic writing as well as of the Bantu languages of South Africa. On a different level, the eighties were inaugurated by the publication, under the editorship of I. D. Nikiforova, of *Razvitie literatury v nèzavisimyx stranax Afriki: 60–70e gody XX veka* (The development of literature in independent African countries during the 1960s and 70s, Moscow, Nauka, 1980, 335 pp.), which likewise covers Egypt, Ethiopia and the production of the Maghreb countries as well as sub-Saharan Africa with the exception of South Africa.

Such continent-wide surveys are becoming more and more systematic and comprehensive. It is significant that a large part of the first volume in Ju. K. Sčeglov's important venture *Sovremennaja literatura na jazykah Tropičeskoj Afriki* (Contemporary literature in the languages of tropical Africa, Moscow, Nauka, 1976, 247 pp.) is an account of literature in Hausa and in Swahili. But new tendencies emerged in the course of the late seventies. After the miscellaneous volumes of an earlier period, more intensive book-length studies of single genres began to appear such as N. D. Ljaxovskaja's *Poezija zapadnoj Afriki* (West African poetry, Moscow, 1975, 168 pp.), or N. I. Lvov's *Sov-*

remennyi teatr Tropičeskoj Afriki (Contemporary theatre in Black Africa, Moscow, Nauka, 1977, 247 pp.), which updated and considerably expanded an article on the same subject, published ten years earlier in *Iskusstvo Afriki* (The art of Africa, Moscow, Nauka, 1967, pp. 44–101). As to I. D. Nikiforova's *Afrikanskij roman: Genesis i problemy tipologii* (Moscow, Nauka, 1977, 238 pp.), it was concerned with historical and theoretical problems applied chiefly to the birth, growth and orientations of the French novel from both North and Black Africa.

On the other hand, a tendency towards more concentrated focusing on individual authors became perceptible at an early date in a book that was rather exceptional in its conception, Ju. M. Nagibin's *Moja Afrika* (My Africa, Moscow, 1973, 244 pp.), which contained interesting personal accounts of the author's meetings with such English-language writers as Tutuola, Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Kariuki, Kariara, Grace Ogot and others. This trend was bound to lead to monographic studies of single authors. The first of these were V. A. Bejlis's *Wole Soyinka* (Moscow, 1977, 270 pp.) and S. P. Kartuzov's *Alex La Guma* (Moscow, Nauka, 1978).

Finally, it was felt necessary to outstep the boundaries of the continent in order to embark on the quest for a definition of African literature's identity in the wider framework of world literature. This idea was very explicit in the title of a collection edited by I. D. Nikiforova, *Vzamosvjazi afrikanskix literatur i literatur mira* (Inter-relations of African literatures and world literatures, Moscow, 1975, 264 p.). While this contains essays by Nikiforova herself (on surrealism and African poetry), V. N. Vavilov (on Nigeria), N. D. Ljaxovskaja (on Cameroon), E. Ja. Surovcev (on East Africa), E. Rjauzova (on lusophone writing) and S. P. Kartuzov (on South Africa), several papers on Arabic poetry (by A. B. Kudelin), on the Algerian novel (by G. J. Džugačvili) and on the Amharic literature of Ethiopia (by M. L. Volpe) testify to the determination of Soviet scholars to remain true to their habit of viewing the literature of Africa on a truly continental scale, including consideration of such writing as is done in non-European languages.

In spite of Germany's colonial past, Africanists at the universities of the German Democratic Republic have not yet produced many literary studies as their main interests are in linguistics and folklore on the one hand, philosophy and ideology on the other. Scholars concerned with African writing in European languages have tended to concentrate on French West Africa. This was already apparent in Christa Wolff-Sieber's "Tradition und Fortschritt im Werk Sembène Ousmanes", *Sinn und Form*, XIX (1967), 474–479; as Christa Serauky, she later contributed a more important essay on "Das philosophisch-literarische System der Négritude bei Senghor", *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*, XV (1969), 425–439. Rainer Arnold, who is attached to the Karl-Marx-Universität in Leipzig, has shown himself to be attracted by wider speculations in such articles written in English as "Folklore and the New Image of Man: Some Remarks on the Contribution of African Literatures to World Culture", *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, VII/VIII (1969), 108–110; "Négritude and the System of Imperialist Ideology", printed in a collection of essays entitled *Theories on Africa and Neo-colonialism* (Leipzig, 1971) pp. 63–78; and especially in "The Functions

of Tradition and Innovation in the African Novel," which was included in *African Studies—Afrika Studien*, ed. Th. Büttner and G. Brehme (Berlin, 1973), pp. 365–381. The results of Arnold's research were summed up in his book *Afrikanische Literatur und nationale Befreiung* (Berlin, 1977, 169 pp.), which is chiefly concerned, however, with Swahili writing and its best-known modern exponent, Shaaban Robert.

Comprehensive information about Hungarian translations from, and Hungarian studies on, African literature is available in Tibor Keszthelyi's "A fekete-afrikai irodalom Magyarországon," *Helikon* 1 (1970), 100–105, which was translated as "Black African Literature in Hungary" in *Studies on Modern Black African Literature*, ed. P. Páricsy (Budapest, 1971), pp. 89–97. In fact, practically all Hungarian research into African literatures in European languages is done by these two scholars.

In the course of the sixties, Keszthelyi, who is the Hungarian translator of William Conton, Gabriel Okara and Amos Tutuola, contributed a number of short articles to various periodicals. The most important of these were "Nigéria irodalmi életéről" (Literary life in Nigeria) in *Nagyvilág*, 10 (1964), 1544–1546, and "A modern afrikai irodalomról" (On modern African literature) in *Valóság*, 7 (1967), 63–71. His "A négritude és a nyugat-afrikai irodalom," *Helikon*, 1 (1970), 11–12, was later translated as "Negritude in West African Literature" in the collection edited by Páricsy. A short article, "A mai afrikai regény" (The novel in contemporary Africa) printed in *Kritika*, 9 (1971), 123–128, was followed by Keszthelyi's most important work so far, *Az afrikai irodalom kialakulása és fejlődése napjainkig* (The rise and development of African literature, Budapest, 1971, 303 pp.), this was later translated into German as *Afrikanische Literatur: Versuch eines Überblicks* (Budapest, 1981).

As to Pál Páricsy, he became internationally known for his tireless and extremely useful bibliographical investigations which led to "A Supplementary Bibliography to Jahn's Bibliography" in the *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts* (Fall, 1967), 70–82, and to his full-scale *New Bibliography of African Literature* (Budapest, 1969, 108 pp.). These were followed by "A fekete-afrikai irodalom kérdései és története. Válogatott bibliográfia" (Problems in the history of black African literature: a select bibliography), *Helikon*, 1 (1970), 77–94, "Additions to a Bibliography of African Drama," *Afro-Asian Theatre Bulletin*, V, 2 (1970), 9–13, and "Selected International Bibliography of Negritude: 1960–1969," *Studies in Black Literature*, I, 1 (1970), 103–105.

In the early seventies, Páricsy was among the first to inform the Western scholarly community about the achievement of socialist science in the field of modern African literature. A French version of his bibliographical survey mentioned in note 2 appeared as "Recherches sur la littérature de l'Afrique noire dans les pays socialistes d'Europe" in *Œuvres Afro-Asiatiques*, 16 (1973), 10–23, Páricsy's own essays demonstrated his interest in the philosophical aspects of modern African literature. They include "Gondolatok az afrikai irodalomról" (Thoughts on African literature), *Valóság*, 10, 7 (1967), 63–71, "A Short Survey of the History of Black African Literature" and "The History of West African Theatre," both of which appeared in *Studies on Modern Black African Literature*, pp. 1–11 and 51–69.

It is worth mentioning that neither Keszthelyi nor Páricsy have been satisfied with their country's achievement in the field of modern African literary studies. Unfortunate-

ly, African writing is not taught in Hungary. They have therefore been unable to found any school or trend. But although they have to pursue their research in depressing loneliness, their own contribution, especially Páricsy's considerable bibliographical work, is of unexpected magnitude and has already provided serious help to international scholarship.

In Poland, the initiator of scholarly interest in modern black writing was Halina Hanna Bobrowska. She was first attracted to the great poet from Martinique, Aimé Césaire. Her first article was significantly entitled "Aimé Césaire, poeta wielkości Afryki" (Aimé Césaire, the poet of Africa's greatness); it was printed in the journal *Przegląd Soczjologiczny*, XIX (1965), 192–207, where the greater part of Polish contributions to African literary science have so far been published. Her main concern was to analyse the image of Africa as it appeared in Césaire's *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal.*

But Bobrowska soon turned her attention to the French literature of Africa proper, and especially of Senegal. "Powieści pisarzy Senegalu: Abdoulaye Sadji i Ousmana Sembène" (Novels by Senegalese writers: Abdoulaye Sadji and Ousmane Sembène), *PS*, XXI (1967), 205–230, was an introduction to the basic problems of imaginative prose in Senegal with special attention to the sociological issues involved. Her interest in social matters was further illustrated in "Zagadnienia spoeczne w utworach Sembène Ousmana" (Social problems in Sembène Ousmane's works), *PS*, XXIII (1969), 350–369, which compared *Vehi Ciosane* with *Le mandat*. While analyzing the structure of African prose fiction, Bobrowska was concerned with elucidating the social criticism of Sembène and his bold analysis of a society in transition.

Her interests in wider ideological issues came to the fore in "Camara Laye—powieściopisarz gwinejski" (The Guinean novelist Camara Laye), which was published in *Kultura i Spoeczenstwo* (1973), 2, 140–149, and even more in "Powieść afrykańska a rzeczywistość Czarnej Afryki" (The African novel and the literature of Black Africa), *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 10 (1974), which revealed an increasing tendency to generalize certain problems of African creative writing by discussing the theoretical problems of social progress that are a major preoccupation of present-day African writers.

At an early stage, Bobrowska had examined the relationship between Birago Diop's tales and the oral art of the *griots* in "Legenda i bajka jako charakterystyczny rodzaj literatury ustnej Afryki Zachodniej" (The legend and the fable as characteristic genres of West African oral literature), *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 3 (1968), 99–115. In the early seventies, this prompted her to explore the connection between modern literary creation and traditional art in "Czarna Afryka w poszukiwaniu drogi przyszości" (Black Africa looking for a future path), *PS*, XXVI (1975), 175–218. Her new, more definitely historical outlook, became manifest in "Tradycja i historia w formowaniu świadomości narodowej krajów zachodniej Afryki francusko jezycznej na przykladzie Senegalu" (Tradition and the rise of national consciousness in francophone West Africa as exemplified in Senegal); this essay, which was included in *Afryka naszych czasów* (Africa in our time, Wrocław, 1976, pp. 105–127), was intended to explain the African intellectual's approach to the history of the continent, based on the work of such historians as G. Balandier, J. Ki-Zerbo, A. Hampate Ba, Anta Diop and Tamsir Niane.

While Halina Bobrowska concentrated on French West Africa, Wanda Leopold, who was attached to the Polish Academy of Sciences, specialized in the study of English writing, beginning with West Africa, more specifically Nigeria.[6] Her first critical essays were devoted to Achebe, Ekwensi and Soyinka: "Chinua Achebe i narodziny powieści nigeryjskiej" (Chinua Achebe and the rise of the Nigerian Novel), *PS*, XIX (1965), 208–243, "Współczesna powieść nigeryjska—problemy kształtowania się nowej świadomości w pisarstwie Cypriana Ekwensi" (The Nigerian social novel: problems in the formation of a new consciousness in Cyprian Ekwensi's writings), *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 6 (1965), 45–60, and "Nigeryjski dramaturg—o twórczości dramatycznej Wole Soyinka" (The Nigerian playwright: On Wole Soyinka's dramatic writing), *Dialog*, 8 (1966).

A translator as well as a literary critic, she emphasized the artistic qualities in imaginative writing and was always on the look-out for new talented writers. This was clear in her important article "Jezyk i literatura Afryki Wschodniej" (Language and Literature of East Africa), *PS*, XXI (1967), 153–185, where she also discussed the Swahili literary tradition. But in "Powieści Igbo" (Igbo novels), *PS*, XXIII (1969), 370–387, she concentrated on the important contribution of Igbo writers to the Nigerian novel, pointing out that the protagonists in Igbo novels usually outstep the limitations of their tribal society in order to adhere, with more or less success, to different sets of values. The same issue of *PS* also contained her Polish translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Orphée noir*, together with her own commentary.

Driven by her keen awareness of the importance of emergent African writing as a fit subject for scholarly investigation, Wanda Leopold was attracted to the history of African literature and gathered the results of her research in *O literaturze Czarnej Afryki* (On the literature of Black Africa, Warsaw, 1973, 195 p.), a synthetic, yet fairly detailed survey which illustrated her critical acumen and her many-sided interests in its emphasis on the inter-relations between African and European literatures and on the specificity of the former. Together with Z. Stolarek, Wanda Leopold published, as a kind of companion volume, *Antologia poezji afrykańskiej* (Anthology of African poetry, Warsaw, 1974, 337 pp.), which covered important areas and included most of the best poets of sub-Saharan Africa.

To *Afryka naszych czasów* (Africa in our time, Wrocław, 1976, pp. 261–306), Wanda Leopold contributed an important essay, "Drogi i manowce afrykańskiej literatury. Z badan nad problemami kształtowanie się świadomości kulturowej w niepodlegych krajach Czarnej Afryki" (Roads and erratic pathways of African literature. Studies on the rise of culture consciousness in the independent countries of Black Africa), where she discussed the ideological problems inherent in the rise of African writing and the relevant aspects of the cultural policies involved.

The seventies have seen the appearance of a third Polish specialist of modern African literature, Ernestyna Skurjat, who teaches at the African Studies Centre of the University of Warsaw. She first produced a number of short articles and book reviews

[6] Dr. Wanda Leopold died in 1977. I was greatly indebted to her unfailing generosity in collecting bibliographical data for the present paper.

which are remarkable for her manner of combining the sociological and the linguistic approaches. While many of these concern Nigerian novels, her first full-size book, *Afryka w twórczości jej pisarzy* (Africa in her writers' creations, Warsaw, 1973, 153 pp.) contains a wealth of biographical and bibliographical information.

In Czechoslovakia, research on modern African writing began in 1967 with Jarmila Ortová's "Réflexions sur l'aspect social de l'œuvre de Sembène Ousmane," a contribution to the Congrès des Africanistes which was held in Dakar, and with Vladimír Klíma's article "Tutuola's Inspiration," in *Archív Orientální,* 35 (1967), 556–562. It is characteristic of Czechoslovak scholarship in this field that it is often published in French or in English.

Jarmila Ortová who used to lecture at the University of the Seventeenth November in Prague before its closure has published numerous essays about French and Portuguese writing in sub-Saharan Africa. These include: "The Burden and Hope of Humdrum Existence: Notes on the Works of Sembène Ousmane," *New Orient Bimonthly,* 7, 3 (1968), 1–3; "Problèmes de la littérature africaine: contribution au Colloque international sur la périodisation des littératures romanes à Prague," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae —Philologica,* 4 (1968), 85–88; "Les femmes dans l'œuvre littéraire de Sembène Ousmane," *Présence Africaine,* 71 (1969), 69–77 and "Politics and Literature in Africa: Sembène Ousmane," *Black Orpheus,* 1970.

J. Ortová also authored two monographs: while one dealt with Sembène Ousmane, the other was entitled *Etude sur le roman au Cameroun* (Prague, 1971, 221 pp.). Analytical in their orientation, these works betrayed her concern with the political and ideological aspects of African writing. This is equally true of "L'art de la parole dans la culture de l'Afrique au Sud du Sahara," the introductory title-essay of a slender volume published by the University of the Seventeenth November (Prague, 1971), and of the studies she later published in two collections of essays issued by the same university: "Literature and Social Change in Africa" in *K problematice formování osobnosti v různých kulturách* (Towards the problem of personality formation in different cultures, Prague, 1973, pp. 135–146) and "Cultural Change and the Picture of the City in African Prose Writing" in *Problems of Culture Change in Africa* (Prague, 1975, pp. 57–81).

The above-mentioned studies discussed the roles of heroes and heroines in different African novels and the methods of their psychological portrayals. Ortová observed that the denunciation of the colonial system was often associated with a critique of the contradictions within traditional African societies. She paid particular attention to class conflicts and their artistic reflection in modern prose writing. A similar approach was characteristic of the textbook which she wrote in collaboration with Klíma: *Modern Literatures of Subsaharan Countries: Texts for University Students* (Prague, 1969; reissued 1971). A Czech version was made available under the title *Literatury zemí subsaharské Afriky* (Prague, 1970, 150 pp.).

As to Vladimír Klíma, his research has been more specifically directed towards anglophone African prose fiction about which he has written several articles and books in English. The essays that followed his brief study of Tutuola's inspiration include: "Chinua Achebe's Novels," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae—Philologica,* XII, (1969),

32–34; "The Two Literary Centres of Black Africa" in *Inter-relations in Asia and Africa* (Prague, 1970), "The Grasp of Négritude," *Archív Orientální,* XXXIX, 2 (1971), 200–210; "The South African Writer's Political Commitment", *Archív Orientální,* XLII, 3 (1974), 193–199; "The Changing Function of the African Author" in *Problems of Culture Change in Africa,* (Prague, 1975, pp. 37–55); and "The Progress of Sub-Saharan Poetry," *Archív Orientální,* XLV, 3 (1977), 193–200. His two books in English are *Modern Nigerian Novels* (Prague, 1969, 204 pp.) and *South African Prose Writing in English* (Prague, 1971, 202 pp.).

So far, the most ambitious venture in Czechoslovakia has been *Literatury černé Afriky* (Literatures of Black Africa, Prague, 1972, 496 pp.), an attempt at surveying the whole field of African literature, oral and written, in European and in African languages, with due consideration of the linguistic problems involved. It was the result of close co-operation between the late Bantuist Karel František Růžička who dealt with oral art, Portuguese writing, the literature of Madagascar, both ancient and modern, and the vernacular writing of East, Central and South Africa, Petr Zima, a Hausa specialist who contributed the linguistic chapters and the section on modern writing in West African languages, and Vladimír Klíma who was responsible for most of the sections on African literature in French and in English; some of the chapters were themselves of combined authorship. For the English version, entitled *Black Africa: Literature and Language* (Prague and Dordrecht, 1976, 310 pp.), the authors intensified their efforts to combine linguistic methods with literary analysis. A Polish translation is forthcoming.

More recently, another volume of plural authorship, *African Culture and Integration* (Prague, 1976) illustrated the growing trend in Czechoslovakia towards collective research, viewing African literature in a wider ideological context. While Klíma contributed the introduction and two essays—"Politics and Poetry: the Subjects of Senghor" and "The African Personality"—the other two authors, Petr Zima and Karsten Legère of the German Democratic Republic, dealt with problems in sociolinguistics.

From Klíma's "Czechoslovak Research in African Literatures", printed in *Research in African Literatures,* I, 2 (1970), 163–165, it was obvious that this type of research originated in Prague, at the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences and at the former University of the Seventeenth November. At an early stage, however, a few novels by Peter Abrahams and Sembène Ousmane had been made available in Slovakian translations. It can now be added that in recent years, other translations as well as book reviews and short articles on African literature have been produced by Viera Pawliková, who is a research fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.

This brief survey of the research undertaken in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe shows that its constant purpose has been not only to elucidate individual approaches and artistic devices, but also to analyse the close relationship between creative writing on the one hand, and ideology, social developments, recent history and political events on the other. The African literary scene is never discussed as an isolated phenomenon to be submitted to purely aesthetic appraisal: it is always viewed within the general socio-cultural context. Both in research and in the choice of works to be

translated, preference has been given to such African authors as faithfully reflect the social realities of the Black continent, the fight against colonialism, racial prejudice and imperialist exploitation, and thus contribute to the general progress of their nations.

A NOTE ON THE STUDY OF AFRICAN WRITING IN YUGOSLAVIA AND ROMANIA

The only Yugoslav scholar to have shown scientific interest in African literature is Biserka Cvjetičanin of the Zagreb Institute for Developing Countries. After her unpublished M.A. dissertation entitled *Sukob tradicionalnog i modernog u afričkoj književnosti engleskog i francuskog izraza* (Conflict between Tradition and Modernism in African Literature, Zagreb, 1970, 200 pp.).[7]

She published a number of articles in Yugoslav journals; these include: „Što je afrička književnost" (What is African Literature), *Književna smotra,* No. 8 (1971), 11–17; "Elementi tradicije u afričkom romanu" (Elements of Tradition in the African Novel), *Književna smotra,* No. 11 (1972), 17–25; and *"Simbolički svijet Wole Soyinke"* (Soyinka' Symbolic World), *Književna smotra,* No. 20 (1975), 17–29.

She also edited two anthologies of poetry: *Suvremena poezija Nigerije, Kameruna i Kenya* (Modern Poetry of Nigeria, Cameroon and Kenya, Bagdala: Kruševac, 1975, 86 pp.) and *Sačuvaj moje riječi* (Keep my words: selection from African oral poetry, Bagdala: Kruševac, 1977, 103 pp.)

Her most important contribution so far, however, is "Povijest afričke književnosti" (History of African Literature) which appeared in the sixth volume of the monumental *Povijesti svjetske književnosti* (History of World Literature, Zagreb, 1976, pp. 427–510). This substantial survey deals with African oral art, written literature in African languages, and African literature in European languages, viewed as part of the general movement of black emancipation which had begun with the Negro Renascence in the U.S.A., *indigénisme* in the French West Indies and *negrismo* in Cuba, before leading to the concepts of negritude and the African personality. Apart from her anthology of oral poetry, Biserka Cvjetičanin later published a paper entitled "Poimanje vremena u afričkoj književnosti" (Concept of Time in African Literature), *Kultura,* No. 36–37 (1977), 154–169. [Information kindly supplied by Professor Biserka Cvjetičanin.]

The publication of a few African novels in Romanian translation in the early sixties does not seem to have led to any developments that could be regarded as scholarly. As poet, head of state and proponent of African socialism, Senghor has received a measure of interest: the 1969 translation of *Hosties noires* was reproduced together with the original French in 1976, with an introduction in French, entitled "Les insignes de la grande poésie," by Radu Cârneci. Otherwise, the contribution of Rumania to the study of African writing seems to be limited to the introductions and prefaces to translations

[7] For a summary in French, see Nada Svob-Dokic, "Institut pour les pays en voie de développement, Zagreb: La littérature africaine," *Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture,* No. 46 (1980), 65–66.

of novels by Sembène Ousmane (1960), Harry Bloom (1963), Peter Abrahams (1963), Mongo Beti (1964) and Chinua Achebe (1974). While traditional African culture, including oral art, has been studied at some length in the books of C.I. Gulian, *Despre cultura spirituală a popoarelor africane* (On the spiritual culture of African peoples, Bucharest, 1964, 250 p.), and *Omul în Folclorul african* (Man in African folklore, Bucharest, 1967, 375 pp.), only two slender essays on modern African writing deserve mentioning: I. Igirosanu, "Literatura negro-africană" (Black African Literature), *Steaua,* 11, (1960), 111–116, which discusses such general problems as the status of the writer in African society and the relationship between tradition and innovation, and Mircea Ivanescu, "O poezie a suferinţei şi revoltei" (The poetry of suffering and revolt), *Steaua,* 13, 4 (1962), 108–119. Since then, the only substantial contribution has been I. M. Stefan's 30-page introduction to the Rumanian version of Jahn's *Geschichte der afrikanischen Literatur* (Bucharest, 1975). [Information kindly conveyed by Dr. Ileana Verzea.]

Elena Rjauzova

2. THE RECEPTION OF LUSO-AFRICAN WRITING IN THE SOVIET UNION

The history of Soviet studies of Portuguese-language African literatures which, as is well known, developed a half-century earlier than African literatures in other European languages, dates back only two decades. And there is nothing surprising in this situation which may at first glance seem paradoxical. For many long years Portugal's African possessions, separated from the entire civilized world by a barrier of silence, were a *terra incognita* for Soviet researchers, a mysterious and inaccessible land, about which sparse and often not very reliable information trickled in through narrow "illegal" channels: the reports of Western journalists who had visited this "zone of silence", articles by Portuguese historians and sociologists, as a rule pro-government in their orientation, and finally, the first-hand accounts either of the few African poets and intellectuals—Marcelino dos Santos, Agostinho Neto, Mario de Andrade—who visited the U.S.S.R. in the 1950s and 60s, or of students from Portuguese colonies who studied at our universities. In view of such limited information there could be no question of serious, systematic research on the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa.

The first period in the study of these literatures (from the end of the 50s to the mid-60s) might be more accurately described as a time of inquiry, of getting acquainted with all the newest poetry and prose from Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde then available to us. It is only natural that at this early stage the principal attention was directed at the popularization of African authors themselves, i.e. at translations of their works. The largest number of authors could be presented in anthologies devoted to one single literature, or to all of them at once. And so the "first swallows" appeared: two collections of poetry[8] and a collection of stories and novellas by African writers.[9] Of course this did not hamper newspaper and magazine publication of translations of individual works by such writers as Marcelino dos Santos (who was published in the

[8] *Vzgljadom serdca. Stixi poètov Angoly, Mozambika, ostrovov Zelenogo Mysa, ostrova San-Tome* (The View from the heart: Verses by poets from Angola, Mozambique, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé Island, Moscow, 1961); *Zdes' i trava roditsja krasnoj. Stixi poètov Angoly, Mozambika, ostrovov Zelenogo Mysa i San-Tome* (Here even the grass is born red: Verses by poets of Angola, Mozambique, the Cape Verde and São Tomé Islands, Moscow, 1967).

[9] *Doroga. Rasskazy i povesti angol'skix pisatelej* (The Road: Stories and Novellas by Angolan Writers, Moscow, 1964).

U.S.S.R. under the pseudonym Lilin'ju Mikajja),[10] Castro Soromenho,[11] or Luis Bernardo Honwana.[12] Especially fortunate was the literary fate of José Luandino Vieira, whose books were published and republished many times in the Soviet Union, both in the journal *Inostrannaja literature* (Foreign Literature)[13] and in separate editions.[14]

Articles about the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa that appeared in the mid-60s were characterized by a clearly popularizing tendency: their authors aimed at acquainting readers with totally unfamiliar phenomena, be it the publishing activity of the progressively minded youth of Portuguese colonies,[15] the poetry of Angola and Mozambique and its links with the liberation movement,[16] or the tendencies of Angolan prose towards realism and national liberation.[17]

The systematic assimilation of Portuguese-language material began only at the end of the 1960s, when contacts with writers and public figures from Angola, Mozambique, and the Cape Verde and São Tomé Islands were established and strengthened, as a result of which far more concrete information about the literatures of these countries became available.

The fundamental characteristic of Soviet African studies is a composite approach to the literatures being examined. The necessity for a composite analysis, i.e. a combination of literary exegesis with an analysis of the socio-cultural situation in African countries and the examination of purely literary phenomena in their historical-sociological context, was determined by the specific development of the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa: these emerged at first within the framework of the Portuguese language and literature, but later embarked on new, original paths under the influence of socio-historical factors. Research by historians, sociologists and economists was of great help to Soviet literary scholars in this regard. Of special interest are Ju. S. Oganis'jan discussions of the peculiar features of Portuguese colonialism and of the national revolutionary movement in Angola,[18] and A. M. Xazanov's detailed evaluation of Portuguese expansion and colonial policies in Africa and Asia and of the African peoples' struggle for independence in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries on the basis of Marxist principles and in their historical aspects.[19] An informative article by

[10] Lilin'ju Mikajja, *Pesnja istinnoj ljubvi* (A Song of true love, Moscow, 1959).

[11] Castro Soromenho, *Mertvaja zemlja* (*Terra morta*, Moscow, 1962).

[12] Luís Bernardo Honwana, *My ubivaem Paršivuju Šobaku* (*Nós matámos o cão-tinhoso*, Moscow, 1967).

[13] Luandino Vieira, "Instinnaja žizn' Dominguša Šav' era," *(A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier)*, *Inostrannaja literatura* No. 8 (1963); id., "Luanda," ibid. No. 12 (1968).

[14] Id., *V. ožidanii sveta* (*Na espera do luar*, Moscow, 1970).

[15] L. V. Nekrasova, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost' 'Doma studentov imperii' v Lisabone" (The publishing activity of the "Home of Students of the Empire" in Lisbon), *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 6 (1962).

[16] Id., "Molodost' poèzii Angoly i Mozambika" (Young poetry from Angola and Mozambique), *Voprosy literatury*, No. 9, (1962).

[17] E. A. Rjauzova, "Proza Angoly (realističeskie nacional'no-osvoboditel'nye tendencii)" (The prose of Angola: Realistic and national-liberation tendencies), in *Fol'klor i literatura Afriki* (The folklore and literature of Africa, Moscow, 1969).

[18] Ju. S. Oganis'jan, *Nacional'naja revoljucija v Angole (1961–1965)* (The National Revolution in Angola, 1961–1965, Moscow, 1968), and *500 let pod piratskim flagom* (500 years under a pirate flag, Moscow, 1965).

[19] A. M. Xazanov, *Politika Portugalii v Afrike i Azii* (Portuguese policies in Africa and Asia, Moscow, 1967), and *Ekspansija Portugalii v Afrike i bor'ba afrikanskix narodov za nezavisimost' (XVI–XVIII vv.)* (Portuguese expansion in Africa and the African nations' struggle for independence, 16th–18th centuries, Moscow, 1976).

A. M. Xazanov tells about the freedom-loving Queen Nzinga Mbandi Ngola, who led the Angolan people's struggle against colonizers in the eighteenth century.[20]

Another important characteristic of Soviet research on African literatures is the striving for the solution of problems, for the greatest possible depth and comprehensiveness in the understanding of the literary process, in defining those features common to contemporary African literatures (the accelerated tempo, the spasmodic quality of their development) and the features characteristic of individual regions. Of equal significance is the attempt, through comparisons with the literatures of other countries, to shed light on the laws governing the literary development of a given area.

A most interesting question for the study of the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa concerns the influence of foreign traditions and literary relations on the development of poetry and prose. This topic is the subject of two articles. In the first, written in 1969,[21] the author offers general observations about the character and degree of outside influence on the literature of each national community, taking into account the peculiarities of its cultural and social evolution. Thus, for example, as a result of the unusually complex paths by which the culture of the Cape Verde archipelago developed, the influence of European and Latin American (Brazilian) traditions is most perceptible there. Like most modern African literatures, that of Cape Verde is developing at an accelerated pace; it is striving to achieve in a very short space of time what it took European literatures centuries to accomplish; to that end it selects out of the cultural heritage of humanity only that which is absolutely vital, by-passing details, omitting entire stages. This characteristic explains yet another interesting peculiarity—the simultaneous existence of various tendencies in the literature of such a numerically small nation as the Cape Verde Islands. Almost all of its representatives were born in the twentieth century; they belong to generations separated by no more than ten years; nonetheless one often observes in their works a rapid evolution, the fast succession of tendencies and artistic styles. The article leads to the conclusion that the influences of Portuguese modernism and neo-realism, and of the north-eastern Brazilian school as well, on the literature of the Cape Verde Islands were not separate or isolated, but interacted among themselves and left their mark on each other, since their inter-relationships were diverse and their influence differed at each specific historico-literary stage. Thus, for example, Brazil's influence, which predominates in the post-war period, in a certain sense counteracts Europe's, especially that of the Portuguese modernists. The experience of Brazilian writers, who attach major significance to the black components of their culture, helps the cultural leaders of the Islands to free themselves from their earlier striving for Europeanization, to feel themselves a part of Africa and to recognize their spiritual links with it.

[20] Id., "Svobodoljubivaja doč' Afriki: iz istorii bor'by naroda Angoly protiv kolonizatorov v XVIII veke" (Africa's freedom-loving daughter: From the history of the Angolan people's struggle against colonizers in the 18th century), *Voprosy literatury*, No. 2 (1970).

[21] Rjauzova, "Rol' zarubežnyx tradicij v formirovanii literatur Afriki na portugal'skom jazyke" (The role of foreign traditions in the development of African literatures in Portuguese), in *Aktual'nye problemy izučenija literatur Afriki* (Current questions in the study of African literatures, Moscow, 1969).

The second article, published in 1975,[22] covers the entire evolution of Angolan prose fiction. The author's purpose is to bring to light the specific nature of the contacts between Angolan, Portuguese and Brazilian fiction (novel and short-story) and to define typological correspondences in their development.

Portugal's wide, varied contacts with the colonies, marked by the policy of assimilation carried out in Africa, generated the theory of "Creole islands." While trying to prove how strong the Portuguese position in Angola was, even after the revolutionary events of 1961, the initiator of this theory, Mário António, nonetheless devoted great attention to the local substratum which, in his opinion, played an important role in the synthesis of Portuguese and African culture traits in Angola. However, he failed to take into consideration the fact that there are extremely few cradles of "Creole" culture in the country and that an inordinate emphasis on Portuguese influence on the written literature, the folklore and the folk music of Angola cannot fail to belittle the uniqueness of African culture, which when viewed in such a light is deprived of any originality.

As for the question of a "harmonious" blending of African and Portuguese cultures, contrary to Mário António's assertions, works by Angola's first writers prove quite the opposite to be the case: the blend of diverse cultures was in the beginning artificial and mechanical; the adoption of artistic devices alien to local tradition for a time inhibited the rise of realism in Angolan prose. As a result of concrete analysis of Angolan prose works, the article reaches the conclusion that outside influences can only play a positive role in the development of Angolan writing if the local soil is prepared for them: this requires some similarity in the respective social and cultural situations, as was exemplified in the growth of democratic tendencies in both Portugal and Angola after the Second World War. The novel and the short story, being new to Africa, require new methods for the artistic rendering of reality, new methods for achieving psychological depth, and the assimilation of principles of composition characteristic of more advanced literatures. The large-scale European narrative genres, when used in Angolan literature, which lacks a long tradition, underwent significant alterations. A lack of literary experience accounts for various flaws and errors by early Angolan writers who had not yet sufficiently mastered realistic principles of characterization and thus failed to take into consideration the formal demands of the genre. However, their chief merit lay in the fact that they attempted to reflect Angolan social reality, to express the psychology and world-view of Africans as well as they could with the artistic devices available to them.

Oral folk traditions and outside literary influence were combined in a unique way in the works of Castro Soromenho. Like Óscar Ribas, he devoted much attention to Angolan beliefs and rites, to witchcraft and worship, but he went further than Ribas in the depiction of the specific character of Africa and in his mastery of the realistic method, disclosing the inner essence of the customs and rituals of African tribes. Such were the questions discussed in the article about literary links and their influence on the growth of Angolan prose.

[22] Id., "Rol' literaturnyx svjazej v stanovlenii angol'skoj prozy" (The role of literary ties in the formation of Angolan prose), in *Vzaimosvjazi afrikanskix literatur i literatur mira* (African literature and its links to world literature, Moscow, 1975).

In the study of the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa great attention is given to the process of literary development and the creation of new genres. An essay on their origins[23] is devoted to the early literary attempts of poets and novelists from Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Angola. Analysing collections of poetry by Caetano da Costa Alegre, from São Tomé, the Cape Verde writer Eugénio Tavares, and the Angolans José da Silva Maia Ferreira and J. D. Cordeiro da Mata, as well as early novels, the author raises the following question: why is it that in spite of the 500-year-old presence of the Portuguese in Africa and an almost century-old poetic tradition, the large-scale production of printed works in Portuguese began so recently, almost simultaneously with that of African literature in French or English. Elements for an answer can be unravelled by scrutinizing certain characteristic traits of Portuguese colonization and by lingering, albeit briefly, on the singularities of Portuguese cultural and economic relations with African nations, as such factors are of decisive importance for the general level of socio-historical development.

From the very first stages of their settlement on the African continent the Portuguese pursued a policy of active assimilation, hoping to create "a people like the Portuguese". In striving to attach the subjugated people to "the divine world of Enlightenment", and first and foremost to the Christian religion, the Portuguese colonizers were guided by considerations that were hardly humane or ethical; their intentions always had a distinctly mercenary, mercantilist character. However, early Portuguese attempts to establish contacts with African kingdoms were doomed to failure. Among the reasons for this were the economic backwardness of the mother country and a shortage of human resources and money. The enormity of the task clearly exceeded the powers of such a small country. Discoveries by Portuguese navigators and explorers in the age of great geographical discoveries brought to the peoples of another continent the bitter taste of slavery and the destruction of a civilization which it had taken centuries to create and which had achieved a high level of development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Kingdoms that existed on the territory of present-day Angola were destroyed and on the ruins of a dead civilization a new, elitist culture arose out of contacts between the Portuguese and the natives. This conclusion derives from a critical analysis of the research effected by Portuguese and African historians and sociologists.

Another paper of 1969[24] demonstrates that the early Portuguese-language poets of Africa assimilated European traditions and principles of artistic expression in a purely superficial way. Only after the Second World War, at the end of the 40s and the beginning of the 50s did the time come for the rise of national African poetry in Portuguese, which developed more quickly and dynamically than prose. In their search for a new poetics and a new form more adequate to content, African writers turned to folklore and to the example of other literatures—European as well as American. They used the rhythms of national dances as well as the techniques of folk art—repetition,

[23] Id., "U istokov portugalojaryčnyx literatur Afriki" (At the sources of the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa), *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 3 (1970).

[24] Id., "Učit'sja slušat' narod (o nekotoryx tendencijax razvitija afrikanskoj poèzii na portugal'skom jazyke)" (Learning to listen to the people: On certain tendencies in the development of African poetry in Portuguese), *Voprosy literatury*, No. 8 (1969).

internal rhyme,—moving away from classical European prosody, from the rhymed verse and traditional poetic genres like the sonnet and the epic poem. Irregular blank verse, repetition, internal rhyme, assonance, alliteration, the sharp syncopated rhythms of folk dances—such are the main devices that have been used increasingly in the Portuguese-language poetry of Africa over the recent decades.

A number of articles are concerned with the current state of individual literatures, dealing with Creole writing on the Cape Verde Islands, revolutionary poetry in Angola and Mozambique, and Angolan literature in the 70s.

In contrast to the other Portuguese-language territories of Africa, the Cape Verde archipelago has two equally widespread languages: Portuguese and Creole, which the local inhabitants now call the Cape Verde tongue.[25] That literature has therefore a peculiarity which is not found in Angola and Mozambique: bilingualism. The article on Cape Verde discusses Eugénio Tavares' *Mornas*, early works in Creole that appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, the verses of other Cape Verde "bards" such as Almerindo Lessa and Mário Macedo Barbosa, the socially tinged poetry of protest created by Gabriel Mariano, Ovídio Martins and Kaoberdiano Dambará, as well as what was until recently the only example of *Crioulo* prose—Sérgio Frusoni's chronicles and stories gathered under the title *Mosaico Mindelense*. One of the most important questions raised in the article is that of the further development of the Islands' literary language. Will poets and prose writers gradually move away from Portuguese and begin to write exclusively in Creole? Will they show a preference for one or the other language, or will the archipelago's literature continue its simultaneous development in Portuguese and Creole?

The major topic of the article about the revolutionary poetry of Angola and Mozambique[26] is the so-called guerrilla poetry which is somewhere half-way between belles-lettres and journalism. As it is intended more for listeners than for readers it exhibits specific features: vividness, sloganizing, structural proximity to oral folk works, the use of the repetitions and refrains typical of folklore.

The 1970s were a crucial decade for Portugal's former African colonies. The achieving of independence could not but affect Angolan writing and especially prose.[27] The change was conspicuous in its content and in the treatment of either new themes or of old ones that had not lost their relevance. However the artistic method was bound to be altered as well, and in this connection the most important innovation was the increasing rejection of journalistic vividness in favour of in-depth study and thoughtful reflexion about the surrounding world.

Questions more urgent for the newly-independent countries began to crowd out the theme that had dominated for several decades their progressive literatures: the exposure

[25] Id, "Vremja Zelenogo Mysa nastalo (o kreol'skoj literature ostrovov Zelenogo Mysa)" (Cape Verde's time has come: On the Creole literature of the Cape Verde Islands), *Inostrannaja literatura*, No. 11 (1969).

[26] Id., "Revoljucionnaja poèzija Angoly i Mozambika" (The revolutionary poetry of Angola and Mozambique), in *Progressivnye literatury mira i revoljucionnyj process* (Progressive literatures of the world and the revolutionary process, Moscow, 1976).

[27] Id., "Literatura Angoly v 70-e gody" (Angolan literature in the 70s), in *Razvitie literatur v nezavisimyx stranax Afriki (60–70-e gg.)* (The development of literatures in the independent countries of Africa: the 1960s–70s, Moscow, 1980).

of colonialism and of the pernicious policy of cultural assimilation. Characteristic for the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa now is the transition from criticism to positive principles, a striving to create, rather than to overthrow. One sees in them more and more clearly a new creativeness which appeared relatively recently but is growing fast and addresses itself neither to the enlightened European intelligentsia nor to the assimilated African élite but directly to the people. Therefore the enlightenment of the masses is now viewed by the Portuguese-language writers of Africa as their primary task, and the techniques of artistic expression to which they have had recourse in their recent works are somewhat different from those that they used earlier.

This is exemplified through a comparative analysis of Angolan works of the seventies, in particular, the books which Luandino Vieira published in 1974. Here indeed his artistic manner discloses unexpected traits as a result of his newly assigned goal—that of embodying content of world-wide significance in a specifically national form, contrasting the Angolan reality of the 1960s with its past, baring the deep, complex interrelations between society and the individual, and most importantly, bringing to light the dialectic of development in post-revolutionary Angolan society.

In order to present his heroes in the greatest possible depth, with all the peculiarities of their psychology, conduct, and inner world, Luandino Vieira attempts to recreate a fantastic childhood world populated with mythical creatures, tales, and legends, and he achieves a distinct emotional mood, a mysterious poetic colouration, not only by bringing in elements of "magical realism", a complex composition unusual for his works, but also through the constantly increasing "Angolization" of the language. The structure of *Velhas estorias* and *No antigamente, na vida* is not as simple and straightforward as that of his early books; it is difficult even to imagine that the author of "Luanda" could have produced the multilevelled compositional subtlety of these stories. Striving to observe and render the very mechanism of the country's movement toward the future in the dynamism of passion and in the clash of irreconcilable contradictions, he has been prompted to use artistic devices that were absolutely new for him and to create a special type of narration distinguished by a closed composition with continual returns to the same events ("a spiral revolution"). In the story "Nós, os de Makulusu" such returns are accomplished through an elaborate system of repetitions, key phrases, images, and associative sequences with an unusual montage of fragments; the interplay of temporal levels—present and past—is of remarkable complexity, since the past in its turn has several gradations and stages, from childhood to very recent events.

The present writer's first book-length study of the literary history of areas that were still under Portuguese control at the time appeared in 1972.[28] It was argued that since the literatures of the Islands of Cape Verde and São Tomé, of Angola and Mozambique arose and for a time existed as a part of Portuguese literature, and since they experienced the direct influence of Portugal's long cultural tradition and of its contemporary literary movements, they are linked genetically to Portugal's literature, inasmuch as their representatives create their works in Portuguese and sometimes within the artistic tradition

[28] Id., *Portugalojazyčnye literatury Afriki* (The Portuguese-language literatures of Africa, Moscow, 1972).

of Portuguese literature. It is the author's opinion, however, that the period of existence as an integral part of another literature is a stage that the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa have already outgrown. Their ever-increasing independence and the unique character of their gradually emerging national distinctiveness are beyond doubt. In this respect, due consideration must be given to the influence of local culture and of the linguistic and ethnic substratum on the creation of these literatures: in Mozambique, for instance, the influence of Arab culture, which was introduced by the Portuguese themselves, is being continually revitalized thanks to contacts between natives of Mozambique and the Islamic inhabitants on the coast of the Indian Ocean.

In order to shed more light on the formation of cultural traditions and on methods of artistic creation the book devotes special attention to the distinctive features and tendencies in the development of the literatures under comparison, taking into account the historical, social, and cultural peculiarities in the development of the nations involved. To this end, it was attempted to provide a general analysis of the conditions —linguistic, social and ethnic—surrounding the rise and growth of these literatures, and the literary process in each separate subgroup of the Portuguese language areas of Africa was examined concretely. In the author' s view, the greatest degree of national distinctiveness, has been achieved by the literature of the Cape Verde Islands, due to the very nature of the Creole society, which resulted from a close merging of heterogeneous elements. Cape Verde Creole culture arose because of two unique circumstances: the existence of a Creole national community that possessed many of the pre-conditions for becoming a nation, and the existence of a Creole language. Along with Portuguese, this became a common medium for the islanders and an alternative literary language in no way inferior to Portuguese in flexibility and expressive possibilities. Creole and Portuguese-language literatures have been developing simultaneously; they are closely linked by common roots in folklore, by similar themes, and by the writers' common determination to arouse in their fellow countrymen a sense of their own worth and national pride.

Unlike the Cape Verde archipelago, the Island of São Tomé has not seen the emergence of a single united nationality and the local language, Forro, has not become the language of belles-lettres, although individual phrases in Forro often find their way into a poem or prose work. The position of writers in Angola and Mozambique is similar in regard to language. In order to make their works comprehensible to the masses they introduce into the Portuguese language African rhythms and elements from the native languages, permitting significant phonetic distortions, although the degree of linguistic reconstruction varies from writer to writer.

From the very beginning literary growth was linked to the nationalism, to the liberation movement, to the desperate attempts by Africans to preserve their own identity, their own cast of mind under adverse conditions of cultural assimilation. This is why even in the early works of writers from Angola and Mozambique one perceives so strongly the note of protest against assimilation; this is why preserving the roots of the native cultures is so important for them. Consequently one of the most complex and vital problems for the Portuguese-language authors of Africa centres on the maintenance of national roots in modern literature, i.e. on overcoming artistic elitism: the circum-

stances of the rise and development of these literatures did not particularly encourage their closeness to the people.

In the process of literary evolution the concept of national roots in literature has itself undergone a transformation—from extreme emphasis on the uniqueness of national identity and from great attention to everyday detail, to the peculiarities of nature and ethnography in a poet's native region, while prose writers are moving toward an ever deeper penetration of social reality, toward the truthful depiction of new heroes, as they seek to find the most varied means of making their own art accessible not to a narrow circle of like-minded people, but to the masses of the people.

The diversity of artistic methods, the modification of verse forms, and the reform of poetics that characterized Portuguese-language African literature from the 1940s to the 60s are a result of the accelerated rate of development, although neither formal technique nor metrical patterns can serve as indicators of the "contemporaneity" or otherwise of any particular author. The central core, the essential thing is his/her attitude toward the world, toward the surrounding reality, even if it is expressed in the most traditional manner.

The book closes on the conclusion that all four African literatures in Portuguese are at different stages in their development. Though the literature of the Cape Verde Islands has displayed its own unique traits, and while in Angolan literature the tendency toward national self-assertion becomes more and more manifest with every year, the literatures of Mozambique (especially belles-lettres) and São Tomé have not yet had time to undergo all stages in their development. The future will show what paths they will choose toward the summits of artistic craftsmanship.

The same author's following book,[29] is devoted to in-depth investigation of the theoretical aspect of a more specific question. The first part focuses on the novel in Portugal from the 1930s to the 70s and on the circumstances and pre-conditions for the rise of a new variety of realism in Portuguese literature: the early period of Portuguese neo-realism during the end of the 30s and the 40s; the evolution of neo-realism in the 50s and early 60s; and the latest tendencies in the Portuguese novel of the 60s and 70s. The second part analyses the development of the novel in Portuguese-language African literature.

It is well known that the novel as a genre was as alien to African creative minds as were the European languages which were forced upon them. Mastering this new genre is especially important at the present stage because the novel is a particularly explicit medium and a mine of information for those who seek to define the peculiarities of newly-emerging literatures, the trends and currents in the historical and cultural evolution of the countries concerned, and especially to study the formation of national self-awareness among the people and intelligentsia. The prerequisites for the emergence of a new art form are the radical changes in the life of the former Portuguese colonies, the ever broader development and stabilization of new social relations, the struggle with

[29] Rjauzova, *Roman v sovremennyx portugalojazyčnyx literaturax (problemy tipologii i vzaimodejstvija)* (The novel in contemporary Portuguese-language literatures: Problems of typology and influence, Moscow, 1980).

the surviving tribal system and patriarchal structure. Though the novel's relations with these phenomena are those of an intermediary, it has most adequately expressed the reality of Africa's Portuguese-language areas: because of its very nature it plays a major role in the formation of national literatures for more than any other genre the novel is appropriate for unhampered self-expression and capable of gratifying the liberated Africans' desire to show themselves to the world "full-length."

The book emphasizes that the specific nature of the Portuguese-language novel in Africa at times brings it close to the Portuguese novel of the twentieth century—primarily the neo-realistic novel. What this means first of all is faithfulness to the principle of reflecting reality, diversity in plot and composition, and a tendency toward syncretism, the merging of genres (prose and poetry, the novel-essay, sociological research). Nor is such similarity accidental: after all, in spite of a vividly expressed distinctiveness, there exists no special path of development for the so-called Third World, including African and Asian cultures, and the creation of the novel genre in the former Portuguese colonies was subject to the same laws and principles as in Europe.

Certain coincidences and correspondences on the literary plane can be accounted for genetically, that is, by the development of the phenomenon under consideration from similar sources. But the transference of forms from one culture to another results from historical contacts. Nonetheless, similarity in cultural and literary conditions may lead, independent of any contacts, to the emergence of analogous principles and devices in different literatures: the source of such resemblance is not imitation, but the fact that these literatures have passed through identical stages. It is for that reason that great attention is devoted to the general pre-conditions for foreign influence, its reception and its reinterpretation in such an aesthetically significant phenomenon as the novel form. The major purpose of the work under discussion is to define typological similarities and to disentangle reciprocal influences between the Portuguese novel and the novels of Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique, taking into account differences and concrete socio-historical conditions in the development of each literature.

Publication of Luso-African works in the Soviet Union in the 70s gained in intensity as a result of renewed Soviet contacts with the creative intelligentsia of the Portuguese-language countries of Africa, often represented by writers or other public figures and, after the proclamation of independence, government officials as well. Names that were new to the Soviet reader began to appear on bookcovers. In 1972 Progress Publishers issued a translation of *Chuva braba,* a novel by Cape Verde writer Manuel Lopes, and in 1977 two works of this outstanding novelist were translated into Ukrainian.[30] As before, poetry has been allocated a prominent position in publishing programmes. In 1973 there appeared in the 200-volume "Library of World Literature" series, founded by A. M. Gorky, a collection devoted entirely to the poetry of Africa.[31] In the Portuguese-language section such poets as Osvaldo Alcântara, Manuel Lopes, and José Craveirinha were presented for the first time. Three years later translations not only from

[30] Manuel Lopes, *Zliva. Obpaleni sxidnim vitrom* (Chuva braba. Os flagelados do vento leste, Kiev, 1977).

[31] *Poèzija Afriki* (The Poetry of Africa, Moscow, 1973).

Portuguese, but from Creole as well were published.[32] The latter collection reflects the peculiarities of the historical development of the former Portuguese colonies since 1974 —hence its title, *The Poetry of Struggle*. However, for the inhabitants of Angola, Mozambique, and the Cape Verde Islands struggle is a very broad concept, embracing not only the partisan war, but diverse forms of resistance to the colonizers' policy of assimilation, a striving for self-assertion, for the awakening of national self-awareness. That is why in this collection, which features the "fire and rhythms" of Portuguese-language African poetry, the range of themes is so broad, the artists' palettes so multihued, running from undisguised deliberate journalism to the soft, at times melancholy lyricism of intimate sketches and miniatures that attract the reader through their deep exploration of the soul's recesses and through the sincerity and intimacy of their tone.

The major criterion for selection was the social and aesthetic significance of the poems. The collection presents poets who seek their own original means of artistic expression, poets who are not satisfied with merely reproducing local colour, the specific geographical, ethnic and social character of their native region, who strive to place their local concerns in the wider context of African literatures, principally those in French or in English.

Many works of Africa's Portuguese-language literature appear in the *Eastern Almanac* which is published regularly by the Artistic Literature publishing house. Along with selections of Angolan poems, the *Almanac* has also published excerpts from works by the Cape Verde writer Luís Romano and the novella *As aventuras de Ngunga* by the Angolan Pepetela. And prospects are fairly bright. The second volume in the "Literature of Asia and Africa" series is already in production. Entitled *Stories and Novellas by Writers from Southern Africa* it gives prominence to prose writing from Angola and Mozambique: fiction by Luandino Vieira, Pepetela and Manuel Rui are featured along with stories by Luís Bernardo Honwana and Nuno Bermudes. The next, third, volume in the "Poetry of Africa" series is already being assembled at the Creative Literature publishing house; and along with verses by world-famous poets from Portuguese-speaking Africa, it contains works by authors not yet familiar to Soviet readers: Arlindo Barbeitos (Angola), Rui Nogar (Mozambique), and Caetano da Costa Alegre (São Tomé). Progress Publishers is going full-speed ahead with a collection by the outstanding Cape Verde writer Manuel Ferreira, which includes two of his novels—*Hora di bai* and *Voz de prisão*—as well as stories. The same publisher is planning to bring out a book of Angolan novellas that will include Luandino Vieira's *Nós, os do Makusulu*, A. Mendes de Carvalho's *Manana* as well as works by Manuel Rui, António Jacinto Rodrigues and others.

We should like to think that in the few years since the establishment of direct contacts with poets and prose writers from Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde and São

[32] *Poezija bor'by. Angola, Mozambik, ostrova Zelenogo Mysa, San-Tome in Prinsipi* (The Poetry of struggle. Angola, Mozambique, the Islands of Cape Verde, São Tomé and Principe, Moscow, 1976).

Tomé, the study and dissemination in the U.S.S.R. of the Portuguese-language literatures of Africa—a very young branch of our African studies, dating back at most two decades—has reached the same level as the study of African literatures in other European and in local languages.[33]

(Translated from the Russian by David A. Lowe)

[33] For further information, see Helena Riauzova, "Literaturas africanas de língua portuguesa na União Soviética", *África*, 2, 6 (1979), 76–80.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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BIRTH AND EARLY GROWTH OF A NEW BRANCH OF LEARNING

The phrase "African Literature" refers to three distinct fields of creative activity and scholarship, each of which is characterized by a bewildering diversity of its own. First came oral literature which, as Africa has a comparatively low level of literacy, is still popular and thrives, availing itself of the opportunities offered by modern audiovisual mass media. It exists in the hundreds of languages and dialects which are spoken on the black continent. It is a field for folklorists and linguists, and will not be discussed here. Nor should we be concerned with the abundant writing that has been produced in Ethiopic languages since the early centuries of our era, or with the literature generated by the spread of Islam in West and East Africa, whether in Arabic or in the vernacular languages. Neither is it our task to list the few works published on the modern literatures in African languages which were one of the literary consequences of contact with Europe.[2] The purpose of this bibliographical chapter is simply to delineate the main trends and identifiable phases in the reception and study of African literatures in European languages. The material has grown so abundantly in recent years that it will be wise to limit our enquiry to works that have appeared in book form.

The earliest of these is probably *De la littérature des nègres* (Paris, 1908), which the Abbé Henri Grégoire (1750–1831)[3] published in Paris, as part of his contribution to the rehabilitation of the black race. In his enlightened enthusiasm, the Abbé was determined to demonstrate the intellectual abilities of black men, usually former slaves, who had left written works—most of them it is true, in Latin and in English. The book was soon translated into German as *Über die Literatur der Neger, oder Untersuchungen über ihre Geistesfähigkeiten* (Tübingen, 1809). More than a century and a half was to elapse before a second book-length study appeared which devoted itself to the beginnings of African writing in European languages. This was Robert W. July's epoch-making *The Origins of Modern African Thought* (London, 1968), which focused not on the almost non-existent creative writing, but on the didactic and polemical works in English (and to a very

[1] This is an abridged, revised and updated version of an essay which was published under the same title in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 7, 1 (1980), 67–92.

[2] Apart from the above article, the reader will find fairly detailed bibliographical information on all this in my *Four African Literatures* (Berkeley, 1971) and *African Language Literatures* (Washington–London, 1981).

[3] See Antoinette Sekomo, *L'Abbé H. Grégoire (1750–1831)* Unpubl. diss. (Liège, 1977).

small extent in French) that were produced during the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, chiefly under the influence of the English-speaking black settlers established in Sierra Leone and their followers along the Guinea coast.

By that time, however, African imaginative writing in European languages had emerged and grown to significant proportions; it had gained recognition as a specific manifestation of the upheavals—cultural, educational and ideological—resulting from World War II; linked to Africa's independence, it had attracted growing critical attention, which contributed much to drawing the eyes of the world to this literature.

The publication of Senghor's first collection, *Chants d'ombre* (1945) did not cause much of a stir, but in 1948 his *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* did, largely because of Jean-Paul Sartre's prefatory essay, "Orphée noir," the first in-depth discussion of African writing by an important member of the Western intelligentsia. The significance of the birth of African literature in French was brought to the whole world's notice by the Conference of Black Writers and Artists held in Paris in 1956.[4] From then on, it was obvious to shrewder minds that here was a new area for critical scrutiny.

Inevitably, the kind of interest given to modern African literature during the last decade of colonialism, and even for some time afterwards, was primarily human and political: these writings presented a vivid image of Africa as seen through African eyes; at a time when political independence was in sight, they offered a unique means of enlarging our perception and understanding of the experiences, problems and tragedies of peoples that were about to take their fates into their own hands. In consequence, much of the critical reception accorded to African literature was at first mainly journalistic, a word which need not imply contempt.

But the scholarly approach, ponderous, élitist, painstaking and objective, took over with notable rapidity. Following such pioneers as Bakary Traoré, whose *Le Théâtre négro-africain* (1958) surveyed the beginnings of West African drama in French, and Joseph-Marie Jadot, whose *Les Ecrivains africains du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi* (1959) provided detailed information about what little writing had been done in what is now Zaïre, Lilyan Kesteloot presented at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, in 1960, her historic dissertation, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature,* which was printed in 1963 and went through its fifth edition in 1975.[5] Meanwhile, other studies had appeared in book form. While Thomas Melone's *De la négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine* and Ezekiel Mphahlele's *The African Image* combined scholarly care with the committed attitude which no African could possibly relinquish in those days when colonialism was still very much present (often in men's memories only, but sometimes, unfortunately, in reality), another work of 1962 was especially instrumental in popularizing the new African authors in the West. This was Gerald Moore's *Seven African Writers,* which contained discussions of two francophone poets, Senghor and David Diop; two francophone novelists, Camara Laye and Mongo Beti;

[4] The complete proceedings were published as a special issue of *Présence Africaine* (1956).

[5] This crucial period has now been thoroughly re-investigated with the help of a large amount of hitherto forgotten material by Martin Steins in his important Sorbonne dissertation, *Les antécédents et la genèse de la négritude senghorienne* (1981).

and three anglophone prose writers, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and Ezekiel Mphahlele. Lilyan Kesteloot was interested mainly in poetry and the concept of negritude; her approach was historical and sociological. Moore gave more attention to prose writers, and his bias was fundamentally a critical one. But, while in a way they thus complemented each other, they had one important thing in common: their international outlook. This was particularly obvious in the case of Moore, whose authors came from Senegal, Cameroon, Guinea, Nigeria and South Africa. But although Lilyan Kesteloot confined herself to writings in French, her authors represented both Africa (chiefly Senegal) and the West Indies. The year 1963 was chiefly marked by the publication of several studies in Portuguese on the literatures of Angola and the Cape Verde Islands. But the tendency to view the black world, or at any rate Black Africa, as a whole, spread further afield when the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow published *Literatura stran Afriki* (1964) under the editorship of F. M. Breskina; this first important Soviet work was followed by several wide-ranging collections of essays culminating in the two volumes edited by Irina D. Nikiforova, *Sovremennye literatury Afriki* (Moscow, 1973–1975).

Historical circumstances, the facts of a common struggle against white supremacy, bolstered by the political ideology of Panafricanism and the cultural ideology of negritude, thus fostered an international approach which seemed to enable African literary scholarship to eschew, at an early stage of its development, the pitfalls of the narrow nationalism that had plagued the development of European literary scholarship during the nineteenth century. This, it might be thought, should have been a cause for rejoicing and thanksgiving among comparatists. Indeed, as years went by, it appeared that this promising trend was steadily gaining ground. While few works of a monographic kind such as Norman Araujo's *Study of Cape Verdean literature* (1966) have appeared so far, most books concerned with African literature in European languages have been international in scope, dealing, for example, with all the literatures in one particular language. Instances are Gerald Moser's studies of Luso-African writing, or Robert Cornevin's misleadingly entitled *Le théâtre en Afrique noire et à Madagascar* (1970), whith deals solely with French-language writers as did Robert Pageard's *Littérature négro-africaine* (1966). Sometimes, too, scholarly works appeared which were concerned with the literary production of one large part of the continent, irrespective of the languages used: to this category belong Judith I. Gleason's *This Africa: Novels by West Africans in English and French* (1965), one of the first book-size discussions of African literature to have come from the United States, or Oladele Taiwo's *Introduction to West African literature* (1967). If the distinguishing feature of comparative literature is the transcending of national boundaries, then the major trend in early African literary scholarship seemed to be comparative.

The most radical view was that of Janheinz Jahn, who held that no balanced view of African writing could be formed unless vernacular works were taken into account as well as works in European languages. The foundation for this approach was laid in his

two bibliographies (1965–71).[6] His *Geschichte der neoafrikanischen Literatur* (1966) was a valiant but clearly premature attempt to offer a comparative historical account on the basis of fragmentary information.[7] For obvious reasons, Jahn had few followers in this particular field. One was the Hungarian scholar T. Keszthelyi, whose *Az afrikai irodalom kialakulása és fejlődése napjainkig* (Rise and growth of African literature to the present day, 1971), was the most comprehensive survey at the time, giving some attention to Portuguese and to vernacular writing. A considerably more ambitious endeavour was *Literatura černé Afriky,* which three Czech scholars Vladimír Klíma, Karel F. Růžička and Petr Zima, published in 1972. It was a promising sign that African-language writing received increasing attention in the course of the seventies.[8] Nevertheless, studies of the survey type have tended to concentrate on European languages and to treat vast multinational areas, or even the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. O. R. Dathorne's courageous and bulky *The Black Mind: A History of African Literature* (1974) will probably be the last one-man job of its kind, for the amount of writing in European languages is now so vast that it can be satisfactorily managed only by a team of scholars and not by any single man, however competent and industrious.

The early years of this infant discipline were thus characterized by a willingness to survey its field on a Panafrican, continental, or even all-black scale, disregarding possible local differences. These, it is true, might not be perceptible to the European student. They might also have been willingly ignored by the African student, who was all too conscious of the need for all-African solidarity and of the dangers presented by tribal fragmentation. Nevertheless, this prematurely comparative approach could not but fail to take into account the rich variety of African cultures, the diversified substratum from which, after all, African literature is bound to draw nourishment, however concerned it may be with the burning problems of the present day. Specialized anthropologists were aware of this diversity, but few of the early non-African students of African literature had any knowledge of traditional African cultures; and while the budding breed of African scholars were inevitably conscious of their specific roots in the culture of one particular part of the continent, they often chose not to utilize this knowledge, for the reasons indicated by Frantz Fanon in *Les damnés de la terre.*

The natural evolution of any new scientific discipline beyond the misty generaliza-

[6] Janheinz Jahn, *Die neoafrikanische Literatur. Gesamtbibliographie von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Düsseldorf, 1965) and Janheinz Jahn and Claus Peter Dressler, *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* (Nendeln, 1971). In the meantime the Hungarian scholar Pál Páricsy had published a complement to Jahn's first list: *A New Bibliography of African Literature* (Budapest, 1969). The latter of Jahn's books is still the basic bibliographical tool for anyone concerned with the study of African literature. It is highly desirable that it should be continued. Meanwhile, the bibliography of francophone creative writing has been updated in Thérèse Baratte *et al., Bibliographie des auteurs africains de langue française,* 4th edition (Paris, 1979). Students of Luso-African writing now have the *Bibliografia das literaturas de expressão portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1983) prepared jointly by Gerald Moser and Manuel Ferreira.

[7] Jahn's *Geschichte,* which appeared in English as *A History of Neo-African Literature* (London, 1968), was also published in French, under a less presumptuous title, *Manuel de littérature néo-africaine* (Paris, 1969).

[8] This has obviously been the case in African and other linguistic journals, where an impressive amount of work is being done on literary achievements in such languages as Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, and the Bantu languages of South Africa. But vernacular writing is also studied in such Western journals as *Research in African Literatures* and *Ba Shiru.* The 1971 special Black Africa issue of the *Review of National Literatures* contained a significant proportion of articles centring on African-language writing. And I. D. Nikiforova's inclusion of an essay on Amharic literature in 1975 is typical of Soviet practice in this respect.

tions of journalism or political pamphleteering combined with the achievement of independence jointly to initiate a decisive new phase in African literary scholarship, characterized by the fast growing volume of scrupulous works now for the first time devoted to individual titles and individual authors. When African Literature was graced with a heading of its own in the *MLA Annual Bibliography*—in 1966, partly as the result of a lengthy, impassioned correspondence between this writer and the then Association Bibliographer, Professor Paul A. Brown—fewer than seventy items were listed, many of them in fact dealing with oral literature and linguistics. Ten years later, the number had swollen to nearly eight hundred titles, the vast majority of which were truly about written literature. By 1977, serious writing about African literature had grown to such a volume that this chapter of the *MLA Bibliography* could be subdivided by countries and even by authors. The increasing predominance of close consideration of individual authors and works was a sign that the whole approach was itself becoming "decolonized." The significant rise in the quality as well as the quantity of contributions by African scholars testified to the validity of the training dispensed in the increasingly numerous universities of Black Africa, and also to the scholars' growing awareness of their social environment at a time—the late sixties—when creative artists were becoming more and more vocal in their criticism of the newly "established" societies. As the blurring effect of negritude and vestigial Panafricanism began to fade in the late sixties, a hitherto neglected factor began to impinge upon the consciousness of intellectuals in general and literary scholars in particular: the realization that Africa was not just one huge blob of undifferentiated blackness, but that each writer, each ethnic group, each country, each linguistic nexus of countries had its own specificity. Accordingly, closer attention began to be paid to more particular phenomena on three discrete levels: linguistic community, national unity, and authorial identity.

Not unnaturally, since francophone writing had been the first to occupy the foreground of the African literary scene, the earliest studies important enough to be issued in book form were devoted to Africa's creative writing in French. Following in the wake of Traoré, Kesteloot and Melone, an important symposium held in Dakar in March 1963 had its proceedings printed as *Actes du colloque sur la littérature africaine d'expression française* (Dakar, 1965), and Claude Wauthier produced *L'Afrique des Africains, inventaire de la négritude* (Paris, 1964), which has been revised and enlarged more than once. Likewise devoted to African literature in French, despite their unduly sweeping titles, were Edouard Eliet's *Panorama de la littérature négro-africaine* (1965), Louis-Vincent Thomas' *Les Idéologies négro-africaines d'aujourd'hui* (1965) and Robert Pageard's *Littérature négro-africaine* (1966). Even in the seventies, the titles of Robert Cornevin's *Le théâtre en Afrique noire et à Madagascar* (1970) and of Jacques Chevrier's *Littérature nègre* (1974) seemed to deny that African authors might decide to use a language other than French for their literary exertions. This strangely chauvinistic attitude was less glaring in Jacques Nantet's *Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française* (1972) and in Cornevin's *Littératures d'Afrique noire de langue française* (1976), which contain a wealth of valuable factual details, and, of course, in Dorothy S. Blair's *African Literature in French: A History of Creative Writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), the first serious attempt at a systematic

survey of the whole field, even though the author regrettably omitted Madagascar. Although Cornevin had devoted one 50-page chapter of his 1976 book to what he called "les littératures nationales," examining the literary output of each francophone country separately, this was simply a matter of convenient listing. In the late seventies it was still standard procedure for French and French-educated specialists to regard the whole of African francophone writing as a homogeneous entity, which was often taken to include the French West Indies. It is significant that the first book-length study of a single national literature was written in Czechoslovakia,[9] and that it dealt with Cameroon, which had a very unusual status in French Africa. As Zaïre was never part of the French empire, Zaïrian scholars often exhibit an intellectual independence and a sense of nationhood which informs many publications by Ngal, Mudimbe, Ngandu and others,[10] even though, as late as 1975, Iyay Kimoni's *Destin de la littérature négro-africaine, ou problématique d'une culture* (Kinshasa) revealed the scantest acquaintance, and second-hand at that, with non-French writing. Among the successor states, as yet only the Congo Republic exhibits the beginnings of an awareness that a nation's literature is intimately bound up with its collective identity.[11] Mention should be made, however, of Gérard Dago Lezou's dissertation, *La Création romanesque devant les transformations actuelles en Côte d'Ivoire* (Abidjan–Dakar, 1977).

Few francophone authors have been discussed in full-length monographs: the slender pamphlets, part essay, part anthology, published by Nathan as introductions to "La littérature africaine et malgache" do not claim to be more than study aids for secondary schools. Apart from Senghor, whose poetry and thought have understandably been the subject not only of much controversy, but also of serious scholarly investigation, only three writers have had their works discussed in substantial monographs: Birago Diop of Senegal,[12] Mongo Beti of Cameroon[13] and Camara Laye of Guinea.[14]

The scholarly study of anglophone literature followed a slightly different path. One reason was that francophone writing made its appearance earlier, which accounts for the ordering of Gerald Moore's *Seven African Writers* and Judith I. Gleason's *This Africa* as well as for the extraordinary confusion of Anne Tibble's *African-English Literature* (London, 1965). A second reason is that by the time anglophone writing in Africa had reached sufficient proportions to merit scholarly consideration, there already

[9] Jarmila Ortová, *Etude sur le roman au Cameroun* (Prague, 1971); this was followed by Jacques Rial's brief introduction, *Littérature camerounaise de langue française* (Lausanne, 1972). Cameroon was not a French colony but a mandate territory.

[10] The basic books here are Mukala Kadima-Nzuji, *Bibliographie littéraire de la République du Zaïre* (Lubumbashi, 1973) and *La littérature zaïroise de langue française (1945–1965)* (Paris, 1984).

[11] Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou, "La Littérature congolaise d'expression française: bilan et perspective," *Comptes rendus trimestriels des séances de l'Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer*, 34 (1974), 793–809, but see especially Roger Chemain and Arlette Chemain-Degrange, *Panorama critique de la littérature congolaise contemporaine* (Paris, 1979). The student of African literature, however, will be able to find some useful information in various national biographical dictionaries, like *Dictionnaire bio-bibliographique du Dahomey;* the first volume of which was printed in Porto Novo in 1969; see also Richard Bonneau, *Ecrivains, cinéastes et artistes ivoiriens. Aperçu bio-bibliographique* (Dakar-Abidjan, 1973); Thérèse Baratte–Eno Belinga, *Ecrivains, cinéastes et artistes camerounais* (Yaoundé, 1978).

[12] Mohamadou Kane, *Les Contes d'Amadou Coumba: Du conte traditionnel au conte moderne d'expression française* (Dakar, 1968), and *Birago Diop* (Paris, 1971).

[13] Thomas Melone, *Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin* (Paris, 1971).

[14] Adele King, *Camara Laye* (London, 1980).

existed an enormous body of creative writing in English from outside the British Isles: therefore the new area for research was naturally allocated from the start to the general discipline known as "Commonwealth studies." African literary studies in Britain thus began under the inspiration of a deep-seated belief that the English language did preserve something of the former unity of the British Commonwealth and Empire: much valuable work on anglophone African writing was published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* launched at the University of Leeds in 1965,[15] and, as Jahn was to put it in 1971, "some of the most searching and relevant analysis of African literature in English that we have had so far"[16] is contained in Gerald Moore's *The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World* (1969). From a comparatist's viewpoint, one of the finest fruits of the "Commonwealth approach" is undoubtedly Molly Mahood's undeservedly neglected *The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels* (London, 1977). Two of these novels—Forster's *A Passage to India* and Greene's *The Comedians*—are thoroughly English, and one—Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—an English hybrid, while the other three come respectively from Nigeria (Achebe), India (Narayan) and Trinidad (Naipaul). But Commonwealth writing is so abundant and varied that its study is in itself an exercise in comparative literature.[17]

The same is true of another "set" to which the nascent anglophone literature of Africa might have been assigned: the field of "Black Studies", which could conceivably cover the three main areas of black writing, Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. If this did not happen, it was probably because, as early as the Paris Conference of 1956, the ideology of negritude—at the time, we must remember, the only definition of African identity to have gained an international hearing—sounded reactionary and repulsive to American blacks such as Richard Wright. Despite Jahn's foredoomed attempts to enrol Africa, the Caribbean and black America under the banner of negritude, the trend came to nothing; hence the paucity of scholarly studies concerning, for example, the influence of Negro-American Christianity on the growth of African literature, or the similarities and dissimilarities between the black man's experiences in Africa and in the United States as reflected in literature.[18]

Given the unmanageable complexity of Commonwealth studies on the one hand and the relative indifference of American blacks to African literature on the other, the need to focus on Africa alone was soon felt. It led to the launching of two periodicals:

[15] It should be remembered, however, that the first Institute of Commonwealth Literature was founded in 1958 at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, by Greta Horst, whose work has since been taken over by Anna Rutherford.

[16] Janheinz Jahn, "Modern African Literature: Bibliographical Spectrum," *Review of National Literatures*, 2, 2 (1971), 239.

[17] For further discussion of the concept of Commonwealth literature, see Albert Gérard, "On the Definition of English Literature," *Southern Review* (Australia), 8 (1978).

[18] On the basis of the idea elaborated in his *Muntu* (1958), 219–227, Jahn included some consideration of black American writing both in the first version of his *Bibliography* (this was dropped in the revised version) and in several chapters of his *Geschichte*. Prior to these, *Muntu* had influenced one of the few Spanish scholars to show an interest in African literature: Fernando Moran, whose *Nación y alienación en la literatura negroafricana* (Madrid, 1964), contains a not very convincing chapter entitled "La africanidad del negro norteamericano." The influence of *Muntu* was also clearly at work in Willfried Feuser's Portuguese book, *Aspectos da literatura do mundo negro* (Bahia, 1969). So far, the most cogent comparative discussion of two black authors, one African, the other American, remains Alain Ricard's *Théâtre et nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones* (Paris, 1972).

in 1968, the modestly mimeographed *Bulletin of the Association for African Literature* which had been issued in Freetown gave birth to a far more ambitious and successful venture, *African Literature Today*; and 1970 saw the publication of *Research in African Literatures*, whose exceptional quality makes it the closest in character to the journals of established international repute in other areas of world literature.

In contrast to what has been done with French and Portuguese literatures, there is as yet no general survey of all the English writing that has been produced in Africa. The widest approach to have been attempted so far is regional, not continental and one must confess that it has not been as systematic as it might have been. Following the example of Judith Gleason, Oladele Taiwo's school handbook, *An Introduction to West African Literature* (London, 1967), treated both French and English writing. But the decline of the francophone output in the sixties combined with the amazingly swift growth of Nigerian literature, induced Adrian A. Roscoe to consider only English-speaking countries in his (for that reason mistakenly subtitled) *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature* (Cambridge, 1971).

Likewise, the development of Kenyan literature in English in the late sixties combined with a vestigial sense of inter-territorial unity inherited from the colonial period to stimulate scholarly interest in East African writing as such; this concentrated on Kenya and pre-Amin Uganda, since Tanzania's literary production in English is negligible. The regional orientation came to the fore during a seminar held in Nairobi in 1965, the proceedings of which appeared as *East Africa's Cultural Heritage* (Nairobi, 1966); it was confirmed by *Writers in East Africa*, which Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder edited in 1974, and by Roscoe's second study, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South* (Cambridge, 1977).

The regional approach was also prominent in the works of literary scholarship that began to arrive from East African presses in the seventies. These were often collections of previously published essays. When compared with similar works from West or South Africa, they stand out for their eclecticism, their ability and readiness to consider not only other African literatures, but also to discuss European works, whether African-oriented or not. Peter Nazareth's *Literature and Society in Modern Africa* (Nairobi, 1972), later re-issued as *An African View of Literature* (Evanston, Ill., 1974), can be said to have set the tone, ranging as it does from East African writers (Carlin, Oculi, Ngugi, Rubadiri, Mangua) to authors from Britain (Tressell), the Caribbean (Naipaul) and even India (Narayan), with which Nazareth, being of Goan origin, has a special relationship. It is what the Nigerian critic Ime Ikiddeh dubbed "the vast expanse of his literary universe" which enables Nazareth to view East African writing in a wider context in his *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility* (Nairobi, 1978), the topics of which extend from Graham Greene to García Marquez. The same eclecticism prompted Chris Wanjala in his editing of *Standpoints in African Literature* (Nairobi, 1973), which includes essays on East, West and South Africa, and even on black Americans. His next work, *The Season of Harvest: A Literary Discussion* (Nairobi, 1978), centres however on East African writing and contains a timely warning against the dangers of a popular literature dominated by violence and sex, and of an élite literature cut from the socio-

economic realities of the local situation. By the end of the decade, a promising new critic had emerged: Micere Githae-Mugo, who is also a gifted creative writer. The title and subtitle of her first scholarly book, *Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley, Ngugi wa Thiongo* (Nairobi, 1978), reveal her significant determination not to ignore white writers dealing with Africa, but to discuss them seriously, albeit of course critically. The rich diversity of modern East African writing was brought out in Ulla Schild (ed.), *The East African Experience: Essays on English and Swahili Literature* (Berlin, 1980), which laid exceptional emphasis on contemporary rather than classical Swahili writing.

Although Roscoe had found it convenient to lump together Eastern and Southern Africa in his 1977 book, the latter area, of course, represents an entirely different case from the West and the East. Although it once consisted of only two countries, the Union of South Africa and the territorial conglomerate that was administered as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the only common historical feature has been the exceptional resilience of white power in certain parts: whereas the Federation burst into pieces in 1964, when Zambia and Malawi became independent, Zimbabwe did not gain majority rule until 1980 and the Republic of South Africa is still governed in colonial style under the control of a racial minority. Furthermore, no English creative writing came from either Malawi or Zambia before independence and what little was produced in (Southern) Rhodesia until 1965 was entirely due to white writers, usually of meager talent, despite the signal exception of Doris Lessing. In consequence, it is not surprising that noone should have attempted to provide a survey of the anglophone literature of Southern Africa. Here, indeed, the regional and the national approaches tend to merge as exemplified in Stephen Gray's misleadingly entitled—though in all other respects excellent—*Southern African Literature* (Cape Town, 1979): Doris Lessing is barely mentioned and other Rhodesian writers are completely absent, so that the book in fact deals with the South African experience alone as a theme in South African and world literatures.[19]

The most remarkable feature of literary scholarship in South Africa is undoubtedly the extraordinary activity displayed by Afrikaner scholars in the study of Afrikaans writing,[20] presumably because *die Tale* (the language) has always been regarded as the cultural emblem and privileged medium of the Afrikaners' group identity and a powerful instrument of cultural cohesion and social self-assertion. This is in stark contrast with the paucity of substantial studies of South African literature in English. It would seem that the creative works produced in English by white people—a linguistic minority within a racial minority—have been considered by both local writers and scholars as just a tiny tributary of the mighty stream of English literature: the first book-length account, Manfred Nathan's *South African Literature*, appeared in Cape Town in 1925; this had no successor until J. P. L. Snyman's *The South African Novel in English, 1880–1930* (Potchefstroom, 1952). At the time such works could only deal with English writing by

[19] For a more detailed consideration, see my review in *English in Africa*, 6, 1 (1979), 89–91.

[20] For bibliographical information about Afrikaans literature, the reader is referred to R. Musiker, *South African Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town, 1979).

whites. Exceptional credit is therefore due to the black scholar Ezekiel Mphahlele for making the first, and so far only, attempt to bring together the various ethnic and linguistic trends that go to make up a national South African literature. His book *The African Image* (London, 1962, enlarged ed., 1974) was followed by Vladimír Klíma's *South African Prose Writing in English* (Prague, 1971), which discussed both white and non-white novelists. *Aspects of South African Literature,* edited by Christopher Heywood (London, 1976), followed this laudable example, adding for good measure an essay on oral tradition and another on Thomas Mofolo, who, however, was no citizen of the then "Union" of South Africa but of the then protectorate of Basutoland (now Lesotho). Such works could only be printed outside South Africa, but the publication of Nadine Gordimer's *The Black Interpreters* (Johannesburg, 1963), and of Stephen Gray's already mentioned book, which has a chapter on "The Emergence of Black English", as well as the many essays by Tim Couzens on the early history of black writing in the country, and the special R.R.R. Dhlomo issue of *English in Africa* (1975), suggest that the spirit of apartheid can be flouted more or less openly in the rarefied atmosphere of literary criticism. They also show that the vitality and originality and the international reputation of Black South African writing in English have strongly encouraged a South African sense of identity which no longer acknowledges the alleged supremacy of English literature. It would be ill-advised, however, to lose sight of the fact that if the phrase "national literature" has any meaning, the national literature of South Africa does not consist solely of its English writing, or even of English and Afrikaans works, but that the vast production in several vernacular languages should also be taken into consideration.[21]

It is a gratifying sign of vitality and intellectual determination that just a few months after Zimbabwe had at last obtained genuine independence, George P. Kahari, already known for his invaluable discussions of Shona writers, published *The Search for Zimbabwean Identity: An Introduction to the Black Zimbabwean Novel* (Gwelo, 1980). He discusses novels which are available, and most of which were written, in English, but his analysis of Mutswairo's *Feso,* the very first novel in the country, is wisely based on the Shona original (1957) which, he says, bears little resemblance to the English version published in 1974.

The concept of a national approach to the study of African literatures was developed earlier in the discussion of anglophone than in that of francophone writing. It was introduced by East European scholars, perhaps because they were more sensitive to the nationalistic elements in the new states than to Panafricanism (which is of Anglo-Saxon origin) or to negritude (which was born in Paris). The originator was V. N. Vavilov whose discussion of Ghanaian literature appeared in *Literatura stran Afriki* in 1964. Because of the decline in the literary productivity of Ghana under the Nkrumah regime, Nigeria became the recognized leader in the course of the sixties. Already in 1969, Vladimír Klíma, addressing the Czechoslovak Society for Eastern Studies, had

[21] For a theoretical discussion of this point, see Albert Gérard, "New Frontier for Comparative Literature: Africa," *Komparatistische Hefte,* 1, 2 (1980), 8–13. This essay was also printed in *English in Africa,* 6, 2 (1979), 33–38, in *Comparison,* No. 11 (1980), 33–44 and in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature,* No. 30 (1981), 57–61.

pointed out that the two main literary centres of Africa at the time were Nigeria and South Africa.[22] Margaret Laurence's *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists, 1952–1966* (London, 1968) was soon followed by Klíma's *Modern Nigerian Novels* (Prague, 1969). The year 1970 saw the appearance of Irina Nikiforova's important theoretical discussion of national characteristics in West African writing, *O nacional'noj specifike zapadnoafrikanskix literatur* and, during the following years, Vavilov contributed several studies of Nigerian literature to collections of essays which Nikiforova edited in 1973 and 1975. An important step forward in the reconsideration of the concept of African national literature was meanwhile made by the publication of *Introduction to Nigerian Literature,* edited by Bruce King (Lagos, 1971), which also included essays on vernacular writing in Yoruba, Hausa and other local languages. This example was followed in *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures,* edited by Bernth Lindfors (Washington, 1976): the plural in the title testified to a welcome departure from the usual English-centredness and to the recognition that Nigeria's national literature is made up of several *Einzelliteraturen* in African languages as well as in English.[23] Another significant development of the early seventies was the amount of attention given to the "lowbrow" writing known as "Onitsha market literature" in Emmanuel Obiechina's *Literature for the Masses: An Analytical Study of Popular Pamphleteering in Nigeria* (Enugu, 1971),[24] while in Alain Ricard's *Livre et communication au Nigéria* (Paris, 1975) this popular literature was viewed in relation both to mass-communication theory and to conventional literary art.

The other national literatures of English-speaking Africa have not given rise to more than a few articles by Vavilov and others,[25] who have dealt, usually with tantalizing brevity, with such countries as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Malawi. These essays are mainly concerned with anglophone writing and overlook the diversity and complexity of the literature of Africa's new states.

With its enormous literary output, its many universities, its increasingly well-trained scholars, and its many (though often irregularly published or ephemeral) literary journals, Nigeria has taken an obvious lead, not only in creative writing, but also in the field of literary studies. This is confirmed, if confirmation be needed, by the number of book-length monographs that have been published about individual Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe,[26] Wole Soyinka,[27] Amos Tutuola,[28] Christopher Okigbo[29] and Cyprian Ekwensi.[30]

[22] In *Inter-relations in Asia and in Africa* (Prague, 1970), pp. 168–175.

[23] This point is elaborated in Albert Gérard, "Towards a History of South African Literature," in *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World,* ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek (Brussels, 1975), pp. 79–88.

[24] A revised and enlarged edition was later published as *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (London, 1973).

[25] Vavilov's essays are included in the two volumes of *Sovremennye literatury Afriki,* ed. Irina D. Nikiforova (Moscow, 1973–1975). On the history of Sierra Leone writing, see also Eustace Palmer, "The Development of Sierra Leone Writing," in *A Celebration of Black and African Writing,* ed. Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan (Zaria, Nigeria, 1975), pp. 245–257, and Albert Gérard. "Contribuição de Serra Leoa na literatura de lingua inglesa de Africa Ocidental," *Africa* (Lisbon), 1, 1 (1978), 89–94; the French original of this essay appeared in *Etudes Anglaises,* No. 75 (1979), 345–357.

[26] Arthur Ravenscroft, *Chinua Achebe* (Harlow: Longmans, Green, 1969). G. Douglas Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational, 1969); David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe* (New York: Twayne, 1970); Thomas Melone, *Chinua Achebe et la tragédie de l'histoire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973);

Since World War II, some detailed critical and biographical attention, both local and international, had of course been given to the white writers of Southern Africa: not only to the founding mother of this literature, Olive Schreiner,[31] or to those who, like William Plomer or Roy Campbell,[32] had left their country to become, as it were, honorary United Kingdom writers, but also to many others from Thomas Pringle,[33] Pauline Smith,[34] Sarah Gertrude Millin[35] and even Francis Slater[36] to Alan Paton,[37] Dan Jacobson,[38] H. C. Bosman,[39] Nadine Gordimer,[40] and even Rhodesians like A. S. Cripps[41] and Doris Lessing.[42] The only non-white authors to receive this sort of treatment have been Peter Abrahams,[43] Ezekiel Mphahlele[44] and, curiously, Oswald Mtshali,[45] but 1978 saw the publication of S. P. Kartuzov's Russian book on Alex La Guma.

Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, ed. C. L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978). An extremely promising phenomenon connected with Chinua Achebe and, to a lesser extent, Wole Soyinka and one or two other African writers, is the publication by local presses of study guides focusing on some of their works: though such little books seldom have any original value, it cannot be doubted that they lay the groundwork for serious literary research and at any rate, for more intelligent reading, among the students for whom they are designed.

[27] Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans, 1971; rev. ed. 1978); Alain Ricard, *Théâtre et nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972); Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973) published in New York by Twayne as *Wole Soyinka;* Oyin Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition: A Study of the Plays of Wole Soyinka* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975). Two other books on this writer deserve special mention, one in German, Rita Böttcher-Wöbcke, *Komik; Ironie und Satire im dramatischen Werk von Wole Soyinka* (Hamburg: Buske, 1976); the other in Russian, V. A. Bejlis, *Vole Šojinka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

[28] Harold R. Collins, *Amos Tutuola* (New York: Twayne, 1969); *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975); Michèle Dussutour-Hammer, *Amos Tutuola: Tradition orale et écriture du conte* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976).

[29] Sunday O. Anozie, *Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric* (London: Evans, 1972).

[30] Ernest Emenyonu, *Cyprian Ekwensi* (London: Evans, 1974).

[31] Vera Buchanan-Gould: *Not without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner* (London: Hutchinson, [1948?]); D. L. Hobman, *Olive Schreiner: Her Friends and Times* (London: Watts, 1955); Marion V. Friedmann, *Olive Schreiner: A Study in Latent Meanings* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1955); *Until the Heart Changes: A Garland for Olive Schreiner*, ed. Zelda Friedlander (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1967); Ridley Beeton, *Olive Schreiner: A Short Guide to her Writings* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1974).

[32] David Wright, *Roy Campbell* (London: Longmans, 1961); Rowland Smith, *Lyric and Polemic: The Literary Personality of Roy Campbell* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1972); John Povey, *Roy Campbell* (Boston: Twayne, 1977).

[33] John R. Doyle, Jr., *Thomas Pringle* (New York: Twayne, 1972).

[34] Geoffrey Haresnape, *Pauline Smith* (New York: Twayne, 1969).

[35] J. P. L. Snyman, *The Works of Sarah Gertrude Millin* (Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1955).

[36] John R. Doyle, Jr., *Francis Carey Slater* (New York: Twayne, 1971).

[37] Edward Callan, *Alan Paton* (New York: Twayne, 1968); see also *Paton's* Cry the Beloved Country: *The Novel, The Critics, The Setting*, ed. Sheridan Baker (New York: Scribner's, 1968).

[38] Myra Yudelman (comp.), *Dan Jacobson: A Bibliography* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1967).

[39] Shora G. DeSaxe, *Herman Charles Bosman: A Bibliography* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1971); B. Sachs, *Herman Bosman as I Knew Him* (Johannesburg: Dia Press, 1971).

[40] Robert F. Haugh, *Nadine Gordimer* (New York: Twayne, 1974); Michael Wade, *Nadine Gordimer* (London: Evans, 1979).

[41] John Robert Doyle, *Arthur Shearly Cripps* (Boston: Twayne, 1975).

[42] Paul Schlueter, *The Novels of Doris Lessing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973); Michael Thorpe, *Doris Lessing* (Harlow: Longman, 1973); Selma R. Burkom, *Doris Lessing: A Checklist of Primary and Secondary Sources* (Troy, N. Y.: Whitston, 1973); *Doris Lessing: Critical Studies*, ed. L. S. Dembo and Annis Pratt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974); Michael Thorpe, *Doris Lessing's Africa* (London: Evans, 1978).

[43] Michael Wade, *Peter Abrahams* (London: Evans, 1972).

[44] Ursula A. Barnett, *Ezekiel Mphahlele* (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

[45] Gilliam Goldstein (comp.), *Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali, South African Poet: An Annotated Bibliography* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1974).

Despite George Heron 's essay on Uganda's leading poet, *The Poetry of Okot p'Bitek* (London, 1976), East Africa sadly lagged behind in this matter of monographic study until the late seventies, when two books dealing with Kenya's most prominent writer appeared in London: Clifford B. Robson's *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (1979) and G. D. Killam's *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi* (1980). It is certainly of good omen that by the early eighties, a number of study guides to single works by African and especially East African, authors had been published not only in Nairobi, but also in India.

The study of lusophone writing in Africa followed yet another course, mainly because Portuguese is, despite the importance of Brazil, a minor language, far less widely spoken and understood than English or even French. Knowledge of the literature itself was confined to the Portuguese world and to the limited number of foreign readers who had learned the language. This unfair but statistically unavoidable situation was regretted by many: Luso-African writing which had been, as Gerald Moser proclaimed, "the first written," was also "the last discovered";[46] while it belongs to "les grandes absentes"[47] in the words of Alfredo Margarido, Manuel Ferreira called it "uma literatura ignorada."[48] In fact, it did not begin to receive serious critical attention until the mid-sixties, that is, a few years after Salazar's censorship had practically silenced it.

In Portugal itself, the literatures of Africa were largely viewed as part of the literary output of what was called the *ultramar português;* an outlook exemplified in the verbose essays of Amândio César's two-volume *Paragrafos de literatura ultramarina* (Lisbon: Sociedade de Expansão Cultural, 1967 and 1971). The same approach, rather similar to the approach to the Commonwealth in the English-speaking world, prevailed in César's *Elementos para uma bibliografia da literatura e cultura portuguesa ultramarina contemporânea* (Lisbon: Agência do Ultramar, 1968).

The case for viewing the lusophone literature of Africa as a separate, self-contained whole owing its cultural identity to unique but definable social and economic conditions was first made by Alfredo Margarido in 1962 in his brilliant essay in French, "Incidences socio-économiques sur la poésie noire d'expression portugaise."[49] A narrower national outlook was, however, introduced by Carlos Ervedosa in *A literatura Angolana: Resenha historica* (Lisbon: Casa dos Estudantes do Império, 1963)[50] and especially in *A Study of Cape Verdean Literature* (Boston: Boston College, 1966), a model of historical exposition by an American scholar of Cape Verdean origin, Norman Araujo. This preoccupation with local writing was further demonstrated in Mário António's study of Cordeiro da Mata, an Angolan writer of the late nineteenth century, and in the literary

[46] Gerald Moser, "African Literature in Portuguese: The First Written, the Last Discovered," *African Forum,* 2, 4 (1967), 78–96.

[47] Alfredo Margarido, "Les grandes absentes: les littératures africaines d'expression portugaise," *Afrique Littéraire et Artistique,* No. 50 (1978), 82–88.

[48] Manuel Ferreira, "A literatura africana de expressão portuguesa: uma literatura ignorada," *Revista de la Universidad Complutense,* 25, No. 103, (1976), 231–254.

[49] *Diogène,* 37 (1962), 53–80.

[50] A revised and enlarged version has since been published as *Roteiro da Literatura angolana* (Luanda: Sociedade Cultural de Angola, 1975).

essays contained in his book on Luanda.[51] It also appeared, with special emphasis on the Cape Verde Islands, in a small but significant pamphlet by Onésimo Silveira[52] and in Manuel Ferreira's far more ambitious book on the cultural significance of what had been known since the 1930s as *caboverdeanidade*.[53]

Throughout the sixties, however, the preservation of the colonial system in Africa's Portuguese "provinces" and its revolutionary potentialities led to their receiving more attention from the Soviet Union than from the Western world. Already during the first few years of the decade, far more Luso-African literature and analytical, critical or historical writing on the subject were available in Russian than in English, let alone in French. In 1964, *Literatura stran Afriki* contained a 36-page essay by L. V. Nekrasova on the literatures of Angola and Mozambique, which were further discussed in another, shorter paper dealing with the "Main Ideological Trends in the Literature of Angola and Mozambique," in *Aktual'nye problemy izučenija literatur Afriki*, edited by I. D. Nikoforova (Moscow: Nauka, 1969). In the early seventies, Elena Rjauzova became the most prominent Soviet specialist on Luso-African writing, with many scholarly papers leading up to her *Portugalo-jazyčnye literatur Afriki* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).

In fact, this book was the very first attempt at a systematic survey of all the imaginative writing produced in Portuguese in Africa, and it is interesting to note that, in the field of Portuguese studies, the "continental" approach which it illustrates has remained predominant ever since. Earlier local scholars, few as they were, were chiefly preoccupied with the local output; even the well-known French anthropologist René Bastide had produced a brief monograph on a white Angolan writer;[54] but most of the research of the seventies was done along continental, international lines. In spite of Mário de Andrade's efforts in the late sixties,[55] British and French scholars seem to have remained impervious to the interests and problems of Luso-African writing. In the English language, the movement came chiefly from the United States where it was pioneered by Gerald Moser, whose unassumingly entitled *Essays in Portuguese-African Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1969) brought together a number of essays he had published in various journals since 1962, while *A Tentative Portuguese-African Bibliography* (ibid., 1970) laid the foundation on which Moser and Manuel Ferreira were to build their *Bibliografia das literaturas africana de expressão portuguesa* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1983). During the years that followed the breakdown of the Portuguese empire in 1974, two important works appeared, which covered the same field as Elena Rjauzova's book of 1972: Russell G. Hamilton's *Voices from an Empire: A History of Afro-Portuguese Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), and Manuel Ferreira's two-volume *Literaturas africanas de*

[51] Mário António, *A sociedade angolana do fim do século XIX e um seu escritor* (Luanda, Angola: Nós, 1961) and *Luanda, "ilha" crioula* (Lisbon: Agência-Geral do Ultramar, 1968).

[52] Onésimo Silveira, *Consciencialização na literatura caboverdiana* (Lisbon: Casa dos Estudantes do Império, 1963).

[53] Manuel Ferreira, *A aventura crioula, ou Cabo Verde, uma sintese étnica e cultural* (Lisbon: Ulisseia, 1976); an enlarged edition was issued in 1973 by Platano Editora.

[54] Roger Bastide, *L'Afrique dans l'œuvre de Castro Soromenho* (Paris: Oswald, 1960).

[55] See his essay "La poésie africaine d'expression portugaise: évolution et tendances actuelles," *Présence Africaine*, 65 (1968), 51–68, and the French translation of his internationally renowned anthology, *La poésie africaine d'expression portugaise* (Paris: Oswald, 1969).

expressão portuguesa (Lisbon: Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa, 1977). All three surveys followed the same pattern, as they were divided according to geo-political criteria and examined in turn the literatures of Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé e Principe and Guinea-Bissau (though not necessarily in that order). It may thus be noted that until the late seventies, Africa's lusophone writing was chiefly studied in compliance with the linguistic criterion—as was francophone writing—while at the same time scholars continued to pay closer attention to national divisions than was the case with any other language. This is probably due to the fact that the Portuguese empire in Africa never formed a geographical unity, so that each of its components preserved its own identity within the common framework of a Portuguese-language culture.

As each state of the former Portuguese empire is producing a rapidly increasing amount of imaginative writing,—conveniently chronicled in the Lisbon quarterly *África,* founded in 1978 by Manuel Ferreira—there is some likelihood that the "national" approach will become more and more prominent, while scholarship on the subject will no doubt grow in quantity and diversity. African lusophone studies received a powerful boost when the African Literature Association's annual conference of 1977 awarded more time than ever before to papers dealing with these literatures. Significantly, it was also in the late seventies that a new generation of *lusofilos* emerged in the United States, with the publication of Donald Burness' *Fire: Six Writers from Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1977). Naturally, scholarly interest also increased within Portugal and Brazil with special attention to Angola, as evinced in Salvato Trigo's *Introdução à literatura angolana de expressão portuguesa* (Porto: Brasília Editora, 1977) and *A poética de "geração da Mensagem"* (ibid., 1978). Although many brief essays were devoted to Agostinho Neto, the white novelist Castro Soromenho had more than his share of attention. The *Contribuição a uma bio-bibliografia sobre Fernando Monteiro de Castro Soromenho* compiled by Fernando Augusto Albuquerque Mourão and others (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Africanos, 1977) was a preparation for the same scholar's *A Sociedade angolana através da literatura* (São Paulo: Editora Atica, 1978), which is almost entirely devoted to Soromenho. The usual continent-wide outlook characterized Alfredo Margarido's collection, *Estudos sobre literaturas das nações africanas de lingua portuguesa* (Lisbon: A Regra do Jogo, 1980).

After the sixties—the period of the founding fathers (and mothers)—the growth of literary African scholarship was thus characterized by the publication of works surveying a whole language area, a region within a definite language area or, in a few cases, a single country. It was also characterized by an increasing number of monographs devoted to some of the more important writers. Between these two extremes, critical work on African literature mostly took the form of collections of essays, each of which expatiates on one writer or one work. It would be idle to attempt the listing and categorizing of all or even a statistically significant proportion of those works, the majority of which are conveniently mentioned in Bernth Lindfors's exhaustive and indispensable bibliography, *Black African Literature in English: A Guide to Information Sources* (Detroit: Gale, 1979). Some good recent examples, which followed closely on

the heels of Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro's compilation *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969), are the volumes edited by Edgar Wright,[56] Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan;[57] and Rowland Smith.[58] Miscellaneous essays are often collected in the proceedings of the many conferences that have been held since the first meetings focusing on African writing were held at Kampala,[59] Dakar and Freetown[60] in the early sixties. The miscellaneous, unsystematic, disconnected character of such publications, equally evidenced in many of the collective works issued in Russian in the U.S.S.R., is unfortunately also present in a number of volumes produced by single scholars, beginning with Gerald Moore's *Seven African Writers* (1962). This mere juxtaposition of often (though not always) previously published articles and independently written essays is a frequent procedure exemplified from an early date in collections of essays by Davidson Nicol from Sierra Leone,[61] and Lewis Nkosi from South Africa;[62] it is still the basic method underlying much of the critical output of the seventies as is evident from a consideration of Charles R. Larson's *The Emergence of African Fiction* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), Eustace Palmer's *Introduction to the African Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1972), and Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1973). To the same category belong the increasingly numerous special issues devoted to Africa by learned journals not otherwise specializing in African literature.[63]

Although the majority of such publications are in English and in Russian, collections of miscellaneous essays have also been printed in French. Two notable examples from Cameroon are *Mélanges Africains,* edited by Thomas Melone (Yaoundé: Editions pédagogiques [1973]) and the proceedings of a bilingual French–English symposium held at Yaoundé in 1973, *Le critique africain et son peuple comme producteur de civilisation*

[56] *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973. repr. 1978): apart from two essays of a general nature, the book contains separate discussions of Soyinka and Ekwensi from Nigeria, Ngugi from Kenya, and Rabéarivelo from Madagascar.

[57] *A Celebration of Black and African Writing* (Zaria and Ibadan: Ahmadu Bello and Oxford University Presses, 1975). Half the contributions are concerned with black authors writing in French or English in the United States and the West Indies. The editors' catholicity is further illustrated by a very informative historical essay on "Early South African Black Writing" and by a study of the Mozambican writer Luis Honwana; the other papers deal with four francophone and five anglophone African writers.

[58] *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature* (London: Longman, 1976). Smith's book is a serious and welcome attempt at diversification: most of the contributions are thematic, and the volume includes one essay by Isaac Yetiv on the North African novel in French and another by Daniel P. Kunene on the aesthetics of Sesotho prose.

[59] See *Conference of African Writers of English Expression, Makerere College, Kampala, Uganda,* ed. Ezekiel Mphahlele (Kampala: Makerere College, [1962]).

[60] These were two seminars on "African Literature and the University Curriculum" held at the University of Dakar and at Fourah Bay College in March and April 1963. Some of the proceedings of both meetings were published in Gerald Moore (ed.), *African Literature and the Universities* (Ibadan: University Press, 1965), while the complete proceedings of the Senegal conference were issued as *Actes du Colloque sur la littérature africaine d'expression française* (Dakar: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines, 1965).

[61] *Africa: A Subjective View* (London: Longman, 1964).

[62] *Home and Exile* (London: Longman, 1965) and *The Transplanted Heart: Essays on South Africa* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope, 1975).

[63] Notable examples are *Literary Review,* 11, 4 (1968); *Books Abroad,* 44, 3 (1970); *Review of National Literatures,* 2, 2 (1971); *L'Esprit Créateur,* 10, 3 (1970), and 12, 4 (1972); the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1975); *World Literature Written in English,* 1 (1977); *ARIEL,* 12, 3 (1981).

(Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977). A special issue of the *Revue de Littérature Comparée* was devoted to African literature in 1974, and the present writer must plead guilty to his *Etudes de littérature africaine francophone* (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1977). Three years after the Portuguese revolution, Jacinto de Prado Coelho produced a special issue of *Colóquio/Letras* (No. 39, September 1977) entirely devoted to Luso-African writing. Similar collections were produced in countries which had had no, or hardly any, colonial dealings with Africa. In Sweden, for example, Pär Wästberg edited *The Writer in Modern Africa* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), and in Hungary Pál Páricsy edited his *Studies on Modern Black African Literature* (Budapest: Center for Afro-Asian Research, 1971). While these testified to a growing interest in, and knowledge of, African literature, as did the publications of Wanda Leopold in Poland[64] and Biserka Cvjetičanin in Yugoslavia,[65] the year 1979 was of peculiar importance for the publication of *Black Literature,* edited by Eckhard Breitinger (Munich: Fink), which, despite its unwarranted English title, is in German. This book heralded an important change for the eighties because it anticipated a massive irruption of German academics into the field of African literature, from which, apart from a few dissertations, they had hitherto generally kept aloof. Another sign of growing German interest was the publication of two special Black Africa issues of the well-known *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch.*[66]

The collections published by Palmer and Larson were indicative of an incipient preoccupation with genre study. Apart from the numberless discussions of negritude, in which poetry and ideology are hopelessly mixed with often hollow rhetoric, the study of poetry as such does not seem to have led to intensive book-length works by individual scholars. The historical connection between poetry and negritude is given a new dimension in Richard A. Preto-Rodas, *Negritude as a Theme in the Poetry of the Portuguese-Speaking World* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970); but a book like N. J. Udoeyop's *Three Nigerian Poets: A Critical Study of the Poetry of Soyinka, Clark and Okigbo* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973) is an exception, as is J. Alvarez-Péreyre's far more ambitious essay on South African poetry, *Les Guetteurs de l'aube: Poésie et apartheid* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires, 1979). African drama did not receive much attention until a symposium on the subject was held at Abidjan in 1970.[67] Since then, it has been the theme of several studies, as both a literary and a performing art, as in Anthony Graham-White's *The Drama of Black Africa* (New York: French, 1974), Martin Banham and Clive Wake's *African Theatre Today* (London: Pitman, 1976), Nikolaj Ivanovič L'vov's *Sovremennyj teatr tropičeskoj Afriki* (Moscow, 1977), and Mineke Schipper–de Leeuw's *Toneel en Maatschappij in Afrika* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977).

It will not come as a surprise that the genre which has been most widely scrutinized

[64] Wanda Leopold, *O literaturze czarnej Afryki* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973).

[65] Biserka Cvjetičanin, *Povijest afričke književnosti* (Zagreb: Institut za zemlje u razvoju, 1976).

[66] These are also available as a single volume, *Afrikanische Literatur—Perspektiven und Probleme* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 1979).

[67] The *Actes du Colloque sur le théâtre négro-africain* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971) was actually the first book-length study of African drama since Bakary Traoré's work of 1958; a slightly updated version of the latter, incidentally, was later published in English (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972).

in learned circles is the novel. Apart from the works consisting of miscellaneous essays on African novels and those that deal with the novel in individual countries—several of which have already been mentioned—African prose fiction has been the subject of investigations which are all the more interesting as they often deal with a specific theme approached from a specific angle, thus continuing the trend initiated by Lilyan Kesteloot in connection with francophone poetry and prose fiction. This in-depth approach, which is of greater scholarly value, has been illustrated in several German dissertations, such as Siegfried Hertlein's *Christentum und Mission im Urteil der neoafrikanischen Prosaliteratur* (Münsterschwarzbach: Vier-Turme-Verlag, 1963), Otto Bischofberger's *Tradition und Wandel aus der Sicht der Romanschrifsteller Kameruns und Nigerias* (Einsiedeln: Etzel-Druck, [1969?]), and Karl-Heinz Böttcher's *Tradition und Modernität bei Amos Tutuola und Chinua Achebe: Grundzüge der westafrikanischen Erzählliteratur englischer Sprache* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974). As these titles suggest, scholars tend to search African fiction for a realistic image of African society and culture. Indeed, one of the first books in French on the subject bore a quite explicit title, *Sociologie du roman africain: réalisme, structure et détermination dans le roman moderne ouest-africain* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1970), by the Nigerian scholar Sunday O. Anozie. It had been preceded by another volume, Bernard Mouralis' *Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française* (Abidjan: Université d'Abidjan, 1969), which reflected one orientation of this sociological approach, i.e., the overwhelming preoccupation with the fundamental polarities of modern African society. This was followed a few years later by yet another work in French, Mineke Schipper–de Leeuw's *Le Blanc et l'Occident au miroir du roman négro-africain de langue française* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), which reflected another orientation, analogous to Hertlein's: an intense intellectual curiosity about the black man's image of the European who had controlled the continent's fate for so many decades in his threefold capacity as settler, administrator and missionary.

It is natural that the sociological approach should predominate among African scholars: the majority of African novelists, after all, attempt or claim to provide a realistic depiction of the problems with which their societies are faced, and many African critics at the present stage consider it their task to see that the congruence between reality and fiction is clarified for the benefit of the reader. So much is obvious in the title of Gideon-Cyrus M. Mutiso's dissertation of 1970, which appeared in print as *Socio-Political Thought in African Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1974), and the same trend in clearly at work in Emmanuel Obiechina's *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), which in spite of its title limits itself to anglophone Africa. A key to these writers' preoccupations is provided by the chapter headings in Shatto Arthur Gakwandi's *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1977): "Colonial Injustice," "The Illusion of Progress," "Nationalism," "Disenchantment," "Freedom as Nightmare," "Commitment." Romanus N. Egudu discusses poetry in *Modern Poetry and the African Predicament* (London: Macmillan, 1978) in not very dissimilar terms.

At length, this type of criticism, tirelessly grinding the same axes, however necessary that may be, can become repetitious and wearisome. The possibilities of new directions more definitely concerned with formal criteria and narrative technique seemed about to materialize when Irina D. Nikiforova published *Afrikanskij roman: Genezis i problemy tipologii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), and yet another vista was opened up with Ernest Emenyonu's *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1978), where the outlook is not continental or regional or even national, but definitely ethnic (or "tribal"), since the writer is concerned with prose fiction written by Igbos, both in English and in their own language.

In a recent review of *A Dry White Season* (1979), the latest English novel by the Afrikaner writer André Brink, a British critic observed that "in certain places at certain times the subtleties we normally demand from fiction seem almost beside the point: all that matters is that the truth be set down, preferably with directness and simplicity. It's not a position we'd expect to be taken by British and American novelists, most of whom feel (perhaps mistakenly) that their societies are stable enough to allow a writer to be as fictive as he or she likes: 'reporting' can best be left to journalists."[68] If such a remark is pertinent for a white writer from South Africa, who can rely on a twofold English and Dutch tradition, it is even more so for the black writers of Africa, and for the scholarship that concerns their works. The study of African literature, now in its early twenties, is no longer an infant discipline: it has grown in size and scope and thoroughness at an amazing pace. It is rather doubtful, though, whether it can as yet be regarded as fully mature. Just as the literary works themselves try to offer a faithful reflection of African society and its problems, and of the author's understandably intense feelings about it all, scholarship, while it deals with history—as indeed it should, and as objectively as possible—is almost compelled, in its critical explications, to hover at the societal surface of the literary art. The problems of Africa and of her literature are so demanding and obsessive that specialized scholars tend to remain self-contained instead of trying to look beyond the confines of their own expertise and obsessions, however justified. But the mere fact that a great many topics of legitimate scientific enquiry in connection with African literature have not yet led to book-length studies, does not mean that they will be neglected forever: this survey has been concerned solely with books, but it should be remembered that pioneering spadework, the first pre-requisite for progress in any sphere of knowledge, is normally done in periodicals.[69]

[68] Blake Morrison in the *New Statesman*, 5 October 1979, p. 516.

[69] For due consideration of this aspect, see Stephen Arnold, "African Literary Studies: The Emergence of a New Discipline", in *African Literature Studies: The Present State*, ed. Stephen Arnold (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1985).

A NON-CONCLUSION

ALBERT S. GÉRARD

THE TASKS AHEAD

To undertake the conclusion of a story that has barely begun would be unusually otiose. The study of modern African literature is of necessity even younger than the literature itself, and both keep changing with amazing speed. Parts II and III of this book demonstrate convincingly that since the feverish days of the 1950s when it took off in earnest, African writing in European languages has maintained an astonishing growth rate with regard to both quality and quantity. From its Senegalese nucleus in Paris and from its tiny, isolated rootlets in various parts of Africa, it has spread to the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. There is hardly one of the countries now in existence on the continent which has not produced some creative writing in some European language. Indeed, many of the new states, especially in the former British territories, have actually developed a national literature of sizable bulk and with specific features. The process of national differentiation has also begun in French-speaking Africa and there is little doubt that it will spread to lusophone Africa after the common exultation over recently acquired independence has subsided and writers have begun to cast more sober glances at the national environment. The continent has produced writers of respectable quality, whose work would grace any country in the world: Rabéarivelo and Senghor, Mongo Beti and Sembène Ousmane, Ouologuem, Kourouma and Lopès, Achebe, Soyinka and Okigbo, Ngugi and Okot, La Guma and Mtshali, Vieira and Honwana... and a great many slightly less talented others. Of course, in Africa as elsewhere, it should be assumed that the greater part of what reaches print is at best mediocre. But popular literature has its function and paves the way for writing of a higher level. It has a sociological interest of its own, and while most of Africa's early literature grew in a somewhat artificial manner, produced as it was by gifted individuals who were inordinately fortunate in receiving a university education abroad, the development of a popular, "lowbrow" literature may be regarded as a return to more organic processes. In the course of its first twenty-five years or so, the growth in quality and in numbers which manifested itself in African writing was accompanied by significant changes in themes. As the literature was born and had its first developments at a time when Europe's African colonies were shedding the yoke and gaining political independence, the often vociferous, though poignant, condemnation of colonial injustice and the seductive idealizations of negritude made way for a more realistic, less rose-coloured consideration of the new African societies: the tone became one of generalized disillusionment at the often unpalatable

situations from which their half-literate victims found some form of imaginative escape in popular writing. It was during the period when this book was conceived and actually written, that the disillusionment which had swooped down upon creative writers in the sixties began to make room for a positive acceptance of the fact that Africa was by no means immune to human frailty, a healthy preoccupation with the everyday life of common people, a determination to contribute to a new fight, no longer directed at alien oppressors, but at the devils within. There have been significant changes in form too, as the three main European languages became enriched with vernacular words, turns of speech, proverbs and the like, and traditional genres were adapted to the alien medium.

In 1963, I encountered some difficulty in obtaining funds in order to study modern African literature: the decision-makers felt it was irrational and uneconomic to squander good money on exploring a non-existent field. Since those days African literature has indeed grown beyond recognition.

This historical account of African literature in European languages, which was to become known among the *cognoscenti* as "the HALEL project," was conceived in Sydney at the 1975 conference of the Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes (F.I.L.L.M.). It was blessed with official approval at the conference which the International Comparative Literature Association (I.C.L.A.) held in Budapest in 1976. A few months earlier, the most prominent American expert on the subject, Professor Bernth Lindfors, had addressed the second annual conference of the African Literature Association in the following terms:

> African literature is a specialty rather than a discipline in American universities, and it appears destined to remain so for the forseeable future. It is an amorphous field offering its devotees neither a large corpus of literary works to study nor established traditions of scholarship to carry on. Indeed, in certain branches of it—particularly the so-called 'vernacular literatures'—even the most basic scholarly tools are lacking and responsible research is difficult, if not impossible to carry out. Until these deficiencies are remedied, African literature is not likely to gain recognition as a separate but equal humanistic discipline in American academia. As scholars we are still too young and unsophisticated to be regarded by our colleagues as peers.[1]

It is idle to assume that such an authoritative statement might have lost much of its cogency in just a few years' time. The growth of a branch of scholarship too is a fundamentally organic process, which cannot be paced at will like automated factory production. Nevertheless, basic requirements can be defined, urgent tasks can be described, trends can be observed and encouraged.

We are all indebted to the great German pioneer Janheinz Jahn, whose 1971 *Bibliography* is still our most basic tool. The most urgent of our requirements is therefore that Jahn's work be revised, reorganized, completed and updated, so that scholars can rely on a truly complete list of all African creative writing. Next in importance comes the secondary bibliography. Year after year, budding scholars after budding scholars spend a lot of energy inventing the wheel simply because they are unaware of what has

[1] Bernth Lindfors, "On Disciplining Students in a Nondiscipline," in *The Teaching of African Literature*, ed. Thomas A. Hale and Richard Priebe (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), pp. 41–47.

already been achieved by their elders. There are two reasons for this. One is that the invaluable annual *MLA Bibliography*—including its African literature section, always packed with recondite bibliographical information—is not available everywhere, a situation which the economic crisis is not likely to improve; perhaps this section might be made available as an off-print to African scholars. The second reason is that Lindfors' wholly admirable *Black African Literature in English* is still the only compilation of its kind. It is a matter of urgency that similar guides to information sources should be produced concerning African literature in French and in Portuguese. And of course, it is highly desirable that these, when they do exist, as well as Lindfors', should be regularly updated.

As literary scholarship in general deals with texts, it stands to reason that adequate bibliographies are its most useful tool. But literary history deals with men as well and as Robert E. Spiller, the prominent historian of American literature, once put it, "*Biography* is the most important source of literary history."[2] Here too, the debt we owe to Janheinz Jahn is enormous. His *Who's Who,* together with Herdeck's later *African Authors,* laid firm foundations for Africa's literary biography. But if these works are not to become obsolete, they too, like the bibliographies, ought to be checked, completed and updated, keping in mind Spiller's dictum to the effect that

> Wherever possible, the research scholar depends upon primary evidence only and goes back to the document itself: the birth certificate, the court or church record,... the letter to a friend, the newspaper report... Secondary evidence, or truth as reported and commented upon by another, is acceptable only when primary evidence is not available or when the task of retracing the steps in each part of a large undertaking is impractical and the reliability of previous scholars may safely be assumed or can be spot-checked.

Admittedly neither Jahn nor Herdeck have always complied with such strict requirements: there are parts of Africa where birth certificates or court and church records are not readily available! Yet Spiller's prescriptions represent an ideal towards which we must all strive, doing our utmost to narrow down a margin of tolerance which probably can never be abolished altogether.

Leaving such elementary, though indispensable, sources as bibliography and biography to turn to more sophisticated aspects of literary research, it is extremely encouraging that the editors of the 1979 A.L.A. Conference proceedings should have noted the emergence of two truly decisive new trends.

One was "a perceptible shift away from tired, basic topics like 'tradition and modernity' and 'oral elements in the writings' of a few well-known authors and a move toward topics which demand research."[3] This is extremely significant. For the study of

[2] Robert E. Spiller, "Literary History" in *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures,* ed. James Thorpe (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1963; 2nd. ed. 1970), pp. 55–68. The whole of this convenient pamphlet ought to be prescribed reading for anyone who wishes to write in a scholarly way about any literature.

[3] Stephen Arnold, "African Literary Studies: Profile and Guide to a New Discipline", in Donald I. Ray *et al., Into the 80's: The Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference of the Canadian Association of African Studies* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1981), Vol 2, pp. 128–151.

African literature inherited from its polemical and journalistic origins a dangerous proclivity to verbose vaticination rather than factual research. In true scholarship, speculation can have no validity unless it feeds on the facts that research has unearthed. That an enormous amount of material still lies buried, sometimes in unlikely places, is demonstrated by T. J. Couzens' recent discovery of numerous unprinted writings by H.I.E. Dhlomo; John A. Comaroff has published Sol T. Plaatje's hitherto unknown *Boer War Diary*; and the original manuscript of his famous *Mhudi* has been recovered and has at last reached print. In West Africa, Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* (1917) which was known only through references in local journals, did not reach print until it was brought to light in the 1970s. More recently, Dr. Alain Ricard managed to recover the *opera omnia* of one of the most exceptional early writers of French West Africa, the Togolese Felix Couchoro: the first African *feuilletoniste*, whose many novels lay forgotten in the collections of a local journal. Nor should we omit Bernth Lindfors' fruitful research into Soyinka's juvenilia or the history of Tutuola's first manuscript. Recovering ignored or forgotten literary texts is one of the greatest services that scholarship can render to African literature. They may lie patiently waiting in the yellowing cockroach-eaten pages of ancient journals, in dusty boxes in the lumber-rooms of the author's heirs, in the archives of missionary societies and of publishing firms, as well as in even unlikelier places. But texts are not the only material that we feed on. To rephrase Spiller's dictum quoted above, as a science, literary history needs accurate and perceptive biographies. Anyone who has had occasion to make use of extant biographical dictionaries, cannot but be sorrowfully aware that we only have the merest externals of literary biography. These data are of course important. But we also need details of a different order, were it only with a view to establishing the connection between a writer's inner life and the development of his work. The many volumes of Wordsworth's correspondence and of his sister's diaries have been a great help in refining our understanding of his poetry. African writers, too, have written private letters, personal diaries. It was discovered in the late seventies that part of Plaatje's private papers could be found at the Manuscript Library of the University of the Witwatersrand. Madagascar's first French-writing poet, Ary Robin (Robinary), was a prolific letter-writer whose correspondence contains considerable information about intellectual and literary life in Madagascar during the early years of French colonialization: it ought to be recovered and exploited. His contemporary Rabéarivelo used to keep a voluminous diary, the contents of which might well be revealed now that the author has been dead for nearly half a century and that the readership's moral criteria have changed considerably: the account of a young man's weaknesses could no longer be a blemish on his reputation, but it would help his admirers towards a better grasp of his pathetic predicament.

Nor is this all. A great many African writers were born into oral societies and fate gave them the (perhaps dubious) advantage of belonging to the first literate generation in their family. The books they read in their school's library were undoubtedly important for the shaping of their writing skill, whether they were influenced by the Western authors they read, or reacted against them, or simply outgrew their influence. In any case, it is essential that the historian should know to which books the nascent artist was once exposed. There are stray testimonies about this, but no systematic enquiry has yet

been carried out. More generally, although African writers, when faced with interviewers' questions, have made no mystery of their reading preferences, it must be regretfully acknowledged that little has been done so far to use these for comparative exegesis. Modern written art in Africa has been grafted on to Middle Eastern and Western traditions which are nearly three thousand years old: a close comparative discussion of any African work with what its author knew and liked of that vast heritage could not but be immensely profitable for our knowledge of the specificity of African writing.

This brings us to the second encouraging observation that derived from the 1979 ALA conference, viz. that "more and more [scholarly] authors [are] showing a command of previous scholarship relevant to their topic." "Relevant" is a rather vague concept. In the narrowest sense, it probably means that junior scholars in African literature increasingly try to become cognizant, like junior scholars in other fields, of the research and appraisals of their predecessors, so that we may henceforth be spared the mighty flood of redundant re-hashings of the same topics and the same authors which is one of the most damaging pieces of evidence of how "young and unsophisticated" we still are. This is not to condemn the sociological approach which has been reigning supreme almost since the very beginnings of modern African writing. Everybody knows that most African countries are plagued with truly obsessive social problems, and these are almost the only source on which the imaginative writer feeds his inspiration. Nor is there anything inappropriate or objectionable in the sociological discussion of poems, novels and plays whether they have been primarily conceived as works of art or as documents illustrating social problems. Even repetition can be justified in such matters: it is a question of effectiveness in public relations, repeating the same things over and over again so as to make sure that they do reach the audience's opaque brains. It would be honest to acknowledge, however, that this form of propaganda is not scholarly research.

The privileged position awarded to social and political considerations in African literary scholarship should not allow us to forget that the spheres of knowledge that can be described as "relevant" to the study of African lierature are almost numberless. Very succinctly, they might be said to fall into two broad categories: one is comparative and is concerned with the relationship between African writing and the other literatures of the world. The other focuses on the relationship of this literature to the society that produces it.

Part IV of this book has tried to illustrate some of the directions which research might profitably take. For while creative writing in European language in sub-Saharan Africa is itself what modern mathematics would call a "fuzzy set", it can also be regarded as a "sub-set" in a variety of intersecting larger "sets": one is the continent as a whole, which includes not only the Maghreb countries but also Libya and especially Egypt, which has produced some writing in French;[4] another is usually described as Black Studies and might be held to cover all non-white writing from Africa, from America, North and South, and from the West Indies; another, wider, one is the Third World,

[4] See notably Jean-Jacques Luthi, *Introduction à la littérature d'expression française en Egypte (1798–1945)* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole, 1974).

many of whose other parts—despite their respective differences—offer significant similarities with sub-Saharan Africa as they feature a pre-industrial society, or an industrialized economy of a neo-colonial type; in most cases, a pre-literate majority culture; very often, too, a social organization based on the village unit, the clan, the extended family, or other varieties of small-scale reference groups in contrast to the mass "civilization" that is supposed to be the token of white modernity. Comparative literary study might show that what Senghor and Césaire called "negritude" is a far more universal phenomenon than they assumed, and that its features—group solidarity, including the dead; intimate knowledge of and contact with nature; belief in the supernatural—far from being a prerogative of the black man, are shared in fact by the majority of the world's societies, including some of the more derelict and impoverished segments of the allegedly prosperous white world.

The first purpose of this international, intercontinental, multilingual comparative approach is to achieve a better informed, more sober, more *nuancé*, more accurate appraisal of African writing, as a substitute for the provincial panegyric outlook which rests ultimately on a basis of racist contempt ("Quite good for a black man!") or of jingoistic self-approval ("this is the work of one of us: it must be praised!"). For such comparative evaluation to be cogently effected, the would-be scholarly critic must recognize—like the budding writer[5]—that he needs to master the basics of his craft: to discriminate between the work as social-political rhetoric and the same work as fictional/subjective verbal artefact; to distinguish close-knit analysis from rambling comment; to appraise the creative writer's control of the devices inherent in the (European) tradition of his art and his skill in introducing new techniques or transferring procedures inherited from his society's oral lore; to appraise the depth and subtlety of his insight into characters and situations.

Half a century ago, one of the first Zulu writers in English made the useful point that although African artists should not be "mere propagandists, semi-politicians and reformers", the individual African writer "must know that he has a social as well as an aesthetic responsibility, a group as well as a personal experience."[6] This is also true of the student of African literature, and more obviously so of the African student of African literature: the aesthetic purpose of the comparative approach cannot be dissociated from another, larger function, which is to throw more light on the relationship of cultural similarity and dissimilarity that exists between African and other cultures.

This leads us inevitably to our second category; a critical approach based on a serious, more than literary study of the various societies from which African literature springs forth. For the European scholar who wants to go into Shakespearean research it is not enough to know English: it is indispensable that he have at the very least clear notions about Elizabethan society, Elizabethan thought and the medieval history of England. Likewise, a few vague clichés about negritude and African "culture" (in the singular), some newsreel knowledge of present-day events in those parts of Africa that

[5] For whom Ezekiel Mphahlele produced his elementary but so useful little *Guide to Creative Writing* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1966).

[6] H.I.E. Dhlomo, "Masses and the Artist," *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 (April 1943), repr. in *English in Africa*, 4,2 (1977), 61–62.

make headlines in the (not necessarily popular) press, orthodox sympathy with the plight of the oppressed (preferably of yore)—all this is certainly not sufficient mental equipment for the non-African scholar. Whenever we deal with an alien society, whether far away or long ago, minimal understanding implies a good dose of history and anthropology. The alternative is for the scholar to confine himself to the narrowest type of *explication de texte*.

To argue that this, surely, does not apply to the African student of African literature, would be a grievous error. For the African scholar can in the nature of things belong to only one amongst the hundreds of African societies in existence. There is no reason why a Malinke scholar from the Ivory Coast should be granted an inborn understanding of what a Kikuyu writer from Kenya writes in English; Tutuola's Yoruba romances in his own brand of English must sound as exotic to a Xhosa critic from the R.S.A. as they do to any Euro-American reader; and anyone who is not informed about the role of Zulu imperialism in the constitution of the Sotho "nation" in the early nineteenth century can entertain no hope of grasping Thomas Mofolo's specific outlook in *Chaka*. Some time may elapse still before the whole of Africa becomes as hideously urbanized and overcrowded as the Boston–New York–Washington strip or Los Angeles county—apparently, the ideal models towards which most silent majorities in developing countries are desperately striving, and ultimately it may prove impossible to clone the variety of life into total *Gleichschaltung*. Although men and societies certainly have no rights unless they also have the power to enforce them, it may still turn out that men and societies are just too strong to see their distinctive characteristics completely obliterated. As the myth of a homogenized Africa (whether of the past or of the future) has at any rate lost its sundry believers in this penultimate decade of the twentieth century, there is now no difficulty in admitting that the works of written art which the continent generates so profusely cannot really be understood except on a basis of extensive knowledge not only of each work's linguistic medium, but also of the history, customs, institutions and beliefs of the particular society which has given it birth through the author. But more is needed if the scholar is to penetrate the unique specificity of any single work: ever wider and deeper knowledge is surely required if the study of African literature in European languages is to reach a degree of maturity and sophistication on a par with the more traditional fields, as indeed it should by the time the threshold of the twenty-first century is crossed.

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