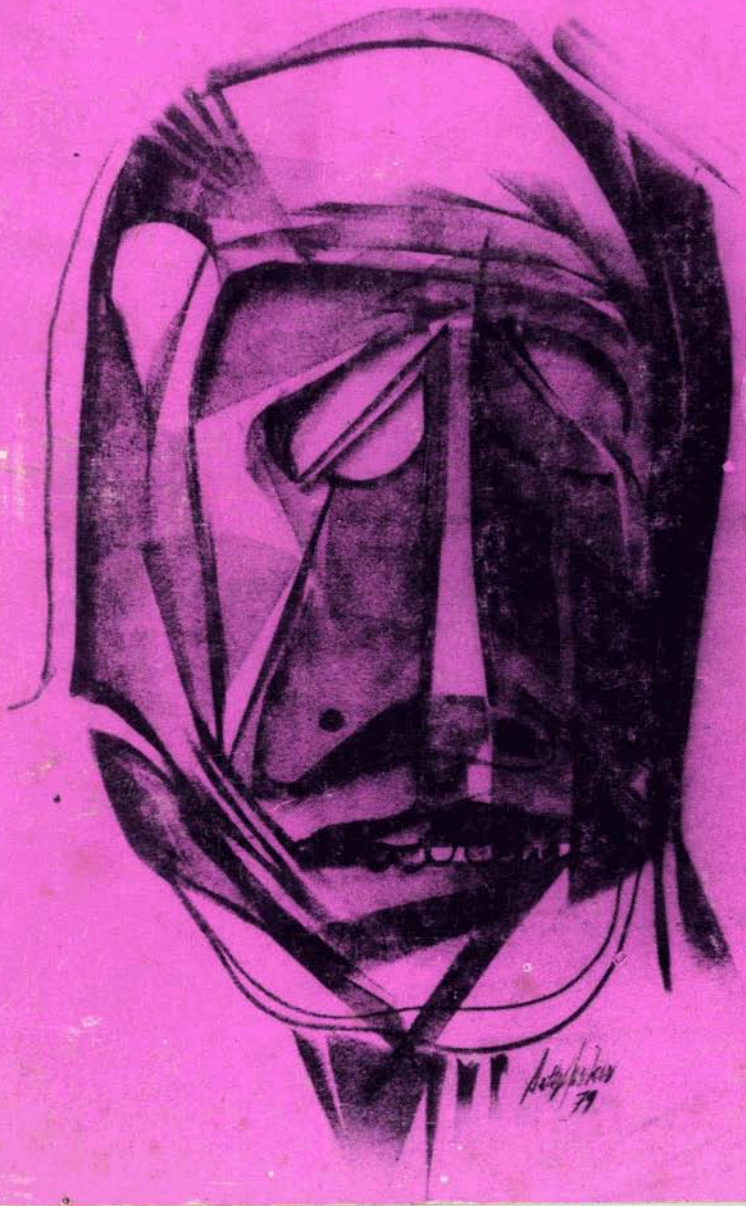
OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING

FOUNDING EDITOR: CHINUA ACHEBE 25/ 26



OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

Published three times a year

Number 25/26: February 1984

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate, typewritten double-spaced with ample margins. A brief autobiographical note should accompany each submission. Manuscripts will not normally be returned.

ISSN 0331-0566

OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

Number 25/26 **February 1984**

CONTENTS

ESSAYS

REVIEWS

ART *Seth Anku*

Seth Anku is a Senior Lecturer, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Our readers and contributors must be wondering why *Okike* has not appeared since 1984. It is, therefore, necessary for us to explain this unfortunate development.

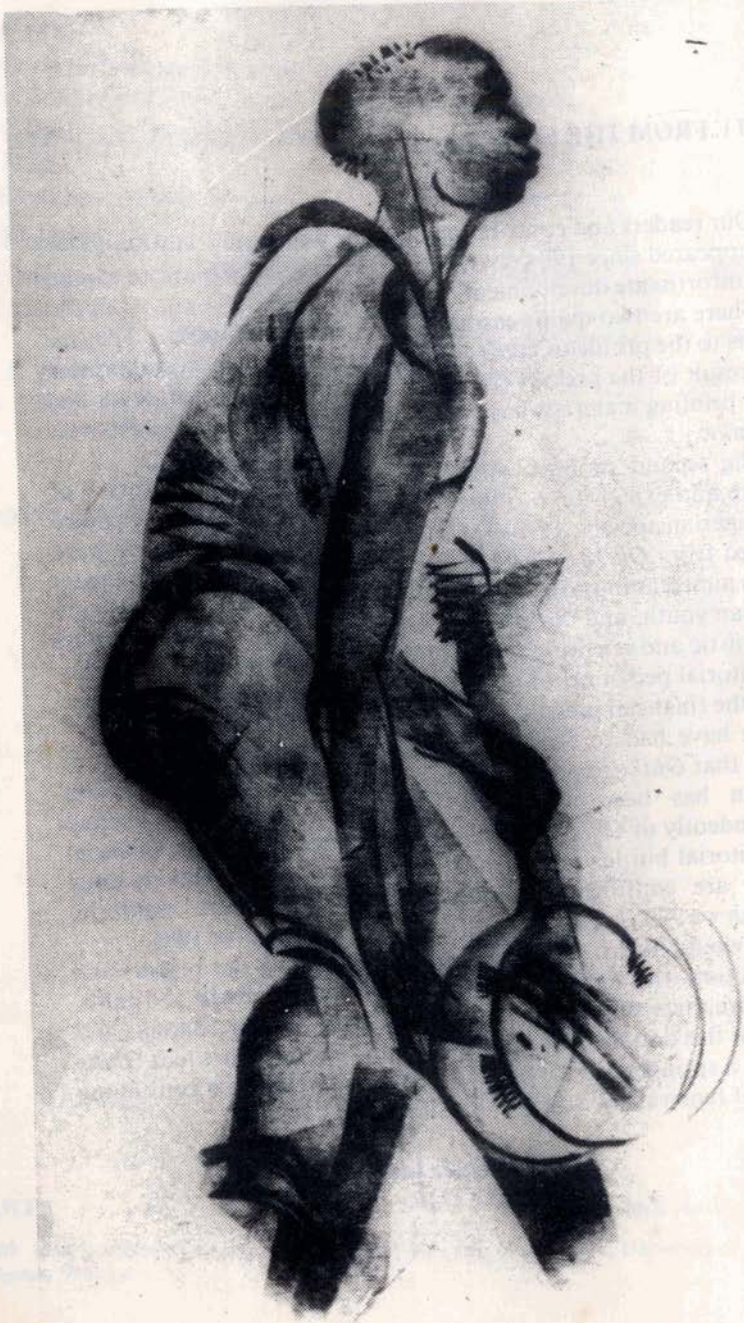
There are two main reasons for our failure to appear. The first relates to the problems confronting Nigerian publishers and printers as a result of the present economic slump. High cost of paper and other printing materials has placed a strain on the meagre resources of *Okike.*

The second problem emanates from the active processes of growth and expansion of *Okike* as it strives to be more relevant to the Nigerian society. In the past few years, two publications have evolved from *Okike.* They are the *Okike Educational Supplement* that is aimed at improving the quality of literary studies among the Nigerian youth, and the bilingual *Uwa Ndi Igbo,* "a broadly-based humanistic and scientific publication." Apart from over-stretching the editorial personnel of *Okike,* the new publications have exacerbated the financial pressure which we have already mentioned.

We have had to deal strictly with these problems in order to ensure that *Okike* appears regularly (three times a year). The main solution has been to let the two new publications operate independently of *Okike,* thereby relieving the latter of the financial and editorial burden which such publications entail. Having done so, we are confident that *Okike* will appear more regularly, although we will first try to satisfy our commitment for 1985.

We would like to use this opportunity to thank our readers and contributors who have sustained us with their goodwill and faith. We assure them that *Okike* is alive and strong (as the contents and design of this double issue attest). It is our task to ensure that *Okike* remains a springboard for up-and-coming writers and a continuing source of renewal and strength for the established ones.

Onuora Ossie Enekwe
EDITOR



Jude C. Ogu

AFRICAN POLITICAL DANCERS

Masked dancers
Occult dancers
You dance with ease
Masked dancers
You dance with style
Occult dancers
You throw up dust
Into the drummers' eyes
And the sullen spectators
Dank with sweat under the sun
Squat behind the sore-eyed drummers
Watching but not comprehending.

But
Masked dancers
Occult dancers
You sing with white voices
And dance with black legs
You dance like lions
Jigging to lambs
You dance like hawks
Hopping to chickens
And you scare the spectators
Into a scamper
When you dance and jig and hop.

And listen
Masked dancers
Occult dancers
You may dance to the knell of harmony
Amidst the clatter of acrimony;
You may dance to the knell of harmony
When the smart climbers
Lean on worn-out ropes
When the haze fizzles away
And hot tears steam out fire.
Then the drummers become drumsticks
And the dancers become the drummers;
And the spectators dance with their heads
Until the mamba sloughs again.
Until the mamba sloughs again?
Yes, as it did the previous season
New then but not young —
The old serpent in a new skin.

Damian Opata

THESE SHOES
(To TS & Chris)

What vegetation now nurse the winged feet
Fleet-footed to find and flaunt
The shoes of the ghost feet unworn
Where last the songs were sung on fiery fairy heights?

What weaverbird now take wings
At noon
Where the sunbird was depluned
And the thunder stilled, spawning condolences?

What firebird shall feast
At the sermon of Fire
And wrench the secret of thunder
After death by water?

Will the path of thunder
No more be trod
And the shoes hang
At the stillpoint of the stairs?

Ajumobi M. Ozumba

MY PURPLE-HUED ONE

Welcome my wild one of the light purple hue.
Welcome to a heart that yearns for you.
I know not your name but my heart knows you
Who comes along when the clouds are dry of tears.

The sky is blue the air dry and brisk
Between the sun and earth a lazy haze intervenes
trapping aggressive rays that may harm my delicate one.
Days upon days I had waited ecstatically,
to catch a glimpse of your purple-hued petals
By the hillside one morning there you were,
wearing the splendour that heralds a new season.

Karen King-Aribisala

FRANGIPANIS FOR MADAM

The blade comes within an inch of his forehead. It carves and scrapes its way from brow to nape deftly. Soon the process is over. And his head appears. A clean and polished black nut. Globular. He feels her eyes on him and turns. And she, purdah-curtain-veiled, in neat sitting-room, returns the stare.

> Does he have to have his head shaved at the entrance of my house? This could only happen in Nigeria. There's no bloody order here. Nothing. No one knows his rightful place. No wonder the country's a mess.

He rises, and dusting off the last hairs, goes to his customary position under the frangipani tree. The tree hangs heavy with blossom and scent. Its limbs are grey-grained and strong and wiry-masculine-looking. But at their tips, there is this bounty of rich, frothy buttery flowers, and stems all leaking their sticky white juice. The centre of each flower is buoyant yellow blasting its sun-energy until it fades into cream, into pure white at its uttermost edge. He plucks a flower and smells it, allowing the scent to pervade his being. He smells greedily, all the while staring at his mistress through the window. He on this side; she on that. The window, the curtains between them. He lies down on the ground and sets to work writing on his prayer board. Occasionally, he pauses to dip his pen in an inkpot.

> Spaghetti writing on wood. Looks beautiful enough I suppose. God, how does he do it? For hours and hours he sits there, praying and reading and copying bits of his stupid Koran. And I'm paying him to do it. Some guard... If any intruder happens to come along, a fat lot of good his bows and arrows would be... What if a thief comes when he's praying to his Allah? It's all a charade anyway. Like everything else in this god-forsaken place.

He is a tall man; all the length of him. Even his toes are long. He is handsome too, with his large doe-shaped eyes and elegant flare of nostrils. He stretches lazily as if to emphasise the sleep in him, and beckons the beggar who chants at the gate. The beggar jiggles his bowl of coins, blind and bat-eyed, his other arm grasped by a little boy who leads him. The guard slowly hands him a five naira note.

There is talk.

> So this is where my money goes to. These people are strange. You'd think he'd save all he could to support his three wives and children. God knows he must have at least two football teams to maintain. I don't believe it; The beggar is giving him change. A beggar giving change.... Wait till I tell the folks back home..... Thank God that beggars' gone. Doesn't anyone earn a living around here? Why does the beggar feel anybody owes him anything? Some of them are so aggressive with it too; I mean if I was a beggar I wouldn't go around cursing people because they didn't feel like giving me the money they earned. Yet some of them do just that. What's he up to now?

She rises in a frenzy, her yellow hair shaking as she moves aside the curtains and hurriedly opens the window.

"Oga, Oga make you not piss there oh". He is squatting in a corner of the garden. His beautifully curved buttocks protrude. There is a smile in his eyes as he shakes the last drops.

> This is the absolute limit. He hasn't any shame. It's not as if we haven't provided him with a toilet at the back in the boys' quarters. I've had enough. It's so hot. That frangipani tree will have to go. Probably harbours snakes or something. All the landscape is so vulgar here. There's no subtlety. The flowers flaunt their beauty like young whores. Even those frangipanis. They will insist on clumping themselves at the end of the branches for all to see. No subtlety. As for the hibiscus, that long red stem freckled with gold is positively repulsive. Their colours are too bright. And look at those lizards, bright orange heads and black bodies. And the earth is frightening too — like blood, red. That's why they painted the bottom of the house orange, so it wouldn't look dirty. Blast... the electricity has gone off again. The almighty NEPA has struck. He seems cool enough. Must be all that washing he does. Never knew a people who washed so much and are so filthy. He must wash at least six times a day. Only certain parts though. And before prayers. Must talk to Jim about him using so much water. After all, there is water-shortage in Lagos. Jesus, what is happening to me? Here I am with my tanks full and I'm begrudging him a little, very little water. It's so bloody hot. I've got to get out of this house. Maybe I'm going mad. This country, this exotic piece of earth is killing me. Murdering me. I've got to get out. I know, the shops. I'll buy some drinks.

She rises, and collecting her purse from the bedroom, re-enters the living room. She glances in her mirror before leaving the house and is reassured of her Nordic beauty. The hair pale gold, the eyes grey, the skin of cream ivory, the figure well-proportioned and womanly. She is wearing a full blown skirt of cream which hugs her hips. The white blouse is full. It is a picture of graceful frangipani femininity. Satisfied, she walks past the guard announcing her departure. He ignores her.

The hours lapse and she returns. She jumps out of the car and

calls the guard. "Oga make you help with these bags." Her angry yellow hair is shaking. A single frangipani falls to the earth. He raises his head and stares at her. His lips are parted in a grin of idiocy. "You fool, can't you hear me shouting at you?" This time only his toes respond. They are long toes, like the rest of him, and they wiggle like friendly oversized worms. Suddenly, he rises and staring past her, bends, hands outstretched to the air, as if touching his toes. He is praying. Exasperated, she enters the house carrying the bags. She hopes the sun will eat its way into his newly shaved skull, that he will die of sun-stroke.

That night at dinner she confronts her husband.
"I've had enough, Jim."
"What's up? I've had a very rough day at the office."
"Well, darling, just because I write at home doesn't mean I haven't got my share of rough days, you know. Anyway, that's not the point. That bastard of a guard will have to go."

Jim continues eating. He is tired. He wants to sleep as soon as the meal is finished. He is thinking of his cool bed, with fresh cool sheets. His wife continues speaking.

"What is this Jim? First the guard, now you're ignoring me. Today I went out shopping and the son of a bitch refused to help me with my bags. And this isn't the first time, as you know. He just pretended I wasn't there and then started praying when I went up to him. I want him sacked." "He's not paid to help you with your bags. Were they heavy?" "No. But that's not the point." "Sweetheart I'm sure if you were carrying something really heavy he'd help you. Besides, he comes from another culture. Women carry the loads in his area." "I don't care. I want him sacked. I pay him for his services, therefore he should help me. I shouldn't even have to ask him. Culture be damned. This isn't a Forsterian exercise of 'only connect'. I want that man out of my life."

Jim is drinking some water as he looks at his beautiful wife.

"You're sure you don't want to try to understand him just a little?"

She pouts: "What is there to understand Jim? I can't stand his habits.

The other day he killed a chicken on the lawn. And he's always peeing by the frangipani tree — the place stinks. I won't have my garden made into a toilet."

Jim smiles teasingly:

"Wondered why the frangipani tree was flourishing. My dear so what if he had killed a chicken on the lawn? He has to eat you know. And it's not as if dead rabbits, pheasants, grouse are entirely absent from the streets of Europe. In your so called civilized society, there are Butcher shops, and on the doors hang dead animals. Nailed in. I remember walking along the

pavement and nearly colliding with the dead things. In the midst of metropolitana. Give way a little. Those European butchers are just as much out of place as your guard.

As for his urination habits, what about those lousy football fans who peed on the spectators in your dear country. Face it, my love, you're obsessed with the man."

She listens silently, tugs her hair, and Jim teases.

"Jim, how could you.....I don't deny he has a certain appeal. But I'm not your Lady Chatterley. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. I've always felt it interesting that Lawrence found it necessary to make Lady Chatterleys gamekeeper, well-bred and well mannered. You have to have good manners in a relationship darling; its the only thing which restrains the beast. There, you've made me amiable again. Do you suppose he has shorts under that long night-gown thing he wears?"

Jim roars with laughter, his wanted sleep forgotten.

"If I wasn't a mature man, I might even be jealous of this guard. I thought you saw everything when he relieved himself on the frangipani. Seriously though, if you're that upset about his behaviour we'll sack him. But why not give him a cultural sort of trial?"

"Like what?"

"Be nice to him, continue to greet him for a week. Then go to the shops, get something really heavy and ask him to help you. I bet he will. He's a human being you know."

The days pass. The madam sits in her sitting room, writing and gazing on the lawn. The guard sits under the frangipani tree with his toes. At times, the curtains swing with a lacy wantonness in the wind, and they see each other clearly. She keeps up her side of the bargain. She greets him and chats into his staring eyes without receiving the meanest response. Until the day of the cultural trial finally arrives. She feels sure of victory; and with the knowledge of his approaching departure from her world, a strange sadness envelopes her. They have become partners in a silent struggle.

She sips her drink of cool lemonade and watches him, almost with compassion. He too is drinking, an inky potion of holy water. His is a spiritual beverage. He carefully cleans his prayer-board of its inky holy words and squeezes the sponge into a cup. He drinks the water. He looks up, and the ritual of meeting, staring eyes commences. She lets her thoughts flow.

Absolutely barbaric. Drinking that mess. His stomach must be lined with iron to withstand the shock of the ink. Well, I suppose if we Catholics can drink wine and pretend its the blood of Christ, Moslems can spend days writing their prayers on boards in elegant caligraphics then washing the whole lot off, and drinking the inky, holy unhealthy water. Maybe Allah will prevent him from getting diarrhoea. I suppose the wine Catholics

drink is 'off' sometimes. Here come his male clique of friends. Wonder what they find to talk about so heartily?

A flash of kola stained teeth grins through the windows. The men are all dressed in long white gowns. She sees the gowns folding and swinging under the frangipani tree. The gowns and the lace curtains swing, unified in motion. Each thrust of wind bantering playfully with the cloths. The men are now sitting in a circle. It is a congealment of white folds, full-bellied. A magazine, the Playboy centrefold, is spread in the very centre of the circle of men. The edges of the pages almost touching their thighs. A lustrous slice of ivory blonde lies on the page. She is scantily clad and her eyes are knowing. The spitting and the chewing of the kola nut becomes more incessant. Every now and again the men stare through the lace curtains at the madam. In purdah no longer. They gaze at the centrefold woman. Until finally the lace curtains, the scant clothing of the girl disappears into nothingness. Satisfaction is in every fold of their garments, in their taut thighs.

She wonders at their intense kola-nut chewing, at their repeated glances. She feels naked. They are silent. She rises and goes to the window. She tells them they are making too much noise. They smile at her. She stands unknowing, eyes blank at the frangipani flower, lustrous, white and yellow, which the guard suddenly thrusts in her hand, through the window. His friends depart. She decides to get out of the house. The shops, anything.

Bastard. Bastard son of a bitch. How dare he give me a flower? Oh the bastard.

She returns from the shop clutching a packet of biscuits. The guard moves towards her, his male length towering over her; he holds the biscuits. "Make I help you madam", He grins. At dinner that night, Jim is all patience.

"So darling? did I win my cultural bet? Did he help you with your things?"

Her response is measured.

"Yes, I suppose so."
"What did I tell you?.. The human instinct always wins in the end." With decision she said "I want that man out of here. I want him sacked."

Edna Aizenberg

CORTAZAR'S *HOPSCOTCH* AND ACHEBE'S *NO LONGER AT EASE:* DIVIDED HEROES AND DECONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE IN THE LATIN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN NOVEL

Introduction

In a review which appeared in *Okike,* Chinweizu calls on his fellow African intellectuals to, as he puts it, "run out of their dungeon and get some fresh literary air" into their lungs. "I, for one," he writes,

> do not see why our literature and criticism should be governed by British rules, and constipated by British inanities... The centres of vigorous literature in this century seems [sic] to have clearly moved to Latin America. Witness the abundance of powerful and lively works produced by Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, Nicolás Guillén, Gabriel García Márquez, and many many others. Their works are vibrant, alive, deal powerfully with experiences under imperialized histories and conditions that are, in many significant ways, quite similar to ours in Africa. Our publishers ought to make these writers more available in Africa. Our critics should help introduce them to us, and point out their technical achievements so that we can inherit what we can from their labors. ("African Literary Criticism," 104-05)

This strong statement by Chinweizu, particularly his assertion that Africans and Latin Americans have much to say to each other literarily because they share "imperialized histories and conditions", lies at the heart of my own interest in a comparison of current African and Latin American fiction. That is, while the study of the African contribution to the culture of Latin America and the Caribbean has been, and continues to be, an important-fascinating-subject, my focus is not so much on how one civilization has influenced the other, but on the way comparable, yet not identical circumstances of colonization and "third-worldliness" have affected literature. My ultimate hope, obviously outside the scope of this article is to arrive at some typology of Third World literature. For the moment, I will content myself with comparing two novelists, making some generalizations, and moving in the spirit of the Latin American-African dialogue proposed by Chinweizu.[1]

The two writers I have selected for comparison are Chinua

Achebe and Julio Cortázar. Specifically, I have chosen to work with Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963). I made these choices for several reasons: both authors are prominent and influential within their respective literatures; they are major figures who are read, listened to, weighed and emulated. Both novels were written in the sixties, and I thought it would be interesting to see what each writer was saying at about the same time and how he was saying it, since each is illustrative of wider trends in his region. Both writers have devoted much of their fictional output to an exploration — more, a dissection — of the cultural and moral relationship between what Cortázar calls "this side" and the "other side", which inevitably in Achebe and often in Cortázar means the Third World homeland and the First World metropolis. (This is, of course, a central issue in the literary discourse of those-who-have-been-colonized as it involves the very essential search for self — call it authenticity, cultural identity, appropriate values or a language of one's own). Both authors have undertaken the investigation of how "here" connects to "there", and have done so by focusing on the figure of the cultural *assimilé,* the Westernized intellectual whose trajectory points to the problems and challenges of defining a coherent ethical-cultural personality in a society not European, yet heavily marked by Europe. To read *No Longer at Ease* and *Hopscotch* is thus to read close to the core of concerns and strategies which characterize the novel of Africa, Latin America (and the Third World).

The Trip-to-Europe

a. From the Other Side

The Argentine critic David Viñas, in trying to establish the recurring topoi and fundamental obsessions of his country's literature, lists the Trip-to-Europe as a constant found over and again. The roots of the obsession and the grounds for its persistence can, in Viñas's view, be easily discerned from the remarks of one of Argentina's important nineteenth-century men of letters: "For an American...there is no greater joy than to be able to undertake a little trip to the fount of all light and all truth in this century-Europe" (149)[2]. As Vinas's analysis pointedly shows, between 1845, when these words were written, and the 1960s, when Cortázar was writing, apparently not much had changed, for Horacio Oliveira, the protagonist of *Hopscotch,* still centres his search for a civilization — for Civilization — on the Continent. The novel's entire first section, unambiguously entitled "from the other side,"

finds him in Paris — called the "big metaphor" for the West — in order to experience his "sentimental education" (*Hopscotch,* 134; 52). One hundred years after Argentina's formal independence, Oliveira is still the New World savage whose attempt to delineate a cultural place in the sun is anchored "there".

Obi Okonkwo, the hero of *No Longer at Ease,* though apparently far removed in geography and ethos from Oliveira, is really his spiritual kinsman. He too reenacts the colonial's paradigmatic Trip-to-Europe-in-Pursuit-of-Culture, or, in Nigerian terms, as someone who has studied in England, he is a "been to." The parallel to the argentine intellectual's statement that Europe is the "fount of all light and all truth" — the motive behind the journey — is, in Obi's case, the solemn pronouncement by an elder from Umuofia, his native village: "Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we... are the first, in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land" (54).

That Obi's and Oliveira's trip is less a practical endeavour than a quest for a spiritual-cultural profile becomes clear by the lack of a strong utilitarian impulse in either of them. Oliveira survives in Paris thanks to the handouts of a brother back home and spends his days with a like-minded group of expatriates endlessly scrutinizing and discussing the arts, texts and values of the Occident: jazz, Klee, Mondrian, authors from Homer to Dylan Thomas, and above all, the cornerstone of Western culture, Western metaphysics, with its rationalist-materialist bent; Obi is dispatched by his brethren to England to read law. Their interest in the trip *is* utilitarian: they want him to settle their land disputes when he returns. But he reads English instead. The significance of the switch is patent: the English language and its literature are the repository of Eliot's famous Tradition, England's "national identity" and "moral values," and by reading them Obi, like Oliveira, tries to position himself as an outsider within the civilization of the West (Eagleton, 27; 29).

Interestingly, while the full measure of how successful the positioning has been only comes into full view when Obi and Oliveira return to "this side," both Achebe and Cortázar give indications of its outcome while the protagonists are still abroad. In both cases, the outcome can be subsumed under the Nigerian expression "know book." That is, since much of Obi's and Oliveira's approach to the Western heritage is through its cultural artifacts — texts, mainly — their Westernization is marked by bookishness, voyeurism, irrelevance and lack of vitality. The Argentine in the

City of Light reading and ruminating incessantly about Western culture is a disemboweled caricature of the Western thinking being: he is *so* reasoning that he is unable to act or feel (18; 20). At the same time, as he himself admits, his "[poking] around the bookcase" of Western culture has a *déjà vu* about it — like the proverbial provincial he has come to many of the moments of Western culture after their vogue and pertinence have passed (92-93). The Nigerian in the city by the Thames is equally textual, vicarious and parodic, playing the part of a Joseph Warton or a William Wordsworth as he writes poetry about his homeland in the English pastoral mode ("How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree...") — an instance of cultural *in*authenticity induced by "knowing book" if there ever was one (17).

The truth is that more than providing the imperialized with a coherent cultural or moral system the Trip-to-Europe reveals the cracks in the order to which they aspire. Oliveira goes to Paris looking for what he describes as the "axis, centre, *raison d'être,*" but the thrust of *Hopscotch* is that the centre simply does *not* hold (15). Paris, the metaphor for the West, is further personified as Pola — Pola-Paris, the text says (424) — a French-woman with whom the Argentine has an affair. Orderly, rational, predictable, Pola is doomed to die of a cancerous growth (424; 136). The symbolism is obvious, but effective as ironically Oliveira's quest in the metro-*pol*-is is primarily for a way *out* of the House that Occident Built. In one vertiginous chapter of the book (71) there is a description of the house in its most futuristic incarnation, made of

> plastic material... with tele-operated bathrooms, a different-coloured water according to the days of the week, a nicety of the national hygiene service, with television in every room... subtle compensations that will reduce all rebellions to conformity, and so forth. That is to say, a satisfactory world for reasonable people. And will any single person remain in it who is not reasonable? (380)

Oliveira's criticism is echoed by Obi Okonkwo. He not only has been to the centre, but seen the centre brought to the colonies since Nigeria is still British at the time of *No Longer at Ease.* Thus, Obi too recognizes the absurdities of the Western way, particularly as exemplified by the British empire builders: the ennobling work ethic applied to the running of a dehumanizing colonial bureaucracy; the "superior" educational system used to remind the colonized that he can't "use his loaf" (65); and again the materialism so overpowring that it ultimately ruins Obi despite his awareness of it (98).

Indeed, the centre that Obi and Oliveira confront is a degraded West, a post-World War II Europe no longer quite so sure of itself as in the glorious centuries of conquest and expansion. Achebe captures this best through the character of Mr. Green, the English colonial administrator, who is now a pathetic figure overseeing the dissolution of an Empire, rather than a bringer of light to the heart of darkness. He writes: "In 1900 Mr. Green might have ranked among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear" (106). Cortázar, in turn, represents the decline through his portrayal of the Left Bank alienated counter-culture in which Oliveira moves. As Viñas puts it, this is a Paris where "Sartre is made aware of his miseries reading Fanon; [and] Levi-Strauss recognizes his [problems] when he faces the Bororos... Europe is no longer heaven even for its own inhabitants; the former colonial world questions them, invades them, kidnaps them and settles old scores for centuries of plundering" (200). How can such a world, with debased values and a self-definition in flux provide a strong ethical-cultural identity to those who are themselves marked by what Abdul JanMohamed calls "peripeteia of values"? (274)

And yet, the debasement not withstanding, the Trip-to-Europe confirms the airs of superiority and the humiliating stereotypes through which the *metropolitains* approach the imperialized; no matter how vitiated, they still insist on playing Prospero to your Caliban. You may be a cold, cerebral Argentine from Buenos Aires, called the "Paris of the South," but to them, as Cortázar's satiric eye so bitingly shows, you are ever the redskin from Amazonia, the Dionysian Latin-Mediterranean who speaks a "barbarian American language" (170; 114; 212). Or you may be a brilliant African student, from a "people who made a great art of conversation," but you too, as Achebe's prose caustically reveals, are inevitably associated with linguistic — hence cultural — barbarism (50). That is why you lower your voice when speaking English with a fellow Nigerian in London: the British would "naturally assume that one had no language of one's own" (49). (I will return to the issue of language and identity a bit later).

In the final analysis, the journey towards enlightenment muddles what it was meant to clarify and illuminates what it was intended to extinguish. Rather than delineating a European persona for the third-worlder, it underlines the ambiguities of his condition as a Europeanizer repudiated by the Europeans; and rather than lessening his tries to the native soil, the stay on the "other

side" reinforces his sense of nativeness. It is in England that Obi asserts his African identity through various components of the Nigerian ethos: language (he makes a point of speaking Ibo whenever he can [49]; food (he tries to "eat Nigeria" despite the difficulties of finding yams and bitter leaf soup in the land of boiled potatoes[34]); and community (he writes poetry about Nigeria, is active in Nigerian student groups, and finds the woman he loves — an Ibo — in London [22; 38]). No wonder, then, that Achebe writes of his hero: "It was in England that Nigeria became more than just a name to him. That was the first great thing that England did for him" (13). Oliveira, a self-confessed "Frenchified Argentine," even more avid in his rejection of the autochtonous — the *French* epigraph to the Paris part of the book is "Rien ne vous tue un homme comme d'être obligé de représenter un pays" — also comes to affirm his Argentineity in France (92;1). Again, this affirmation is linguistic (the use of Spanish, the recital of the very indigenist Argentine epic poem, *Martín Fierro* [211]); culinary (mate, the Argentine bitter tea, assumes almost existential importance for him [78-79]); and communal-emotional (he longs for the warmth of Argentina, its "generous schedules, open house, time to throw away", and likewise finds the woman he loves — a Latin American — in Paris [152]). In fact, the relationship with this woman, known not insignificantly as La Maga, The Magician, becomes the true *raison d'être* of Oliveira's quest in Paris. She stands for everything Pola does not: disorder, intuition, superstition, naiveté, bigheartedness, spontaneity, emotion. She is Latin American, raped as La Maga was, accepting herself as poor and *non*-European. And she becomes the question which opens the book and propells it forward: "Would I find La Maga?" (3) In other words, having met my continent in Europe and lost it through my attempts at Western intellectualization — La Maga leaves Oliveira after he displays no feelings at the death of her son — will I be able to find it and be what I authentically am, a Latin American?

If the fact that you are *not* a Westerner is what the Trip-to-Europe ultimately subtantiates, then the answer must be on "this side." Oliveira and Obi both return home, and in each novel the search for self, for what should be "more mature versions" of self, continues on home ground (Foster, 103).

b. From This Side

What do the protagonists find at home? To arrive at an answer it might be worthwhile to cite Viñas once more on the intent of the

European pilgrimage. He writes:

> Its fundamental meaning is a dialectic between the particular and the universal, between the place of departure, where the empirical is located, and the sought after "domain of the spirit." The aim is to leave the devalued material zone...in search of a possible "salvation" in the "region of Humanity" and in the models and parameters of Culture. (149).

The basic opposition here is important: Europe-domain of the spirit/Third World-devalued material zone. Simply put, to come home again is, as in the Hispanic form of the game, to hopscotch from Heaven above to Earth below.

This is exactly what happens to Oliveira and Obi. In Europe they had been doubly spiritualized: they had sought to become part of the Western spirit, and in so doing achieved a kind of notional acculturation divorced from their own reality. At the same time, while European colonialist xenophobia and a sense of estrangement from the European milieu had intensified their feelings for the homeland, that too had something of the intangible about it since it was occurring abroad and consisted in part of idealized gestures, such as Obi's utopian verses about his "noble fatherland/Great land of sunshine bright" (103). What the remigration does is to pit this ethereal baggage against the empirical in all its earthiness. The test, as Obi expresses it, is to see whether the theories formed in London — the abstractions — would survive the impact of the homecoming. (38). But given that the home ground is *a priori* the *devalued* material zone (otherwise why seek Culture in Europe?), the conclusion seems foregone.

And so the Argentina that Oliveira returns to is a parochial, ersatz place, hiding its face as a culturally underdeveloped, economically exploited and politically unstable Third World country under what he calls an "official version," a veneer of Westernized sophistication and a rhetoric of "high and mighty national sovereignty" (233; 52; 234). It is thus symbolized in *Hopscotch* by a circus and an insane asylum, and by the man who works in both, Manolo Traveler. A close friend and nativized doppelgänger of Oliveira's, Traveler — despite his name — has never left Argentina and never examined life too much. He is what Oliveira would have been without the trip, and through him Horacio enters the mad, mad world of Argentine life as an employee of both tragicomic institutions.

Clearly, having returned from Heaven to Earth, Oliveira must — in the words of the Latin American expression — try to "assume

his reality," impoverished and grotesque as it may be. He works — in contrast to the "spiritual" existence in Paris — and he discusses local issues, from literature to politics — not European art and Western metaphysics. In fact, he refuses to speak French or to talk about the "other side," as if to say the great myths of universal culture — Obi's theories from London — are simply not functional here. This means that the colonial's attempts to successfully internalize the Western way, already shown as problematic in Europe, receive even stronger blows at home. The answer to the quest for an ethical-cultural personality again appears to be accommodation to the Third World reality, falsities, corruption and all.

As already suggested, what confronts Oliveira in Buenos Aires is to a great extent what Obi encounters in Lagos. There is the befouled, corrupt environment, covering its sores behind a facade of modernization and a discourse of development, an environment imagized as a "world turned upside down," or even more sharply as "an Augean stable" (46; 43). There is also the unavoidable immersion of the protagonist in this slime through his work (Obi becomes a government bureaucrat), and his realization that in the domestic context the cultural and ethical norms learned in Europe — be they romantic love or the fact that palm greasing is bad — are inoperable. And there is the apparent conclusion that to be a Nigerian you have to make peace with these things. (Obi loses his love because she is from a group considered taboo by his people, and he begins to "eat" bribes). As the traditional wisdom says: "A man may go to England, become a lawyer or a doctor, but it does not change his blood" (160).

Neat, pat, and obviously too simple. Can Cortázar and Achebe really be saying that the solution to the search for self is the willing surrender to a lunatic asylum or an Augean stable? Of course not. Obi and Oliveira "assume" their reality contentious and reproachful, no longer at ease, to paraphrase Achebe, or farther away from their own countries than when they had been wandering about Europe, to paraphrase Cortázar (228). Their discontent is connected in large measure to what Oliveira characterizes as "the business of coming back and going away" (228). Having been abroad and acquired a wide scope, they, like outsiders, have a keener awareness of problems and a lessened tolerance for the status quo. Further, caricaturesque, unrealistic and incomplete as their Westernization might be, they have been exposed to its rationalistic-critical sense and its individualism, and so find it difficult to accept the less questioning attitudes of their fellows and to integrate harmoniously

into their communities. Neither Oliveira nor Obi can easily be a Traveler, "without intellectual and existential anguish, at home in his own territory" (Garfield, 93).

The way they bridge the gap between themselves and their societies is not willing surrender, but what could be called bungled surrender. Obi renounces his fiancee, but in the process alienates his kinsmen and causes her to have an abortion; and he takes bribes, but in such an inept way that he is arrested. Oliveira becomes so much part of the madness of Argentina that he goes mad, and in the ambiguous ending of the book apparently commits suicide. Both protagonists, in other words, are defeated by the conflicting claims of their "double heritage" *(No Longer,* 110). They cannot successfully negotiate the contradictions or find positive solutions, for instance, in action to change their societies. (There are moments in each novel when Obi and Oliveira consider how changes might be effected — Obi speculates about a half-way house between enlightened dictatorship and democracy [44], and Oliveira meditates on a peeling away of the sophisticated veneers and an acceptance of the impoverished truth of the masses as the first step [233-34] — but neither effectively goes beyond this stage.) Their stories are chronicles of a search for self amidst the discontinuities of a colonized status, with the emphasis on the *search,* not on the resolution. (Oliveira does not find La Maga again.) Still, if there is no resolution *within* the story, on the level of the fabulation, there is a sort of coming together of the contraries in the act of *writing* each novel. That is to say, by casting a tale of alienation — a Western theme — in Third World terms the two authors have blended the conflicting threads, and in so doing transcended them.

A Language and a Form of One's Own: Subverting the European Novel

Charles Larson, who in the early 1970s published *The Emergence of African Fiction,* has more recently written a study with a wider scope entitled, *The Novel in the Third World.* In it, incorporating some of the analyses and theses of the first book and expanding on them, Larson makes two significant observations, one thematic, the other formal. He notes that *the* theme of Third World novels, found repeatedly in works from the most diverse areas, is "the Third World culture exposed to the West, in all its various stages and permutations." The range goes from the "initial exposure to the West" to "those aspects of colonialism and racialism that have lived on, after independence," but the subject is ever

present (14). Such thematic commonality, Larson writes, is mirrored by a formal parallelism, which can be described most broadly as "something *contrary* to our concept of the novel in the West" (12; emphasis added). This means that Third World novels often share a lack of concern with some or all the givens of the mainstream Western novelistic tradition, for example, "the luxuries of characterisation [sic], motivation, depth, psychology,"[3] and that they subvert — subtly or radically — many of the linguistic structures and the cultural presuppositions on which the Western novel rests. The path each novelist chooses for his or her creative "irreverence" towards the Western tradition — the term is Borge's — will be determined to a great extent by the particular Third World cultural circumstance. As Larson says, "the very 'form' of the novel from cultures within the Third World has often been strongly influenced by those cultures themselves" (12). Achebe and Cortázar exemplify all these facts well: they are "third-worldly" in their thematization of the clash of cultures, and they tamper with the Western novel in ways which are affected by their respective sociocultural environment.

The first level on which the tampering occurs is on the level of language, the very stuff that makes the novel possible. A major issue in Third World writing *is* the matter of language since colonization inevitably means the imposition of the conqueror's tongue on the conquered. When a creative artist in the Third World sits down to write fiction in a European language there is almost always the problem of finding a way to say things about "us" using "their" medium. As Achebe writes of English, his colonial language, the challenge is to create "a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" ("The African Writer," 62).

No Longer at Ease makes this the centre of its concern. Indeed, in an essay entitled "Language as Theme in *No Longer at Ease,*" Felicity Riddy convincingly argues that Obi Okonkwo's failure is primarily a failure of language: none of the linguistic codes available to him is adequate to express the identity of an urban African caught between two worlds (150-51). To show this, Achebe constantly tampers with English as only a third-worlder can, hopscotching back and forth between conversational English, the English of poetry and narrative prose, formal speechmaking English, semiliterate written English, pidgin, Igbo interspersed with English, and Igbo represented through English words (4; 17; 39; 95; 96; 50-51 passim). The result is something different from metropo-

litan English, which is suited to its new surroundings in the sense that it articulates the modern African dilemma. Obi "tries on" a variety of these linguistic forms, but is no longer at ease with any of them. Igbo, for example, embodies a ceremonial, ordered way of life governed by traditional values, and Obi can wax poetic about it, yet it cannot convey other areas of his existence, those connected with Western values, such as "consecutive reasoning" or Western-style eroticism (50; 44 45). English, on the other hand, has its own limitations, largely related to the fact that it first comes out of books rather than out of vital experience. The point is that his own culture has determined how Achebe approaches the deconstruction — and reconstruction — of the colonial language. He has not shattered the oppressor's code — as Sartre would have the Third World writer do — but he has bent it for his purposes (Booth, 81).

The one who seems closer to Sartre's ideal is Cortázar. If Sartre writes that the post-colonial Francophone writer will "strip from words their Frenchness, will shatter them, will destroy their traditional associations and will juxtapose them with violence, Cortázar says in *Hopscotch* (through his narrative alter-ego, the author-character, Morelli) that he wants to "give language back its rights... expurgating it, punishing it, changing 'descend' to 'go down' as a hygienic measure" (Booth, 81; *Hopscotch,* 439). While Cortázar's concern is ultimately with all language that "has been falsified, debased, made to serve ignoble ends" (as is Achebe's, by the way; see his essay, "Language and the Destiny of Man"), his first line of attack is against Spanish, that dubious inheritance of Mother Spain.

This may seem strange to those not closely familiar with Latin America, for as Larson indicates in *The Novel in the Third World,* one reason he does not include the region in the study is that its authors do not write "in their second language — the language of the colonial power that subdued them" (916). The Latin Americans of course *do* write in an imperial European code, and even though it is not second to them in the same sense that English is to the Igbo-speaking Achebe (since none of them is a Native American whose first language is Quechua or Guaraní), they have always felt a sense of estrangement from the linguistic traditions of received, Peninsular Spanish. This estrangement has been so profound and long-lived that modern Latin American writers date the beginning of a truly Latin American literary Spanish only from the 1940s, when Borges created a cold, exacting rigorous prose, suitable for

irony, humour and a desacralizing playfulness (Fuentes, 26). This kind of prose was needed because Spanish, as inherited from the metropolis, was a pompous, flatulent language, used to conceal the realities of a fragmented, suffering continent under a cover of well-wrought and sonorous verbiage. It was thus the Latin American circumstance, the socio-cultural demands of the particular Third World milieu, that once more influenced the direction in which the colonial language had to be overcome.

Hopscotch is a superb-radical — display of the expurgating, punishing and deflating strategy ("descend" — "go down") at work. It is linguistic tour de force, written in a slangy, conversational Argentine Spanish, full of puns, wordplays, parody, humour and jabberwocky. Cortázar himself has pointed to chapter 75 of the book as a condensation of what he wanted to achieve linguistically. There, while brushing his teeth in front of a mirror, "Oliveira remembers his past life in Buenos Aires and does so in a polished and chiseled" Spanish (Harss, 234): "In Buenos Aires...he felt himself surrounded once again by that discreet smoothing off of edges that likes to go by the name of good sense..." (388). After about half a page of this, Oliveira bursts out laughing, takes the toothpaste, and begins to draw doodless and write obscenities all over the mirror; the aim is to cover up — or to expose — his "false face," the false face created by a false language. Like Achebe, then, Cortázar sees authenticity in language as authenticity in values, and his hero's battle to find himself is, like Obi's, in the great measure of linguistic struggle.

The attack by Cortázar on the language bequeathed to him by Europe is part of an overall assault on the mainstream European novel tradition, that is, on the realist novel. In *Hopscotch* this type of novel is mockingly called the "Chinese roll" because of its comfortable linear progression, its assumption of a steady forward movement in the development of character and the resolution of plot (443). Again, one chapter (34) of the book sums up the mockery, when Cortázar alternates lines from a novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, Spain's, major nineteenth-century realist, with Oliveira's caustic running commentary on is trashiness. What the chapter does microcosmically, *Hopscotch* does as a whole; it is an anti-linear hopscotch in which the reader, following a table of instructions is urged to jump back and forth between chapters from "this side" and the "other side," and a third section called "from diverse sides." This section contains additional "optional" chapters, newspaper clippings, selections from various literary

works, comments by Morelli, and other miscellanea. One purpose of these manoeuvres is to more accurately and powerfully involve the reader in the cultural leap-frogging, temporal disjunctions and unreality which characterize Oliveira's existence as a Latin American. Latin America is not Europe, Cortázar and modern Latin American literature are saying; it has not had and does not have a history of steady progress and of individual advancement within a well-regulated polity. Therefore, it cannot have a mature novelistic creativity that pretends to embody these presuppositions of European realism. In Europe itself, with the twentieth-century crisis of positivism and progress, the avant-garde — Kafka, Joyce, Proust and others — abandoned realism, and to the extent that Latin Americans interact positively with the Western novel, they do so with these subversive innovators.

The African novel has had to wage a similar war of acclimatization with the European novel; and it has had much less time in which to do so since the novel is a relatively young phenomenon in Africa. (The first Latin American novel was written at the beginning of the nineteenth century; the first African novel around the turn of the twentieth.) Perhaps, because of this, the offensive against the formal hegemony of the Western novel has generally been less extreme than that of the Latin Americans, who have themelves only recently moved well beyond realism through the liberal use of fantasy and experimentation. In addition, the novel in Africa — certainly as Achebe conceives it — still fills certain sociological needs which the Latin Americans feel their novel no longer has to (or no longer can). One is the need to accurately document Africa's historical and cultural inheritance, to recapture it from the distortions of the colonizers. Another, closely related to the first, is the need to use the novel as an instructional tool, a place where Africans can find objective representations of themselves and their continent. (The Latin Americans feel that today other agencies can carry on this *direct* sociological-educational work more successfully than literature.) These imperatives militate against a "difficult" novel of the cut of a *Hopscotch,* and call for a less radical modification of the realist pattern.

But lack of radicalness does not mean lack of change. The ongoing critical debate about the technical differences or the technical difficulties of the African novel indicates that the Africans are modifying Western realism in a manner rooted in their cultures; and whether you call these alterations problematic (Roscoe, Abraham) or inevitable and even innovational (Chinweizu,

Obiechina) depends on how strongly you believe that a "well-made" novel is one in the Western realist tradition.

The list of charges or virtues is usually headed by the items quoted earlier: African novels do not have "luxuries of characterisation, motivation, depth, psychology and all the rest of it." (Neither do Latin American novels, for that matter.) Significantly, these remarks were made by Keith Waterhouse in a review of *No Longer Ease,* and they indicate — back-handedly — where Achebe has parted with the Great Novelistic Tradition. He has done so because its "luxuries" (read, conventions based on Western conditions) do not correspond to African reality. Obi Okonkwo is not a privatized European living in a Cartesian universe where "thought processes within the individual's consciousness have supreme importance" (Watt, 18). He is an African formed in a setting where "collective tradition tends to inhibit the development of individuality which nurtures an awareness of self as a distinct entity.... independent of the group" (Obiechina, 116). He thus cannot be characterized through European depth psychology. Achebe in fact shows the predicament of his hero through Obi's repeated — failed — efforts to engage meaningfully in self-reflexive, Cartesian "consecutive reasoning" (44). When he tries to think discursively his mind tends to roam, or finds more coherence in the symbolic language of the collectivity, that is, in Igbo folklore (44; 46).

Some Final Thoughts

The search for self is the form *and* the content of *No Longer at Ease* and *Hopscotch.* The fragmentation and tension of the heroes' quests is also that of the novelistic medium: both wander in an intermediate zone, seeking to define themselves between the West and the non-West. Any differences in what is essentially the same trajectory are by and large induced by the particular Third World situation. Oliveira goes to Paris because enlightened France took the place of backward Spain as "Europe" for the Latin Americans; Obi, still colonized by England, goes to London. One tries to enter Western civilization through the English Great Tradition; the other through a belated French existentialism and a deracinated hodge-podge of universal culture which is so typically (Franco-)Argentine. Cortázar's attack on Western language and literature is more extreme because he is backed by a more established Latin American novelistic tradition, where various narrative strategies have already been tested, and where paradigms of rupture with realism have already been developed (in part through contact with the modernist

prose of Europe). Achebe, on the other hand, though he definitely "does things" to the traditional novel, stays closer to it because it is the heritage most availabale to him (through England); because of the newness of the African novel; and — most importantly — because he sees his role as a documentor and teacher for his society ("The Novelist as Teacher," 44).

NOTES

[1]This study is the result of research conducted at the University of Texas at Austin during the summer of 1985, while I was a participant in a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on "Major African Authors." My thanks go to Bernth Lindfors, the seminar director, colleague, friend and teacher, for his help and encouragement in the preparation of this article.

[2]All translations from the Spanish, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

[3]The description of these particular givens is from Waaterhouse, 398.

WORKS CITED

Achebe, Chinua. "The African Writer and the English Language." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. 55-62.

——, "Language and the Destiny of Man." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. 30-37.

—— *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975.

——, "The Novelist as Teacher." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. 42-45.

——, *No Longer at Ease*. New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1960.

Alazraqui, Jiame, and Ivar Ivask, eds. *The Final Island: The Fiction of Julio Cortázar*. Norman: University of Oklahom Press, 1978.

Baldwin, Claudia, comp. *Nigerian Literature: A Bibliography of Criticism, 1952-1976*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980.

Bell, Gene H. "The Rise of the Latin American Novel." *Okike 14* (1978): 4-24.

Booth, James. *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "El escritor argentino y la tradición. *Obras completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974. 267-74.

Brody, Robert. *Julio Cortázar: Rayuela*. London: Critical Guides to Spanish Texts-Grant and Cutler; Támesis, 1976.

Carroll, David, *Chinua Achebe*, New York: Twayne, 1970.

Chinweizu. "African Literary Criticism Today," *Okike 9* (1975): 89-105.

——, "Beyond European Realism". *Okike 14* (1978): 1-3.

Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Washington: Howard UP, 1983.

Christ, Ronald. "Among the Ibos." Rev. of *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe. *New York Times Book Review*. 17 Dec., 1967: 22.

Cortázar, Julio. *Hopscotch.* Trans. Gregory Rbassa. New York: Pantheon-Random, 1966.

——, *Rayuela.* Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1963.

Dash, Michael J. "The Outsider in West African Fiction: An Approach to Three Novels." King 19-29.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York: Grove, 1967.

Fernández Moreno, César, Julio Ortega and Ivan A. Schulman, eds. *Latin American in Its Literature.* Trans Mary G. Berg. New York: Homes and Meier, 1980.

Fernández Retamar, Roberto. "Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America.' *Massachusetts Review,* 15 (1974): 7-72.

Filer, Malva E. *Los Mundos de Julio Cortázar.* New York: Las Américas, 1970.

Foster, David William. *Currents in the Contemporary Argentine Novel: Arlt, Mallea, Sábato and Cortázar.* Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1975.

Fuentes, Carlos. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana.* Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969.

Gallagher, David Patrick. *Modern Latin American Literature.* New York and London: Oxford UP, 1973.

Garfield, Evelyn Picón. ***Julio Cortázar.* New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975.**

Harss Luis, and Barbara Dohmann. *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin American Writers:* New York: Harper, 1967.

Innes, C.L., and Bernth Lindfors, eds. *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe.* Washington: Three Continents, 1978.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.

Killam, G.D. *The Novels of Chinua Achebe.* New York: Africana, 1969.

King, Bruce, ed. *The Literarry Half-Yearly: A Chinua Achebe Number, 21* (1980): i-202.

Larson, Charles R. *The Emergence of African Fiction.* Rev. Ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972.

—— *The Novel in the Third World.* Washington: Inscape, 1976.

Mannoni, O. *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization,* 2nd. ed. Trans. Pamela Powesland. Intro. Philip Mason. New York: Praeger, 1964.

Moore, Gerald. *Seven African Writers.* London: Oxford UP, 1962.

—— *Twelve African Writers.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980.

Obiechina, Emmanuel. *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975.

Riddy, Felicity. "Language as Theme in *No Longer at Ease." Critical Perspectives,* 150-59.

Vinas, Davis. *Literatura aragentina y realidad polltica: de Sarmiento a Cortázar.* Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1970.

Waterhouse, Keith. "New Novels." Rev. of *No Longer at Ease,* by Chinua Achebe. *New Statesman* 17 Sept., 1960: 398-99.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1957.

Wren, Robert M. *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe.* Washington: Three Continents, 1980.

Tess Onwueme

WHERE OIL CEASES TO ANNOINT

I have seen flowers
shut their eyes to a dying day
I have heard of the sun
sleep through the day
and of coups by night
superintended by a squinting moon
but never have our dreams
been so dead drowned
in a thirsty sea
..... in a land
where oil ceases to annoint

Tess Onwueme

REQUIEM FOR THE LIVING

The stream's nose no longer runs
The sky's tears no longer clean
Only the Sea's bitter Salt
Only the coconut's dry breasts
Only the sun's fire to mop us
Only earth's ditch to envelope our soft bones
Only stones to nail our winged ambition
  to its final cross
Only us to gorge on our oil
  To the precipice
In the midst of this oil a gloat
  Here we come
We who have tasted thirst first-hand
  to the precipice
We who inherited a snail shell
  from the essence of the sea
  I to the precipice

With heavy heart to scavenge on its own love with you
I with you lie low on high seas
Awaiting the dawn
Awaiting dawn to separate sand from salt
Awaiting dawn to separate sea from salt
Awaiting light to sear the man from monkey
Only then to moan "amen"
Only then to murmur "amen"

E.A. Markham

GRANDFATHER'S SERMON AND MICHEAL SMITH

Let the cow, the horse, the camel, the garden-bee — let the mud-fish the lobster, the mussel, eel, the sting-ray, and the grunting pig-fish — let these, and the like of these, be put on a perfect equality with man and woman!

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

i

Echoes of the Hymns return,
the frayed little knot in a cemetery,
people standing as if in need
of practice: is this how to outlive
something dead of natural causes?
Somehow it was better inside, sagging
with the weight, bending a knee
to the strange little god of a grandfather
whose voice lacked timbre, the highish pitch
right for the man's unprepossessing
look. His favourite hymns, Nos 182 and 527
in the Methodist Hymnal
come back now with the whiff
of these unnatural deaths, these killings
of near friends, this contempt
for what it takes to live.
The killer, the new god of power
will claim to be a man like other men
babbling, from a script, the language of love.

ii

The clans are fighting a mile away.
They paint their faces, wear bits of grass and bark
to tell us this is happening at an earlier time.
Do not believe it, this is wishful thinking;
they wear suits and conquer the centuries
by aircraft. In capital cities
they shake each other's hands, careless

of what smears them.
They are what old men fearing, feared to predict.

A familiar animal lives on this hill,
puts on clothes during daylight
and affects human speech: you know him.
Dangerous to women after dark, particularly
those he would own: one returns from his embrace
with a shattered jaw, ribs broken.
Why do we pretend not to recognize him?

These are your grandchildren, old man —
lay-preacher, taylor, Overseer, modestly
letting the horse outlive you —
By croaking out that ancient song, by pleading asthma
you have not prevented them inheriting your earth:
Sometimes the Light surprises
the Christian while he sings...
is a coy way to approach you, Michael Smith.

But what is strange to a dead man?
To march in the street in his cause is strange.
To live with his death is strange.
To play the poet, imperial in arrogance,
and colonize this *subject,* is worse, ridiculous
as reading a few lines, in a public place,
for Peace. *Vanity of Vanities, saith the Lord:*
All is Vanity. Yet, we must do it.

You are ageless, Michael Smith, grandfatherly
when it suits, you are anybody's.
The men in suits have given you away.
Don't let their dupes turn you into a hero.

iii

And will they now name a bookshop
after you, a mini-shrine
where we can come and salve conscience,
the pious and the hypocrite among us
oozing virtue and well-meaning,
and let the killers off the hook?
Some who wished you dead will buy your poems:
no one will stop them.

iv

Older, from the death of friends
we are the old men now. We preach
when we can, not knowing how to lament
those many, many dead unknown to us:
so we abuse you, Michael Smith, with excess
of sentiment.
My voice is no sweeter, my command no surer
than a grandfather who for an hour stayed
God's hand and stopped a hurricane which threatened genocide:
his voice is now mocked by bandits who rule this land
killing for the people's good.
If you could believe it you would return to misquote
godless lines;
to turn Whitman's 'heresy' into an island's hope
and demand with us
that some be hanged by their ties,
their well-pressed suits and fake dashikis.
But who will prevent killers in the congregation
saying *Amen* to this?

E.A. Markham

THE BLACK PRIEST

I'm forgetting my history, Prudence:
which Caesar marched back triumphantly to Rome,
which potential god arrived there in chains?
I startle you with God? I'm a Priest, woman:
I can still, let us say, blaspheme in fourteen tongues
not counting the dialects. Tomalup we called Him
over there. You remind me of them,
those Mandobo women, unmarried, preserved
to be changed, on the day of Resurrection
into sea creatures, into frogs. One night,
two emissaries from your heathen tribe came
after dark and asked for a sign.
Look at our hands calloused with work.
Yours, like the Dutch, are Priestly: your magic
aeroplanes bring cargo without taxing
the muscles — how can we learn the trick?
For years, they had awaited the earthquake, the promised
miracle when a man with one wife only
would go to the factory and become corned beef
like a Spinster; where those who had eaten dogs
would then have to pay debts to the Dog:
a future where all pigs would be white.
What makes you resist the Will of Tomalup
woman, and say no to corned beef?

They drag you out of the pickle with the souse
and the tripe to be my welcoming party:
that's how they honour their own in these parts.
I've been away decades, I know the form:
second wife and children in their Sunday best,
long-limbed, fair-skinned and worth it.
Here I am greeted by a servant Emeritus
who even in her thieving heyday never had the breasts
to start a Cult. Had I gone West like the others,
worn famous Capitals on my gown,

things would be different: there'd be queues
of fresh talent here, with offerings of cake. *There there,*
don't be nervous: you wish to alter the tone
of the Reunion. Let us pray.
You were never at your best standing up
or lying down. Better accept God's compromise
on your knees. Let me do what I'm good at.
Preaching's a hard business, my Sister.
Looking onto the spreading mounds
of temptation, I sometimes think, this God
who is so good to me, will he win re-election?
Yet, I'm a delegate, a delegate — your Soldier —
Preacher, out there, getting mud on his armour.
The world is changed, the Spirit now finds it safe
to desert the man and to lodge in the Organization.
Hi-jack the Spirit. Only then will you *become*
the Organization. But let's not drift into metaphysics —
my weakness, my Special Paper in College.
Tomorrow, I will go to my old church
and preach a sermon about merrymaking. Tomorrow,
from that ground I will renew my Social Contract
with the people. That happens at least once
a week and must make me one of the most
democratic countries I know. Tomorrow,
I will seize evil by its, ah, lovely throat
and preach the bitch off this land. Let us pray.

E.A. Markham

SITTING BULL & LAMBCHOPS

(Bufallo have been introduced into Enga
on an experimental basis)

(There are, as yet, no official barbers in the State)

i

Like fish 'n chips and rich and poor
Sitting Bull is thought to go with Bufallo.
He feels no nostalgia among the Diopin
and the Tinlapin, who leave the herd at peace
and hunt each other, burning homes and gardens:
the big pig is not like his favoured bison.
But job-descriptions have defeated everyone here,
he doesn't feel a fraud playing the black man now.
He's seen enough of whites — cheats and liars.
And they kill people too. Having to live up
to a name, he stands by the truth
spoken after imitation Chiefs connived
at the carve-up of the last great Sioux
Reservation in Dakota: *There are no Indians left
but me.* He sees no reason to go back on that
a hundred years on. Now, as one of two black
Expatriates on Wabag's Snob Hill,
he wonders if his time has finally come.
Impossible to forget Grierson's 10th Calvary: Buffalo
Soldiers, black to a man. No Sioux considered the beauty
of black then. Agai, at the Mission West of Clay Creek
they underlined the point cheating
brave Lakotas of their victory. The discredited 10th
fell into repentance for the nation's ills
punishing themselves with song and dance
and running against the clock. Many turned
their collars the wrong way round
in parody of Kicking Bear's Ghost Dancers:
that too, seems to have lasted a hundred years.

The Lambchops man (reputed to be touring wig-
making shrines in the Wapenamunda area) has no interest
in all this; he has never invaded Sioux country,
killed their women. Though, it is rumoured that others,
who escape punishment, have done that to him.

ii

They drink together and denounce
brigands who have hi-jacked their countries
scattering people far from home.
Yet who isn't here by courtesy of Great Father
who plays the black man's game of changing
his name by the season. Dad is a World Bank
Chief basking in potency, with a foreign-based
Uncle ready to move in when the other leaves home.
Children will be paid off in money
instead of land: with so much dead buried
everywhere, earth's not so clean anymore.
Sitting Bull raises his beer bottle to Lambchops,
clean-shaven and British, not right for his daughter.
To Lambchops, confident as a man who flirts
on the margins of War; arrogant
as his cousins of another colour. To Lambchops,
tattooed by flying bits of English steel; seasoned
by a tour of the world's market-places —
graduate at the tough academy of Bouaké.
This man, who represents a future Sitting Bull
rejected, brings lure deep in New Guinea
of the Mirano, the Afro, Hercules, Casino, Santiago
and more: He's the first, the NAMBAWAN
barber in the State. The joke in Wabag
is that he will learn from the seasoned cowboy
of the West, how best to scalp these innocents.

INTERVIEW WITH OLA ROTIMI*

By Onuora Ossie Enekwe

Photo: Ossie Enekwe

Ola Rotimi

Enekwe: You are trying to write a play on Harcourt Whyte. It is not surprising to those of us who are familiar with your work that you are interested in Whyte, a musician. How do you intend to do that?

Rotimi: Well, when we talk of Harcourt Whyte, I think it is a bit deceptive to see him purely within the province of music. I think Harcourt Whyte's personality transcends the realm of music. It embraces humanist concerns. As you know, he led a rebellion against inhumanity as was being perpetrated in the Port Harcourt General Hospital in the late twenties against the lepers whose eviction the authorities of the General Hospital were insisting

upon. The result of that revolt was the founding of the Uzuakoli Leper Settlement. You might see that as a struggle by handicapped people possessing the courage to assert their humanity, and individuality. I think the story of that struggle is a politico-humanist statement which should remain emblazoned in the memory of this nation. In brief, I am looking at Harcourt Whyte, not only from the viewpoint of a musician who has revolutionized Church music in these parts, in particular, and in Nigeria generally. I appreciated him also from the point of view of a politically conscious Nigerian convinced of the inalienable right of man to recognition and respect.

Enekwe: Thank you. It does appear that you often deal with a hero who fights for what he believes in. Is this practice a conscious one?

Rotimi: Well, let's put it this way. To fight for what one believes in is the mark of heroism. In turn, it goes without saying that heroism is the crucial fibre of which leaders are made. I have tried to examine the issue of leadership in virtually every one of my plays. In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi,* I examined the leadership which Oba Overami — (as the English call him) — provided the Benin people in the late 19th century in the face of British, exploitative economic incursions. *The Gods Are Not To Blame* also handles this subject of leadership, but from the perspective of an ethnic bigot. *Kurunmi* deals with the question of leadership, too, in its own way, Political Leadership.

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again also treats the question of political leadership, more in contemporary terms. Another play which is yet to be published is entitled *Akassa Yomi (Akassa War).* It recalls the attack on the British trading post of Akassa by the Brassmen in an economic revenge led by King Koko. Again, another exploration of the responsibilities of leadership in the face of crisis. It seems then that the spectrum of characterization of all my plays tends to reflect shades of leadership. The choice of Harcourt Whyte as my next dramatic hero fits into this pattern, I should say.

Enekwe: What do you think should be the responsibility of a leader considering what you have done in *The Gods Are Not To Blame* and *Kurunmi?*

Rotimi: I cannot advance a definitive answer to this question of leadership. When you talk of leadership you talk of human beings: you talk of an entity endowed with a thinking faculty, a soul and the corporeal form. You wouldn't gainsay the fact that we are the

most complex creatures on earth — different idiosyncrasies, different preferences, different assumptions, different biases, assorted notions about how things should be handled for the benefit of man, and so on. I would not pontificate on a definitive concept of good leadership. Everybody has some idea of what good leadership should be, anyway. Perhaps, reading or watching these plays might give further glimpses into good or bad leadership and so help crystalize individual ideas, to facilitate the process of choice. My personal view is that a good leader, above all else, must act for the benefit of others, not for himself, alone. This expectation, unfortunately, seems to be the reverse in the experience of leadership in contemporary Africa. To most leaders, it is self first, rather than the people first.

Enekwe: In *The Gods Are Not To Blame,* Odewale seems to me to be very concerned about the public interest. In fact, going through the play, I find a consistent effort to get the people to do things for themselves...

Rotimi: That's true...

Enekwe: Not to depend entirely on the rulers to do things for them. There is a suggestion in your play that the people are also responsible for what has happened because, for instance, they bring in somebody from another tribe and make him their king against the tradition. Would you consider this to be one of the causes of the tragedy?

Rotimi: No. As a matter of fact, I do not think the people are guilty in that respect. They needed someone to give them succour in the face of persistent aggression and devastation from a neighbouring tribe. They needed some leader to help mobilize them, to help galvanize their morale, and, by extension, to help forge them into a solid group against those invaders. Odewale arrived at the right moment to give them the needed boost in spirit against the people of Ikolu whom they eventually defeated. Their individuality and pride as a people were thus restored. In this context, Odewale wasn't a voluntary choice on the part of the people of Kutuje. Rather, his reception as their king was a matter of expediency. In any case, that they welcomed a stranger as King or leader can't be a fault against them, because, in essence, the play condemns tribal chauvinism.

When one says 'the gods are not to blame', one must contemplate the world-view of the African people; particularly the Yoruba concept of destiny. This is that, a person chooses his own destiny

from a sort of *tabula rasa* mind, before he descends to the world to practicalize the choice. You might say that this determinist tenet has a fatalist ring which could, in human affairs, encourage social stasis. It is like foreclosing individual effort against all odds to achieve success. I do not think that is the way we should look at it. Rather, we should conceive the idea from the angle that every action of man, or every destiny, has a role in the entire purpose of human interaction. If somebody has been destined to be an armed robber, perhaps that would have the effect of inducing a counter reaction to armed robbery that would itself engender something of positive value in society. Take, for instance, Lagos, which used to be a city obsessed with lavish week-end parties — notorious for the naked display of monetary well-being. The parties would go on through the nights till daybreak. The longer they ran, and the more disturbing they were to neighbours in the community, the better. With the emergence of armed robbery, these nocturnal parties of squandermaniacs have phased out. People now scuttle home at the sight of dusk. The other smaller cities that copied the extravaganza of Lagos have themselves contained their own profligate leanings. The prowling night marauders are about. In that context, one might say, perhaps, armed robbery has, in spite of its patent brutality, helped to curb waste among our people. Again, from the fears of armed robbers, the metal-fence and burglary-proofing industry has blossomed in Nigeria. Sometimes these window, door and frontage barriers do enhance the architectural cosmetics of buildings in Nigeria. Look around (laugh). To come back to your question, I do not think the people of Kutuje committed a crime against nature in welcoming Odewale, an assumed stranger. Rather, the fault is in Odewale himself, in his 'free' choice of tribal jingoism as a natural trait. That choice led him to unwitting parricide, which in turn led to his marrying the woman who was available to match his new status as King. The woman turned out to be his own mother.

The point is, having chosen tribal jingoism as a major concern of his destiny, all he has to do on earth is actualize the implications and consequences of that 'free' choice. Rather than blame the gods for letting Odewale perpetrate such heineous crimes, people should look at Odewale's experience and learn the lessons from unbridled tribal bigotry. In other words, Odewale is used, in the idiom of the play, to dramatize the shocks which ethnic jingoism is capable of parallelling in the relationships of African people. In this sense, Odewale's tribulations can be seen as drawing attention to that

most obtrusive of African national evils: ethnicism.

Enekwe: Thank you very much. In *Kurunmi,* we have another very strong leader and a very capable soldier, who is also interested in his people. I find that play very intriguing, because by the end of it he says, "I do not even know what the fighting is all bout." (Laughter). And as the play goes on, you find that people talk less of the initial issues. They recede into new expedients. Did you do it purposely.

Rotimi: *The Gods Are Not To Blame* and *Kurunmi* were both written during the civil war. There are clear analogies between the situations in Kurunmi, in particular, and the spatial and temporal milieu in Nigeria from 1966 to 1970. Again, this whole attempt by Kurunmi and Ijaye-land to secede from the Oyo empire, presaged, as it were, the Biafran situation in Nigeria. Warring, Kurunmi says, is like conversation. We all know how to start it, but no one can predict how it will end, because, like conversation, one thing is likely to lead on to another; and before you know it, you have lost touch with the starting point. That seems to apply to the Nigeria-'Biafra' confrontation. It started out with a justifiable feeling of persecution on the part of the Easterners, but by the time it reached its climax, the main issue — that is the need for our people to guarantee safeguards for ourselves against mutual persecution, seemed to have receded. What came to the fore was whether Russia should continue to support a cause against genocide, or whether France should continue to encourage a move to break up our nation. In other words, we started searching for scapegoats outside ourselves. Outside our own failings as a people. If we look at the causes of that civil war, ethnic jingoism was at bottom of it all. All the ethnic groups in Nigeria stand guilty of that. After all is said and done, thousands of lives were lost in the civil war. Eventually, we came back to square one, to live together again as one. What then did we gain? I describe those years as two years of abundant life that only fattened the vultures.

Enekwe: *Kurunmi* deals with something that happened in history among the Yoruba. It also deals with our recent crisis. You are, therefore, using history in two ways — one to tell us something that happened in the past and on the other level, you contemporize it.

Rotimi: I try to.

Enekwe: And in so doing you have managed to keep the facts of the past history almost intact. Do you think I am correct?

Rotimi: The word "almost" is significant. I don't transplant history. I would not say I interpret history either. Rather, what I do is use history to expound some of my ideas — some of the gutsy issues that give one insomnia. Let us put it this way: as I will further demonstrate, in the play on Harcourt Whyte, I use drama to distil historical facts into historical truths. When you immerse historical facts in the liquid of imagination and heat the crucible, the distillation of this mixture which collects at the other end of the creative receptacle is what I call historical truth. That truth can be described as a statement potent with contemporary applicability in a human context. You can relate facts to the specifics of space and time. Truth, on the other hand, has longevity and a universality all its own.

Enekwe: Your plays are important in another significant way. I am sure, you are aware of the discussion about clarity in Nigerian writing. Some Nigerian writers have been criticized for obscurity. Some people try to defend them — for example, Stanley Macebuh, who argues that because Soyinka writes about Ogun, he must necessarily be complex, since Ogun is a complex god. But, we have seen that although you also deal with very complex issues, you have managed to come across very well. Stylistically, do you really make an effort, for there is a very clear distinction between the diction of your critical writings and the diction of your plays? What would you say about this?

Rotimi: I can only speak for myself. I would say that when I started writing, I was conscious of the alienating effect which a foreign language poses between writer and reader or audience. The question then arose as to what one should do to diminish this alienation between the writer and his public, the majority of whom use foreign language from necessity. For my part, I decided to undertake an experiment to see whether one could extenuate the gravity of that alienating factor. I started out apprenticing under traditional Yorubal artistes and spiritualists, spiritualists in the sense of people like the Ifa Priest; Ogun priest; traditional poetry chanters, et cetera. I would frequent Ifa festivals, Ijala, Ogun ceremonies, and watch as many plays by Yoruba performing groups as possible. In the process of all this, I guess, I got myself really absorbed in conditions where the manipulation of our language was richest. The imagery, the sheer evocative power of home language, stunned me as never before. Again this was so, considering that I grew up in the city where home language exists in adulterated form. For the

first time, I was meeting the Yoruba language in the villages and rural settings — around Ife, Oshogbo, Ede, Ikirun, Okitipupa, Ilesha, Ekiti and so on. I made friends with masters of the Yoruba language living in Ife — like Chief M.A. Fabunmi, Chief Fashogbon. I started perceiving the possibilities of using the English language to approximate the impact which our traditional language has on people. *The Gods Are Not To Blame* was the first play in the conscious experiment that followed. *Kurunmi* came next. You might be able to detect the progression stylistically. By the time I came to *Ovonramwen,* I think, I had reached a stage where I would say that I'd become more at ease with the experiment. I must add that the reactions of audiences to my plays encouraged me considerably in that experiment.

I am now branching off to what I would call ultra-realism. What I mean by that will be felt in my next play, the one on Harcourt Whyte, which in itself is an advance on the play preceding it entitled *IF.* With *IF,* I broke away from a rather different experimentation to one of relative audacity. I think the result of this would again impress my audience even more. It is a diversification of the element of language.

---

* *This interview took place in the Paul Robeson Drama Building, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on May 25, 1981.*

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu

THE BOOGIE WOOGIE STORY
for renée (my black american twin sister)

sister i've strained myself
to tell the boogie woogie story
but the right words
will not come
words are too wretched
for events so profound
see?
so i leave it to you
perhaps you can engrave
the boogie woogie story
on canvass
from your side of the shore

i remember these scenes
from boston
a snack bar
in a derelict neighbourhood
an equally derelict clientèlle
all hooked to the drug
and gliding about
like astronauts on the moon
like ghosts of ancestors
come to steal sacrifices
from callous descendants

ii

a young girl
trembling with shattered nerves
laughs out aloud
in a crackled voice
exposing foul teeth
through lips overreddened
with excessive lipstick
eyes masked with artificial whimpers

and heavily saddled
with black mascara
a supermini miniskirt
a pair of tired legs
perched on unlucky
but very high hills
she flicks back
a tangled mass
of artificial blond hair
and with an air of
rehearsed arrogance
says to bar tender:

fix me two legs of chicken
will ya
bar tender takes no notice
cause he knows
she aint got money to pay
then she slumps
into a chair
and begins
to cry her heart out
smearing black mascara
all over that horrifying face

iii

then comes the 'sisi'
with robust chest
a prominent adams apple
a square jaw
and a deep throaty voice
straining to chirp
like a bird
in line with assumed femininity
lips display with stubborn prominence
a scarlet hue of lipstick
from one ear dangles
luxuriously
the extravagant earring
of the flamenco dancer
this one flips an eyelash
at bar tender

and says in mock shyness

mh h brother
fix me a cheezeburger
will ya
bar tender yells in disgust
we dont serve sisis
you get the hell out of here
once again the tears tumble down
as disappointed man/woman
makes about turn

iv

listen sister
there's one episode
of boogie woogie
that breaks my heart
this uncle of ours
up there in boston
the one who was never sober
always neck-deep in rum
uncle timmy's second name
could have been
derilium tremens
oblivion or near madness
uncle timmy's sole property
was a battered old suitcase
locked up in a railway compartment
from fifty years of factory work
this was all uncle timmy
could show for it
what invaluable treasure
lay hidden in that battered case

one day uncle timmy
lay dying
and summoned me
with his last breath
to untie a ragged twine
long married to his trembling hip
that held the key
to the holy of holies

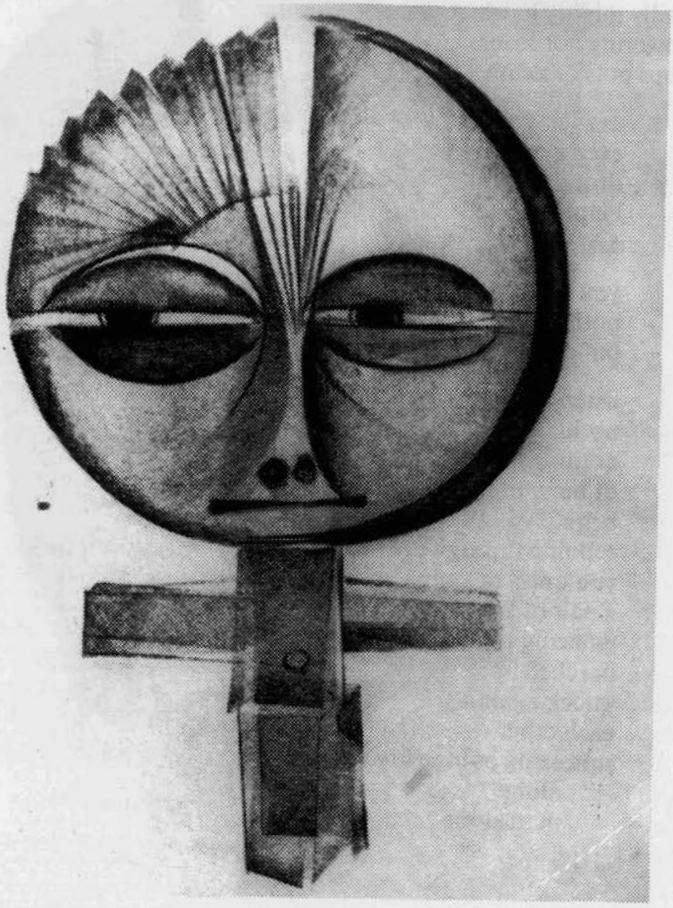
that housed the precious gem
uncle timmy heaved a long sigh
when he saw the case
eyes shone with unuttered anguish
the anticipation of a final embrace
with a parting lover
uncle timmy's hands trembled
as they carefully uncovered
what might have been
the mummy of tutmoses
or rameses ii
then i glimpsed them
the items that meant the world
to my dear old uncle timmy

a wooden pipe
an armstrong hat
a framed photograph
(this uncle timmy clutched to his heart)
of a very strange uncle timmy
sober
responsible
almost a gentleman
sizwe bansi's life in death
and this he bequeathed to me
his most beloved niece
the only one who ever cared
for dear old uncle timmy

v

so ride on sister
you must tell
the boogie woogie story
as best you can
go on
splash it on canvass
but remember
boogie woogie
did not start
in plantain and sugar plantations
boogie woogie
did not start

in the dirty bowels
of cargo ships
overladen with sweating
naked bodies of ebony
boogie woogie
started right here
on the primeval soil
of my ancestors
when the slave-hunter's crooked drum
sounded behind the likes
of equiano and ja(w) ja(w)
and fierce wind
was caught in a trap



Catherine Obianuju Acholonu

MAN ALONE

lightening rends
the sky in two

roaring hurricane
advances with fire
pouring black hot sand
into your eyes

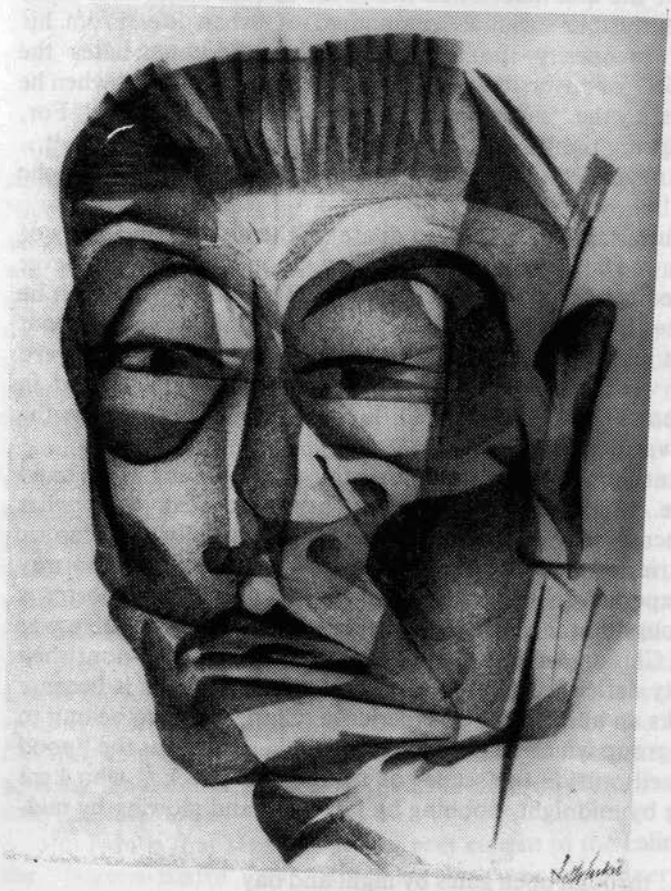
deadly mighty hawk
showering hot stones
drops pots of death

at such a time
even a nursing mother
drops infant
helpless
dashing for shelter

you look and see
nothing
but desolation

listen and hear
nothing
nothing but the clatter
of hurrying footsteps
behind you
echoing through the night
you quicken your steps
a pair of frightened eyes
glancing back
parched lips
knock against
each other
squeezing out the dry words
alone
man alone

those shared years
months
days
shrink into nothingness
nothing remains
but an infinite emptiness
the horror
of the discovery
that you are
man alone



Emeka Okeke-Ezigbo

"VAMPIRES OF BREAD AND BLOOD IN MUD:" The Apocalyptic Vision of Pol Ndu

There is perhaps an innate tendency in man to romanticise a distant phenomenon or an experience he has not had. The anthropologist who searches zealously for the "primitive" is likely to come from a privileged and "civilized" sanctuary.[1] Those who extol rustic life and theories on the virtue of folk culture are likely to be irrepressible socialites enamoured of urban life. From his haven of prosperity the armchair philosopher enunciates the "sweet uses" of adversity; yet he is likely to bemoan his lot when he is assaulted by the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." For, as Shakespeare rightly observes in *Much Ado About Nothing,* "... there was never yet a philosopher that could endure the tooth-ache patiently."

It is quite easy, therefore, to dilate on the honour and glory of war when one is sheltered from its gory. John Dryden, who never experienced actual fighting, wrote "Annus Mirabilis" in which he praised the "prudence of our king" and talked approvingly about the "most just and necessary war." Alfred Tennyson, far removed from the wreckage and blood bath in the Crimea, indulged in idyllic fantasies and made "mellifluous pronouncements" on the Crimean war.[2]

Nor can there be a substitute for a factual or first hand experience. A poet who has not been smeared with what Christopher Okigbo calls "dust of combat", is usually handicapped when he tries by sheer force of empathy or imagination to portray the war experience.[3] For instance when J.P. Clark's war poetry is placed alongside the vigorous, eloquent and highly evocative war poetry of Chinua Achebe, Clark's is found to be under-nourished and largely deficient in emotive charge or impact. This is because Clark lacks an authentic war experience. Clark seems to belong to that jolly group which he himself describes so aptly as the "good number well outside the scenes of ravage and wreck," who kept "drinking by midnight, bobbing by fairylight and glowing by midnight" while

> ... through open gates by night and day
> Brigades and villages are going out
> Like light over Lagos.[4]

Once in a while, however, it is possible for a sensitive and gifted poet whose language is imbued with epiphanic power, to bestir our feelings with a vivid rendition of the catacylsm of war, even though he may not have directly engaged in warfare. T.S. Eliot remained aristocratically aloof and felt that the great men of letters should be isolated from the wranglings of war.[5] Nevertheless, his unique poetic piece, "The Waste Land", is a poignant description of the vast panorama of physical and spiritual destruction that was everywhere evident in the post-war world:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this Stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.[6]

Eliot is not alone in this disillusionment. In the late 1960s, the strange and unpredictable forces of history created a situation in Nigeria whereby a young and sensitive Igbo poet found himself caught with his people in a most bitter and amorphous civil war. It was a fierce, faceless fratricidal war which erupted and raged like an erratic volcano that could not be extinguished because no one dared venture near the vicious source of its molten energy. In such an all-consuming war, there was utter disregard for the sacredness of man and a total negation of human dignity, because mankind had become debased lower than the wild hound or the bush hog. The literati, the mechanic, the carpenter, the trader, women, children and livestock were reduced to nought and forced into comradeship by the earthy rawness of hunger and the plasticity of the bulging darkness. Cosmic harmony was disrupted: the elements were stricken and subdued; the air was, as Achebe put it, "heavy with odours of diarrhoea of unwashed children";[7] the moon was sick and sour, having been soiled by the murkiness of things;[8] the sun looked timid and rougish, becoming a devious excrescence across the languid sky. The scene was thus well set for war's brain spattering and bone cracking; for the hot swoop of the "bird of death from the evil forest of Soviet technology";[9] for the drifting, choking smoke and smog and the implosive-explosions of liquid steel and tinted fire.

Pol Ndu is that sensitive young poet caught in the cross-fire of the "Nigeria-Biafra" war. His is the authentic war experience of the man-on-the-spot who saw the iron biceps and muzzle of giant

ordnance pitted against puny ordnance; the chilling experience of a humane person who was condemned to watch human blood pour in torrents and witness the daily re-enactment of the African war ritual of decapitation and disembowelling.

But Pol Ndu did not plunge into battle like Christopher Okigbo or court martyrdom like Rupert Brooke. Nor can we compare Ndu with Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes. These British youths seem to be attracted imaginatively to war largely because they find in it a vicarious excitement, an *esartz* 'macho' pleasure. War gives them the dramatic kick they cannot get in workaday civilian life. Theirs is essentially a sporting attempt to exercise or satisfy the primordial brute instincts of man; whereas Ndu's effort is to castigate or exorcise those instincts through stern poetry. If indeed Ndu has a British kinship, it is perhaps with Wilfred Owen. Like Owen, Ndu is a fine-hearted artist who but for the disjointed time into which he was born, could have chosen the path of the aesthete and given full rein to his rather Keatsian introspection; or he could have been an African Shelley singing his "little soul song," his homespun "Epipsychidion"; or still more probable, he could have joined the Ezra Pound — Okigbo cult and practiced what Pound calls *phanopoeia, melopoea* and *logopoea.*[10] However, the war overtook Ndu. As it were, he shares with Owen the latter's sad sight of the "monstrous anger of the guns"; "the stuttering riffles' rapid rattle"; "the shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells". Ndu's subject, like Owen's is war and "the pity of war, the pity war distilled." "The poetry is in the pity."[11]

Yet it is misleading to give the impression that Ndu is a wholesale war poet in the sense in which Owen was a poet whose fervid voice broke during the war and was perforce given a hearing. Actually, Ndu has been a poet of the human situation before the Nigerian civil war broke out. He can no more be described as a war poet than Okigbo could be so labelled. The truth is that Ndu, like Okigbo, belongs to the rare group of poets gifted with vision and prophecy. It is as if both poets possess a special mechanism for telescoping and xraying distant events that are as yet sealed and hidden away in the deep recesses of time. Only the wizard-artist, the vates, can perform this oracular feat of seeing tomorrow today.[12] This poetic and quasimystical power of previsional clairvoyance is like the Promethean act of stealing fire from heaven. And like Prometheus, the seer-sayer has to pay a high blood price for raiding what Okigbo calls the "bed-chamber thoughts" of the gods:

Screen your bedchamber thoughts
with sunglasses,
who could jump your eye,
your mind-window,

And I said:
The prophet only the poet,
And he said: Logistics
(which is what poetry is)...[13]

"The logistics of poetry," says Ndu, "are like the manoeuvres of the matador in the bull ring. Without them the matador is gored."[14] The poet's life thus becomes an eternal manoeuvre. The *Genius Loci* assails him for revealing the secrets hidden from man; the poet's constant dodgings against these death blows constitutes his psychic fulfilment. This is perhaps what Cowper means when he declares that:

> There is a pleasure in poetic pains which only poets know.[15]

It is equally what Ndu means when he says that:

> The anguished notes of Okigbo's poetry arise from his experience with the artist's dilemma, from his insight into the ultimate loneliness of the man of vision in the "silence to appease the fever flight beyond the irongate."[16]

Yet in spite of the logistics and manoeuvres, notwithstanding Ndu's prayer that "good Spirits repel Evil", both Okigbo and Ndu are finally gored, for as Okigbo foresees, there is no escape:

Oblong-headed Lioness —
No shield is proof against her.[17]

Ndu, too, sees the tragedy coming, knows that it is inevitable, and keeps waiting for the end:

now pilgrim birds troop across the
dimmed horizon, and bereaved kites
abandon smoky fields
for tunes of frustrated loneliness.
tell me, my true-god,
what holds back your hand?[18]

Peter Thomas, in a memorial tribute to Pol Ndu, remarks upon "that sense of doom which haunted even his earliest writings... at Nsukka", and wonders:

> Can it be that such men, living as it were on the perpetual brink of tragedy, bring upon themselves a personal version of the general disaster they foresee? What really happened on that road a few miles from Ihiala? Did Ogun, who withheld his hand for four years of American highways, lay claim to Pol Ndu so soon after his return home?[19]

There is no doubt whatsoever that an oppressive fore-boding of doom, a sense of tragedy, pervades the poetry of Pol Ndu. It is as if the poet, conscious from the beginning of the decree of fate, and aware that his time will soon come round, tries to make out of his short span a long threnodic lay. The poet dies by instalment:

> days eat me,
> as acid matter:
>
> where I have remained tethered
> to a decaying wood-pillar
> in banana-chain
> under a leaky sagging roof (p.5)

He is firmly tethered and cannot escape. And the buffetted roof is caving in on him. His years are corpses and each year he lives, marks his grave and constitutes his funeral:

> grave number twenty-four,
> red-axe forged from last burials
> of twenty-three corpses in my:
> *Okpoko* (p. 13).

Subtly implied here is the poet's punning on his name. His name is a capsule of cosmic irony: *Ndu* means *Life;* but the poet is grimly aware that Death stalks him; that his life span is indeed a death span; that his years on earth are the sum total of his corpses and graves.

In another sense, this emphasis on death can translate into an act of bravado; a tactical ploy to frighten Death by surprising her in her own boudoir where she is "paring her fingernails." Henceforth, Death will feel compelled to leave the young man alone. It is like the Swiftian bid to scare Death by writing "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D." The basic fact here is that the poet loves life and does not wish to die. Of course, this love of "Life" implies a measure of love for "mankind" since neither concept can exist in isolation. Therefore, when a critic writes that "if Achebe's vision is essentially tragic' one poet whose attitude to mankind borders on contempt is Pol Ndu," the critic misses the point.[20]

Pol Ndu does not hold mankind in contempt. Rather, he has "fathomless love and flowing pity" for mankind (p. 13). His dia-

tribe against man is not prompted by sheer perversity or misanthropy. It is rather a purposeful assault before restoration; a step toward his overall wish and prayer, "let us be born again" (p. 14). The poet is appalled by the obtuseness, iron-heartedness and wanton destructiveness of man. His diatribe against man is a kind of electric shock therapy; a calculated design to "bully humanity into humility" (p.22); a priest's effort to exorcise man by whipping out the hoary legion of demons that have taken up tenancy in man's machinating head. If the poet at times sounds strident or too full of vitriol, it is because mankind is too adamant and obdurate. If the poet at times appears cynical and despondent, he is only feigning misanthropy because man's folly has rendered mankind unworthy of the poet's ardent love. The situation is an interpsychic confrontation between the poet and mankind and at the same time the poet's own intrapsychic defence. For the poet must device a means of retaining his sanity in the midst of general insanity. When Ndu writes,

> I despise mankind:
> vanguarded tractors
> bullying tracks of their kind,

it is similar to E.E. Cummings writing:

> Pity this busy monster manunkind
> not Progress is a comfortable
> disease ...

Both poets "despise" mankind and refuse to "pity" it precisely because they are one with mankind and have a stake in it.

What is the cause of Ndu's anger? What indeed aches the young seer? Edward Okwu, in a concluding comment on Ndu's poetry, writes:

> ... Ndu remains basically a poet of sound. There is an abundance of sound motifs — the "doom! doom! of age-old drums", the "ordered frenzy" of "royal-wine-drums", the "cascading muskets of destruction", the "groans of rustling mortals." Such devices as repetitions, cacophony, onomatopeia, and compound word formations are frequently employed, and the impression one gets is of a rumbling volcano that is about to erupt. Somehow, this infrastructure of breaking sound patterns seems appropriate to the overall theme of *the collapse of a normative order.*[21]
>
> *(my emphasis)*

The cue here is "the collapse of a normative order". The poet is a conservative, a cultural primitivist who craves the continuance of order so that the age-old customs and beliefs, what Yeats call "traditional sanctity and loveliness", will be perpetuated and

venerated. It is this hankering after pristine order, this desperate attempt to find a worthwhile anchor and mooring in a new world of opaque fluidity and chaos, that underscores Ndu's romanticism. His sad realisation that the past, with its rich load of cultural gems, is threatened with extinction, constitutes his romantic agony. The poet's situation is even made worse by the fact that he has no last resort, no refuge or haven: Wordsworth could retreat to the mountains or regress to Duddon, the river of his childhood; Gabriel Okara could still muse nostalgically on river Nun, the source of his birth; but Ndu is denied such escape-latch. His own Ulasi river is desecrated, dead and dry:

> dead voices of sacred past,
> echoes from dry wells of eternal
> depth.....
> .....
> royal-wine-drum
> whose echoes fade into the black
> bottom of thirsty wells (p.7).

Hence the poet's outburst of anger, lament and pain.

Ironically, the poet-persona has been full of hope and optimism when he first set out on his journey of initiation into the mysteries of life and prophecy. The neophyte has borne the physical inconvenience of the journey patiently because he has felt that the ultimate purpose is worth all the trouble. Abraham, the father of the tribe, is to initiate the young Isaac and hand him over the mantle of mystical authority:

> Toward the silent altar
> we paced; hopeful!
> Abraham and Isaac
> resolving in quiet.
>
> A goat-skin sack
> over my forehead
> rubbed rough hair
> on my bare back
>
> One tiny bell warned,
> heralding our approach as
> we paced, hopeful! (p. 3)

The tiny bells are meant to ward off evil spirits and ill-fortune. The gods are wooed out of the sacred past and urged to prosper and fertilize the land and protect all the members of the tribe. The gods

are called upon to uphold the communal give-and-take that is the soul of the tribe and the secret of tis survival. It is a close-knit society where everybody is his brother's keeper and everybody wishes his neighbour well. The tribe has one mind and as the wand (ofo) fell, giving a stamp of finality to the prayer,

> we said 'ahaa'
> with all intent (p.3)

The "costly blood" of the cock was shed to cleanse the soil, the flesh of sacrifice was fed to the gods, and the cleansing ritual was over.

But to the poet's great discomfiture, the old world he knows and which he has grown to love and cherish, is threatened. Perversion has set in because men have become shallow and disoriented. Alienation and estrangement from the tribe has set in. Instead of "'ahaa' with all intent,"

> Today, we say "Amen"
> with less intent
> eat the flesh of sacrifice to feed
> ourselves and not the gods.
> Christmas comes and Easter;
> blown by a blowing bitter
> wind with empty bowels and greedy
> flouts that sweep our aged creeds
> into their yawning mouths (p. 4).

Here then is the mainspring of the poet's anguish and bitterness. His line of apostolic succession has been broken. Now that the Isaac of yesterday has become the Abraham of today, the persona is aggrieved that he has no *lares,* no ancestral authority to transfer to the next Isaac,

> because Ofo
> is lost
> for my son

And here too lies the basic temperamental and circumstantial difference between Ndu and Okigbo, the difference in the tone of their poetry. Okigbo is a prodigal impelled by the Poundian "homesickness after one's own kind", to return to his roots. When we first encounter the poet in *Labyrinths,* he has just returned to land, to Idoto, and is performing the rites of homecoming. He is in the process of "reconnecting the broken circuit", to use the language of Philip Slater.[22] But in the case of Ndu, reconnection

is not possible. In the first place, Ndu is not a "prodigal". He is a poet who has been conscious of his paternity from the very beginning. His problem is that he can no longer function as a traditionalist because the ancestral shrine has been profaned and the river fouled and dried up.

> At last!
> the very head-stream is dried,
> the tail-stream has lost its deep
> blue gleam and marooned fishes
> fade out,
> belly-upturned
> in muddy-mess (p. 5)

Whereas Okigbo catches a glimpse of his watermaid however "brief her presence", and notices that she is bright with "the armpit dazzle of a lioness", Ndu has no such opportunity. His assaulted water goddess has fled and vanished because the secret of the river has been laid bare and its energy defused:

> The water goddess
> shall no more beat her gong
> To straying children at mid-day,
> nor frighten them with wild laughter at midnight
>
> Women and children
> never will run-pass these lands
> again nor hoe-hardened plain
> peasants bow for blessing to drink
> your cooling touch (p. 5).

The poet knows that the loss is final and conclusive because the sacked river and the goddess have been replaced with the mocking, one-eyed symbol of the invading alien culture; an intruder as destructive as Milton's "twin-headed engine at the door";

> ... for where you lived,
> a grey-white,
> four-nosed-stone
> now lives
> with its single eye
> burrowing
> from the top, running
> threat-like out of light
> towards earth-centre... (p. 6).

This mocking alien symbol is not only fully entrenched but has conspicuously occupied "earth-centre" thereby consolidating its usurped authority. Tradition has been silenced; all drumming has ceased and the cry for help and restrain gone unheeded:

> Criers of last night gape,
> arms-folded
> at the charred remains of sacred drums (p. 8)

The poet is lonely because he cannot relate to the new hollow men bred in the new culture. These transformed people look ridiculous and ill-blended, a laughable yet pitiable specimen of "Black Skin, White Masks" as they gather in their new place of worship that is more like a warship:

> White black man,
> black white man,
> have reached their meeting point
> of black and white
> into white-and-black;
> of white saliva on black double tongue
> of black sermons
> on white sundays
> to coloured congregations
> the cancer is naked
> contorting the black brow
> which bloughs rich simply souls
> to uproot an earthen-god
> and replant bastard barrenness (p. 8)

The massive church provides no shelter to the poet because the very idea of Sunday worship is unpleasant, since he regards it as pretentious and un-African. The true African practices his religion everyday and in the open. It is an integral part of his life:

> we feel no shade
> in any gold-house
> where they work on Sundays only.
> everyday
> was a Sunday (p. 9)

We can now better understand the poet's plaintive notes and despair. He is already in a mood of sadness over his dislodgement from his native base when he foresees the coming of another disaster too horrible to mention because its "groaning avalanche" of hate is calculated to drown a whole race in "bloodflood" and

inflict eternal darkness and gloom on all things bright and beautiful. It is in this mood of presentiment and tension that the poet wrote "July 66", easily his most bilious and acerbic poem.[23] The poet is angry that the same forces that conspired to desecrate and smash up his ancestral shrine are on the onslaught again, this time with the grim determination to sweep both the quick and the dead under the pulverising wheel of its "vanguarded tractors." He is totally disgusted with man's endless chimerical machinations. Mankind has become diseased and infected; mankind is now causing cosmic pollution and creating serious ecological hazards. The poet's anger is legitimate:

> I despise mankind
> vanguarded tractors
> bullying tracts of their kind
> raising sputum and spittle
> both passing t.b.
> on wings of wind
> down lungs of all kinds.
>
> Infected mankind,
> infesting all sides:
> road-signs, shop-signs, all signs
> warning off infectious wards (p. 16).

There is no immunity or immunization; everybody is infected; the epidemic must take its toll; we are all patients waiting patiently for the end:

> Who is not a patient
> of patience
> in this charged ant-march to the place of bones?
>
> Call it clawing, call it sawing,
> men are vampires
> of bread and blood in mud (p. 16)

Human life has been grossly cheapened by warring men! Since flesh and blood cannot endure in a wicked, automated world; since man has turned destructive like blight and vampire, and has sunk so low as to gobble putrid "bread and blood" sunk in nauseous mud; since:

> worms have eaten worms
> and worms worms
> in these wars of worms (p. 26),

God may well consider casting the future man in polymer. Plastic ape might endure, since plastic is not biodegradable. Besides, man, the incurable anthropophagite, may relish any form of animal flesh; but he certainly cannot, as yet, digest iron or plastic. The situation is urgent, and God must make his decision now; for if mankind is an obsolete error, the error must be rectified at once because error is fissiparous:

> if those birth pangs were mistakes,
> why so many back-breaks
> to rear more heart-aches
> and blood baths?
>
> why cannot silence
> come on all mis-makes
> and leave nothing made? (p. 17)

The poet's radical pronouncement seems to have opened the floodgate of prophecy. The long, unbroken chain of tragedy that threatens to annihilate mankind is seen by the poet as in a cyclorama and he describes each tragedy as he sees it: "the thundering roars of steel monsters" (p.7); "crushed limbs and fractured plates," "broken breasts and shattered bones", "cartileges and sockets disjoint at the joint", "the blood ablaze in the shred of plates" (p. 18); "the looming avalanche and the bridge", "the frenzied sirens and the birth-pangs of past years" (p.19); "the untiring ruin-module," "the shrieking into the unheeding twilight", "the gallants and ghosts grimacing at the fires from our crematorium" (p. 27); "the tears of widows at midnight", "the limited compunctions and limitless destructions" (p. 29); "the staring skulls amid burnt bricks", "the bull's horn broken in hot red-riddle," (p. 32); and "the bull's heart in search of ram-heads" (p.30). It is this blood curdling catalogue of perdition so graphically presented by the poet, that Professor Collins calls "apocalyptic horrors in nightmarish vision".[24]

Those who have been raised on a jelly diet of embroidered, consolatory poetry; those who are so scared of the bitterness of the curative pill as to opt instead for a placebo are likely to find Ndu's poetry hard, terrifying, corrosive or pessimistic. The truth is that, given the turbulence of Africa — in fact, the world as large — no authentic and honest African poetry can afford to "please and delight"; certainly not poetry emanating from the privation and trauma of the Nigerian civil war. For Ndu's poetry is a veritable "sad study in passion, politics and pain."[25] It is the provoked and

provocative poetry of a young patriot charged to fullness with what Donald Davie calls "articulate energy". It is an urgent call on brothers fighting "skull to skull" to desist from fratricidal strife, make peace with one another, and unite to build a new Jerusalem out of the charred remains of the old:

Let us pull ourselves together,
each to each, here
as brother with brother, pooled.
Take past events as the
repentant woman's past
always forgotten and always retold (p. 32).

Ndu's poetry is at once a remonstrance, a rebuke and warning. Only the mature poet, the true seer, can warn.[26] Greening poets and cowardly poetasters cannot warn; they possess half heart and half knowledge and can only prophesy in part. The full-fledged visionary prophesies whole.

Ndu's achievement, then, is the ultimate triumph of Vision. His is the large, timely and time-less vision of the prophet; and vision, after all, is the greatest attribute of the poet-prophet:

the purest victory of all
the victory of vision
of visitation
of creation (p. 5)

We predict that Pol Ndu's banner, like that of his soul brother, Christopher Okigbo, will "run the course of wider waters"; for, like Okigbo, Ndu "heared and gave tongue the growls of the thunder".

FOOTNOTES

[1]For an interesting critique of "civilization", see Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: E.P. Dutton, 1974).

[2]The phrase is Alan Bold's. See Bold ed., *The Martial Muse: Seven Centuries of War Poetry* (London: Pergamon Press, 1976), p.33.

[3]The phrase, "dust of combat" may have had its origin in W.R. Greg's *Literary and Social Judgements* (N. Trunbner & Co., 2nd ed., 1869), in which is contained Greg's criticism of *Westward Ho!* See Robert B. Martin, *The Dust of Combat: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London, 1959), p. 178. Quoted in R.N. Egudu, *Four Modern West African Poets* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1977), p.13.

[4]J P. Clark, "Party Song," in *Casualties* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970), p.36.

[5]Eliot's statement reads: "I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a few men of letters should remain isolated, and take no part in these collected activities". See Murray Sperber, ed. *And I Remember Spain* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974), p. 206. Quoted in Alan Bold, The Martial Muse, p.49.

[6]T.S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p.51.

[7]Chinua Achebe, "Refugee Mother and Child" in *Beware Soul Brother* (Enugu: Nwankwo-Ifejika Publishers, 1971), p.8.

[8]To the contrary, Gabriel Okara says that the peace of the moon is "unsoiled by the murk and dirt of this bucket war." See "Moon in the Bucket" in *The Fisherman's Invocation* (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1978), p.36.

[9]Achebe, "Air Raid" in *Beware Soul Brother,* p. 11.

[10]According to Pound, the chief methods of charging "language with meaning to the utmost possible degree" are *phanopoeia,* that is, "throwing the object (fixed or moving) on to the visual imagination"; *melopoeia,* which is "inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech"; and *logopoeia,* which is "inducing both of the effects by stimulating the associations (intellectual or emotional) that have remained in the receiver's consciousness in relation to the actual words sor word groups employed". See Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York, 1960), p.63.

[11]Wilfred Owen, "Strange Meeting."

[12]With regard to Okigbo's foreseeing the Nigerian civil war, Gerald Moore observes that "it did not take a poetic sensibility to see these things, but what is striking about Christopher Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" is that he sees them in a particular historical context and as omens of a more radical crisis which nothing can now avert." See Moore, "Poetry and the Nigerian Crisis", *Black Orpheus, II, 3* 61968), p.11. Quoted in Egudu, *Four Modern West African Poets,* p.17. Perhaps Moore is speaking from the vantage point of an outside. It should be noted that notwithstanding the topsy-turvy situation at that time, many Nigerians did not see a more radical crisis (civil war) as inevitable. In fact many people thought that a military coup was impossible. As Kalu Uka has noted, "even as late as 1964 we were discussing the impossibility of military coups in Nigeria!" See Bernth Lindfors, ed. *Dem-Say. Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers* (Austin, Texas: Occasional Publication of the African and Afro-American Studies and Research Centre, No. 9, 1974), p.75.

[13]Christopher Okigbo, "Heavensgate", in *Labyrinths* (London: Heinemann, 19717, p.9.

[14]See Pol Ndu, "Mytho-Religious Roots of Modern Nigerian Poetry: Christopher Okigbo", *The Greenfield Review,* vol. 5, Nos. 3 & 4, Winter 1976/77), pp. 7-21.

[15]William Cowper, *The Task.*

[16]Ndu, "Mytho-Religious Roots of Modern Nigerian Poetry". *The Greenfield Review,* p.14.

[17]Okigbo, *Labyrinths,* p.27. Both Okigbo and Ndu died violently: Okigbo in 1967 on the Nsukka battlefront; Ndu in 1976 in a car accident.

[18]Pol Ndu, *Songs For Seers* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1974), p.13. Further page references are enclosed in parenthesis after the quotations.

[19]Peter Thomas, "The Unprogrammed Imagination (In Memoriam Pol Ndu)," *The Greenfield Review,* Vol. 5, Nos. 3-4, pp. 5-6.

[20]Edward Okwu, Review of *Golgotha,* by Pol Ndu. *Ufahamu* Vol. IV, No. 1. (Spring, 1973), pp. 166-168.

[21]Okwu, Review of *Golgotha. Ufahamu,* pp. 167-168.

[22]Philip Slater, *Earthwalk* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

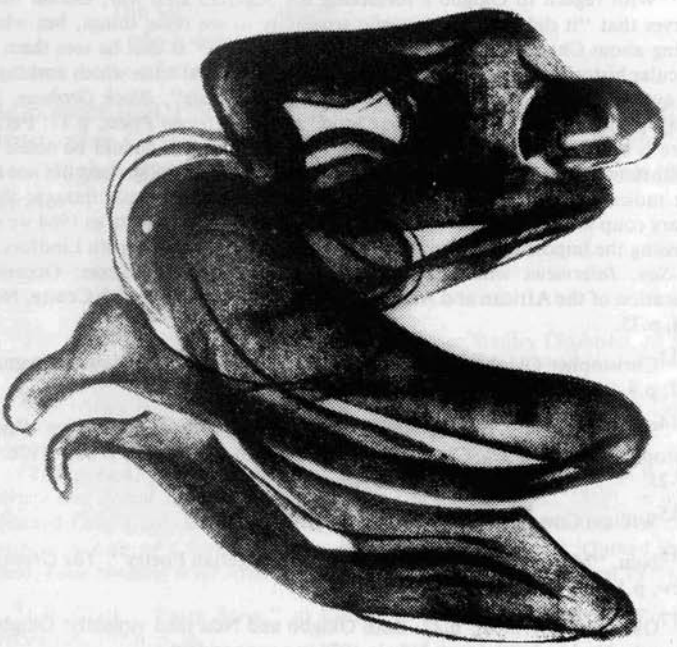
[23]The poem originally appeared as the title poem in *Golgotha* (Ife, Nigeria: Pan African Pocket Books, 1971).

[24]Harold Collins, Review of Ndu's *Songs For Seers, Book Abroad: An International Quarterly* (Winter 1976), pp. 1225-226.

[25]Michael Echeruo, Introduction to *Songs For Seers* by Pol Ndu.

[26]Owen, one of the greatest of war poets, downplays "consolation" and regards "warning" as the duty of the true poet:

> Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory.
> They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn.
> That is why the true Poets must be Truthful.



Robena Egemonye

RENEGADE

He crouched low in the darkness and waited for the morn light. The crying of wild dogs just behind in the African bush made him quite uneasy. For the first time in his lonely presence, he was overcome with a fear that he had not paced himself far enough, ahead of the pack, to make his long desparate journey worth the while. But he could not act too quickly now. He had to exercise that degree of patience which had escaped him in the past.

He looked around in the amber light and spotted a big mango tree, surrounded by hedges and long grasses. He pushed his long strong body along the ground to the base of the tree, lowering his backpack down against the side of the tree. He quickly turned over, his head lying in the soft grasses. From here, he could lie low and watch the house without being seen. He pulled his grayish green Castro-style cap down over his eyes and his laboured breath became regular as he tried to sleep a much needed sleep.

For awhile, he just rested and listened for any sounds coming from the house. Then his heart was reassured when he heard the faint cry of a child, crying from within. His rest was in peace.

The sudden cry of the cock crow at dawn surprised him and he caressed his faithful companion. It would still be a long wait even now that it was daybreak. As the house rang loud with the laughter of the children, his children, he became more nervous and agitated. But he knew that the house was probably guarded, ever since his "father-in-law", Phillip du Barry had been relieved of his duties as Head of State and placed under house arrest. He swiftly crawled back to the cool comfort of the tree and watched the lone sentry who guarded the house march back and forth. Then he thought better of that and rested the gun straight across the ground. The gun's barrel could give off a flash against the sun's rays. Now that he had come this far, he would not be found until he desired to be found.

So he closed his eyes in restful agony until he heard the sound of an army truck drive up to the house.

The shout of the commander was clear. "We need every man. The 'Renegade" is trying to cross the border and we don't want his trouble'."

The lone sentry jumped aboard with the rest and the truck sped off down the dry dirt road. Now was his chance.

Within the house, Madame du Barry looked outside as the truck went away. She was happy to see that the soldier had gone. Because of his stroke, her husband's physical and mental condition had deteriorated so that the new military government need not have worried. Now that she had gotten permission to leave the country with him and her grandchildren, she felt anger at still being guarded. She walked down the hallway of the rundown government bungalow and told the triplets to go out to play. Then she went to the kitchen and put on a pot of tea, thereafter arranged a tray with cups, saucers, cream, biscuits, and sugar. Now she must look after her husband. As she walked to the sitting room, she glanced at herself in the hallway mirror. At one time, she had been considered the most beautiful girl in her province in France. But now all she could see was a drained graying white woman with the typical veiny sections on thin legs and spotted browning skin with puffy red hands. She sighed and went to the sitting room. She stood over her husband and watched him sleep peacefully in the old fashioned rocker. She recalled how she met him, while they both studied for a Ph.D in Political Science. Theirs was a whirlwind courtship and the dour warnings of everyone telling her what would happen if she married a blackman. But she had loved him so, even though he was a lot shorter than she. So a commitment was made. By the time that they had completed their doctorates they had been married a year. His homeland had become independent of France so there was a desperate need for his services at home. After they returned, it wasn't long before he had risen to become vice-president of his country. She had contented herself by having babies... three sons and finally what she had so longed for a baby daughter. She had adored the child from the start and considered her so beautiful. Madam and her husband had spared no expense in making sure that their daughter, Domonique received the best possible training at home and in France. By the time that she was twenty, Domonique had received a degree in journalism. "Belle Petite, Domonique" was how she was known throughout Africa and many parts of Europe working as a fashion model. By this time Monsieur du Barry had become Head of State. So Domonique came home to help her parents in carrying out many of the social affairs of state. Soon they had arranged for her to marry the son of the wealthiest man in their country. Monsieur du Barry knew that with this marriage his political power would be strengthened and consolidated.

"So it could have been", sighed Madam to herself as she gently wiped her husand's forehead. She shook her head and left the room. She would have tea and biscuits alone this afternoon. She placed a tea cozy over the steeping pot of tea and placed it on the ornate tray with other essential items. She walked outside on the stone porch and placed the tray on a small white table surrounded by two white circular wood chairs. One of the triplets was running too close to a thicket where there was always the running possibility of snakes. "Come back Patrice" she shouted in a lilting French voice so typical of women of her age. "Go where Pierre is playing".

Madam did not see the shadow emerge from the bush, swiftly cross the yard and quietly come up behind her. The sudden silence of the children should have warned her.

"Madam du Barry" please don't scream."

The dry silent whisper seemed familiar in a painful way.

"Please, Madam, I mean you no harm. I just came to see my children before you take them away."

It had been five long years, five years of hell and misery since she had heard that voice. For a moment she stood still, every vein in her body on edge. Then she turned to face the tall gaunt figure in soiled gray-green fatique. He calmly assured her as he placed his rifle and his backpack against the wall of the house.

"Is Monsieur around?"

"Yes, he is resting." She stared at him, sick with contempt.

"Did you come for the children?"

"No, Madam, I did not come to take my children."

"Then why did you come here?" she said with abrupt anger.

"To ruin our lives a second time!"

"No Madam", he said with a strange smile on his face. "My time is running close. Five years ago a professional guerrilla like me could come and go as he pleased. But now everything is developing so that my species is fast becoming extinct. I guess I just wanted to live a lifetime today of all days. I just had to see them just this one time to make sure that they were really alive and well."

Her voice trembled as she remembered in her automatic bourgeois manner that she had not asked him to sit down.

"You may sit down", she murmured.

He sat down uneasily in a chair far too small for him and stared first at the children and then at the tea.

"Pour yourself some tea and have some biscuits."

"Thank you, Madam", he said anxiously as his rough black hands carefully grabbed a cup. She poured the tea for him. He

added lots of sugar but no cream. His hands shook as he drank the tea and ate some biscuits. His face squirmed as he tasted the cheese biscuit, the long ugly scar that ran from the centre under his right eye down to the corner of his mouth glistened with sweat.

Madam stared at him in disbelief and wondered how her daughter could have wanted to follow such a man. No breeding. No finesse. She turned her eyes away and trained them with his at the children who were gaining courage to come forward. The girl came up to the steps. He got up and walked down to the lowest step and sat, gently pulling his daughter to him. Madam du Barry thought it strange that the child did not react in any way, but seemed to even like this rugged man. He kissed her light smooth skin and touched her long thick kinky mane of auburn hair. "Her mother", he said in a faint whisper.

The boys said almost in unison, "Good Afternoon, Sir". This impressed him. he beckoned them to shake his hand. But Madam du Barry interrupted this by offering the children, his children, some biscuits. Then she scurried them off to play again.

He stood for a long while watching the children play and sighed. Then he went back to sit to drink his tea. For a long while Madam du Barry sat motionless with tight drawn hands crossed in a clasped position. She looked straight ahead for a while until she felt that he was staring at her. She turned and looked into strong silent eyes which looked at her with pity.

Abruptly she turned her face away. "Where is my daughter's body? Where did you take her?"

He looked straight ahead at his children. "She is at peace Madam. I took her body from the hospital after the children's births".

"She died because you let her lose too much blood." Madam's body shook with tears as she recalled the terrible state that her daughter had been in.

"Madam, she did not want to come in."

"That's a lie. How she could follow something like you, I have never understood it."

"That is because, Madam, your love comes with qualifications".

"Still where is her body? At least, I can see to it that she be given a proper burial. Please tell me."

"No". He was emphatic. "You white people have no respect for the dead. I buried my wife according to my tradition and her body was properly treated."

"Your wife? You were never married. All you did was to abandon your children. You used her and made fools of us all! We helped your people during their liberation struggle and this was our pay back."

"Madam, I married your daughter even if it was spiritually. Before I buried her, I said the proper words for both of us."

"That is ridiculous! How could you marry a corpse?"

He smiled. "You see what I mean? You white people have no respect for the non-living." He finished his tea, and listened to the soft sobs of Madam du Barry, but he did not try to comfort her. She was too bitter for far too long.

Eventually her tears ceased and she asked him politely if he wanted more tea. He said 'yes'. Today, of all days, he would drink tea as he wished.

He checked the slant of the sun's rays and knew that now it was early afternoon. It would not be long before the dusk of another day. His business was now urgent. He turned to speak to Madam who sat as if in a trance. His voice was gentle almost tolerant as he spoke to her.

"Since your daughter, my wife, left me, life has not been exciting to me. I find people petty, two-faced, and outrageous."

Madam du Barry laughed. "They find you even more so. Your own people have declared you wanted dead or alive. Newspapers are filled with stories of the 'renegade' and the senseless atrocities that you have committed. Your liberation struggle is over."

"Madam, that is where you are wrong. It is not enough for the land to be liberated but for the people of the land to also become liberated. This is quite difficult in a developing nation. The people who were my comrades have not remained true to the purity of our revolution. They are more corrupt than the people we overthrew. I stood up against this evil and have since been cast out. I have harmed no human being who has not tried to harm me first."

"For a 'renegade' that is an obvious statement."

"No, Madam. I have proof of what my enemies have tried to do to keep me quiet." He stood up and quickly went to get his knapsack. He opened it carefully and handed a large folder filled with written paper and photographs to Madam.

"This is a manuscript that I have been secretly writing for the past three years. It contains a lot of information about political affairs not only in my own country, but in other areas. The pictures are reliable, for I took them myself. The name of the publisher is enclosed. Please make sure that it gets in the right hands. I have

indicated in a letter within that all the money that I was to receive from the sales of the book should go into a trustfund for my children. Please Madam, take it quickly, my time is running out."

The desperation in his voice touched a nerve. She could recall the last cry of her daughter. "I love him, Mama. He is good and I will follow him."

She hesitated and then took the manuscript.

"Thank you Madam", he said gently. "They will never suspect that you have it. It will become a best seller."

Madam smiled. "Let us hope so."

He slumped down in his chair and relaxed.

"Let me take the tea service inside and check up on my husband." As she entered the house, his eyes were on the children, his children at play.

Inside, she adjusted the cover over her sleeping husband. Then she looked into the cupboard for a bottle of wine and a glass. As she came back outside, he was busy putting his things in order. At first she did not notice the men, who at a distance did not clearly appear.

He looked up and responded like a school boy. "Thank you ma for the tea and biscuits. It has been a pleasure." He carefully packed some photos and papers. He said automatically. "This is the dummy manuscript which my friends over there will want to destroy. I must now join them for a solitary walk back near or across the border. It really does not matter where or how, does it?" He gently gathered up his belongings as his people waited for him just beneath the mango tree. The children ran toward him to bid him good-bye. He smiled down at them and walked swiftly away. As he reached the field, he was surrounded by men in arms, wearing the same uniform as himself. Madam watched as they ran off into the distance for the border. She sat down and looked at the children chasing some lizards for some time. Then she poured herself a glass of wine. She took the first sip. Then there came a piercing yell, the last cry of a renegade.

Abena Busia

LIBERATION

We are all mothers,
and we have that fire within us,
of powerful women
whose spirits are so angry
we can laugh beauty into life
and still make you taste
the salt tears of our knowledge —
For we are not tortured
anymore;
we have seen beyond your lies and disguises,
and *we* have mastered the language of words,
we have mastered speech.
And know
we have also seen ourselves.
We have stripped ourselves raw
and naked pieced by piece until our flesh lies flayed
with blood on our *own* hands.
What terrible thing can you do us
which we have not done to ourselves?
What can you tell us
which we didn't deceive ourselves with
a long time ago?
You cannot know how long we cried
until we laughed
over the broken pieces of our dreams.
Ignorance
shattered us into such fragments
we had to unearth ourselves piece by piece,
to recover with our own hands such unexpected relics
even we wondered
how we could hold such treasure.
Yes, we have conceived
to forge our mutilated hopes
into the substance of visions
beyond your imaginings
to declare the pain of our deliverance:

So do not even ask,
do not ask what it is we are labouring with *this* time;
Dreamers remember their dreams
when they are disturbed —
And you shall not escape
what we *will* make
of the broken pieces of our lives.

Abena Busia

SILVER WEDDING

After celebrations,
come the private moments when the guests have gone,
so this morning, early,
you sneak downstairs
to tackle the abandonned dishes on the deserted table
where yesterday we gathered.
Yesterday was special:
even breakfast in bed which you both dislike,
but we wished it
so you obeyed,
even watching us do what you have spent the years perfecting
while you sat idle
because we insisted
you both relax.
And so you sat
counting the days,
counting the years,
counting the children and that helped,
counting our years you realize, after all,
it has been so short a time.
In the kitchen remember how
both laughing you rejoined us
to recall funny stories,
unable to say you could not reminisce in private
because it is all, far from over.
But we know,
you have taken the better with the bad
and still show us, only the laughter.
Opening the curtains you'll see again
the dining-room spread with flowers
and gifts from absent friends.
You were both surprised by some who remembered,
and excused those who knew and who forgot.
the half-filled glasses of leftover wine
are all that's left to the celebration dinner

we laboured all day to bring you
on your fragile wedding china.
Facing each other across burnt-out candles
will you recall the tears
and silently treasure the toasted cheers for more tomorrows
which begin today
with the clearing up of yesterday's feast:
celebrations leave their marks,
there are new stains on the lace white tablecloth.

COUNTER-COUP

Harshly aware of the brightest of electric light
against the chill January sky,
in the ominous silence of the Harmattan night
we kept vigil
for the final shots.
From guns to guns again: full circle.

GENESIS 4:3-10

"am I my brother's keeper?"
first breaking of the blood bond;
reluctant question to a question of earth-blood —
Not guilt imposed, but recognitions;
source of first responsibilities —
Love half given;
fruitless offerings ill-received.
And the voice that asks the questions
Is the self that knows the answer.

Edith Ihekweazu

"BLACK AND WHITE IN LOVE"? THE THEME OF CULTURAL *MÉTISSAGE* IN AFRICAN LITERATURE.

For the purpose of this article we are using literary texts as a source of information about their authors' view along with other non-fictional texts. This of course does not exclude a more aesthetic approach to literature, nor does it neglect the need to compare the findings with facts and figures from empirical and sociological sources. Moreover we have to bear in mind that literature does not always carry the latest news. There are obvious lags between news and novel, life and literature. The frequency of a particular theme, however, through a considerable period of time, indicates the writers' urge to solve the problem implied.

Because of Africa's history the theme of cultural clash and cultural reconciliation has become the central topic of her literature, almost trite but nevertheless ubiquitous. From one angle it looks like a cynical euphemism to talk about love between black and white; but authors from South Africa have also tried their hands on the topic.[1] Sometimes, though, one feels more tempted to say "black and white in divorce", or with the words of the Senegalese writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane: "Les haines les plus empoisonnées sont celles qui naissent sur de vieilles amours."[2] Behind the attempts to reconcile in the private sphere or on the cultural level of partnership and exchange remains the fact of inequality of power and wealth, development and underdevelopment as an immovably fixed wedge.

European writers have not much patronized the topic of Europe's relationship to Africa, — the genre of the exotic novel has remained marginal,[3] — and even less did they think of presenting it in an emotionally charged image of love and marriage as African writers did, who populated their plays and tales with white girls falling in love with Africans. If one counts how many of the girls die in the process, how many are abandoned or rejected, how many children are aborted or die at a tender age, one may be tempted to conclude that black writers are taking their subtle revenge by sacrificing the white colonizer's most jealously guarded property. On the other hand, they present the girls mostly as sympathetic,

humble and loving creatures, quite unlike the colonial "madams"; more often than men they are supporting the Africans abroad, share their views and actively participate in the preparations for the struggle for freedom. But in the course of action they are abandoned for the sake of a higher purpose which demands refraining from all signs of fraternization. It might be interesting to tackle the theme from a psychoanalyst's point of view, but we rather place the love-stories in the framework of interracial and intercultural history, and we shall not talk about love-stories only, but take them as a focus for the various problems of intercultural relations.

1. Love as a Symbol of Cultural Compatibility

Mbella Sonne Dipoko did not add a question mark to the title of his poem "Black and White in Love"[4] and thereby made it look more positive than it really is. In the diary-like lyric the author relates his vagrant life with a white girl in France and Spain, a love-story which is overshadowed by the awareness of the colourbar:

> While in my thoughts
> And because of the strain known
> In our cruel world
> Only to those who have ever loved
> One who is not of their own colour
> I am desperately wishing you were black
> Because then, half of the problems of prejudice
> Would have vanished
> Leaving only two human beings
> To plot out their future
> On the chart of fate.[5]

The reason for the unhappy ending is called prejudice, and the author sees it more on the side of the girl's people:

> And I harangued you
> On the hostility of your people
> To the sight of a black man and a white woman.[6]

The poem was published in 1972. It is therefore not surprising that the African lover is not desperately wishing he were white. He has transcended the colonial complex which Frantz Fanon analyzed about twenty years earlier in *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* and concluded:

> De la partie la plus noire de mon âme, à travers la zone hachurée me monte le désir d'être tout à coup blanc. Je ne veux pas être reconnu comme Noir, mais comme Blanc... J'épouse la culture blanche, la beauté blanche, la blancheur blanche.... Dans ces seins que mes mains ubiquitaires caressent, c'est la civilisation et la dignité blanches que je fais miens.[7]

Dipoko has dismissed the idea of assimilation entirely; *métissage* is no solution to the problem — if someone accuses another person of having prejudices, he cannot at the same time respect him as a superior species of man by whom he will be uplifted and developed. He shows no desire to espouse white civilization. At the same time, however, the idea of "only two human beings/ To plot out their future" also transcends African traditional background which does not normally allow individual decisions without society's interference or even control. The author has in fact assimilated ideas of individual freedom and emancipation which derive from the European philosophy of enlightenment of the 18th century. He feels that he himself is now more advanced on the way to humanity and progress, which have not been implemented in Europe.

From this idealistic point of view it may be correct when many European scholars state that Africans have gained "vastly more"[8] from Europeans than they from them. In a recent study by H. Debrunner on the presence of Africans in Europe up to 1918 we read:

> The question of African impact on Europe is relatively unimportant... Africans in Europe have been quicker in discovering not only European achievements in civilization but also values of European culture. Afro-Europeans have begun that fascinating selection of elements from European cultures which they have adopted as distinct from elements which they purposely reject.[9]

If one remembers that this "fascinating selection" took place under the conditions of slave-trade and colonialism one may question the freedom of choice. The few examples of Africans really accepted in Europe as equals did so for the price of total assimilation. The respect for cultural identity emerges from the fact that up to 1909 Africans were displayed in European Zoos, preferably in the company of monkeys and parrots.[10] It is therefore not surprising that many scholars find it most rewarding to study the influence of European literature on African writers and not seldom they turn round and blame them for having lost their identity or categorize them as writing mainly in search of it.[11]

There is a good number of studies on the image of the African

in the various European literatures. No doubt, the more Africa got under European control, the "blacker" it becomes, the more wicked, primitive and barbarian her inhabitants in the descriptions of European writers.[12] Thus the question of intermarriage, one of the hallmarks of cultural *métissage,* does not even arise. Fanon has explained this image as the compensation of guilt and the projection of frustrated desires and suppressed sensuality on the part of the whites who have sacrificed their own vitality on the altar of technological development. Following this line of thought, Eldridge Cleaver has coined the expressions "omnipotent administration" and "supermasculine menial".[13] Thus racial segregation becomes a means of maintaining power. While the white man has always taken the liberty of rape and sexual exploitation of the black women, he would regard it as a sacrilege to allow a white woman to be touched by a black man, while thinking that the black man would find nothing more desirable. The history of domination has distorted the relationship until today. One of the results is that love-stories between black and white are written exclusively by black authors and that the constellation is only black man — white woman. Apart from the reasons suggested by Fanon and Cleaver — the white woman as a symbol of white man's power — there are consolidating factors for this constellation: African tradition allowed men the exposure to white man's civilization earlier than women and white women found it easer to part with their own societies' prejudices. Love-stories between black and white, as they appear in literature, are an attempt of reconciliation and also a challenge to white domination. But they still show traces of the image of the white woman impressed upon blacks by white men.

2. Early Encounters

A culture which has introduced itself through domination can only be assimilated as a weapon to be turned round against its original owner:

> J'irai là-bas, bien loin là-bas
> Au pays des Blancs
> J'irai boire bien loin là-bas
> A la source des Blancs
> C'est à la source
> Que l'eau est pure....
> J'irai demander à l'ours blanc
> Ce qui l'engraisse et fait sa force...[14]

A. Kanie's poem of 1952 shows the brand of optimism which even now motivates students in the quest of the Golden Fleece to spend many years of study abroad and compels African governments to invite Western experts: the former master is still the magician who holds the secret of success, the secret of how to become fat and strong. A part of this secret can be found in the archives of slave-traders and colonial trade-companies rather than in the syllabuses of Western universities. Nevertheless, the notion of white superiority lingers on in African literature as a reflection of European ideologies.

Olaudah Equiano published his "Interesting Narrative" in the year of the French Revolution, after having acquired his freedom by "honest and honourable means"[15] that is by paying 40 pounds to his "owner". He cannot emphasize enough his admiration for the white man and his desire to learn from him:

> I no longer looked upon them as spirits but as men superior to us, and therefore I had the strong desire to resemble them, to imbibe their spirit and imitate their manners. I therefore embraced every occasion of improvement, and every new thing that I observed, I treasured up in my memory. [16]

Equiano had become a devout Christian, in spite of his observation that his Christian masters behaved worse than "savages and brutes". He campaigned against slavery with legitimate means, not like his contemporaries in St. Domingo, who organized the rebellion against the whites and founded the Republic of Haiti in 1804. Equiano preferred to preach and believed in enlightenment without bloodshed:

> May Heaven make the British senators the dispersers of light, liberty and science to the uttermost parts of the earth. [17]

Equiano's proposal was to establish a system of commerce and he hoped that through it "the native inhabitants will insensibly adopt British fashions, manners, customs, etc.":

> How many millions doth Africa contain? Supposing the Africans, collectively and individually to expend five pounds a head in raiment and furniture yearly, when civilized, an immensity beyond the reach of imagination![18]

This theory proved in fact to be irresistible. In 1806 the slave trade was abolished in the British dominions. In 1809 the British Governor introduced the pass system in South Africa. Hired labour and forced labour proved to be more profitable than slaves.

About a hundred years later, in 1902, another prominent traveller visited Britain from the newly acquired Protectorate of

Buganda, Sir Apolo Kagwa. The modern editor of his secretary's report, the writer Taban lo Lyiong, recommends this memoir warmly to the reader and describes the travelling Prime Minister as a paragon of African dignity, whom Okot p'Bitek's Lawino should have known when she bitterly complains about her husband's selling off of traditional African values:

> It was he who invited the representatives of the Imperial British East Africa Company to enter Uganda... and all benefits of modern life spread into other parts of Uganda through Buganda.[19]

Mukasa's memoir is full of praise and admiration for all "the things European":

> They are not white men for nothing, in all countries white things are considered very beautiful, and also the English deserve to be held in honour, not only on account of their white colour, but because to their whiteness they add wonderful wisdom.[20]

The gist of his observations is that only hard work and intelligence are the source of such prosperity and that his own people were in great need of education and that they required

> teachers of both the Gospel and also of handywork of all kinds — carpenters, smiths, builders, traders in cotton-goods and other things, brick makers and coffee planters.[21]

Mukasa and his Minister believed firmly in the goodwill of their hosts to protect and develop their country,

> because the British rule righteously in all lands, whether of wise nations or of ignorant nations.... this nation is a truly peaceable nation in all its laws which are in many ways like the laws in the Bible.[22]

Yet another East African, Mugo Gatheru, wrote in 1966 about his own experience of the wisdom and righteousness of the helpers whom Apolo Kagwa had implored to protect his country (and also his own interests as a member of the ruling élite?). His experience in Kenya is one of racial discrimination by the guests from abroad. It is the stench in the public lavatories in the African location of Nairobi which makes him get involved in politics:

> Why were Africans always treated to such humiliating and degrading fashion and always accorded the last place in what was after all their own country? [23]

Disappointed with Britain, Gatheru turns to America, "the first British colony to win independence", not bearing in mind that this independence was won by a slave-keeping society. He now believed that the US were just waiting to be called upon to make beneficial contributions to the development of his own country. As he feels

himself as a harmonious product of his own traditional upbringing and American education, "Child of Two Worlds", he believes that his country would profit greatly from American development aid without having to make any sacrifices:

> I could see my country as highly industrialized as the United States. In this hope there was no question of slavish imitation of Anglo-American culture, merely a desire that Kenya should have the benefit of the better things produced by Western civilization whilst at the same time maintaining the best of her own way of life.[24]

Gatheru defends the same additionist theory which we know from Mukasa as a pragmatic and optimistic approach to cultural *métissage*. He tops his belief in racial and cultural compatibility with a successful marriage to a white girl, just as Equiano did.

3. The Oath against Fraternization

In her study "Le Blanc dans la littérature africaine" Mineke Schipper de Leuw states, after illustrating the wide gap between black man and white woman under the colonial system:

> On parle peu de relations amoureuses entre une femme blanche et un Noir en Afrique.... La plupart des histoires d'amour entre une femme blanche et un Noir décrites dans les romans africains se situent donc en Europe, l'Afrique y joue rarement une rôle. Le plus frappant est cependant que chacune des relations, sans exception, se terminent tragiquement, part la mort de l'un des partenaires.[25]

Most of the novels dealing with interracial and intercultural relationships were written in the later colonial period, the time of increasing "black consciousness" following the movements of Négritude and Cultural Nationalism. Under these auspices the issue of *métissage* cannot be expected to be treated positively. The authors of these novels belong to the generation of African élites who have been thoroughly trained abroad and then constituted the vanguard of the liberation movements. The difficulties of this generation and the danger of being estranged from their own culture while fighting against colonialism has been treated in Peter Abrahams novel *A Wreath for Udomo* in 1956. The "African Freedom Group" formed in London depends heavily on the co-operation of white girls, but back in Africa all members take an oath never to get married to a white woman. The only member of the group, Udomo, who believes in the principle of *métissage* and even dreams of bringing his white girl-friend to Africa, fails. He is accused of having betrayed the African past — which he himself despises and regards as an enemy of progress and development.

In Ousmane Socé's novel *Mirages de Paris* (1967) Sidia rebuffs

his friend Fara's belief that the *"métis* sera l'homme de l'avenir". His own point of view is:

> Ce sera grand dommage, car les hommes de race pure sont superieurs au metis.... Il ne faut pas que nous ayons des enfants métis. Ceux-ci retourneront à la blanche un jour ou l'autre. Et la race noire, qui a tant besoin de cadres, se trouvera ecremee de géneration en géneration.[26]

We are not concerned here with the obvious sources of this anti-racialist racism — Sidia's friend points to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* on the bookshelf — but simply states that with the new consciousness the desire for any form of *métissage* has disappeared. The rediscovery of the African's dignity and his own values has rendered this avenue to civilization superfluous — to marry a white woman is considered as treachery and as falling into the trap of cunning imperialism.[27] Even Camara Laye who is quite open to the idea of complementary cultures and mutual enrichment, prefers his alter ego Fatoman (in his novel *Dramouss)* to sustain his loyalty to his Guinean fiancée during his stay in Paris.[28] The French girl-friend Francoise who is quite eager to marry him, is kept in good friendship at arm's length. It is similar with Aké Loba's *Kocoumbo, l étudiant noir,* who discusses Marxism with his friend Dénise[29] and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's Samba Diallo in *L'aventure ambigue*[30]. These novels which transport the theme of cultural conflict from the stage of the colonized home country to Europe cannot be centred around love-stories.

Especially Kane's novel deals categorically with the impossibility of cultural *métissage* and its indesirability. Diallo, who is sent out to learn from the white man the art of conquering without being in the right goes through the bitter experience of loss of spiritual identity:

> Jadis, le monde m'était comme la demeure de mon père: toute chose me portait au plus essential d'elle-même, comme si rien ne pouvait être que par moi. Le monde n'était pas silencieux et neutre. Il vivait. Il était agressif... Ici, maintenant, le monde est silencieux, et ne résonne plus. Je suis comme un balafon crevé, comme un instrument de musique mort. J'ai l'impression que plus rien ne me touche.[31]

Samba Diallo studies philosophy, certainly not the subject to equip him with the necessary arms for conquest. He gets more and more paralyzed by realizing that whatever he could learn would destroy his own humanity in a more subtle way than the fact of being colonized. The analytical method of Western philosophy, the distance established between man and nature are for Diallo a major

threat to human dignity, it is the gesture of mastery and domination:

> L'avez-vous remarqué? C'est le même geste de l'Occident qui maîtrise la chose et nous colonise tout à la fois. Si nous n'éveillons pas l'Occident à la différence qui nous sépare de la chose, nous ne vaudrons pas plus qu'elle, et ne la maîtriserons jamais. Et notre échec sera la fin du dernier humain de cette terre.[32]

Thus, inevitably, Diallo's mission was doomed to failure. The above statement shows the dilemma of cultural *métissage* in all its facets. There is the problem of learning from the conqueror; there is the danger, because learning from him implies the risk of becoming his image, his instrument or his successor; there is the perception that to learn could just be another word for being corrupted, but also that the radical refusal to learn means defeat as well; and lastly there is a faint hope of a humanizing mission, of "awakening" the West.

We have to accept that Cheikh Hamidou Kane, as a member of the Muslim élite of his country, has stronger reasons for rejecting cultural *métissage* and of appearing more conservative than his by twenty years older countryman Senghor, whose article "De la liberté de l'âme ou éloge du métissage" was published about the same time.[33] Senghor, while maintaining his old perception of the African's attachment to the "forces telluriques" now discovered the need to acquire reason and technical knowledge from Europe and to create what he calls "l'homme intégral", the ideal mixture of European analytical and active intelligence and African abandonment to nature. He thus advances the classical reconciliation of reason and heart, instinct and imagination as the pattern of intercultural and interracial *métissage:*

> Et voilà que nous étions rencontrés sur les bords de la mer médiane, nombril du monde. Et nous devisions fraternellement dans l'air luminieux et tiède. Et nous goûtions la douceur de la mer métisse, de la Méditerranée.[34]

Senghor was day-dreaming at a time when the African map showed only three independent African states, Liberia, Egypt and Ethiopia, fostering the idea of cultural reconciliation before political independence.

4. After Independence

By 1960 the map of Africa had changed, but political independence did not mean immediate economic and cultural autonomy. Senghor's idea of cultural reconciliation has been rejected by many authors who deny its basic assumption and draw a distinct line

between the "West and the rest of us"[35], but it is still the experience abroad which inspires the most critical assessments.

Africans never travelled abroad for the sake of adventure and discovery.[36] During the initial period they were well groomed by their European school-masters and tended to find reason for any difficulty on their own side; they felt obliged to work harder and to prove that they were not less endowed by nature and to "win the respect of these people" as Martin Ijere puts it in his memoir *An African in Germany*.[37] The next group is less humble and less convinced that much could be learnt, apart from technical skills. But the dichotomy of values, established by the Négritude movement, was indirectly still responsible for shaping the experience. In Kole Omotoso's novel *The Edifice* (1971) we read:

> It's alien all this education and these and degrees and examinations. I should be at home cultivating the land and bringing forth fruits.... Why must I be so educated? Why did I desert my own way that was full of life, vigour and humanity? Instead of allowing them to influence me, I should influence them, preaching to them my people's doctrine of humanity and helping them to escape their materialism and decadence.[38]

We can still recognize the missionary sound of Senghor and Kane, "ce que l'homme noir apporte" is more valuable than what he receives. The irony of Omotoso's novel is, however, that Dele, the advocate of African humanity, returns to his country only to become a corrupt politician. His disappointed English wife Daisy states:

> This was not the kind of party he would have formerly belonged to... The party had no programme. All it had was a collection of friends from all parts of the country... Where were the ideals we had talked about when we were in Britain? How was he using the experience he had got in Britain?[39]

She only echoes what Dele had stated earlier on himself, when talking about some of his countrymen who returned from England:

> People live in Britain, pass through Britain, but refuse to allow Britain to pass through them. They don't learn a thing from this greatest of all world democracies.[40]

The daily experience of racism — from the barber's shop to the night-bar — makes it understandable that Dele does not allow Britain to pass through him. He sees his stay in Britain in the categories of "promise and betrayal". Like the process of learning from Britain, Dele's marriage fails in spite of the wife's willingness to adapt. In the name of cultural difference Dele feels free to beat her and to bring other women to her bedroom. He defends himself:

> She was a stranger. Could I help her? Could she still help me? Weren't we both casualities of circumstances we could not control?[41]

Symbolically Dele's and Daisy's child is drowned in a well, allegedly with the help of the grandparents. Through this act the last hope for compatibility of the two cultures is destroyed. One has to admit, though, that the conflict is not really caused by basic cultural differences. It is due to a coincidence of racial prejudice abroad and a debased post-colonial élitist attitude which uses traditional values and customs only to cover selfish interests. Dele obviously does not implement "his people's doctrine of humanity". The author's criticism is directed against both the British and the Nigerian society.

Though written more than ten years later, the last novel of the Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ, *Un chaut écarlate* (1982) follows exactly the pattern of Omotoso's novel, with the not unimportant difference that the hero meets the white girl Mireille, a French diplomat's daughter, in his own country.[42] The couple gets involved in a passionate love and marry against the resistance of both parents. Ousman maintains from the beginning that he is by no means willing to compromise his own culture and that the girl has to adapt, which she does, even to the extent of becoming Muslim. She fails in some respects, for instance by frowning at her husband's guests spoiling the carpet or by putting not enough meat into the soup prepared for her father-in-law. But the husband does not attempt to advise her. After a slow process of alienation, Ousman falls in love with an attractive and uneducated Senegalese girl, squanders the wife's money on her and eventually takes her as his second wife. He now feels that he has fully recovered his Africanness and cultural identity and sneers at the white wife's futile attempts to keep him. When she discovers this, she still decides to stay on, because of her child who, she feels, would not be accepted by her own family in France. Under the strain of this decision, she falls mentally ill, poisons her child and attacks the man with a kitchen knife.

The author's criticism of the man's reckless behaviour is much more severe than of the girl's failure to integrate fully into African life. Thus, the novel is not, as some critics wrote, yet another elaboration of culture-clash, but — just like Mariama Bâ's first novel, *Une si longue lettre*, mainly a feminist criticism of polygamy and male chauvinism under the guise of African identity. The author musters support for the abandoned white first wife of Ousman from one of his best friends, his sister and even his old

father, who all condemn him. The man finds acclamation only from those who gain from the feasts he gives for the second wife.

A reaction to this African feminism has already come from a male African critic, who accuses Mariama Bá of Westernism and Beauvoirism and abandonment of her own cultural heritage.[43]

There is a good number of novels and memoirs written between 1960 and 1975 which reflect a more complicated situation of inter-cultural encounter, no longer a clear-cut opposition of African and Western values. Buchi Emecheta's Adah, for instance escapes to Britain, "the land of her dreams" and in spite of all disillusioning experiences with landladies and daily minders, she finds a greater opportunity to develop her own personality as a woman and of training her children in the spirit of equality of sexes than at home. She regards her own husband as a more serious obstacle to progress than any white racist:

> If you really want to know, I brought my children to save them from the clutches of your family, and, God help me, they are going back as different people; never, never are they going to be the type of person you are. My sons will learn to treat their wives as people, individuals, not like goats that have been taught to talk. My daughters.... God help me, nobody is going to pay any bleeding bride price for them. They will marry because they love and respect their men, not because they are looking for the highest bidder or because they are looking for a home.[44]

It is remarkable that especially African women are now eager to learn from the West in order to emancipate themselves from traditional restrictions, whereas their husbands still defend traditional values against Western influence. The Senegalese Awa Thiam notes in her book *La parole aux négresses* (1978) that Algeria has fought a battle of national liberation with the support of her women without allowing the women to be liberated themselves.[45] Emecheta's Adah hopes that her husband will change his patrirchal ways in England. Once again the theme of cultural *métissage* is seen in a more optimistic perspective, and many authors feel that with goodwill, tolerance and education gaps that still remain could be diminished. Chinua Achebe has recently emphasized the need for a "two-way-traffic", a cultural version of the North-South Dialogue.[46]

We cannot go into all the examples here, but shall in conclusion, return to the author from whom we borrowed the title. He did not add the question mark, but his story did, with the warning that in the last analysis private agreements and cultural compromise do not solve historically and economically based

problems. In his poem, the lovers part. In the same author's preceding novel, *A Few Nights and Days*,[47] the African's French fiancée commits suicide, because her father is opposed to the marriage. He is a French business man with a branch of his company in Ivory Coast. During the decisive conversation with his daughter's African suitor, he concludes his meal with peeling a banana; the young African has chosen an apple. They know each other's habits, but it is the European who keeps the African at arm's length; the African parents had already given their consent. The African, though quite familiar with the French way of life, is not prepared to give up his own values — he describes himself as a tortoise which carries its house on its back. His assimilation does not go beyond his principles, even at the expense of a tragedy. He keeps his own distance, which the author describes in another poem, a letter addressed to the father:

> Just being myself, daddy,
> kissing across the colour line
> falling in and out of love
> while dreaming of a black woman at home.[48]

5. Conclusion: A Question Mark

As a result of increasing scepticism with regard to white superiority, the question of *metissage* is no longer a central issue in African literature. It is significant that in Dipoko's novel it is the white girl who really wants the marriage, who dreams of starting a new life outside her father's authoritarian rule. It is also significant that in all literary reports of Africans in Europe it is always girls who are the mediators between the two cultures, the long list of Thérèse, Dénise, Francoise, Lucienne, Mireille.... This is not only because love-stories are the salt of any novel, but also on account of the natural solidarity of those who have felt the power of the "omnipotent administrator", as Eldridge Cleaver calls the white man. Feminist movements in Europe like to compare their own rôle in society to the fate of the colonized people. The irony is that black women seek emancipation from their indigenous patriarchal system in Europe, whilst white girls dream of a more independent life in Africa. The dilemma of either side is that cultural métissage is regarded as a means of liberation from the strains of "this cruel world", instead of first solving the fundamental issue of the underlying problems:

> Nous verrons qu'une autre solution est possible.
> Elle implique une restructuration du monde.[49]

The frequency of the motive of black and white in love shows a certain inclination towards the "Cinderella"-solution of the problem, but the absence of the happy ending also shows the disbelief in fairy tales. Fanon's "restructuring of the world" does not begin from culture, not with the intimacy of love and marriage. In the most recent African literature this topic has lost interest. Learning from the West has become an issue of borrowing technologies, not of falling in and out of love. The future will show whether E.O. Okeem's advice to his fellow Africans in his pamphlet *England at First Sight* (1980) is practicable:

> While in Rome make some efforts to do like the Romans, but afterwards do not forget when you have left Rome.[50]

The strongest criticism of young African authors is in fact directed against those who forget and become "black white men". Thomas Akare, a Kenyian novelist, describes in an episode of his novel *The Slums* (1981) the case of a "been-to", who had got "married to one of the white baboons", broke with his family and drove his old father into suicide.[51] In a good number of recent African books we find the expression "white shit"[52]. The disappointment that twenty years of independence have not proved the assumption of black humanism[53] may be one reason, another one that economic independence is still far from being a reality. These militant "black activists" reject any form of cultural *métissage* and talk of cultural decolonization. We said in the beginning that often literature does not carry the latest news. To mirror cultural relations in the image of love and marriage shows an emotional approach which does not portray the realities of black and white in business.

NOTES

1) cf. Peter Abrahms, *A Wreath for Udomo,* London: Faber and Faber, 1956; Lewis Nkosi, *Rhythms of Violence,* Oxford: OUP, 1964. The latter discussed by Wole Soyinka, "Ideology and the social vision", in: *Myth, Literature and the African World,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p.70f.
2) Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure ambigue,* Paris: Juillard, 1961, p.172.
3) cf. for instance C.C. Nwezeh, *Africa in French and German Fiction* (1911-1933), Ife: University of Ife Press, 1977.
4) Mbella Sonne Dipoko, *Black and White in Love,* London: Heinemann 1972 (AWS 107).
5) Ibid. p.4.
6) Ibid. p.12.
7) Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs,* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952, p.51.

8) S.T. McCloy, *The Negroe in France,* University of Kentucky Press, 1961, p.274.

9) H.W. Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige.* A History of Africans in Europe before 1918, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1979, p.8.

10) Ibid. pp. 270-274; pp. 363-364 and plates 36-39.

11) cf. Eckhard Breitinger, *Black Literature,* München: Wilhelm Fink, 1979; Martin Steins, "Léopold Sédar Senghor and die Deutschen", in: *Afrikanische Literatur — Perspektiven und Probleme,* ed. by Ulla Schild, Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen 1979, pp.225-242.

12) cf. W.F. Feuser, "Das Bild des Afrikaners in der deutschen Literatur", in *Akten des V. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses in Cambridge,* 1975, pp. 306-315.

13) Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice,* New York: Dell Publ. Co. 1968, p. 192.

14) A. Kanie, "Envol", in: *French African Verse,* ed. by John Reed and Clive Wake, London: Heinemann 1972, p.43.

15) *Equiano's Travels,* Abridged and edited by Paul Edwards, London: Heinemann 1967, p.81.

16) *Ibid.* p.43.

17) *Ibid.* p.175.

18) *Ibid.* p.158.

19) Ham Mukasa, *Sir Apolo Kagwa Discovers Britain,* edited by Taban lo Liyong, London: Heinemann 1975, p.VII.

20) *Ibid.* p.32.

21) *Ibid.* p.124.

22) *Ibid.* p.29.

23) R. Mugo Gatheru, *Child of Two Worlds,* London: Heinemann 1966, p.21.

24) *Ibid.* p.211.

25) Mineke Schipper de Leeuw, "Le Blanc dans la littérature africaine", in: *Afrikanische Literatur,* l.c. p.277. cf. also her book, *Le Blanc et l'Occident au miroir du roman négro-africain de langue Francaise,* Assens: Eds. van Gorcum, 1973.

26) Ousmane Socé, *Mirages de Paris,* (1937), new edition: Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1961, p.144ff.

27) cf. Peter Abrahams, *A Wreath for Udomo,* London: Faber & Faber, reprint of 1977, p.21.

28) Camara Laye, *Dramouss,* Paris; Plon 1966.

29) Aké Loba, *Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir,* Paris: Flammarion 1960.

30) Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure ambiguë,* Paris: Juillard 1961.

31) *Ibid,* p.163.

32) *Ibid.* p.167.

33) L.S. Senghor, *Liberté I, Négritude et Humanisme,* Paris 1964, pp. 98-103.

34) *Ibid,* p.86.

35) Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us,* London & Lagos: Nok Publ. Co., 1978.

36) cf. Ezekiel Mphalele, *The African Image,* London: Faber & Faber, 1974, p.71 Walter Rodney, "The History of Africans in Europe 1600-1790", in: *The Cambridge History of Africa,* ed. John Fage and Roland Oliver, Vol. IV, OUP 1976, p. 649ff and John E. Flint/I. Geiss, "Africans Overseas 1790-1870", ibid. Vol. V, p. 418ff.

37) Martin O. Ijere, *An African in Germany,* Hicksville/New York: Exposition Press, 1975.

38) Kole Omotoso, *The Edifice,* London: Heinemann 1971, p.65.

39) *Ibid,* p.116.

40) *Ibid,* p.91.

41) *Ibid,* p.140.

42) Mariama Bà, *Un Chant écarlate,* Dakar, Abidjan, Lome: Les Nouvelles. Editions Africaines, 1982.

43) Femi Ojo-Ade, "Still a Victim? Mariama Bà's *Une si longue lettre",* in *African Literature Today,* Vol. 12, 1982, pp.71-87.

44) Buchi Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen,* Glasgow: William Collings Ltd., 1977 (first 1974), p.133.

45) Awa Thiam, *La parole aux négresses,* Paris: Eds. Denoel, 1978.

46) Chinua Achebe, "Impediments to Dialogue between North and South" *Okike: An African Journal for New Writing,* No. 16, Nov. 1979, p.9.

47) Mbella Sonne Dipoko, *A Few Nights and Days,* London: Heinemann, 1970.

48) *Black and White in Love,* l.c. p.64.
A more satirical version of "kissing across the colour line" can be found in Dillibe Onyeama's novel *Sex is a Nigger's Game* (London: Satellite Books, 1976), where the hero makes a living out of the myth of sexual prowess of the negro, only to find out in the end that it is yet another form of exploitation. The same author gives in *Nigger at Eton* (London: Leslie Frewin Publ., 1972) a bitter account of his experience in the famous school.

49) Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs,* l.c. p.64.

50) E.O. Okeem, *England at first Sight,* Enugu: Star Printing & Publ. Co., 1980.

51) Thomas Akare, *The Slums,* London: Heinemann 1981, pp.31 and 145.

52) cf. Dambudzo Marechera, *House of Hunger,* London: Heinemann 1978 and Naiwo Osahon, *A Nation in Custody,* Lagos: Heritage Books, 1980.

53) cf. Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State" in: *The Writer in Modern Africa,* ed. P. Wastberg, Uppsala: The Scandin. Inst. of African Studies, 1968, pp. 14-21.

Elaine Savory

THE OLD GODDESS

for A

Echoes
in the cool tomb
of the museum, her
lioness face.
Beyond,
winged maternity, blue
and a painted oar,
the rustle of silk
on thighs in the airy temple,
corn
and mirrored fishes.

My hair flows
on my head like tangled
water.

The lords of patriarchy
had women
stone their own image.
I hear you bless me
with the voice of your male god.

My breasts
curve, fill under the carved
shield's glitter.

Have you forgotten Isis,
the Virgin, free
woman, Queen of Heaven?
Her son Horus
suckles her breast,
her wings shelter Osiris,
she brings men to life.

Octavius and Paul, emperors
of order,
ransacked her temples,
made her Mary, and
Magdalene,
the vacant eyes of wives,
flaccid tongues of courtesans,
and of menstruation, a
hidden shame.

Octavius hacked his mind
free of the smell and muslin breezes
under a lifted veil, the
sly glimpse of luminous skin
parted before Isis' altar.

Paul took water and the womb
out of his spirit, gave us
amnesia, bored husbands and the clink of coins
in sacred vaults, colonialism
which denies balance,
the harmony of conception
between equals, the Other.

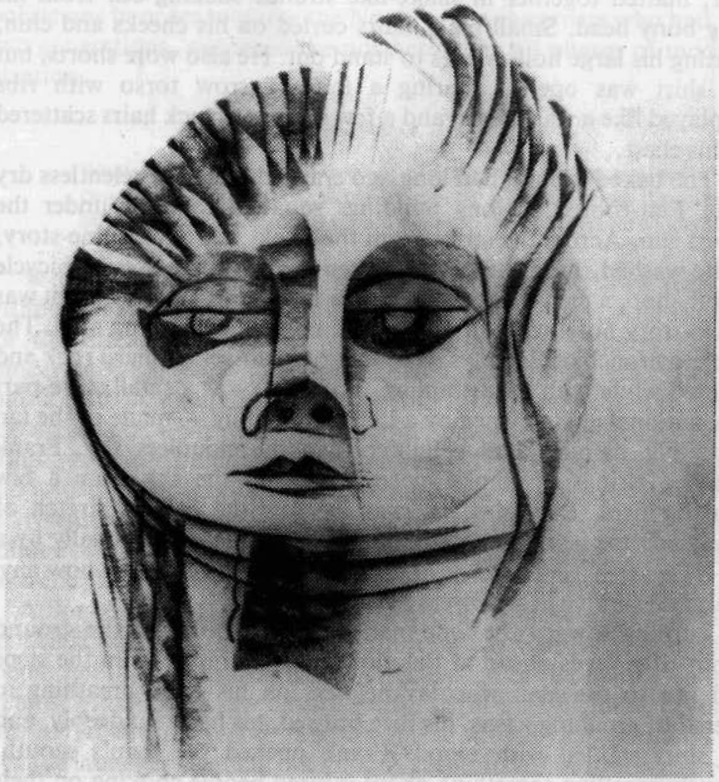
My eyes blink
to remember the slap
of a brisk Roman
sandal on a perfumed Egyptian belly,
cruel laughter,
nakedness before the smirks of lust and
priestly celibacy.

Echoes
in the warm womb
of your forest, waterfalls, old leaves,
now and then the foot stumbles over
abandoned masks and buried talismans.
Do you remember?

She waits
for you to speak to her.
You sit crosslegged in an empty room,
searching for something with incense and silence,
or you walk amongst your trees alone,

but you do not know her name,
you have forgotten the Watermaid,
the moon women of Aba and Owerri,
and
before.

Light the candles,
turn from the crescendoes of men, their
circuses of storm, for the tides begin
to rise, there are angry
eyes in the oceans
of birth and
Isis grows impatient.



John Zurlo

FACES OF FEAR

Frank stood motionless on the steps of the bank, watching a long man in baggy brown slacks and white pullover shirt stumble off the road, followed closely by a raging mob of almost a hundred men, most of them young, many dressed only in short pants and t-shirts, and barefooted, carrying clubs and throwing stones, and shouting in northern dialects. And leading them all was a tall, lanky man riding a bicycle and carrying a machete. He had long, stringy hair, matted together in snake-like strands sticking out from his long bony head. Small black hairs curled on his cheeks and chin, causing his large hollow eyes to stand out. He also wore shorts, but his shirt was opened, baring a long, narrow torso with ribs displayed like a washboard and a few stranded black hairs scattered on his chest.

The baked ground had long ago cracked from the relentless dry heat. Flat-roofed, oblong buildings squatted together under the desert sun. Across the street from the bank, a group of one-story, white-washed, mud buildings housed family businesses: a bicycle repair shop, a men's shirt shop, and a shoe store. On their right was a two-story hotel with an open-air dinning and drinking area. The bank, a branch of Barclays, was built of a native tan hard rock and painted white with red trimming. To its left was a small store-part of a national chain owned by a Lebanese family — made of the tan rock, but painted a blue lighter than the cloudless sky. Frank watched strings of smoke meandering into the sky from a few cooking fires. Dropping his eyes, he saw the endless stretch of sandy soil to the north, across the river, broken occasionally by a few dwarf trees and patches of green weeds. He wondered how any life could survive in arid areas like this.

Turning toward the lone man, who had fallen to the ground about fifty yards ahead of the mob, Frank jumped from the steps and ran to the man who lay helpless on his back breathing in irregular, groaning gasps, his face bruised, his head cut deeply, and his shirt stained with blood. Frank opened the man's mouth, vaguely recalling something about injured people choking on their tongues, something he'd dismissed years earlier as irrelevant to his life style. He fingered awkwardly inside the man's mouth and

managed to clear the air passage, but the man's breath was like the breath of a shadow.

Feeling nauseous, Frank looked away from the man, toward the river. There, a motor boat had stopped near the shore, with motor running, a white man on deck gesturing excitedly toward a black man crouched in some river weeds. Frank watched the man swim to the boat and crawl on board. Then the boat sped away southward.

Turning again to the man on the ground, Frank pressed a handkerchief to the top of the man's head where blood oozed from a large gash, and then propped the man's head up and looked directly into the man's face, the eyes brown but bloodshot and yellowish, the face charcoal grey with coagulated streams of dark red splitting his face into sections of agony. And the shouting mob clamoured for the kill; the business of the day as decreed by northern politicians in order to purge the North of the easterners who had, in two generations, outpaced the northerners in all phases of modernization.

II

> Wanted: College grads to teach in Africa, Asia, and South America for two years. Working and living conditions are challenging. The pay is small, but the experience is rewarding. Help the Third World Modernize. Contact the Peace Corps at....

What had sold Frank was the "Wanted" and the "two years," without Uncle Sam's face and his intimidating finger. And except for the threat of tribal war, which haunted the country like a reincarnated plague, Frank appreciated his tour in Nigeria. "Better than a tour in Vietnam", he often told his Nigerian friends, who had no idea of what was happening in Southeast Asia. Neither did Frank, except from letters he'd received from a college friend who had joined up. It was safer here, Frank knew, in spite of the threat of dysentery, malaria and gonorrhea. "Just boil the water, take quinine pills every day — and if you must indulge, take Terramycin for a couple of weeks, and see your regional doc if pain persists."

A lot safer in Nigeria than where he almost ended up — Southeast Asia, a far off mysterious world to Frank, a world people fell into when they sailed off the edge of the planet. In his dreams, Frank often saw himself strutting through highland forests with a flame thrower burning tunnels of stored rice, and with a grenade launcher cleaning out villages suspected of harboring spies, and with a machine gun in a helicopter gunning down traitorous farmers tilling their fields of rice. In his last dream, he saw himself

crawling around in a swampy rice paddy, groping around for flesh from his buttocks, blown off by a land mine. Then he was nailed to a tree by crossfire in a grotto of mosses and vines, with snakes crawling over his feet and monkeys picking lice from his hair, a victim of a Marxist-Lennist-Stalinist-Maoist-Revisionist-Socialist-Special Forces, CIA-financed syndicate headquartered in the primeval forest. A strange gimpy-legged mystic with a long gray beard appeared and showed him a paper. It was the classified section of his home town newspaper with a notice circled:

> Wanted: College grads. Jobs in the endangered parts of Southeast Asia. Salary sufficient to maintain your current life style. Contribute to U.S. efforts to civilize and Americanize these unfortunate people being attacked by an alien culture. Help spread Peace. Contact your nearest recruiting....

He had been one speedy stride ahead of his draft board, telling himself he was a pacifist, although he wasn't sure what a pacifist did under extreme pressure to defend himself or another person against violence. But somehow, he believed that these emergencies could be avoided. "There's more than enough natural threats to life. Why create more?" he often urged in late night conversations with friends.

III

"European, what you doing?" the man with the hollow eyes yelled at Frank. "This man, he be your brother?"

"What difference does it make?" Frank answered, not looking up, thinking of his eastern friends in town, wondering if they were safe. "You can't just kill a man like he's some animal." Frank was trying to figure out how to get the man from the ground onto his motor bike and then through the mob to the hospital.

"We kill him and all his brothers, European. Go away. This is our business." The mob remained silent during the exchange between the man with the machete and Frank. And the business of the day continued: the bankers banked, and the store keepers sold; the radio station told about a new five-year economic development program in Tanzania and riots in South Africa. Fishermen set their nets up river, and farmers tended their fields; and the mob stood waiting for instructions from their leader.

Frank turned toward some Nigerians who were watching from a safe distance. "Help me get this man on my bike; someone help me." He placed the suffering man down gently on the ground and hurried to the bystanders, who backed away a few feet, shaking their

heads, murmuring, "But we can't, sir. We'd be killed too."

He returned to the man on the ground, a large-boned, broad-nosed man with deep creases in his forehead and graying, wiry hair on both his head and chin. Frank knew the face only slightly, having met the man through mutual friends on social occasions, but it was the face of an easterner living in the North, forced to live outside the main section of town. And like many easterners, he was a successful, middle-level government employee, too successful to suit the northern political leaders, who preferred foreigners because they would spend lots of money and not get involved in politics.

Frank held the man's hand and felt a gold wedding band. He wondered if the man's family had escaped before the trouble. Frank then realized that thousands of easterners like this man were being killed throughout the North at this same time, among them his friends, and his eyes swelled with tears.

The hollow-eyed man edged closer, machete held high, voice raging in dialect urging his followers forward. Frank glared from the depths of his soul into the hollow eyes, and madness stared back. Frank was stunned by his own emotions, completely unaware of the danger he faced. He fixed his eyes on the mad man in a look of disbelief, perhaps anger; but whatever else it might be, it was strong and unyielding. The man stopped and stared in dead silence. Then, Frank saw the sharp reflection of the sun off the machete as the man sliced it through the thin, dry air.

"Afraid? Yes," Frank admitted to himself. He felt that marble-sized lump in his stomach, like a lump of nitro, undetectable by x-rays and resistant to medicine, that tiny timed death-pill that shifts constantly throughout the digestive tract. Sometimes, like a cancer, the lump shatters and spreads and attacks its victim without warning, exploding into the bloodstream, eventually completing its unnoticed journey back to the cortex of the brain. Frank knew that the dying man felt it, at least while he was living in the North and especially while running from the mob; and the spectators watching the man die felt it, even now; and the mob certainly felt it exploding into their collective blood-stream at that very moment. And to Frank, the hollow-eyed man was the embodiment of fear itself.

Frank turned and stared glassy eyed into space, feeling helpless, wondering why he was alone, he of all the teachers at the school and all the expatriates in town, boasting of their colonial exploits and of chasing Rommel across the desert: those defenders of the Queen's honor; and the Nigerians, trained from childhood to know that force (formerly in the hands of the whites) controlled and that

control is power, and that power brings the luxuries of life. Why him, he wondered, here, alone, taking a stand for the values of western civilization. And the bankers kept banking, and the store keepers kept selling; and the nets were cast and the grounds were tilled; and Frank the Peace Corps teacher knelt on the hard, sandy ground caressing the victim's bleeding head.

The mob became restless, waiting for their leader's signal to finish the job because they had more names on their list, and it was already late in the afternoon. A crowd of bystanders milled close to the entrances of the bank and the store, exchanging rumours and waiting to see what this "crazy European" would try to do. Dogs barked and scampered about by the riverside; a high-life record blared from the hotel bar across the street; beggars worked the Europeans who, while leaving the bank, glanced quickly at the mob and then sped away in their Fords and Land Rovers without even noticing the object of the mob's fury lying between the bank and the river or the danger faced by a fellow European.

Frank neither saw nor heard the activity around him. He was thinking that he should have gone to graduate school instead of joining the Peace Corps. For a moment, he imagined that he was in graduate school trying out for a part in a play about a cowboy who loses his brother to a band of outlaws and sets out to avenge the murder. But, he'd forgotten his lines, and the actor playing the dying brother kept giggling. But it didn't matter to Frank, because he didn't really have time to be in a play while taking twelve graduate hours in history and teaching two survey courses. In a few more minutes, he could forget the whole embarrassing incident, and go home and drink a beer while listening to Strauss's "Don Quixote."

Then, he remembered the draft board's letter and that he had indeed joined the Peace Corps to avoid the violence of Viet Nam: Peace Corps volunteers were issued boxes of books instead of M-16s; they learned how to set up village adult literacy classes instead of night-time defensive perimeters, and to irrigate fields with water instead of blood.

So, he was a Peace Corps volunteer, just like thousands of other idealistic men and women from the United States who were scattered around the globe to help raise the life expectancy and standard of living for millions who had the misfortune to be born in economically depressed lands.

The twelve hour plane ride to Dakar and his excitement during orientation in Lagos had deteriorated from a creeping despondency

with his role and ineffectiveness as a Peace Corps teacher; and from the months of rumours of coming violence, even pogroms, if the easterners didn't leave the North. He had pleaded with his eastern friends to leave the North and had even loaned money to some so they could get their families out.

V

The man with the machete was talking to Frank in rapid, wild bursts of rage and slurred speech; but Frank understood none of it; the words were just spurts of hatred and madness to him. Neither did he understand the retreating bystanders nor the disappearing Europeans. Frank knew only that he would stay with the dying man, even though Frank did not understand death either. He felt the blistering sun burning on his forehead, the sand pressing against his knees, the sun and the sand. And he felt the faint pulse of the man in his arms, hardly a rhythm any more, just a meek, futile tremor about to expire.

Then Frank looked directly at the mad man. "What do you think I'm doing in your country? I didn't come over here to referee your civil wars."

"You teach school, European. Go back to your classroom," shouted a voice from the mob. This caused a general stir in the mob, but the mad man, with machete raised, became silent and began moving toward Frank.

"If I wanted to fight, I'd be in Vietnam," Frank said, knowing the hollow-eyed man probably didn't understand. "I'm in the Peace Corps. I'm supposed to be helping you," but Frank was no longer sure how or even why. The man flashed his machete again, and said coldly, "You may join your brother if you wish." Then he turned to the mob and began an animated discussion with two of the men.

Near the store, some chickens fluttered and cackled, reminding Frank of a letter he'd received from a close friend working with the Peace Corps in India to help increase the size of chickens. In Washington, someone had decreed that what the U.S. could do best for the poor of India was to send them over-night specialists in children farming. "Bigger chickens meant healtheir chickens," his friend had written, "and healthier chickens meant more chickens; and more chickens meant more eggs; and the bigger the chicken the bigger the egg; and just think of the omelets and fried chicken we volunteers can eat; since most Indians around here are vegetarians. Sure feels great to be saving the world and eating well at the same time.

The chickens fluttered again, as some tiny children raced behind the store laughing and teasing each other. Frank bent close to the dying man's ear and spoke, "I won't leave you. Believe me."

Then Frank stared directly into the eyes of the man with the machete, who stopped about ten yards from Frank and looked past Frank, beyond the river, out into the sandy wastes of the desert, "You should not interfere, European," he said in a cautious voice. "This is Nigerian business."

"Leave us. You got what you came for. Give him some peace." Frank held the dying man and watched his eyes close. The man grabbed Frank's hand and squeezed tightly for a couple of seconds and then his grip loosened, and his arms dropped to the ground. The mob, still, but tense, began murmuring. A car's engine revived in the bank's parking lot, the muffler backfiring; a motorcycle roared in the distance; and shoppers hurried away from the store. The leader of the mob dropped his eyes to the ground, turned to his followers, and spoke in a low voice, pointing toward the town. The mob turned slowly and followed the lanky man quietly down the road. A bystander said to his companion, "At least he had someone with him. It's easier if someone's with you."

Someone called to Frank, "You're very brave, European, but very crazy."

Frank turned slowly and answered, "So I'm the crazy one, and you're the normal ones; and that mob down there, they're the brave ones; and this man he's the coward. Do you think the killing will stop here?"

Frank called Saint Anne's Church and waited until the dead man was picked up. Then he drove home. He put on a tape of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," turned up the volume, and sat in his chair, with a beer, staring at the print of "Guernica" on his wall.

It was late.

Outside, cattle with thick protruding ribs were wandering across Frank's sandy yard, scrounging for blades of scrub vegetation. They moved with great effort, a step at a time, groaning with disappointment, while buzzards hovered in the distant sky, waiting impatiently for one of the cows to fall. The Sahara wind cut through the heat and sandpapered everything above ground, as a beige haze settled on the horizon, dulling the setting sun. The faint call of a muezzin was carried by the northern breeze across the town, while all else fell silent.

Chimalum Nwankwo

THE LOST WIND

When the lost wind wandered to my door and knocked
Ancestral voices sang their song of love

A comrade is man who shares my sand with me.

When the lost wind moaned of a homeless heath
My house of reeds thrilled the ancestral song:

A comrade is a man who shares my sand with me

And the lost wind blew the song with a bugle
And the rafters shook and the dust was cowed:

A comrade is a man who shares my sand with me.

When the lost wind found my home his home
A demon song rose from a mouth of fire

And my house of reeds was wrapped with fire
And a burning dirge drummed my heart beyond
Mocking and mocking my welcome song

A comrade is a man who shares my sand with me

Now that I and my house of reeds are gone
O wind, beware the silence after the dirge

A comrade is a man who shares my sand with me.

Chimalum Nwankwo

SPIRIT CYCLE

No festivals follow the dark path of the dark fawn;
testaments only
No eagle Feathers no trumpets in royal gear;
testaments only

Who shall gather the yam tendrills on stakes
How shall water sustain the pith of pumkins
Over ancestral semaphores testaments only
Into the eddies after the flight of the fawn
Testaments of diffident kins and selfish kings
Testaments like arrows of red hot metal
Testaments over the swollen rivers of beaten dreams
Testaments over the misty groves of fitful visions
Testaments weaving blades of trenchant lamentations
Testaments in devil — logue, ballast of detractors:
Born without a rainbow at his heels
He cannot find the secrets of the atria
The wide ways to the light atop stairs
Born without a rainbow on his brow
What ritual is not the smoke of a fool's pipe

The forest gods chant from the silver in the clouds ——
Chiefdoms are broken cheered with hallowed bulls
And who has woven one thousand testaments
Has forgotten the rainbow's many moles
Drunk with atonic rumours of birthmarks of doom —
Children of Chaka floatsam for fish at blood river
Dumb dunes and silent seas brooding over unsung bones
Silent citadels silenced by the fiery voices of iron giants
After the dark fawn in flight the forest gods chant
Masterstroke for *masterstroke* after the iron god's towers
Who shall gather the yam tendrils on stakes
How shall water sustain the pith of pumkins:
Master strokes shield of eddies *master strokes*

Who sits on root tops after the dark fawns flight
Who sends beetles into the communal barns
Fuelling fratricides with hunger and anger
Whetstone for testaments grist for enemy gums
Opening glee for the song of many rivers
Knowing that many rivers will only rive the landscape
Breakers for the workman breakers for night dancers
A vengeful terrain is fit land for brambles
Whose sleep is easy on hard rock and thorns
A genius will flare like a candle in a breeze
While all lips form for trenchant lamentations
Fiery blades for the dark fawn in flight
Fiery blades sharp like the devil-logue
Speeding after the dark fawn in flight:

> Did blood of his phallus water the rain stone
> did he tell us if he broke the virgin stone
> Did he ever dine with the masked spirit
> Fruit of the arse of the masked spirit

But the dark fawn is in flight, the dark fawn is flying
Powered from the rainbows many many moles
Master stroke for *master stroke* spark from his heels
Before the first flight across the seven rivers
Trenchant testaments shoot like the western breeze
Before the death of all the Sacrificial embers
A sand storm wail gathers in a funeral air
Tinders and mourners palmfronds and slaughtered cows
Confusion chants like the bird of death —
His world is sand is death is sand —
With its alien blessings the gathered wail pauses
And the devil-logue strikes like trenchant lamentations:

> Born without a rainbow at his heels
> The wide way to the light atop the spiral stair
> Will grow weeds on the path to one atrium
> Born without a rainbow at his heels
> His dark waters mirror no sky of stars

No festivals follow the dark path of the dark fawn;
testaments only
No eagle Feathers no trumpets in royal gear;
testaments only

But a season of sorrows for a season of light
River denizens know deluges live like the sun
The dark fawn flies beyond this generations dirge sticks
And the dark fawn remembers the night of big cannons
Lost angry souls hoisting a barnnered silence
A dark silence steaming like a medicine pot
The dark fawn flies forward toward the aerial zone
Before the gathered wail beyond the old testaments
The horizon will soon break in a fanfare of plumes
After the great great noon of red red fires.

Joshua Uzoigwe

NDUBUEZE (For Chris Okigbo)

Amid the ululations of jackals
I hear your plight; for
Man and horse must ever ride
In endless ripples of fear and joy;

Yours is now the voice
That stained the mind
With cam-wood from mother's palm —
The echo redoubling, redoubling
Along the clanky dog-track shades
To heavensgate
To make peace with the sullied blood of comrades
Convolved with hope, sleeveless
Hope in tatters, hanging
Fast on weather-beaten shoulders
'Till lopped on your trench-mortar,
Victory came!

Amid the ululations of jackals
I hear your plight beating
Upon the edges of the bush
Like a head without a body
Fastening its teeth
On a bleeding stump
To ease the agony of shooting nerves...
Beneath the centre of father's, Obi,
Beneath those ashes
Glowing prismatic-coloured
Over three logwoods
— Urnful, rose-burnt —
Seek refuge;
Through the feathered clay-mounds
Come home. Come home.
Ndubueze.

'Ha! so my friend,
I, Onyije, the tree of good and evil
I, Osondu, the fruit of the tree
I, Ndubueze, the flesh of the fruit...
We are the apple of the dust.
In the Second Coming
Spread the ashes
And the moon shall lick me
In the mist.'

Solitary limbs. Solitary limbs.
Roots beat the stem for more sap
Dry kernels in ten earth-holes
Ash-flakes settling on grey eyelids
I hear the ikoro rolling.
I hear the ikoro rolling.

'But love in man
Was betrayal in fear;
Think you then I that loved life
Would wear the eagle feather
Cam-wood on beaten brows
White clay on dry chest?
No. I have tasted the bayonet
With a flickering tongue
And drawn forth blood
To wash away the sand
From your eyes.'

I hear the ikoro rolling...
A butless gun smoking on lone stilt.

'We were three weeds
Born on this earth-mound,
Stifling the crop of hope
In the bleaching moment
Of Onyije's resolve.
I tried to grasp the foot of the dying stem
But there was no green in the sap.
The Tree
The fruit
The flesh,
The burnt remains of a passing race,
Smoked ashes in the falling rain, falling rain...

Before the dying flame
Moths shake off their powdery wings;
The old lie stretched
In the cold ashes;
And behind this glowing tree
I have waited five months
For your second coming
before the dying flame

Ndubueze. But tell me,
Tell me through these dancing
Shadows, before the moth is caught
In the leaping light:
When you were born
Did not your father strike
His sword against your chest
Betokening his ancestor's
Might?

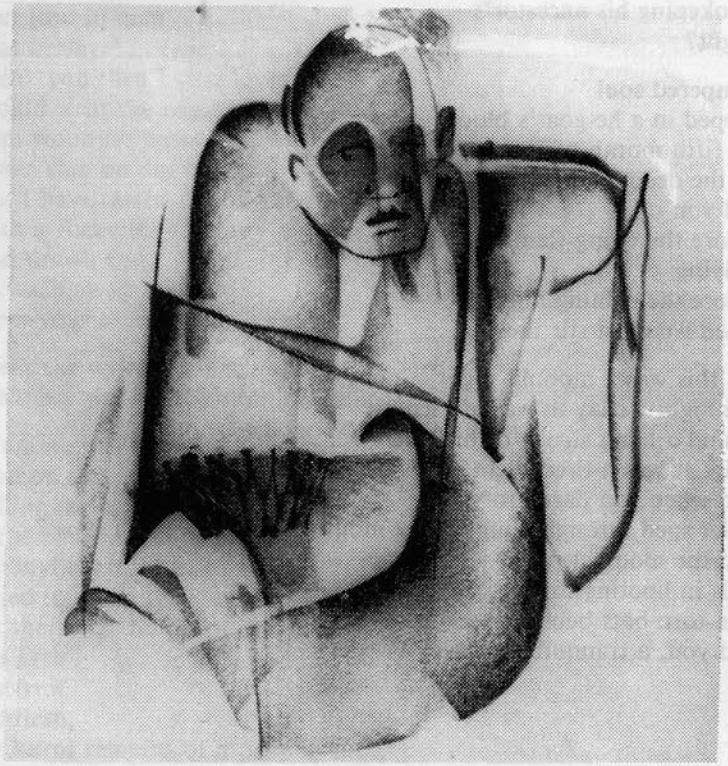
Tempered soul
Dipped in a he-goat's blood
On fifth month of first offering
To the dead... humble father
Led you on
Before the dying flame
Is dying
Before the coming night
When we must stir the urn.

But this was a moonlit night,
The night we lay at warmth length
Behind a hand stroke of broken
Twig. It was a tired night.
And when you dared to yawn
Bullet sped through your gaping mouth
And the moon slept.
Owls in hooting throng.
Rain-torn bats behind coconut slivers.
And you, a tranquilized dust.

Broken knives at crossroads.
I no longer cut the branches that once shaded me.'

At Azumiri you drank the frog-soup
Beat cassava roots to fill the gullet;
But lead created one mighty hole
And all sank alike wine in punctured gourd.

Osondu walked on stilts;
Onyije rode the snail-shell;
Ndubueze crawled in broken ripples
And broke earth in the early wetness.
And the sun rose and fell, rose and fell
As my beating heart began to receed
Towards the earth-hole.



N. Chidi Okonkwo

THE NOVELIST AS HEADMASTER: Joseph Sebuava's *The Inevitable Hour.*

At this stage in the development of the African novel, it is proper to examine every new African novel in the light of the total tradition that has grown up since *Things Fall Apart.* Thus viewed, Joseph Sebuava's *The Inevitable Hour* is a remarkable attempt to set that tradition back by some three decades.

The Inevitable Hour deals with two major subjects: the curse of childlessness and the inevitability of death. Sebuava has tried to weave these into a tragic parable about Man's Estate. But this is quickly lost sight of as the writer gleefully embarks upon his retrogressive anthropologising and pedagogy.

The story line is an uncomplicated as that of a parable. Sedofia, a very prosperous shallot farmer and money-leader, is sterile, as a result of which two of his four wives have abandoned him. The years pass, and the danger looms that Sedofia may die childless, his name and lineage (or "species" as Sebuava would have it) terminated, his two loving wives disinherited and turned out of the home they helped so much to build. Unlike the senior wife (Domelevo) who already has three children by a previous marriage, the third wife (Amiga) has none. Consequently, when Sedofia invites a Togolese healer to attempt to cure his sterility, Amiga uses this opportunity to conceive a child by another man, hoping thereby to give Sedofia an heir without causing a scandal. But the pregnancy aborts and an oracle reveals the shattering truth to Sedofia. From an ill-conceived sense of affronted honour, Sedofia divorces Amiga. When he later tries to take her back, he learns that she has married another man for whom she is now pregnant. This is the inevitable hour for Sedofia: he drowns himself.

In terms of the mechanical manipulation of plot, Sebuava is considerably successful. The plot is seamless, and the ultimate disaster is effectively generated through a series of counter-pointed ironies. A perverse Fate ensures that Sedofia's and Amiga's best intentions constantly backfire, and what appear as enviable assets turn into fatal liabilities.

Sebuava has also given his story a considerable "regional

spread." Though the novel is set in pre-independence Ghana (the Gold Coast), its action indirectly spills over into French Togoland, Dahomey and Nigeria. Sedofia is linked to Togoland by a trail of woe: the seducer of his youngest wife is a Togolese, as is Amuzuga, the healer whose arrival ironically triggers off Sedofia's doom. And the rumour mills have it that Sedofia "had gone to Yorubaland in Nigeria and used his genitals in buying powerful witchcraft to make him rich." There are also one or two echoes (perhaps intentional, perhaps not) of Chinua Achebe. Amuzuga's fame "spread like a bush fire in the harmattan season." When a disastrous drought ruins a shallot harvest, one farmer commits suicide — the first of two suicides in the novel.

The trouble with *The Inevitable Hour* is that it is too consciously pedagogic. It is as if Sebuava, taking Chinua Achebe's "novelist-as-teacher" concept in a very literal, class-room sense, sets out to write a pedagogical text in the guise of a novel. This should not be confused with mere didacticism. Sebuava writes as if his potential reader is a dumb-witted pupil who must have everything labelled in bold capitals, explained several times over, and then hammered in with a duster in the form of a proverb. Worse still, the novel is consciously addressed to a European audience, a creative atavism similar to the worst of Onuora Nzekwu (*Wand of Noble Wood* and *Blade Among the Boys)* and Buchi Emecheta *(The Bride Price).*

The Eurocentric tendencies are revealed in the author's language, his attitude to the experiences he portrays, and the delight with which he parades what he considers as exotic customs to regale his chosen audience — all of which are labelled and explained with the glee of a tourist guide. The reader constantly encounters such phrases as "custom demands," "to set the records straight," "if we take into account," "When translated into English," "which freely translated means," and "civilized standards." A word like "native" is used in a strictly European sense. On the whole, the novelist's attitude varies from the apologetic to the patronising and mission-school.

Sebuava's efforts to give local colour to his tourist documentation by using proverbs and folk tales are ruined by his excess zeal to satisfy his non-African audience. He uses proverbs and folk tales with an abandon which leads to surfeit and provokes rejection. Thus abused, proverbs lose their ability either to turn the peculiar and local into the universal, or to clinch an argument with the force of conventional wisdom. The novelist also ransacks European literature and scripture for adages, aphorisms, echoes, allusions

and concepts with which to explain his Africa to the Western world. There are numerous allusions to, among others, T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land,* Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Merchant of Venice,* Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" from which the novel takes its title and epigraph.

In this celebration of the novelist's own erudition, it is virtually impossible to distinguish his narrative prose from the speech of his characters. In a novel whose characters are already no more substantial than line-drawings, this weakens characterization even further. Like the author's, the characters' speeches are bookish. Even illiterate characters quote and paraphrase passages taken from European literatures and philosophy, as when Amiga's mother quotes Machiavelli.

Because he is pre-occupied with literary "Shrobeniusology," Joseph Sebuava ignores more important issues raised in his novel. For instance, the drought which leads to a poor harvest and a farmer's suicide is almost given symbolic treatment to parallel Sedofia's sterility (a form of drought and crop failure) and suicide. But Sebuava's tourist concerns smother the issue. He, therefore, misuses an opportunity to build his themes to a truly tragic height.

On the whole, *The Inevitagle Hour* is a very shallow novel with a retrogressive thrust. Despite the multiplicity of characters and events, despite the twists and turns of a faultlessly articulated plot, the exposition merely scratches the surface. This is because Sebuava merely talks about people, places and situations, without revealing or exploring them. His subject matter is the stuff of tragedy. But out of this material, he has only spun a thin sad tale.

P. Emeka Nwabueze

THE CHATTERING AND THE SONG

Femi Osofisan
Ibadan: Ibadan University Press
Pages: 57
Price: ₦2.50

Femi Osofisan has been consistently articulate in his concern with the present state of the country. He has expressed his anger, his frustration, his criticism, in essay, review, and drama. Each of his drama has attempted to tackle major shortcomings of the Nigerian effort at nation-building. And recently his play, *Moroundotun,* won Convention of Nigerian Authors literary prize.

Osofisan is known as a radical. His works breathe agitation, action, rebellion, mobilization, intrigue and revolution. *The Chattering and the Song,* even though it starts deceptively with harmless student banter, inevitably develops into more sombre and serious thought-provoking national intrigue.

The play which has a prologue and an epilogue, is divided into parts rather than acts and scenes. The action in the prologue is set in the past. The prologue, apart from introducing the reader to the major characters, also shows Yajin's abandonment of Mokan in favour of Sontri.

Part One begins a day before the wedding between Sontri and Yajin. Mokan, Yajin's former boy-friend, and a Leje join the group in preparation for the next day's wedding ceremony. Yajin reveals that while in School, Sontri was wild, untamed, and in the habit of running with street touts. When Sontri enters, he creates the impression that there is apparently no improvement in his behaviour. Rather than greet his guests, he creates confusion by quarrelling about the escape of his weaverbirds, and when told that Funlola was responsible for their release, he subjects her to wild torture. This part ends with the decision of Yajin, Funlola, Leje, and Mokan to stage Sontri's apparently forgotten play as a wedding present to Yajin and Sontri.

The main dramatic activity in Part Two is the presentation of the play. The play-within-a-play terminates with the arrest of Sontri and Yajin. We therefore see Mokan's foreshadowed

vengeance and some interesting revelations — that Mokan is a secret policeman from the Special Squad, that the musicians he brought along with him belong to the special Squad investigating Sontri's Farmers' Movement. Thus, a play intended as a wedding present becomes a most devastating irony. What was intended as fiction becomes reality for the principal actors. The playwright seems to infer that illusion and fantasy are capable of turning into reality, and are obviously not abysmal.

The epilogue which takes place an hour later is essentially a dialogue between Funlola and Leje, and steers between diatribe and dullness. Funlola sees Leje drinking alone and asks him out of the house. In the dialogue that ensues, she learns the real identity of Leje. He is Osongongon, the leader of the Farmer's Movement. He tries to win Funlola over and cause her to join the movement. The playwright leaves us in doubt of her eventual decision.

The play ends without a resolution. It lacks the resolution which completes a play and compels audience empathy. Perhaps the playwright is telling us, albeit in undramatic fashion, that the play does not end as long as the struggle continues, thus reiterating the lack of difference between reality and illusion.

The Chattering and the Song reflects many of the aspirations and contradictions inherent in the contemporary Nigerian society. It is perhaps intended as a symbolic gesture as well as a warning. The themes treated range from political ills through judicial treachery to mass ignorance.

Dominant images in the play include the chattering and the song of weaverbirds, the game of cards, and a thread in the loom. One cannot help admiring the playwright's ability to make trivial things assume importance and significance. For instance, a trivial activity like playing cards leads the author into an exposé of the human condition. Life, the playwright seems to suggest, is like a game of cards. Those who win in the first round of any human endeavour by cheating "always forget that there will be a second game" (p.31).

Though the play touches all aspects of Nigerian society, its main focus is on politicians and people in power. The playwright parodies them in the "Song of Crawling things": "the haughty thing that walks the streets on myriad feet and struts as if he owns the sun"... (p.14). This "crawling thing" is depicted as constituting a national menace:

> This millipede, a curious thing
> A curious thing of middling mien
> It signifies our nation now (p.15)

Corruption in the society is depicted in many episodes in the play. For instance, when Latoye begins his agitation against the state of the society in the play-within-a-play, the king, Abiodun, tries to buy him over. In order to deceive the general public he reassures him that

> Tomorrow the public crier will carry the words of your repentance and of your apology to the King; and that will be the end of the matter (p.39).

However, there are some cavils in the play which impede easy comprehension. The first scene is slow to grip attention. The point of attack, mechanical, and the dramatic conflict are unclear. Though the songs and vernacular expressions reinforce the central purpose of the author, they sometimes obtrude where they occur in the text. This could have been remedied by means of footnoting.

Some apparently unmotivated actions and attitudes strike us throughout the play. This is particularly manifested in the prologue, especially in the relationship between Yakin and Sontri on the one hand, and Yakin and Mokan on the other. The play leaves them floundering in improbabilities and melodrama.

Furthermore, there are a number of melodramatic incidents in the play which are not sufficiently developed; for instance, Sontri's sudden recovery from drunkenness in the prologue, Sontri's inability to recognize Leje as the leader of their movement, and Sontri's attitude to Yakin's friends and relatives. Perhaps the author's division of the play into parts may have prevented him from greater exploration of person and problem, on the one hand, and events and confrontations on the other.

The major strength of Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* lies in its use of a vigorous and variously rich and diverse dialogue. It is a dialogue of prose and poetry, flat statement and slang, the speech of body and of pain, friendship and enmity.

By and large, *The Chattering and the Song* is a thought-provoking play which needs to be read by all Nigerians whether in Agbada, Khaki, or the gown and hood.

C. Chike Momah

C.L.R. James: **BEYOND A BOUNDARY**
New York, Pantheon Books [1983]

This is the most challenging cricket book I have read; it is also the most complex. Indeed it would not be wholly correct to describe it simply as a cricket book. It is, rather, one man's reflective and searching commentary on West Indian life, told around the game that has given English-speaking West Indies its one legitimate claim to preeminence in the Commonwealth of Nations.

"What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" James asks. His theme is that to understand the West Indian and his attitude to life, you have to understand his attitude to cricket, and what the game means to him, which is EVERYTHING. Cricket is woven into his conception of life, including politics and race matters, which in the West Indies were intricately linked. When West Indians flock to international cricket matches (Test matches), the author tells us, they bring with them "the whole past history and future hopes of the islands". Unlike England, with its rich historical traditions and famous characters (and even some under-developed countries who can go back a few centuries to rebuild a grand conception of themselves), West Indies has nothing else to fall back on, except the cricketing deeds of its famous sons.

If this were a book on cricket purely as a game, it would be interesting only to those, relatively few, West Africans who know the game. But because it is about the West Indies and West Indians, and what motivates them, this book should be read by all West Africans who want to know something about their soul brothers and sisters on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean. It will perhaps not be the easiest book for those who have little or no familiarity with the technicalities of the game of cricket. The author's reference to the day he bowled three maiden overs might very likely be misread, by a transposition of the plural, as bowling three maidens over, which is quite another matter. But the author has attempted to keep the technicalities to the barest minimum. The result is one of the most beautifully written and thought stimulating books. As the publishers stated in an introductory section: "A note on cricket", no detailed knowledge of the game is needed to appreciate the book.

West Africans will easily identify with the author when he laments "the limitation on spirit, vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, *everything* began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and learning, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal — to attain it was, of course, impossible." Or when he declares that, at the end of his secondary education, "there was no world for which I was fitted, least of all the one I was now to enter".

The introductory section on "A note on cricket" contains a few errors of details: a cricket pitch is 22 *yards* (not 22 feet) long; there is no stated limit in the laws of the game to the number of runs that may be scored by the two batsmen running from one end of the pitch to the other for each stroke or hit; it is the *batsman,* not the bowler, who can be dismissed 'leg-before-wicket'; Test matches comprise a maximum of two innings per team. Finally, it denigrates the art, beauty and purpose of cricket batting to suggest that, in playing a defensive stroke, the batsman functions much like a hockey goalie, whose desperate, sometimes ungainly, lunges at the puck it is difficult to imagine anything less graceful and aesthetically satisfying. But these are minor blemishes, which can, hopefully, be corrected in a future edition.

Egwugwu Illah

REVIEWING THEATRE TRADITIONS IN A.B.U.: MICHAEL ETHERTON'S *THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN DRAMA* (London, Hutchison 1982) AND BRAIN CROW'S *STUDYING DRAMA* (Harlow-Essex, Longman, 1983)

It is necessary to review these two books on a comparative basis because they are products of the same time and experience. Both authors (Etherton and Crow) had been involved in the pioneering work in drama in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, whose major focus has evolved around the idea of taking theatre to the people removed from mainstream entertainment. On a theoretical level, there appears to be a semblance of an agreement in approach on questions of African drama which attempts to situate literary analysis in the context of a wider society.

However, the discordant note is sounded on the concept of African drama and the whole controversy surrounding the subject. Etherton's seminal discussion draws upon experiences in East, West and Southern Africa, where he has been variously involved in teaching drama and forging a theatre tradition that is "non-elitist", committing the members to some form of political action, along the lines of *Ngaahika Ndeenda.* This seems to have convinced him about the futility of making "tenuous distinctions" about the status of traditional performance forms in contemporary society, especially as they relate to literary texts. This issue itself has been brought into topical critical discourse by the publication of Yemi Ogunbiyi's *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a Critical Source book* (Lagos, Nigeria Magazine, 1981), which reviews the two major approaches: evolutionist and relativist schools. However, Ogunbiyi's conclusions get ensnared by an attempt to pin down the argument to a prescribed nomenclature of "dramatic ritual, popular tradition and Yoruba travelling theatre".

Etherton's argument on the other hand points the way forward by maintaining that classification or its justification cannot be an end in itself, a tendency which could obviate the current status of traditional performances within a totally different socio-economic formation. Not only has there been a systematic secularization (in this movement from ritual to entertainment) but there has been an attendant commercialization of these forms. By this sociological

approach, Etherton situates these forms in the current socio-economic formations: by virtue of Africa's integration into the world capitalist order, the mode of production of these peasant art forms has been subverted within a complex process of proletarization. It would therefore sound dubious, celebrative and folkloristic to continue to see these performances in their archetypal forms.

Crow's book, *Studying Drama,* in resurrecting the whole question of traditional performances and whether they could be termed drama exudes a reductionist tendency characteristic of 19th century European Formalism. This book comes out of his experience of teaching dramatic criticism in Zaria over a period of about a decade. His approach, very much in the European tradition, (even though it looks at African playtexts) is highly prescriptive and narrow and could mislead students into seeing the text as an end in itself. The danger of it lies in the fact that it could be a conscious attempt at reifying students into a correct way of looking at drama.

In the first part of the book, Crow goes back to this distinction between Theatre and drama by pointing out that conscious impersonation, plot (as story in action) and meaning remain fundamental to any classification of drama as it relates to traditional performances. In other words it might be more illuminating to describe traditional performance forms as containing dramatic elements (or what Ruth Finnegan calls "quasi-dramatic elements"). When we apply Crow's approach to the Masquerade, both in its ritual and secular forms, we would come to see that the masquerade ceases to be a mythological construct encapsulating myth, history and worship and becomes a curious spectacle.

The second part of *Studying Drama* looks at the main types of drama — Tragedy, Comedy, Tragi-comedy, with a penultimate focus on Melodrama. This is an interesting chapter because it introduces a new dimension to African dramatic criticism. Looking at Rugyendo's *The Barbed Wire,* Sofola's *The Wedlock of the Gods* and Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,* Crow tries to show how these artists employ melodramatic techniques in pushing their intentions across by a simple manipulation of the audience's emotions. This thesis had earlier been advanced in another article — "Melodrama and the 'Political Unconscious' in two African Plays" *(ARIEL* Vol. 14, No. 3, 1983) — where Crow introduces an ideological dimension to the argument by showing how melodrama could be utilised for political purposes. In Ngugi and Mugo's play, there is a rhetorical excess for revolution, while in *Ovoramwen Nogbaisi,* Rotimi employs melodrama to provide a

political exoneration of the elite in its collusion with Western exploitation. However, one gets the impression that melodrama is artless in itself even though Crow agrees that it is one of the most popular forms of drama in modern life.

At this theoretical level, therefore, these two books coming from similar experiences in Zaria prove to be discordant on definitions of drama and theatre. While Etherton explores the contradictions surrounding the concept and practice of drama and theatre in Africa, Crow is prescriptive, and also places too much premium on the literary text. Etherton, on the other hand, is cautious, giving spatial dimension to his argument by establishing the transient or ephemeral nature of most performances, be they literary or traditional.

This point expresses the dialectical relationship between the traditional performances and the modern playtexts or between modern African dramatists and most of these performance forms. This relationship is parasitic, for even though the drama might be replete with traditional motifs, the literary artist's reliance on them enhances the status of the literary tradition while marginalizing these performance forms. This is where the concluding chapter in Etherton's book is important since it looks at the performance tradition within the popular theatre framework and explores the role of folk media in the process of conscientization through threatre. In this, the text is disposed of with a preference for a working scenario in the immediacy of socio-political factors.

Crow's book *Studying Drama* also highlights one serious fact, that the fundamental determinant in the development of any literature, especially African literature, is economic. In other words, we must recognize that even though the literary text emerges in the tradition of great works, there are some other silent forces at work in the background — what Etherton calls the mode of production of art — determining the nature, form, content of what gets published. In other words, a people do not get the art they deserve (Adolfo S. Vasquez — *Art and Life)* but what the publishing houses decide. The readership is, therefore, in perpetual danger of substituting commercial interests for aesthetic values and sensibilities. And in this, we see the grand collusion between the publishing houses, the writer and the critic all in the service of Finance Capital. In this case, criticism ceases to be as neutral as it seems and becomes an ideological weapon in the grand strategy of capitalist hegemony. As manifestation of this grand collusion, we notice the movement of the International Book Fair usually in Ife (Nigeria) to

Harare (Zimbabwe) because the latter (by its independence) has become the new hot belt, the literary 'tabula rasa' without any major writers. All the international publishing houses and their marketing subsidiaries — Longman, Hutchinson, Heinemann, Macmillan — have zoomed down to Zimbabwe in a hungry quest to discover writers, suggesting what should be written or what will sell, while we bask in our ignorance that we have African Literature.

Just going through Phanuel Egejuru's *Towards African Literary Independence* shows how the whole literary racket of writing in metropolitan languages, writing specifically for the market, and creating literary 'gurus' with celebrative notions of themselves, is engineered by the publishing houses complete with book prizes and funding for various writers' associations. Everybody forgets that before the publication of *House of Hunger,* Dambudzo Marechero was sleeping in St. James Park (London). It was then "I said to myself, shit, these people are acting. They don't know me" (*South,* Dec., 1984).

This great "act" can be seen in the fact Nigeria has produced quite an impressive number of writers not because of any great artistic tradition (along the line of Dennis Duerden's argument in *African Art & Literature: The Invisible Present)* but because we have more "gullible" writers and we have one of the largest book markets, and there is profit to be made. We are not also surprised that more books on textual dramatic criticism of African drama are getting published, along the line of *Studying Drama.* Even though we credit this effort, we recognize the fact that it is all engineered by the publishing houses, since the proposed inclusion of drama in the W.A.S.C. and G.C.E. A/L syllabi.

The magnitude of the danger can only be realised when we establish that we live in an era of Western Cultural domination, and as such criticism might not be as innocent and neutral as it seems (Terry Eagleton — *Criticism & Ideology).* Dramatic criticism is no longer helping to "bridge the gap' between the dramatist and the audience. Rather, it is perpetually enslaved to the whims of finance capital. Ideologically, it reifies neo-colonial literature into the metropolitan aesthetic tradition with the metropolitan elites (the so-called literary experts) teaching in various African Universities serving as bridge-heads.

Robert Fraser expressed his apprehension of ceasing to perform such functions in a write-up, "Death of a Critic: a valediction" *(West Africa,* 3/12/84) reviewing the recent conference on New

Writing from Africa at the Commonwealth Institute (London). His apprehension stems from the movement towards writing in African languages, which to him, marks the death of the critic, as if criticism is essentially a European phenomenon. Criticism is necessarily attendant upon creative writing. Moreover, there is a richer dimension given to artistic enterprise with the translation of works of foreign cultures and languages. Apart from this, one of the recent features of African creative practice is the movement from the literary to the performance tradition. Here, criticism ceases to be literary and becomes immediate in the context of performance along the lines of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (an argument advanced too by Solomon O. Iyasere in "African Oral Tradition — Criticism as performance: A ritual" *African Literature Today,* No. 11).

It is therefore apparent that *The Development of African Drama* and *Studying Drama* provoke larger issues which recommend them as a legacy to the study of drama and theatre in Africa. It also seems to emphasize the work that has been done in alternative theatre in Zaria over the years. Despite the larger contradictions, this has been given a concrete form with the publication of Segun Oyekunle's *Katakata for Sufferhead* (London, Macmillan, 1983) — a product of the Zaria experience — in which pidgin is employed in an ideologically-conscious manner to explore the predicament of the proletariat in Nigeria. While Crow's book expresses the crisis in which African drama could still be considered an appendage of the European tradition (in terms of literary and performance aesthetics), Etherton's book internalizes this crisis and suggests that we look at issues in African drama and theatre on a socio-political basis as an organic complex of contradictions.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Edna AIZENBERG who lives in Jamaica, New York, teaches Latin American Literature.

Abena P.A. BUSIA is a writer who teaches at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her poems have been published in *Summer Fires,* an anthology by Heinemann.

Robena EGEMONYE is a lecturer in History at the University of Lagos.

Onuora Ossie ENEKWE, a Senior Lecturer in Dramatic Arts at the University of Nigeria, is author of *Broken Pots* — poems (Greenfield Review Press, 1977) and *Come Thunder* (Fourth Dimension, 1984).

Edith IHEKWEAZU, Senior Lecturer in German Literature at the University of Nigeria, heads the Humanities section of the Division of General Studies at the University of Nigeria.

Egwugwu ILLAH teaches in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Karen KING-ARIBISALA teaches English at the University of Lagos.

Adewale Maja-PEARCE, a regular contributor to *Okike,* lives in South Wales.

E.A. MARKHAM is a Media Coordinator in Wabag, Enga Province, PNG.

C. Chike MOMAH lives in New York.

Emeka NWABUEZE is a lecturer in Drama at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Chimalum NWANKWO teachers Literature and Playwriting at the University of Nigeria.

Jude C. OGU, a graduate of History, teaches at the Federal Government College, Jos. His novel *Born to Win,* which won a prize in the Macmillan Literature Competition in 1981, is expected to be in print soon.

Emeka Okeke-EZIGBO is a Senior Lecturer in Literature at the University of Benin.

N. Chidi OKONKWO is a Lecturer in English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Tess ONWUEME who teaches at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria, is also a playwright.

Damian OPATA, teaches in the Use of English unit of the General Studies Programme at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Ajumobi M. OZUMBA, a former editor of a government newspaper *Renaissance,* is a senior official in the Ministry of Information, Sports, Youths and Culture, in Enugu, Anambra State. Nigeria.

Elaine SAVORY lives and works in New Jersey, United States of America.

Joshua UZOIGWE, a Musicologist, teaches in the Department of Music at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife.

John ZURLO lived and worked in Yola, Nigeria, as a member of the United States' Peace Corps. He teaches at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

1. Individual Rates:

	U.S.A.	U.K. AND EUROPE	NIGERIA
1-Year	$24	£12	₦30
2-Year	$45	£22	₦56
3-Year	$60	£30	₦82

2. Agency Rates:

	U.S.A.	U.K. AND EUROPE
1-Year	$20	£ 9
2-Year	$36	£16
3-Year	$48	£22

3. Airmail Postage Extra:

U.S.A.	=	$10 per annum
U.K. and Europe	=	£3 per annum
Africa	=	₦9 per annum

4. Cost of Individual copies of Current Issues:

U.S.A.	=	$8
U.K. and Europe	=	£4
Nigeria	=	₦10

5. Back Issues:

Price will be supplied on request for available issues.

Printed by SNAAP PRESS, Enugu Phone: 042-339902