OKIKE

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FOUNDING EDITOR: CHINUA ACHEBE

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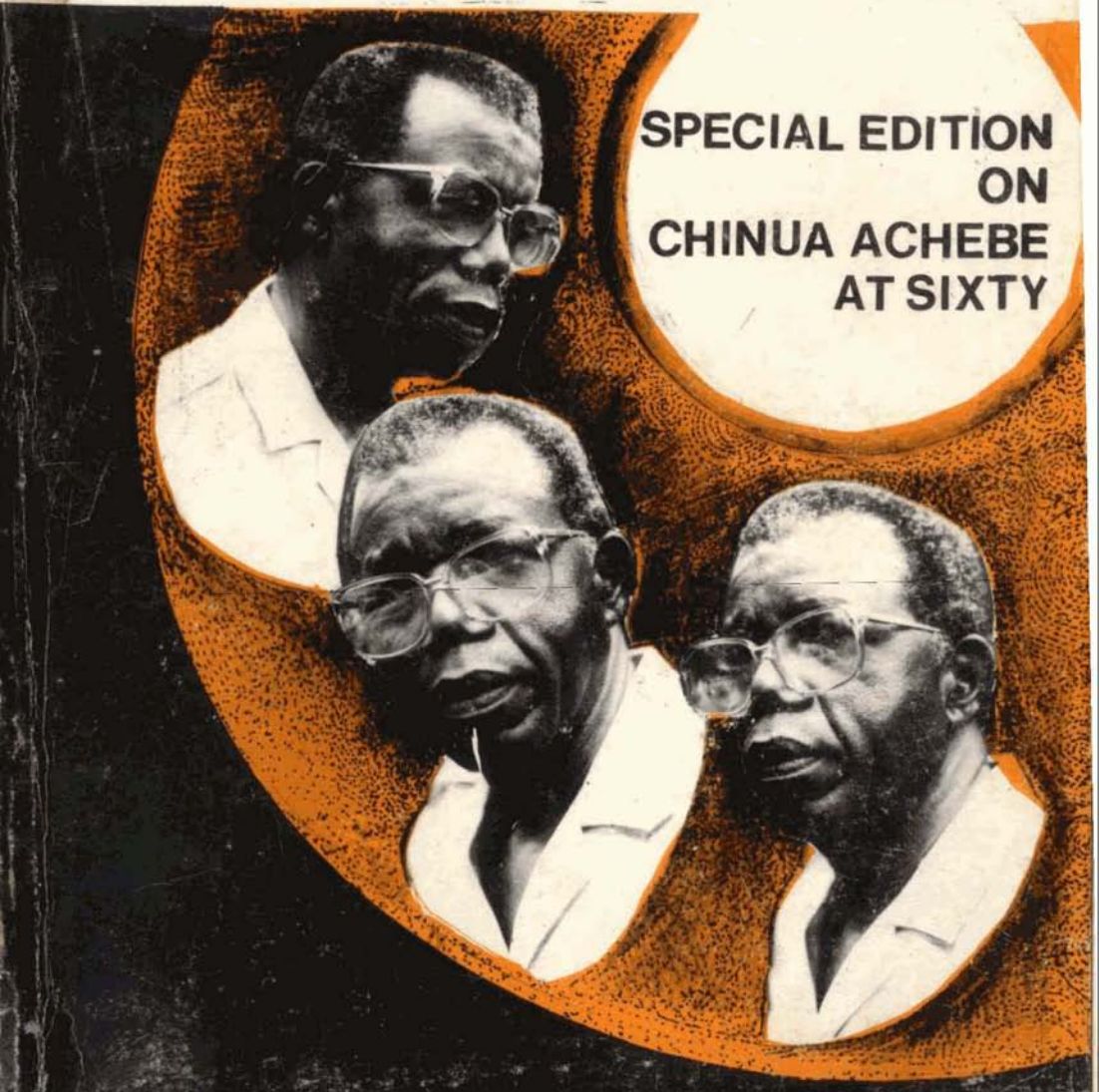

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *Okike* was conceived in 1988 to commemorate Chinua Achebe's sixtieth year (birthday: Novermber 16, 1990). By then, several articles on Achebe had been received, selected and scheduled for publication in numbers 27/28 and 29. It suddenly occurred to me, that, instead of calling for fresh articles on Achebe, it was better to publish the ones in hand, and others that might come afterwards. Subsequently, more articles on Achebe were received. However, excepting Dan Izevbaye's pre-symposium lecture, delivered under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka — in preparation for the very successful Achebe Symposium — none of the articles in this issue was solicited. Rather, they were products of independent research, self-motivated, without the limitations of articles written hurriedly to meet deadlines.

This issue comprises several articles by scholars in various disciplines in the Humanities. By bringing perspectives unique to their own areas, these scholars have enriched Achebe studies.

In selecting the poems, I have tried to emphasize poetry that reflects the mood of celebration, occasioned by Achebe's birthday, though none of the poems directly talks about the occasion. Talking about celebration, Achebe's essay in this issue sees literature as a celebration of our common humanity, that is, when it is not perverted.

In keeping with Achebe's international stature, I have included poems by non-Africans, especially his friends or admirers. I have arranged the selection in such a manner as to suggest an evening of poetry reading in which poets from different parts of the world would read their poems as a tribute to him.

Early this year, Achebe sustained serious injuries in a road accident. The entire members of *Okike* Editorial Board wish him quick and complete recovery.

Next year (1991) is significant in the life of *Okike*: the journal will be twenty years old.

Onuora Ossie Enekwe

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This is based on the theme of Black Writing. Already published in RAL, Vol. 19

CHINUA ACHEBE

AFRICAN LITERATURE AS RESTORATION OF CELEBRATION

Just under two years ago, I was one of a dozen or so foreign guests at a Writers' Symposium organized by the Irish Arts Council to commemorate one thousand years of the founding of the City of Dublin. The general theme of that Symposium, chosen, I believe, by the novelist Anthony Cronin, was LITERATURE AS CELEBRATION.

Some of my colleagues, as I recall, appeared to have difficulty with that subject. For my part, I thought it was perfect; it rendered in a simple form of words a truth about art which accorded with my traditional inheritance as well as personal preference. The brief paper I presented on that occasion was the genesis of the reflections I wish to share with you today concerning African literature.

But, before I start, I wish to repeat a disclaimer which I made in Dublin. On the morning of my presentation, the Irish *Times* carried a prominent story in which a very kind columnist referred to me as the man who invented African literature. So I took the opportunity of the forum given me at the Symposium to dissociate myself from that well-meant but blasphemous characterization. Now, before you run away with the idea that my disavowal was due to modesty on my part, I should tell you right away that I am actually not a very modest man (a fact which you probably would have discovered in any event on your own before very long). No, my refusal was due rather to an artistic taboo among my people which forbade us—on pain of being finished off rather quickly by the gods—from laying too heavy a proprietary hand on the smallest item in that communal enterprise in creativity which the Igbo people undertook from time to time, and to which they gave the name *Mbari*. *Mbari* was a celebration through art of the world and of the life lived in it. It was performed by the community on command by its presiding deity, usually the Earth goddess, Ala, who combined two formidable roles in the Igbo pantheon as fountain of creativity in the world and custodian of the moral order in human society.

Once every so often, and it is her absolute discretion, this goddess would instruct the community through divination to build a home of images in her honour. The diviner would travel through the village and knock on the doors of those chosen by Ala for her work. These chosen people were then blessed and separated from the larger community in a ritual with more than a passing resemblance to their own death and funeral. Thereafter, they moved into the forest, and, behind a high fence and under the instruction and supervision of master artists and craftsmen, they constructed a temple of art.

Architecturally, it was a simple structure, a stage created by three high walls supporting a peaked roof; but in place of a flat floor, a deck of steps ran from one side wall to the other, rising almost to the roof at the back wall. This enclosure was then filled to the brim with sculptures in molded earth and clay, and the walls with murals in white, black, yellow, and green. The sculptures were arranged carefully on the steps. At the centre of the front row, sat the formidable figure of the earth goddess herself, a child on her left knee and a raised sword in her right hand. She is mother and judge.

To her right and left, other deities took their places. Human figures, animals (perhaps a leopard dragging along the carcass of a goat), figures from folklore, history, or pure imagination; forest scenes of village and domestic life; everyday events, abnormal scandals, set pieces from past displays of *mbari;* and new images that had never been depicted before—everything jostled together for space in that extra-ordinary convocation of the entire kingdom of the human imagination.

When all was ready, after months or even years of preparation, the makers of *mbari,* who had been working in complete seclusion, sent word to the larger community. A day was chosen for the unveiling of the work with a gigantic celebration of music and dancing and feasting in front of the house of *mbari.*

I used the word *stage* to describe the *mbari* house. Indeed, the two side walls and the back wall encompassed a stage of sorts, in which the community on the ground is the audience looking into the enclosure with its festive walls and the massed arrangement of sculptures on the steps. But I believe that the event does invite a second way of apprehension in which the roles are reversed, and those still and silent dignitaries of molded earth seated on those steps in the royal enclosure become the spectators of the world as a lively scene.

The problem some of my colleagues had in Dublin with the word celebration may have arisen, I suspect, from too narrow a perspective on it. *Mbari* extends the view, opens it out to meanings beyond the mere remembering of blessings or happy events to include other experiences—indeed, all significant encounters which man makes in his journey through life, especially new, unaccustomed and thus potentially threatening, encounters.

For example, when Europe made its appearance in Igbo society out of traveller's tale into the concrete and alarming shape of the District Officer he was immediately given a seat among the molded figures of *mbari,* complete with his peaked helmet and pipe. Sometimes, they even made room for his bicycle and his police orderly. To the Igbo mentality, art must, among other uses, provide a means to domesticate that which is wild; must act like the lightning conductor which arrests destructive electrical potentials and

guides them harmlessly to earth. The Igbo insist that any presence which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgment and celebration can become a focus for anxiety and disruption. To them, celebration is the acknowledgment of a presence, giving to everybody his due.

Therefore, the celebration of *mbari* was no blind adoration of a perfect world or even the best of all possible world. It was an acknowledgement of the world as these particular inhabitants perceived it in reality, in their dreams and imagination. The white District Officer was obviously not a matter for dancing, any more than was the figure of the man whose body was covered with the spots of small-pox, a disease so dreaded that it was personified and alluded to in quiet, deferential tones of appeasement as the Decorator of its victims, not their killer. Nor was she a matter of joy the woman depicted in copulation with a dog.

Even if I were to speak about *mbari* for the rest of the time I have, I could not tell you all the important statements it sought to make on the nature of art on the relationships between art and its makers, or between them and the community at large, between tradition and individual talent; between art and morality, etc., etc. But I want to mention just two points:

(a) Most of the creators of the art of *mbari* were not trained, professional artists but ordinary men and women chosen to work for a season in seclusion with master artists;

(b) After completion of the work and its celebration, the *mbari* building and its vast treasure of art was abandoned to ruin and decay. Years later, the goddess would demand another celebration, and the process of building a new *mbari* would be repeated by other members of the village.

I offer *mbari* to you as one illustration of my precolonial inheritance—of art as celebration of my reality; of art in its social dimension; of the creative potential in all of us and of the need to exercise this latent energy again and again in artistic expression and communal, cooperative enterprises.

Since our primary concern is literature, let me explain that my choice of the visual and plastic arts and the drama of *mbari* rather than, say, our legends and epic poetry, was dictated by convenience. *Mbari* manages to make its statements more comprehensively and compactly and perhaps more memorably than anything I can think of in our language arts. But the same perceptions and wisdoms can be drawn from our vast oral traditions if we had the time and space to do so.

And now I come to what I have chosen to call my *middle passage,* my colonial inheritance. To characterize my colonial ex-

perience as an inheritance may surprise some people. But everything is grist to the mill of the artist. It is not my intention to engage in a detailed evaluation of the colonial experience, but merely to ask what possibility there was in this episode for the celebration of our world, for the singing of the song of ourselves.

Colonization may indeed be a very complex affair, but one thing is certain: You do not walk in, seize the land, the person, the history of another, and then sit back and compose hymns of praise in his honour. To do that would amount to calling yourself a bandit. So what do you do? You construct very elaborate excuses for your action. You say, for instance, that the man in question is worthless and quite unfit to manage himself and his affairs. If there are valuable things like gold or diamonds which you are carting away from his territory, you proceed to prove that he doesn't own them in the real sense of the word—that he and they just happened to be lying around the same place when you arrived. Finally, if the worse comes to the worst, you will be prepared to question whether such as he can be, like you, fully human.

Am I sounding peevishly extravagant? No! Examples are legion. In the 1870's, Durham University in England arranged an affiliation with the first university institution in West Africa in modern times—Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone. *The Times* of London was so deeply incensed that it published an editorial reprimand asking Durham if it might next affiliate with the zoo!

OK, that was 1870, in the Dark Ages! What about Albert Schweitzer, celebrated philosopher, theologian, musician, humanitarian, a missionary to Africa, and one of the greatest men of the 20th century? *He* found it possible to say: the African is indeed my brother but my *junior* brother.

Those two are sufficient to my needs of sketching in the frame of mind of colonialism towards the colonized. Clearly nothing in its agenda can bear any resemblance to celebration; not even celebration of the guarded and problematic kind accorded by Africa to the white man's presence in *mbari.*

Presence is the critical question, the crucial word. Its denial is the keynote of colonialist ideology. *Were there people there?* Well ... not really, you know ... people of sorts, you understand.

From the period of the Slave Trade, through the Age of Colonization to the present day, the catalogue of what Africa and Africans have been said not to have or not to be, is pretty extensive. Churchmen at some point wondered about the soul. Did the black man have a soul? Popes and theologians debated that for a while. Culture, religion, and things like that were debated by others and generally ruled out as far as Africa was concerned. History was unimaginable except perhaps for a few marginal places like Ethiopia where Gibbon tells us of a short burst of activity followed

from the seventh century by one thousand years in which she fell into a deep sleep, "forgetful of the world by whom she was forgot" to use Gibbon's own famous phrase.

With Trevor Roper, Regius Professor of History at Oxford in our own time, no bursts of light, no matter how brief, have ever illumined the dark sky of Africa. A habit of generosity to Africa does not seem to have grown with the times; on the contrary it seems to have diminished.

Caliban is not specifically African; but he is the colonial subject created by Shakespeare's genius at the very onset of Europe's Age of Expansion. To begin with, Caliban knew not his own meaning but "wouldst gabble like a thing most brutish". And yet Shakespeare restores humanity to Caliban by giving him great poetry to speak before the play's end. Contrast this with Conrad three hundred years later. His Africans make "a violent babble of uncouth sounds" and go on making it right through *Heart of Darkness.* Generosity has not prospered.

So these creatures have no soul, no religion, no culture, no history, no human speech, no I.Q. Any wonder then that they should be subjugated by those who are endowed with these human gifts.

A character in John Buchan's famous colonial novel, *Prester John,* had this to say:

> I knew then the meaning of the white man's duty. He has to take all the risks.... That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being in a little way a king, and so long as we know and practice it we will rule not in Africa alone but wherever there are dark men who live only for their bellies. (from Brian Street, *The Savage in Literature,* London & Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1975, 14).

John Buchan, by the way, was a very senior British colonial administrator turned novelist. One suspects he knew his terrain.

So let us add to our long list of absences the *absence of responsibility.* If we should now draw a line under this list of absences reported from Africa, it would add up to one great Absence of the Human Spirit.

I am not quite certain whether all the field-workers who reported these absences genuinely believed their report or whether it was some kind of make-believe, some kind of alibi put together by a man arraigned for a serious crime. You see, it is significant, for example, that the moment when churchmen began to worry and doubt the existence of the black man's soul was the same moment when his body was fetching high prices in the market-place.

In one striking passage in *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad gives us a remarkable perspective on this problem of the African Absence. It is the scene where a French gun-boat is sitting on the water and fir-

ing rockets into the mainland. Conrad's intention, highminded as usual, is to show the futility of Europe's action in Africa:

> Pop would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding.

About sanity, I cannot speak. But futility, good heavens, no! By that crazy act of shelling the bush, France managed to acquire an empire in West and Equatorial Africa nine-to-ten times its own size. So there was definitely profit if not method in the madness.

Conrad was giving vent to the popular conceit that Europe's devastation of Africa left no mark on the victim. This is a way of disowning responsibility no matter what John Buchan's character might say. Africa is presumed by the popular conceit to pursue its dark, mysterious ways and destiny untouched by explorations and expeditions. Sometimes Africa as an anthropomorphic personage steps out of the shadows, and physically annihilates the invasion—which of course adds a touch of suspense and even tragedy to Europe's enterprise. One of the best images in *Heart of Darkness* is of a boat going upstream and the forest stepping across to bar its return.

I think it is interesting to contrast Conrad's episode of the French gun-boat with the rendering of a similar incident in *Ambiguous Adventure,* a powerful novel of colonization by the Muslim writer Cheik Hamidou Kane from Senegal, which was colonized by the French. Conrad insists on the futility of bombardment. Cheik Hamidou Kane, standing as it were at the explosive end of the trajectory, tells a different story. The words are those of the Most Royal Lady, a member of the Diallobe aristocracy.

> A hundred years ago our grandfather, along with all the inhabitants of this countryside, was awakened one morning by an uproar arising from the river. He took his gun and, followed by all the elite of the region, he flung himself upon the newcomers. His heart was intrepid and to him the value of liberty was greater than the value of life. Our grandfather, and the elite of the country with him, was defeated. Why? How? Only the newcomers know. We must ask them: we must go to learn from them the art of conquering without being in the right. (p.37).

Conrad sees a void; Hamidou Kane celebrates a human presence and a heroic struggle.

It is inevitable, I believe, to see the emergence of modern African literature as a return of celebration. It is tempting to say that this literature came to put people back into Africa. But that would be wrong because people never left Africa except in the guilty imagination of Africa's antagonists.

I must now emphasize one final point. Celebration does not mean praise. Of course praise can be part of it, but only a part. Anyone who is familiar with contemporary African writing knows how we stand in this matter. Some years ago at an international writers meeting in Sweden, a Swedish writer and journalist said to a small group of Africans present: *You fellows are lucky. Your governments put you in prison. Here in Sweden nobody pays any attention to us no matter what we write.* We apologized profusely for our undeserved luck!

The running battle between the Emperor and the Poet in Africa is not a modern phenomenon. Our ancestral poets, the griots, had their ways of dealing with the problem, sometimes direct, at other times oblique.

I shall end by telling you a very short Hausa tale.

The Snake was once riding his horse curled up, as was his fashion, in the saddle. As he passed the Toad who was walking along the road, the Toad said: "Excuse me sir, but that is not how to ride a horse".

> "It's not?", replied the Snake, "Can you show me then how it's done?" "With pleasure," said the Toad.

The Snake slid out of the saddle down the side of the horse to the ground. The Toad jumped into the saddle, sat bolt upright and galloped most elegantly up and down the road. "That's how to ride a horse," he said.

> "Very good," said the Snake, "very good indeed. Please descend".

The Toad jumped down and the Snake slid up the side of the horse back into the saddle and coiled himself up as before. Then, looking down at the Toad of the roadside, he said: "To know is very good; but to have is better. What good can superb horsemanship do to a man without a horse". And he rode away.

Everyone can see in that simple tale the use of story to foster the *status quo* in a class society. The Snake is an aristocrat who has things like horse because of who he is. The Toad is a commoner whose horsemanship, acquired no doubt through years of struggle and practice, avails nothing in this hierarchical society. The Hausa who made this story are a monarchical people and the ethos of the story accords with the ruling values of their political system. One can imagine the Emir and his court enjoying such a story.

But quite clearly the griot who fashioned that story, whether he was aware of it or not, concealed in the folds of the laughter the hint and the glint of irony. In the fullness of time that same story will be ready to serve a revolutionary purpose using what was always there: an unattractive, incompetent and complacent aristo-

Silence is the blunt rhythm of distant drums
the lonesome drummer caged in my chest

THIS PAGE

A blank white paper, I blacken as I name it. A rectangular page with equal and parallel opposite sides. With these words, I walk its length and breadth, invent myself, my destiny. I write my footprints down its whiteness, its silent streets of snow. The naked lamp overhead blinds me. A two headed sultan rides by on a unicorn. I walk, slide and fall over idea and images in my mind. I walk with my fingers and talk with a pen between my feet. I'm eager to reach the page's end. Why? I don't know. I haven't thought about it, I'm in a hurry. I run, stumble and almost fall into the gorge between this and the previous page, but I rise then run on. I run and run but can not find my way to the book's edge. I think I'm lost: I turn to look for myself among the confused hodgepodge of nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, comas, question-marks and periods which trail me. But I can not find myself. I turn to flee to the next page, although I can't find my feet, my legs, my arms, or my head. I can't even move because I'm scattered all over this page and remain forever nailed to it by the pronoun "I".

A WORD

Written in a few letters
the word weaves me
into this poem where
words are the wicker
and lines the baskets
I'm drawn by the word
whose silence
spells me out
without a face

A word that walls me up
in the dungeon of an idea
as an image by a mirror
A word sown upon this page
and waits to sprout in your eye
A word waiting
to be read to life

Ifi Amadiume

A PASSING FEELING

Man with misty eyes,
Oh look:
See how the colourful
prairie chicken taps,
vibrates,
in orgasmic rhythms in dance;
the oo — oo — oo deep sound,
like the blowing
of the big cow-horn,
tells its satisfaction
as it dances
for the coming again
of the season of spring.

See how I myself,
in lightness of mood,
leap up into this
bewitching sun-glory,
in movements
of loosened limbs,
as I lean forward
my vibrating body
in dance challenges,
right before your moody eyes,
full of worried looks

Only for this fleeting moment,
join in my own dance,
be a man of the season for now;
be servant
to this compulsive pulsing
of our joyous hearts:

My dance
asks more
than a nodding head:
Yet, it is not forever,
nor is it for worse;

only a passing feeling,
only a single pleasure,
only this single treasure

of an ecstatic being
of here and now:

Will she deny us
a single pleasure,
the stiff-necked woman,
chained in a golden ring
around her fine finger
in selfish single monopolies!

Dan Izevbaye

HISTORY'S EYE-WITNESS: VISION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE WORKS OF CHINUA ACHEBE

A celebration of the achievement of Chinua Achebe at this stage of his literary career must begin by acknowledging that, as a result of the complexity of his art, the criticism of his work occupies an ambiguous field because of the varied and sometimes contrary uses to which his writings are put. I will begin by looking at two subjects that are, perhaps, the most important in Achebe's writings: culture and history.

The works of Achebe are celebrated for re-creating a culture that had such great beauty and had attained such a level of cultural stability, that it seemed as if the society had to await the coming of the white man for things to fall apart. At first, so widespread and firmly accepted was this image of a culture where time almost stood still and traditions were permanent, that readers often had to be reminded that the novels were also concerned with the internal contradictions of the traditional societies in which they were set. Similarly, the so-called novels of village life command such fierce loyalty and the title of the first novel has become so much a part of Achebe folklore, that readers have to be occasionally reminded that Achebe took the title from a white man's poem written at about the same time as things were falling apart in Umuofia.

In 1977, I was visiting Austin, Texas, for the first time. I was introduced to a Nigerian student in one of the science professions. The student was relieved to meet a Nigerian literary scholar for one important reason. One of his professors who, it would appear, had some Irish blood in him, had told the Nigerian student that Achebe borrowed the title of his famous novel from the work of an Irish poet. Now, providence had made it possible for the student to enlist the help of a black man who knew his subject; he assumed I knew my subject, or I would not be visiting the United States. His cause was to put down one more chauvinistic white man who would not concede originality and creativity to any black man, however good. As my audience would have guessed, I never got round to meeting that Irish-American professor. But I did get a good idea of the kind of battle that critics sometimes have to fight on behalf of Chinua Achebe. Not that Achebe is incapable of fighting his own battles. In fact, though he has such an unobtrusive personal style, he has originated many important literary and cultural battles, and seen them through to a resolution.

One such major battle — the question of the African past — has given rise to a complex mix of subtle truths that are quite capable of

being misunderstood. A major purpose of Achebe's writing is the reactivation of time in that expanding space occupied by various Nigerian peoples, beginning with small Igbo communities: first, Umuofia and Umuaro, then Odili's country and Obi Okonkwo's Nigeria, and now, Kangan. By substituting the process of time for the datelessness of myth, Achebe helps to restore history to a people from whom it had been taken away. This negation of African history has a long story behind it. The story has a clear outline. The introduction of literacy in the English language closely followed the conversion of Africans to a Christian faith and world view. The eventual incorporation of the African into this cultural community is reinforced and confirmed by the establishment of a canon of European literature for an African reading public. What kind of history does that literature offer Africans?

Joseph Conrad, Achebe's most regular target[1], presents such a history in his narrator's account of a continent where time stood still, in his short story, *Heart of Darkness,* perhaps the central text in the literature of European colonialism. Sailing up the Congo river, the narrator comes upon "settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pin-heads on the untouched expanse of their background". The power of a literary canon in disseminating and establishing such a view of history is evident in two articles and a novel which are, in essence, Naipaul's re-writing of Conrad's Congo diary and two stories some three quarters of a century after Conrad wrote his works. V.S. Naipaul, an ex-colonial West-Indian of Indian ancestry with a thoroughly English education, now lives in England as a British citizen. Naipaul is fully aware of his spiritual and literary descent from Conrad, the Polish immigrant who became a British citizen. It is easy to understand how Naipaul came to write like one of the intellectuals who carry on the traditions of the metropolitan culture and reinforce the canon that sustains its world view. So, in spite of *Things Fall Apart,* written seventeen years before Naipaul wrote his own report on the Congo, Naipaul could still announce that for the people of the Congo, "the past is a blank; and history begins with their own memories", and "to arrive at th(is) sense of a country trapped and static, eternally vulnerable, is to begin to have something of the African sense of the void" (Naipaul, 184, 195).

The literature, through which such a view of African history is disseminated, has a deadening impact on the historical awareness of its audience because it offers an earnestly held view of history disguised as imaginative play. Narratives, whether factual or fictional, are a cultural necessity because they are the means of bringing a meaningful structure to bear upon reality. Narratives are the signs of the order that human consciousness has harvested from the chaos of the past. The cultural importance of narratives is evident in the amount of material and intellectual resources that are in-

vested in their preservation. The growth of secondary or auxilliary texts further validates these narratives through a tradition of critical explication or exegesis, a tradition that has played such a key role as part of literary education in colonial and post-colonial cultures.

In view of the cultural importance of the metropolitan tradition in colonial societies, it would be useful to examine, very briefly, some of the factors that determine the psychological impact of narratives on a given audience or reading public. As I noted earlier, narratives are of two main kinds: the historical and the fictional. The historian sees himself as being essentially a recorder of events, and his text as a transparent medium through which actual events can be mentally grasped. Fiction, the other kind of narrative, is more indirect in its method. Myth, a form of fantasy, eliminates time from its narrative: it claims an unvarying and enduring truth, and so commands the unquestioning belief of its audience. Another sub-genre of fiction, realistic fiction, locates its material within time, and thus appropriates the technique of the historian. But at the same time, it shuts off the paths that lead directly to historical experience, and opens up instead a world of illusion. By this means it achieves freedom from verification, a freedom which is denied the historical text. It is also a means through which the author hopes to control the responses of any reader whose critical consciousness has been artfully disarmed by its involvement in the recreational world of illusion. Any critical energy that is left gets expended in a critical practice that does little more than validate the text because it is caught up in the circular activity of explication, elucidation, interpretation, annotation and paraphrase.

Many of the canonical texts written from the point of view of colonialism are valorised by such a tradition of critical practice. A text like *Heart of Darkness* is sustained by the weight of the accumulated critical texts which ensure its cultural acceptance and its continuance within the canon. By focussing exclusively on the text as psychological mirror and ignoring the interplay of text and the real world of the (non-European) reader, critics like Wilson Harris (1981) are able to insist on the integrity and centrality of Conrad's tale on the grounds that it is a parody of the colonial mind. They thereby miss Achebe's central point which is: what aspects of reality are hidden behind the imagery, and what kind of influence do such blind spots have on a reader's attitude to reality? We may wonder, for example, why, close to the end of the century after Conrad wrote, it is possible for some sophisticated readers to still hold the view of history and of Africans, that is supposed to be the very target of Conrad's satire. Naipaul, for example, does not respond to the parody or the obliqueness of Conrad's technique. It is not surprising that, unlike Conrad — for whom the ruthless ex-

ploitation of the Congo was at least a moral issue — Naipaul does not even consider any such issue as part of his concern as a novelist. For him, *Heart of Darkness* is a powerful story, not just because of the disturbing psychological depths which the impressionistic imagery exposes, but because it contains both "reportage about the Congo, totally accurate, as we now know... (and) fiction — not as something in itself, but as a varnish on fact". Naipaul further cites Conrad's own view of the story as a faithful psychological mirror — as "*experience* pushed a little (and only a little) beyond the facts of the case" (emphasis added), to serve his own interpretation of a geographical and historical reality (Naipaul, 1974, 213—214).

Allusions to Conrad's work are spread throughout Achebe's first three novels because Conrad's tale is considered the definitive image of the western attitudes to Africa at a specific point in history. Conrad's vision remains largely within the consciousness of its subject. The setting is not represented as an objective piece of reality. It is filtered through the subjective mind of the narrator and his characters, and it gets to the reader as a set of distorted images because an impassable void separates the character's mind from the objective reality which is named but not represented. Only the existence of the void continues to be recognised by writers like Naipaul. The absence of a bridge across this gulf keeps such writers out of touch with the reality beyond the gulf. Achebe constructs his novels as the bridge to make possible his readers' passage across this gulf.

Achebe's concern, in other words, is with the problem of how *Heart of Darkness,* a text that is so central to modern European civilization, could be so inimical to a reader's recognition of the possibility of a civil society in Africa. For if Conrad's art enables the reader to comprehend the spiritual limitations of nineteenth-century Europe, it is also true, as Achebe contends, that the story does not enable the reader to see that, beyond the horror of Kurtz's imaginary world, there are real people who live in organized societies. The triumph of Achebe's art, then, is not just a literary triumph. He has sought, and succeeded in bringing about, a change of consciousness in his readers. He has been able to count among the converts to his point of view, both the young Nigerian schoolboy who read the novels as advice to the young (Achebe, 1975, 42 — 43), and the distinguished German jurist who responded to the message of *Things Fall Apart* by turning down an appointment earlier offered to him by the rulers of South West Africa (Achebe, 1989).

Achebe's engagement, then, is not just with artistic form, but also with the affective power of art; with the power struggle over the allegiance of the reading public. *Things Fall Apart,* his most popular novel, is a measure of his success. It is a representative

African novel, not only because it is an archetypal African story, but also in the basic sense of speaking on behalf of a people who have not been adequately understood because they were not adequately represented. This may sometimes obscure the fact that the communities portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are not necessarily typical in their political organisation of African communities in general. But that very fact underscores Achebe's intention, that is, to speak for the kind of Igbo community that is ignored in the political reckoning of the British administration because it did not conform to the kind of civil society that was favoured by the administration. This aspect of Achebe's art makes a political point in the sense that it questions the politics by which a hierarchy of civil societies is established, replicated and disseminated through literary texts.

The concept of African history is central to this enterprise. In Winterbottom's confident claim that the Umuaro people have "no idea of years (although) they understand seasons" (35), we have Achebe's explicit reference to a basic assumption in European narratives about the African past. It paraphrases Marlow's statement that not "a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginning of time" (Conrad, 103). In such narratives, the period of European contact is made out to be the only intelligible beginning of African history and consciousness. Achebe's first task was to detach African history from its European expression and construct for imaginative use, a logical history that he had retrieved from the historical information stored in Igbo lore, colonial accounts and contemporary recollections of the past. The late scholar, Professor Robert M. Wren, has painstakingly researched and established beyond doubt, the actual historical foundation of Achebe's fiction. But this factual source can be misunderstood by other scholars, even by trained literary scholars. It is therefore important for us to remind ourselves how the unity of vision, the consistency of imagery, the coherence of the imagined world and the sustained commitment to an African world view, have all contributed to the distinct literary character of Achebe's writings.

The material from Achebe's historical sources was recreated into such life-like characters and social institutions in the novels, that the impression of a stable, pre-colonial culture which they leave with many readers, has all but overshadowed the importance of history in the conception and execution of the novels. For the rest of this discussion, I shall be emphasising the centrality of history as source, subject and frame for the development of Achebe as a novelist.

The presence of time and history in human affairs is featured in two distinct ways in the novels of Achebe. Time is the first and

passive aspect. It is measured out into the four days of the Igbo week which are used to regulate all human activities associated with markets, ritual observances and social celebrations. The four days are recognised as auspicious or inauspicious to the maintenance of these human needs. But these emanations of time are largely neutral. Time guarantees nothing for human communities, except the predictable succession of its units and the natural cycle of growth and decays, for it has an objective existence beyond human interference.

History, the second aspect, has no such objective existence or neutrality. It is brought into being by human consciousness and authorized by the human hand that creates the narratives. Achebe is fully aware that history is created by human action. In one of his poems, "An 'If' of History," he reflects on how the course of history would have been drastically changed if Hitler had won the Second World War (Achebe, 1972, 16 — 17). The recitative that Nwaka sings at the Idemili festival is identical in form to Ezeulu's recitative at the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves. They both enumerate the procession of days which the protagonists encounter during their mythical journeys, but the two narratives contain different histories: one is Nwaka's account of his personal conflict with Ezeulu; the other is Ezeulu's account of the recurrent ritual experience of the Chief Priest as scapegoat, and can hardly be described as history in the ordinary sense, though it certainly incorporates the historical basis of the ritual in its story. Nwaka too, allows the historical character of the experience to be dissolved in the mythical form that he adopts.

Two versions of history are also brought into being in *Things Fall Apart* and *No longer at Ease*. The narrator's eye-witness account of the rise and fall of the protagonist is ironically interrupted by the hasty judgements of the unnamed District Commissioner and Mr. Green, whose conclusions are not informed by any access to the true facts of the case. The interventions by these colonial agents show whether each of them has tried to understand to what extent the tragic incident at the African outpost of empire has a full history behind it: if the District Commissioner could allow perhaps only "a whole chapter" for the story of the man "who killed a messenger and hanged himself", the narrator's eye-witness account fills the novel with the facts of the case.

The impression that Achebe gives, of his authorial distance and detachment from his narratives, belies the fact that the narrator's voice in all his novels is that of the insider who is almost always completely privileged. This applies to the disembodied narrator of the first three novels, as well as to the participant witness of the other novels in which the events are not so much narrated, as mediated through reflection and analysis. The artistic personality

presiding over the action is privileged by this ventriloquism. The method enables the narrative voice to be modulated to suit the occasion or a change in the direction of the plot. But even in an author as reticent in asserting his ego as Achebe, there are enough indicators of a strong involvement with the significance of the action for the reader to feel the strong authorial presence of an eyewitness.

The concept of an author's presence in the action is not, of course, meant to be taken literally. It does not mean that the author was actually present at the event which is recreated in the action of the narrative. An artistic personality expresses its presence through technique. Such a technique establishes the past in the present sensibility of the reader. The reader is required to recognise the author's presence, not only as the source of the experience being recreated, but also because the experience being communicated cannot be separated from the source of the communication and the point of view from which it is being communicated.

Ventriloquism, a technique which Achebe increasingly resorted to in his later novels, minimises the force of an author's direct presence in his narratives. An author, like any other person who is required to preside over a wide and varied range of human activities, may employ agents or surrogates to carry out his will, as Ezeulu does when he sends Oduche to be his eye and ear in the white man's school. So, a narrator is usually an author's delegate. His presentation of an insider's account of a story is really an expression of an author's imagination and insight: he can create agents to see for him and hear for him. This skill is independent of any one of the physical senses. It is not unrelated to the visionary power whose source is independent of physical sight, suggesting that a poet's "eyes" are merely the agents for some more powerful organs. The reality of that "organ" is acknowledged even in the rational civilization of the west. In the paradox of Beethoven making the music he cannot hear, we have a parallel to the experience of a number of major European poets from Homer, through Milton, to the Spanish Argentine, Borges, who were all able to overcome the deprivation of sight by superior insight and enhanced visionary power. Achebe's Obika felt that power under the full possession of Ogbazulobodo when he became "at once blind and full of sight". The old storyteller who is visiting Bassa from Abazon, in *Anthills of the Savannah,* identifies this gift as the special possession of Agwu, the god of healers and patron of artists:

> Agwu picks his disciple, rings his eye with white chalk and dips his tongue, willing or not, in the brew of prophecy; and right away the man will speak.... He is (now) the liar who can sit under his thatch and see the moon hanging in the sky outside. Without stirring from his stool he can tell you how commodities are selling in a distant marketplace. His chalked eye will see every blow in a battle he never fought.

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A writer need not be always as direct as this artist in bearing witness to his experience. But authorial presence, even if it is mediated through narrative surrogates, is essential to the moral conception of the experience that is being narrated. In narratives which bring history into active involvement with human action and institutions, the author plays the role of scribe and mediator in the moral universe thus established by the human pact with history.

The conception of human history as a form of human contract or transaction provides one of the frames within which Achebe creates his narratives. His characters negotiate their historical destiny with four key forces: the divine realm, the physical environment, the social world and an unknown factor introduced by the intrusion of the human agents of an alien culture. The first three of these forces are largely the creation of the human community involved in the action, for even though the physical environment is a material fact which existed before any human community, it is consciously shaped by human hands and then given a place within the social order, created by people. By the terms of the social contract of Umuofia, Unoka belongs to the bad bush, and his son, Okonkwo, to the fertile fields of yam. If history were stable and passive, this would have provided a sufficient basis for a chronicle of Umuofia during the life and times of Unoka and Okonkwo. But the unknown factor has entered the reckoning, although it was not provided for in the cosmology of Igbo village life.

The difficulty which the world view of traditional village life faces when it has to cope with this new element, is vividly brought out in one of the most memorable cultural experiences to be recreated in African literature. It is that report when the villagers of Abame killed a white man and tied his iron horse to a sacred tree to prevent it from running away to call other white men. The iron horse turned out to be more than a mere exhibit; it became a powerful witness in the history that was about to be made. But it was also a statement — to the effect that the villagers were not in full possession of the resources for interpreting and comprehending such strange events. For the narrator, the warning of the oracle was imperfectly understood, and the meaning of the relevant folktale had long been forgotten. Was this part of the tribal amnesia, their tendency to forget the transactions concluded in the past, like "one of those essences loosed upon the world by the potent 'medicines, which the tribe had made in the distant past against its enemies but had now forgotten how to control"?

Things Fall Apart is the only one of Achebe's works in which a people are made to bear the collective responsibility for the failure of their transactions, as in the iron horse incident. This is partly because a single leader never emerges by the end of the story. Okonkwo, aspiring to be one of the lords of the clan, fails to fulfil

the conditions required of one who would be a leader. The failure is seen in the context of the story as a failure of the transaction between Okonkwo and his *chi*, or spirit companion. After *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe turns his attention to the technical exploration of other problems, like the problem of an individual's contract with his people, in *No Longer at Ease*, or the problem of leadership in the other three novels. Perhaps after examining the question of the social consequences of an individual's actions in *Things Fall Apart*, the question of responsibility could no longer be laid at the door of a people collectively.

In Achebe, the problem of leadership is not seen as an exclusively political problem, except in *A Man of the People*. In both *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, political leadership is placed side by side with religious authority. They are either in alliance or in conflict. Together or apart, they have serious consequences for the social and psychological conflicts in the novels. From this point of view alone, *Arrow of God* is a seminal text in the development of Achebe's themes of leadership, political power and individual responsibility, the relationship between religion and politics, and the consequences of a failed transaction with history. Ezeulu is an unforgettable character because Achebe makes him a total embodiment of these themes.

Ezeulu is firm in his single-minded conception of the essentially religious nature of his office. He "will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu", but we are left in no doubt about the basically political nature of his approach to his problems: he would not leave the question of succession completely in the hands of his god. The priesthood came into being as a religious solution to a political problem. There are unmistakable political overtones in this history of religious succession in which the priest of the present chief deity of the village superseded an earlier rival, to be himself supplanted by the priests of the future god of his people. The ambiguous origin of the priesthood reflects the relationship of religious and political power even in his present circumstances. The two factors are polarized in each of the two different camps that are ranged against him in an alliance of politician and priest: Nwaka and Ezidemili at first, then the British administrators and the missionaries.

This duality is united in the person of Ezeulu. He is himself a physical expression of the alliance of the human and the divine, the sacred and the secular: "(t)he left half of his body — from forehead to toes — was painted with white chalk". Thus, "one half of (him) is man and the other half spirit". Ezeulu is unable to contain this duality in him when the political tensions in his society get too strong for him.

It is hinted at in the novel that Ezeulu's family tree shows that he bears the genes of his mother's proneness to madness and the

sometimes politically motivated ambition of the first Ezeulu, his ancestor. The roots of his present psychological isolation and eventual madness are to be traced as much to this domestic role as carrier of the family plague, as to the requirements of his ritual role as carrier of his people's sin. In other words, we have here an aberration of the spiritual and political elements which are combined in his office as priest. At the level of literary genre, Achebe combines the hero of myth — who is plagued by fate — with the character of realistic fiction who suffers psychological conflicts. History triumphs over myth for a brief moment when Ezeulu is tempted to steer the course of Umuaro history by daring to explore one of the unused paths of its history, until the two forms re-unite at the drop of the curtain on this his final performance. In trying to re-write the orthodox script and redefine the limits of his role as Chief Priest, he shifts his performance from the customary ritual space to an actual historical stage where he is caught in a real life tragic drama for which the preceding Pumpkin Leaves ceremonies now turn out to have been mere dress rehearsals.

Ezeulu is the archetypal trans-actor. He negotiates the crossing between the human and the divine realms, between oral and literate cultures, between political and religious responsibilities. He is fully reconciled to isolation and loneliness, the price he pays for religious leadership. His problem begins when he seeks to transform his ritual role into an active social force. This brings down a scourge of a type that is most dreaded in farming communities: a man-made blight of the earth before which the victims are helpless.

Ezeulu's madness ends an epoch in Umuaro history. As Obiechina points, out, in traditional societies "history is documented mainly in terms of outstanding symbols" (134). The social crisis that reaches a psychological climax in Ezeulu's madness stands out powerfully as a period marker in the light of the strong historical consciousness brought out by the rivalry between the two priests. Not Nwaka or Ezidemili, but Ezeulu, lends his name to this epoch in which his curse blights an agricultural community. Earlier, in *No Longer at Ease,* Achebe had pointed out that nature itself can be rational in seeking a balanced distribution of rainfall and sunshine when it seems "as though the deity presiding over the waters in the sky found, on checking his stock and counting off the months on fingers, that there was too much rain left and that he had to do something drastic about it before the impending dry season".

The unfolding history of Igbo country in the early novels, and of Nigeria in the later novels, shows an increasing decline of collective and religious leadership. Both of these forms of leadership come after the fall of the Chief Priest of Ulu and the entrance of British administration and the Christian religion on the African historical

stage. The secular state has come into its own, and religion is an independent, other-wordly institution that is no longer connected to economic and political activities. The two institutions have become separated. Each is the receiver of the remainders from the harvest of the traditional institutions which they both helped to bring to bankruptcy. The ensuing social and moral decline is everywhere evident in *A Man of the People.* As a representation of political leadership in post-colonial Nigeria, this novel is a work of despair. Since Achebe is always the ironist, hardly ever a bitter satirist, it was difficult to see what reserves of creativity he could have salvaged from the hopelessness of the political situation represented in *A Man of the People.*

There is sufficient cause for the deepening of this despair in the various social and political upheavals that nearly put an end to Nigeria during the period following the composition of *A Man of the People.* It was at this time that Nigerian politics, completely stripped of the protective robes of ethics, morality and law, began to don the mask of terror. The period between the anarchy of 1966 and the emergence of a clearly defined form of political authority at the end of the civil war threw up material that is best represented in literature only through the symbols of a ravished land. Such symbols are not the normal staple of the tradition of realistic fiction:

Achebe's art seemed to have been moving within its fluid boundaries by the time he published *A Man of the People.* The symbols are to make their appearance in the next novel, more than two decades after the fourth novel.

Anthills of the Savannah includes a symbolic representation of the period between the beginning of violence in 1966 and the end of the Civil War. Achebe's remembrance of the crisis is not directly represented. It is obliquely slotted into the narrative in the form of a "tale out of storyland" which Ikem includes in his composition: "Pillar of Fire: A hymn to the Sun". It is the story of a people whose desperation set the wheels of a new history in motion. They:

> rise and march south by starlight abandoning crippled kindred in the wild savannah and arrive stealthily at a tiny village and fall upon its inhabitants and slay them and take their land and say: I did it because death stared through my eye.

The anarchy in that tale sets the tone for a people's expectation of a strong and just national leader. It explains the strategic placing of the leadership theme in the novel, as well as the collaboration and betrayal of two men of principle who partly redeem themselves as witnesses of the political drama that begins to unfold in the first

part of the novel. Achebe's political vision extends across the intervening period from the time of the national crisis up to the time of the composition of the novel and on to the future and the birth of a new society. While the novel is reminiscent of *A Man of the People* in its recognisable portrait of the contemporary political scene, he has revised his narrative technique to cope with the new material for this novel.

The history of the country presented in the fiction reaches the end of an epoch in the fifth novel, after the extensive destruction of the country's material resources and a subtle suppression of its traditional institutions and folkways. Achebe's technique in this work relies heavily on the revision and restoration of material drawn from traditional sources. Many of the traditional items are familiar to his readers, having been featured in his earlier writings. The interlocking of myth and history is important to Achebe's technique of restoration. There is a revival of those themes that had been in decline in his fourth novel: the themes of leadership and a spiritual priesthood, the assertion of the moral will of the old deities who used to be in fruitful communion with human society, the impetuousness of the socially committed male, the importance of the female principle as a haven and source of sustenance for men who get into trouble because of their excessive anxiety to assert their manhood.

Anthills of the Savannah opens with two narrators referred to as witnesses, who function partly as the author's surrogates. The two, a commissioner and a newspaper editor, are ideally placed to report on their former friend, now Head of State and fledgling dictator, and a relentless hunter of fugitive citizens, who include even his former friends and his loyal subordinates. Although both of these participant narrators cannot be said to represent fully the point of view of their author, they deserve important functions in the novel. They help to bring out the underlying religious meaning of the action. Chris, whose name in full, incidentally, means "Christ bearer," has lent implicit support to His Excellency's fascist rule by staying so long as his Commissioner of Information that he is unable to opt out when the danger signals become too strong. But that extended association gives him the kind of intimate knowledge of the Head of State and his cabinet that only an omniscient narrator can surpass. Through Chris and the second witness, Ikem, we become aware of the conception of His Excellency as some kind of anti-Christ, or at least as a parody of Christ. He is strongly linked to the armed robbers on the execution grounds by a set of identical visual and verbal images and religious symbols. They evoke a backcloth of allusions to Christ against which the reader is expected to judge him as well as the thieves at the place of execution.

Beatrice and His Excellency are brought together for the same

moral purpose. Beatrice as Nwanyibuife is identified as one of the Daughters of Idemili who perform the archetypal role of the first daughter sent down by the Almighty "to bear witness to the moral nature of authority" in the beginning when "(p)ower rampaged through our world". The encounter between Nwanyibuife and His Excellency is to be interpreted in the light of the cautionary folk story which sets out the ritual role of one of Idemili's daughters at an *ozo* title ceremony. Anyanwu and Idemili, tropical sun and tropical river, determine the character of a race. The conjunction of Idemili, Pillar of Water, and Anyanwu, described in this novel as Pillar of Fire, produces the most pregnant union of images in the novel. The mythical version of this phenomenon is the folktale about the quarrel between the sky and the earth. The quarrel reaches a climax when the earth was scorched as a result of the suspension of rainfall. The horror of a contest between earth and sky in this dimly remembered tale, the horror of a quarrel between forces that should be in alliance, this horror becomes the grim reality that is alluded to in the title of the novel. Life may still exist on the scorched landscape of Kangan; but that is because, to continue to survive, it has to take refuge in the anthills. Even though Chris is murdered on the landscape during his flight from His Excellency, no direct connection is made between the action of a leader and its effect on the land.

The parallel between the two stories of leaders who bring ruin to their land is a subtle one, but one that is strong enough to make them versions of the same theme: they both deal with leaders who overreach themselves by denying their people the right to a decent life. There is a particularly strong echo of this similarity in the words of the story teller at the Harmoney Hotel. The delegation has come to the Big Chief (His Excellency) to ask for help because "he holds the yam and the knife". For him to hold back this gift is for him to call down a plague on the land. His Excellency holds back, like Ezeulu of old, whose symbols of power are also the yam and the knife. There is, however, one important difference. In *Anthills of the Savannah,* His Excellency does not fight the cause of any deity, and he has no deity to fight his cause; in fact, he is his own deity, as the presentation of him as a parody of Christ strongly suggests. So he turns his wrath directly on his people. And for this, the great god turns his scorching eye on the land.

In earlier novels, the deities that preside over the affairs of human communities are protective or tutelary deities — Ala, Idemili, Ulu, agents of peace and fertility. Even a locust invasion, dreaded in our times, could be handled as a providential event, bringing to the village a feast of locusts, dried and eaten with solid palm oil. The bad bush, a blot on the landscape, was reclaimable, as the Christians prove. In *Arrow of God,* the reverence for the

earth is so profound it is sanctified by religious observance; even children respect that sanctity. When Obiageli tries an unorthodox variation on a traditional tale, she is sharply rebuked by a younger sister and an older brother:

> "Who will punish this Earth for me?"
> "No, no, no," Nkechi broke in.
> "What can happen to Earth, silly girl?" asked Nwafo.

All this seems to end with the Ulu era, after which "any yam harvested in (the) fields was harvested in the name of the son". But in blighted Kangan, the deities reappear with a new aspect. The old rituals of hospitality and kolanut offering still survive; but an ascending sun is aroused, and the incensed Daughters of Idemili respond to their ancient priestly calling.

In happier times, kolanuts were offered in sacrifice to the sun, whose Igbo name is translated as the Eye of God. Achebe says of this and similar rituals that "the sun (is) an agent of Chukwu to whom it is said to bear those rare sacrifices offered as man's last desperate resort" (Achebe, 1972, 99). Now, in Kangan, the sun, refusing its customary role as carrier of sacrifice to God, turns to scourge the Earth.

These perceptions are made possible by the observations of two principal witnesses and rhetorical agents of the author, Ikem and Beatrice. Stroked by the "sun in April" while his countrymen "roast in peace", Ikem is virtually transformed into a sun worshipper. Held in a state of possession by the deity, he has a solar vision of the land as he composes a "Hymn to the Sun". Beatrice identifies the social plague as originating from "an embittered history". In light of the foregoing discussion, this social problem turns out to be only one more recurrence of a familiar historical pattern, a more serious fouling up of the transaction between man and his destiny, as leaders break their contractual obligations to their citizens.

In *Anthills of the Savannah,* Achebe has adapted his old artistic devices to a slightly different kind of fiction. It would be a mistake, I think, to read this novel as if its narrative form conforms strictly with the conventions of the realistic novel. This is not to say that the novel is not a part of that tradition or that it is very far removed from it. To take one of its features as an example: the range of names and idioms effectively represents the polyglot character of a modern African capital like Lagos. The author has not had to resort to a direct transcription of speech forms in the available languages to achieve the illusion that he is faithfully reflecting the range of urban forms of language available in the capital. It is true that Achebe's typical restraint does not allow his profound engage-

ment with the mythic world of Igbo divinities to break the narrative limits of what can be rationally explained. In Achebe's fiction, the fantastic is usually held in a secondary frame within the larger narrative: the marvellous story is usually related by a character within the narrative. Even in *Things Fall Apart*, our consciousness of the presence of a traditional storyteller blends the extraordinary events with the details of the ordinary, everyday affairs of village life. The details of the nativity and christening of Elewa's child in *Anthills of the Savannah* derive from the conventions of realistic fiction. But the significance of the scene as part of the overall design of the novel follows the structure and practice of the narrative tradition of fantasy, particularly the allegory and the parable. and yet the novel cannot be read strictly in allegorical terms, in spite of the presence of contemporary social themes like inter-ethnic marriage, the caste system, the relationship between a deity and the character of the people. It is clear that the two narrative traditions — the realistic and the didactic — come together in at least one of the incidents at the christening ceremony: in the concert of religions that springs up spontaneously for the celebration of the child's birth. We have a "realistic" symbolization of the post-colonial culture in Nigeria, as well as the author's vision of a future society. Christianity and Islam are dominant now. But the traditional religious consciousness — referred to as "the unknown god", is far from dead. Beatrice is its unwitting and involuntary priestess. That is why she cannot be interpreted as one would an ordinary character in a realistic novel, if her proper place in the novel is to be understood. A first class graduate of English of the University of London, she does not know the "traditions and legends of her people because they played but little part in her upbringing", and she has even dropped her Igbo name, Nwanyibuife, because she does not like what it suggests about her sex. But, the author points out in a reference to the experience of religious possession among the Igbo, "knowing or not knowing does not save us from being known and even recruited and put to work". And so, she is impressed into service as "the priestess of the unknown god".

In this extended historical tale, Achebe has created an artistic vehicle which enables his social vision to contain the crisis of the present by conserving and drawing on the wisdom of the past.

I must not forget the occasion for this gathering and this lecture, which is, to honour one of the foremost artists in this land and elsewhere. I began this talk by recalling my meeting with a Nigerian student who was very strongly committed to Achebe's work, in far away Texas, and the implication of his views for the use, interpretation and misinterpretation of Achebe's purpose and practice. Clearly, there are uses of literature that break out of the limits set by the original conception of the texts. But after thirty years of an

international career, Achebe has sufficiently publicised his conception of the use of literature, for his many readers to get a clear picture of his place in contemporary literature and culture. It is now time to take stock of Achebe's achievement.

Achebe's works have enabled us to see our past through his eyes. He has relentlessly pursued the critical reappraisal of the old literary favourites of the colonial period, particularly the works of Conrad and Cary, those writers on Africa who dazzle the unwary African reader with the sophistication of their technique. He has dared to be an African, in spite of the industrial glamour and economic power of western culture. The nature of the task confronting Achebe at the beginning of his career as a novelist, is most clearly reflected in the artistic preferences of one stratum of his potential reading public. During the decades before and including the period when Achebe published his novels about the past, the most popular films in Nigeria, next to westerns, were films about Tarzan, a white character who was represented as knowing the African forests better than the Africans who live in them, and speaking the language of African animals, although Africans themselves cannot. The link between these films and Conrad's fiction is more than superficial[4] although, because of the reach of Conrad's imagination and the sophistication of his technique, it is in the films that the cultural problem is more directly revealed. As a collector of tusks and human skulls, is Conrad's Kurtz really more than a higher apeman created for a Victorian bourgeois class out of a guilt-ridden racial conscience? Kurtz appears more human than Borrough's hero mainly because of his vulnerable ego; he turns out more complex because of the Freudian probing of his personality; and he draws greater sympathetic attention from the reader mainly because his cultural condition is typical and recognisable. The African reader can share in that empathy only at the cost of forgetting the cultural assumptions which led to Kurtz's crisis in the first place. Kurtz's experience can, of course, be generalised and made universal for all races, so that he becomes, in essence, a "distortion of the human mask" (Harris, 88); but at what cultural cost?

Against these cultural/aesthetic choices (that is, the choice between the popular action film and the highbrow psychological parable), Achebe has provided the young African reader and the African literati with cause to be confident in their past without being complacent about their present. And he has achieved this without being obsessively satirical or naively nostalgic.

Achebe has stamped his trademark on the language of African literature in English by forging a literary English for an African experience — a suiting of medium to message. Since Achebe is a man of words, and we have no other means of paying him tribute, let us,

finally, pay him a tribute of words by borrowing the proverbs and tales that he himself frequently evoked in his novels to remind us of the function of one type of artist in traditional society.

For Achebe, an ideal artist is like the flute player who restrains the headstrong wrestler; he is like an adviser to the fly that is perching on a grave-bound corpse; he is the witness of truth at community disputes; he is the flutist in the wayside bush who puts liveliness into the heart of the bird dancing in the pathway. Let us therefore honour the first of those artists who make it possible for an African to teach literature, not just as another job to be done, but as something which gives him joy and to which he can be genuinely committed, emotionally and culturally.

NOTES

1. Achebe's Amherst Chancellor Lecture, "An Image of African," delivered in the 1975/79 seesion, is only the most sustained attack on Conrad after a series of critical observations on Conrad's short story not only in Achebe's creative writing, but also in lectures and interviews.
2. Whatever the effect of his images on the reader, Conrad did not claim, as Naipaul claims here, that his story was an accurate piece of reportage. His description drew on impressionism. He has been quoted as saying, in this connection, that "the story (is) mainly a vehicle for conveying a batch of personal impressions" (Quoted in Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography).*
3. "Christ Bearer," the literal meaning of Christopher, also contains the legendary narrative of the saint. While the meaning fits neatly into the context in which the name occurs in the novel, it is not necessarily a conscious choice. It is equally tempting to read into the name, "Chris Oriko", a conscious or subconscious allusion to Chris Okigbo, he whose memory Achebe obviously desires to keep alive. But while the novel may carry strong suggestions of a *roman a clef* in the play of names, incidents and characterisation, the strong symbolism establishes the novel firmly as mythic history; and even in this case, it is good to remember that not many of the characters can bear the heavy burden of an archetypal reading.
4. In the following passage from *Heart of Darkness,* Marlow could have been describing a flurry of visual impressions and frightening sounds taken from a Tarzan file:

> (S)uddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. (96)

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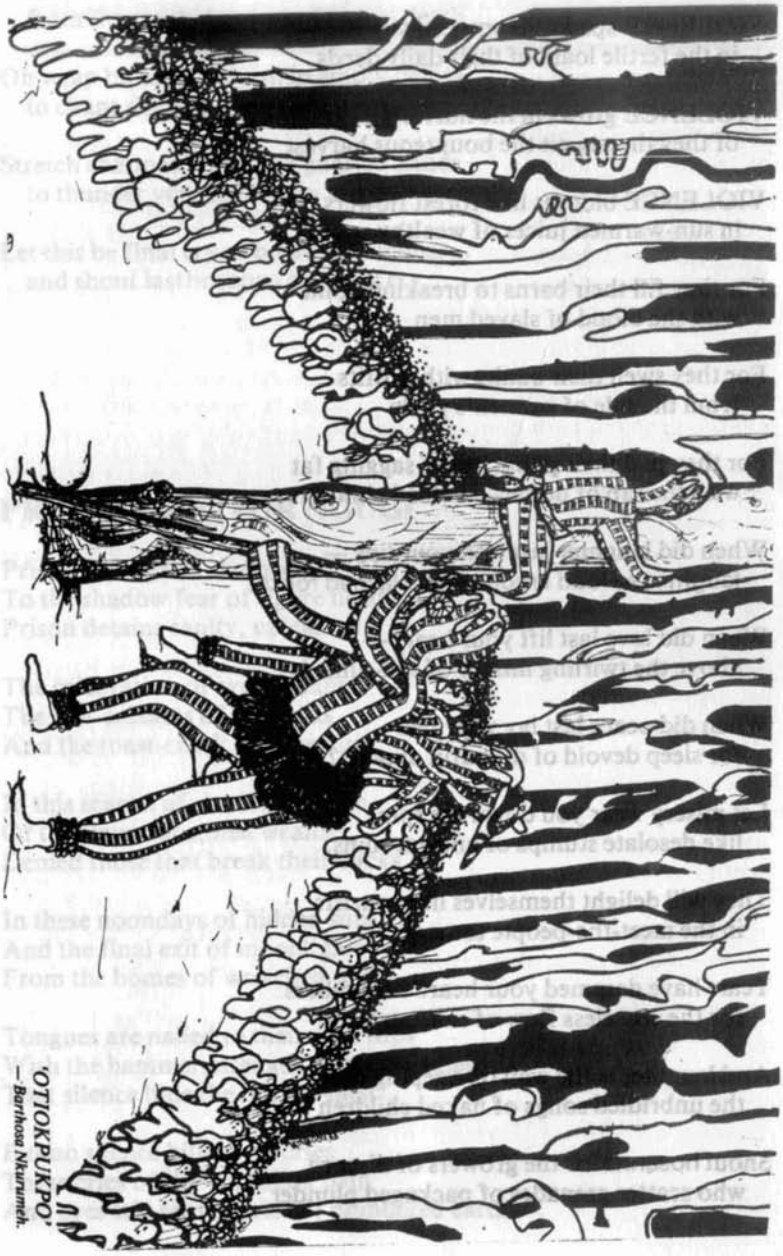

'OTIOKPUKPO'
– Barthosa Nkurumeh.

E. Ogaga Ifowodo

VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE spawns from seed sowed
in the fertile loam of their daily deeds

VIOLENCE grows in the nurturing care
of they that await the bounteous harvest

VIOLENCE blooms like forest flowers
in sun-warmed juices of wealthy soils

For they fill their barns to breaking point
with the blood of slaved men

For they swell their banks with profits
from the sale of women's pride

For they pad their paunches of sagging fat
with the sap of dome — bellied children

When did laughter last lash your lips —
laughter so loud among wave lashed rocks?

When did love last lift your heart —
above the twirling misery of toil-tunnels?

When did peace last lay your bed
for sleep devoid of dreadful dreams?

Let misery wear you down the spine
like desolate stumps of ancient ruins,

They will delight themselves like tourists
in the meet-the-people tours

Tears have dammed your heart's chambers
for the ceaseless flow of salty streams

And laughter is the wail of weeping wives
the unbridled songs of naked children

Shout hosanna for the growers of discord
who scatter grenades of packaged plunder

Along your thistled paths of pain
to keep you beaten to dust and rust.

Hosanna for the resurrection of saints
from the morbid graves of moral death.

Oh wrap bloated anguish in empty bellies
to chant slogans of regeneration.

Stretch chapped fingers of gnarled hands
to thunder your love from angry bowels

Let this be final cry to break the chains
and shout last hosanna as battle cry.

PRISON SONG FOR NGUGI

Prison is progress chained
To the shadow fear of figure heads
Prison detains sanity, unleashes

The celebration of sychophants
The cult-salaams of lootlords
And the toast-chink of wine-cups

In this season of sirened passage
Of the flaunt of stolen wealth
Denied those that break their backs

In these noondays of hidden suns
And the final exit of moonlights
From the homes of wretched toil

Tongues are nailed to their roof tops
With the hammer-strength of prison gates
That silence hide the rape of men

But no silence kills these cries
These cries of sky-rumbling pain
And eyes still see the grief of plundered earth

Then how many pikes shall hold the tongue
That flames with the fury of floundered dreams....
How many pikes shall stand its melting fires?

Speak with the cricket's shrillness
That shatters the stillness of night
And let reapers of neighbours' farms flee.

Blow through a double-barrelled pen
Windstorms to winnow garnered grains of wheat
And spread fertilising fluids of pierced petals of blood.

Shrill along the tunnels of prison
The lootyards of lurking predators
Your song of unravelled thieveries

Shrill to the eternal witness
Of flint and thorn-sole witness
On this crooked path of home coming.

S.C. Chuta

THINGS FALL APART AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: IDENTIFICATION OF PARALIELS IN CHURCH GROWTH

It is now about thirty-two years since Chinua Achebe wrote his first novel — *Things Fall Apart*. Since then, this book, together with his other works, has undergone rigorous examination by many critics[1]. Essentially, Achebe has been extolled not only as Black Africa's best-known fiction writer, but also as a social critic of astute conscience. The anthropological and sociological contents of his *Things Fall Apart,* the quality of his artistic skill and the Africanness of his literary tradition that runs through all his works, all these and more to his credit have widely and for long been commented upon. His critics seem to have over-concentrated on these literary and sociological dimensions of his works that one is impressed that sooner or later, the overall excellence of his contributions would be spent. This article seeks to obviate any such speculation, and to suggest that Achebe's treatment of missionary activities in his *Things Fall Apart* should be seen as a model of the interrelation between artistic and historical faculties. It is, put simply, to demonstrate how relevant the fifteenth to twenty-second chapter of that work is to crucial aspects of Church growth as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Some of the inferences in this analysis might seem naive and others forced. But it will, no doubt, be eventually realised from the subtle evidence of parallelism that rather than ascribe such features to chance concurrence, one would imagine the entire formulation as an admixture of the author's artistry and inspiration *per excellence.* Besides, Achebe's christian background and upbringing are enough factors to adduce that he must have written those chapters under the guide (conscious or unconscious) of some established biblical themes[2].

The enigma that need first be unravelled, which occurs in the fifteenth chapter of his work under consideration is the identification of the presence and fate of the *white man*[3]. The question is, to whom does the *albino,* quite a different albino, refer in *Things Fall Apart?* One could suggest three possibilities. The albino could refer to either a white British colonial official, a white foreign missionary, or it could refer to Jesus Christ. From select circumstances of this strange figure as contained in this work, it is being suggested that Achebe, in his white man, refers to the person of Jesus Christ, the author and founder of the new religion soon to be introduced in the clan.

It was Okonkwo who first mooted the idea of an albino. What else could Achebe be suggesting other than that such a creature must be a mystical combination! Besides, when the prophetic Obierika replied that the strange white man was not an albino but that he was quite different, Achebe was merely heightening the element of the strange man's esoteric novelty. Moreover, this white man rode on an iron horse and, as "the first people who saw him ran away.... he stood beckoning to them" (p.97). It should not be seen as a trite imputation to speculate that this was a reference to Christ's rejection by those for whom he came (Jn. 1:11), his concern for the erring humanity, and an invitation to the oppressed (Mtt. 11:28). It is also significant that on consultation by the elders, the oracle declared that the strange man would "break their clan and spread destruction among them" (p.97). Besides Simeon's visionary presentiment associating Jesus with "the fall and the rising of many in Israel" (Lk. 2:34), the accusation brought forward by the whole company of the Jews that "we found this man perverting our nation" (Lk. 23:2), is relevant in establishing, at least, an oblique reference to Jesus in that oracular pronouncement.

Furthermore, Achebe, in his account of the fate of the white man in the hands of the people of Abame, wrote that they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree. It would be preposterous for Achebe to have suggested the hanging of the white man on their sacred tree since the idea of crucifixion was outside the Igbo cultural context. Instead (but adhering to the parallel in Acts 10:39, "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree"), there is a clear vision of the crucifixion in the symbolic tying of the white man's iron horse to their "sacred tree", because it looked as if it would run away to call the white man's friends. Here, too, in this second part ("it looked as if it would run away to call the white man's friends"), the author must have either of two biblical events in mind, or both. First was the taunt of the Gentile guards, "This man is calling Elijah... wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him" (Matt. 27:47f) Secondly, shortly after the death and burial of Jesus, the Chief Priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and suggested precautionary measures that should be taken "lest the disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He had risen from the dead'" (Mtt. 27:62ff).

Finally, in this attempt to establish a hypothetical parallel between Achebe's albino and Jesus Christ, one is impressed with the reply to Uchendu's incisive question: "What did the white man say before they killed him?" asked Uchendu. "He said nothing", answered one of Obierika's companions (p. 98). This should be seen as a direct reference to the passage on Philip's explanation offered to dispel the Eunch's confused absorption. The Eunuch had been reading the passage about the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53)

who'

> "as sheep that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, *so he opened not his mouth*".

And just as Peter blamed the Jewish delivery and participation in the crucifixion of Jesus on their ignorance ("You acted in ignorance" Acts 3:17), Uchendu, grinding his teeth declared:

> "Never kill a man who says nothing.
> Those men of Abame were fools.
> What did they know about the man?" (P. 98).

Chinua Achebe might not have intended to follow a strictly lineal course of church growth as is mapped out in the Acts of the Apostle. Of course, to have done so would be tantamount to a self-denial of creative autonomy. His must be a work of an artist trying to establish an impression of what lay in the subconscious, the result of which is a free but unmistakable use of already established sources.

From the sixteenth chapter of *Things Fall Apart,* the missionaries are seen invading the village of Umuofia. They had established churches having recorded a handful of converts. In fact, the early congregation had turned out to be a self-propagating mission, for evangelists were being sent to the surrounding towns and villages just as teachers and prophets had been despatched by the Holy Spirit to Selucia, Cyprus and as far as Paphos (Acts 13:1-6). But when it comes to a comparison of the themes of evangelical message, it becomes pertinent to ask if Achebe was not applying Paul's style in the latter's condemnation of the Athenians. This is particularly clear when the white leader of the missionary party launched his crusade at Mbanta. Paul had referred the Athenians to "The God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). He further told them that,

> "Being then God's offspring, we are not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man".

With considerable support lent by oral sources on the early experience of the church in Igboland, the white man in Achebe's words also told the people,

> "about this new God, the Creator of all the world and all the men and women" (p. 102).

He also reminded them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone (p. 102). It is also important to note that in that encounter with the Athenians, Paul found it necessary to emphasise

the element of repentance since God,

> has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man who he has appointed[4].

The early evangelical strategy adopted by the missionaries in Igboland was a constant reference to the day of judgement, postulating, on the one hand, the element of bliss in god's eternal kingdom and, on the other hand, the element of the anguish in hell. Hence the white man's leader explains that:

> ...all men when they died went before Him for judgement. Evil men and all heathen who... bowed to wood and stone, were thrown into a fire that burnt like palm oil. But good men who worshipped the true God lived for ever in His happy kingdom (p. 102).

However, if Paul had reason to refer to Athenian gods of gold, silver or stone, because of the advanced metal artistry of Asian culture, one wonders if the white man leader had reason to refer to gods of "stone" in Igboland since wood-carving and not much of stone sculpture was the incipient form of Igbo religious art material. It is, therefore, probable that Achebe is merely repeating Paul in Acts 17.

Besides Achebe's adoption of the Acts evangelical approach, it is also significant that he provides a similar intellectual duel and ludicrous episode as Paul had to contend with among the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens. Some said, "What would this babbler say?" and they all regarded Paul as a teacher of strange things (Acts 17:18). So also did Okonkwo, representing the Igbo intellectual bent of his time, take the interpreter to task on the issue of the sonship of God:

> You told us with your own mouth that there was only one God. Now you talk about his son... So he must have a wife and all of them must have buttocks (p. 103)

Okonkwo is sceptical, not because he is mentally inert, but because he refuses to accept what cannot be empirically demonstrated or rationalised within the context of his culture. The idea of the christian God who had a son but no wife was as bewildering to him, just as the Jews in Jerusalem were following the uninhibited language torrent of the day of Penticost. "They are filled with new wine", said the Jews (Acts 2;13). Okonkwo, on his part, is convinced that the interpreter is mad: "He shrugged his shoulder and went away to tap his wine. (p. 103).

Okonkwo remains incredulous, conservative and unshaken in his faith in his ancestral values and traditional institutions. Had he experienced any religious conversion, it would have been easy to ap-

proximate his experience with that of Paul. For Paul too had declared: "and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14). Achebe could have done just this had he not resolved to create out of Okonkwo a symbol of an uncompromising attachment to the traditional life of his people. Instead, Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, is made to take up the moderating human element that remains dormant in his father. What, therefore, strikes one is not merely the conversion of Nwoye as "symptomatic of the way in which Christianity strikes against the things Okonkwo represents"[5], but the semblance of his conversion to that of Paul.

Of the many factors that have been posited as having operated in Saul's conversion, there is in that process what psychologists describe as the recognition of the inner unrest that cannot be easily denied[6]. Saul's presence during the stoning of Stephen formed the foundation of Saul's history of conversion. That episode, over a period, must have undergone a subconscious incubation or William James's "cerebration", awaiting a time for resolution[7]. Nwoye's conversion adopted a similar process.

The killing of Ikemefuna was in accord with the traditions of Unuofia just as the stoning of Stephen, even in style, agreed to the Jewish religious practices.

Okonkwo had replied to Obierika:

> The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger. A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm (p. 47)

But even though Nwoye did not physically witness Ikemefuna's ritual murder, "something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow", (p. 43) as soon as his father walked in that night shortly after the act. Nwoye had had a similar feeling during the last harvest as:

> They were returning home with baskets of yam... When they heard the voice of an infant crying in the forest... Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthen-ware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again (p. 43)

That these acts of human brutality were part of Nwoye's culture is never in doubt. But they did succeed in setting in a revolt in him against what appeared to him as a 'wicked society'. His point of resolution came with the arrival of the missionaries when Nwoye heard the message of the new religion. The interpreter had intoned:

> All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent twins (p. 43).

Having heard this, Nwoye was captivated. There was something in the poetry of those lines that "seemed to answer the vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul — the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed (p. 104).

It becomes necessary to pursue further the stories of Paul and Nwoye after their conversion in order to highlight the element of parallelism. According to the Acts, after Paul had been known to have preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

> ....*he went in and out* among them at Jerusalem.... but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him to Tarsus[8].

Nwoye, on his part, rather than go "in and out among them", is seen as he,

> "*passed and repassed* the little red-earth and thatch building (hut) without summoning enough courage to enter" (p. 106).

But shortly after, he is seen being confronted by his father who barks at him: "Answer me before I kill you" (p. 107). We learn that Nwoye goes to inform Mr, Kiaga about his intention to go to Umuofia, just as Paul was sent to Tarsus, their nativity.

Soon after the conversion of Nwoye, others are to join essentially on account of the factor of mass conversion that is also traceable in the Acts. Copeland has indicated that church growth in the Acts is to be understood as the mysterious and sovereign work of God, with the Holy Spirit affectuating the word of witness with "signs and wonders"[9] Mass conversion attended the pentecostal outburst: "So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:4). At times, mass conversion followed either a miracle or an occasion of group triumph over persecution and strange challenge (Acts 3:9; 4:4; 5'14). In *Things Fall Apart,* this "mysterious and sovereign work of God" is seen in the victory of the new christian congregation over the dark forces of the Evil Forest of Mbanta. The Evil Forest was allocated to the christians to give them, "a real battle-field in which to show their victory (p. 105). In actual fact,

> "The inhabitants of Mbanta expected them all to be dead within four days. The first day passed and the second and third and fourth, and none of them died" (p. 106).

In the Acts, such occasions evoked astounding reactions of fear, perplexity and amazement (Acts 2:5, 11; 2:4). Achebe simply states, "Everyone was puzzled", and thereafter the congregation wins its first three converts. Furthermore, the people are surprised that twenty-eight days after the establishment of the church at Mbanta, their gods and ancestors have allowed the missionaries and their converts to defy them. At the end of the twenty-eighth day when all the missionaries are expected to have died, "they were all alive"; constructing both a new mission house and a house for their teacher Mr. Kiaga. The outcome of this seeming humiliation of the people by their gods and ancestors is that the christian community "won a handful of more converts" (p. 107).

One common feature of pioneer missionary activity in the history of christianity from the Acts up until the present day is the wave of persecution against christian converts. In the Acts, as in *Things Fall Apart,* persecution raged in various forms, assuming, at certain times, the dimensions of personal and group antagonism and, at other times, institutional confrontation in the face of evangelistic affrontry. In the Acts, it was the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees who came upon the apostles "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). In *Things Fall Apart,* it is also the priests (one of whom scorned the missionaries: "Go and burn your mothers' genitals") (p.110) as they, the missionaries, "boasted openly that all the gods were dead and impotent and that they were prepared to defy them by burning all their shrine (p. 110).

It is, however, significant that both in the Acts and in *Things Fall Apart,* the christian cause has the fortune of being protected against this institutional determination to crush it. The intervention of Gamaliel is a familiar episode in the history of the Church as is recorded in the Acts. *In Things Fall Apart,* the cause of the christian missionaries is made more precarious following the establishment of the British administration and the people's consequent suspicion of identity of roles between the two structures. Okonkwo, representing the astute conservatism and nationalistic spirit of his generation, bemoam the impotency and betrayal of Abame people, and indicates a proper line of action to be taken by his own people:

> "We would be cowards to compare ourselves with the men of Abame. Their fathers had never dared to stand before our ancestors. We must fight these men and drive them from the land". (p. 124).

To play the moderating role of Gamaliel in the history of the church in Umuofia is Obierika who, while not in total objection to Okonkwo's view-point, says:

> "It is already too late... If we should drive out the white men in Umuofia, we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given the power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame" (p. 124).

Thus, reason, not sheer brutal force, should be allowed to prevail in dealing with Christianity and its devotees, perhaps, if there were neither a Gamaliel nor an Obierika, the history of the church in the world and at Umuofia would have been a story beyond human conjecture.

Yet, the christians had received similar treatment in both accounts. Gamaliel's intervention commuted the death penalty alloted the apostles to severe beating and a charge never to speak in the name of Jesus. In *Things Fall Apart,* the people commuted the killing sentence or total expulsion to mere destruction of the christian church. That, in the eyes of the people, is "something substantial". But it is not so substantial as to impede the further growth of the church.

So far, one is left in little doubt as to what copious use the author of *Things Fall Apart* has made of themes in the Acts to account for the course of church growth in his work. However, one additional theme needs to be discussed to confirm this assertion of evidence of parallels in the two writings. This is the element of crisis and compromise that in the Acts gave rise to the Council of Jerusalem.

The central issue that bears weight on this theme as is recorded in the Acts was the problem of admissibility of the gentile converts to the christian fold. The question was whether these gentile converts were to be subjected to the scruples of cultural bias. The circumcision issue gave rise to no little dissension within the early christian community that it became necessary to refer the matter to Jerusalem with a view to reconciling the moderates, represented by Paul and Barnabas with the hard-liners as seen in the stand of the Jewish christians. In the same manner, the crisis that rocks the foundations of the church at Umuofia bordered on a similar sensitive cultural stigma. The trouble begins over the question of admitting outcasts. These outcasts, seeing that twins have been welcomed within the christian fold, join, but not without hesitation. They are accepted, although on the day they first enter the church, there is "an immediate stir". That acceptance,

> lasted till the end of the service. The whole church raised a protest and were about to drive these people out, when Mr. Kiaga intervened and began to explain. (p. 111)

It is worth noting that in both the verdicts of Mr. Kiaga and James, the fundamental issue is resolved on the same premise that,

> Before God, there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brethren (p. 111).

By introducing these episodes of crisis and compromise in both writings, it is perhaps the intention of Chinua Achebe and the author of the Acts of the Apostles to draw attention to the inevitable problem of the christian gospel in a cross-cultural context. However, as far as Achebe is concerned, the problem is more than that. For the issue has to be exposed from the African and European perspectives. First, is the attitude of the African convert, Enoch, the son of a traditional priest of the snake cult, who applies no restraint whatsoever in his recently acquired religious faith, but goes all out to brazenly provoke the wrath of the clan. The story goes round that Enoch had "killed and eaten a sacred python and that his father had cursed him" (p. 131). Against this religious extremism of Enoch is pitted Mr. Brown, the white missionary, who begins to preach against religious fanaticism. His explanation, both in contents and lyric, stands in close parallel to St. Paul's to the Corinthians. Mr. Brown advises:

> "Everything was possible... but everything was not expedient" (p. 126).

St. Paul, on his part, admonishes:

> "All things are lawful for me but not all things are helpful"[10].

But when Mr. Smith arrives at Umuofia to take the place of Mr. Brown, he (Mr. Smith) is seen to be a different kind of man:

> "He condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battle field in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness" (p. 30).

It is no surprise that Enoch, with an over-zealous approach towards the traditional society, finds in Mr. Smith a like-minded temperament and flourishes. In addition to the allegation of killing and eating of the sacred python, Enoch commits an unpardonable crime of unmasking an eqwugwu in public. By calling in the ancestors of Umuofia to take full revenge in the event of the unheard-of desecration of the people's customs, Achebe leaves one in no uncertain terms about his position. First, Christianity can be tolerable only within the context of mutual respect in matters of culture. This is in keeping with the spirit of the Council of

Jerusalem. Some foreign missionaries failed to take cognisance of this fact particularly at the inception of christian evangelisation in West Africa. Second, Achebe shows in what form African gods can fight for themselves to defend their cherished tradition and spurn an underserved humiliation of the clan's ancestral spirit. The ancient Roman empire would tolerate any violation of its religious institutions, but certainly not to the extent that it would endure an individual or collective refusal to pay homage to or show respect for Ceasar. Therefore, the rampage that visits both Enoch's compound and the red-earth church at Umuofia is not to be attributed human but supernatural wrath against wanton indiscretion and travesty on a people's humanity.

This writer's suggestion in this article is no to emphatically infer that Chinua Achebe wrote his chapters on missionary activities with the Acts of the Apostles by his side. Instead, it is that, reading between the lines, there is abundant evidence to show that his treatment of these chapters was greatly influenced by his intimate knowledge of the patterns of church growth in the Acts. It might not have been his intention to establish a perfect impression of the characters and episodes that appealed to him in the Acts. Yet, either consciously or unconsciously, he touched on the leading themes without effort to stretch them out. For example, the Ethiopian Eunuch who became the first gentile convert was baptised at a time he could read the book of Isaiah without understanding what he read. In like manner, Ogbuefi Ugonna became the first convert in Umuofia who received the sacrament of the Holy Communion at a time he "thought of the feast in terms of eating and drinking... (and) therefore put his drinking horn into his goat-skin bag for the occasion" (p. 123). These instances of parallelism could be seen as sheer coincidences. But are they really?

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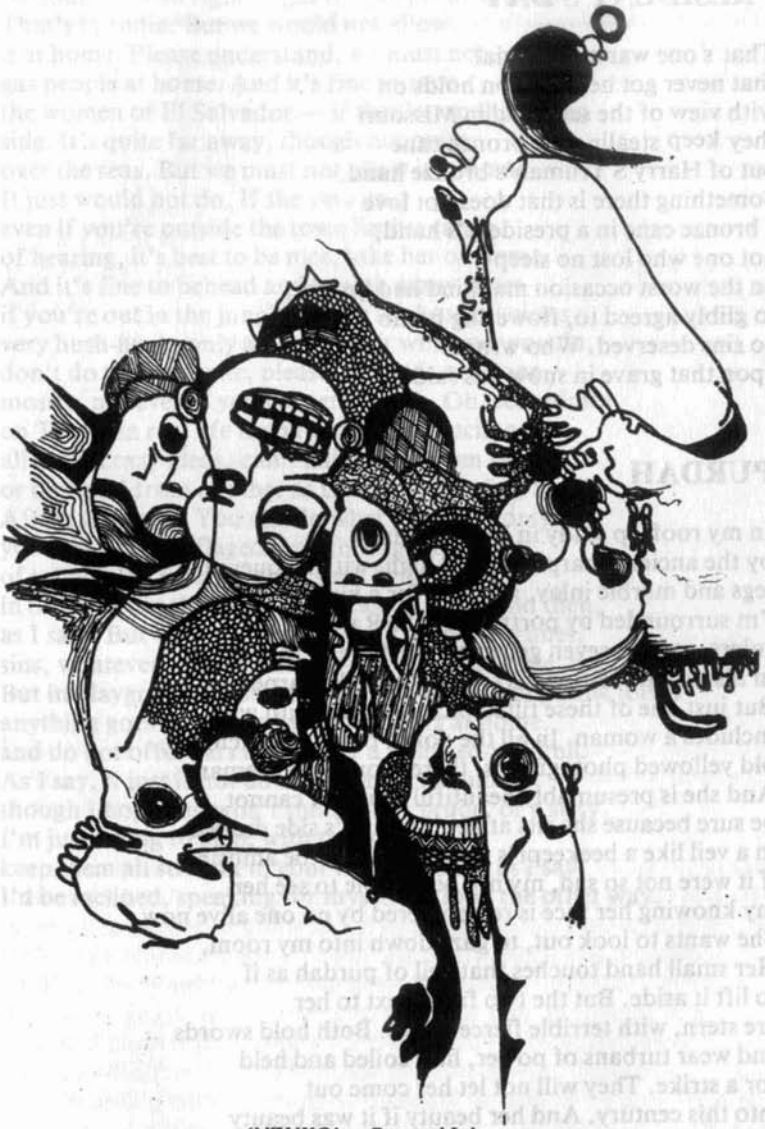


'NZUKO' — Pen and Ink
— Barthosa Nkurumeh

David Ray

PRESIDENT'S DAY

That s one war crimes trial
that never got held. Nixon holds on
with view of the sea. And in Missouri
they keep stealing the bronze cane
out of Harry S Truman's bronze hand.
Something there is that does not love
a bronze cane in a president's hand,
not one who lost no sleep
on the worst occasion mankind had known,
so glibly agreed to, flowering bomb
no sins deserved. Who writes
upon that grave in snow has said it all.

PURDAH

In my rooftop study in India, sitting
by the ancient charpoy a yard high, with lacquered
legs and marble inlay, a bed fit for a king,
I'm surrounded by portraits of the Rajput
rulers, at least seven generations of them, each grim
in his turban, letting his sword touch the carpet.
But just one of these tilted pictures hung with wire
includes a woman. In all the dozen paintings, etchings,
old yellowed photographs, there is only one woman.
And she is presumably beautiful though I cannot
be sure because she sits at her husband's side draped
in a veil like a beekeepr's gauze. It would be amusing
if it were not so sad, my not being able to see her,
my knowing her face is remembered by no one alive now.
She wants to look out, to gaze down into my room.
Her small hand touches that veil of purdah as if
to lift it aside. But the two faces next to her
are stern, with terrible fierce glares. Both hold swords
and wear turbans of power, hair coiled and held
for a strike. They will not let her come out
into this century. And her beauty if it was beauty
is lost while behind her, magnesium flares against tile
blinding those men while I presume her eyes were brown
agate, her skill the bronze of those women of roadsides
who cup their gold hands as I pass, sharing their faces.

MANNERS

Of course it's all right to gas the people of Bhopal.
That's in India. But we would not allow
it at home. Please understand, we must not
gas people at home. And it's fine to rape
the women of El Salvador — if they're on the wrong
side. It's quite far away, though not quite
over the seas. But we must not allow it at home.
It just would not do. If she says no,
even if you're outside the town limits, range
of hearing, it's best to be nice, take her on home.
And it's fine to behead and to stab many times
if you're out in the jungle on one of those missions
very hush-hush, only advising. But whatever you do,
don't do that at home, please. It just is not done,
mostly, not even if you get very drunk. Oh, sometimes
on TV. or in real life if you watch too much, get
all those crazy ideas, can't tell fiction from fact
or one land from another as if North America, South
Africa were one. You can do what you want only if
you ride a camouflaged tank through a crowd
of schoolgirls grieving their slain brothers
in Soweto, not the suburbs of Kansas. Now and then,
as I said. But we can't in good faith approve crimes,
sins, whatever you call them — not close to home, not here.
But in playgrounds abroad, watering holes, hot pillow joints
anything goes. Just mind your manners at home.
and do not offer ears in a bag or a polished-up skull.
As I say, it just is not done, at least it should not
though I hope you won't think I'm a prude, or a sissy.
I'm just trying to help, with the issues,
keep them all straight in your mind, though as I say
I'd be inclined, speaking for myself, to look the other way.

Christopher S. Nwodo

"OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE VALUES IN ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART"

"Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered"[1]. Just as Achebe started his story of *Things Fall Apart*, "at the height of Okonkwo's fame"[2], our analysis might as well start right there with the *respected* and the *revered* among Okonkwo's people. Initially it might appear paradoxical and perhaps illogical that a group of people within a tradtional society would put a higher premium on personal achievements than on age, especially if one considers the fact that age represents long life, even if punctuated by occasional ill-health. Health and life have always represented objective values, not primarily because everybody desires them, but more because there is some intrinsic worth in them. Besides, they are the prerequisite conditions for any achievements since one has to be alive first and then healthy before he or she could accomplish anything significant or otherwise. In a traditional society where infant mortality was high, to have made it to a mature old age was something to be given due acknowledgement And there is no doubt about the fact that there was deference to age. It is still customary among the Igbo to give respect to any person older than oneself. Achebe acknowledges that fact in this telling passage:

> Ezeulu had been the oldest man in his village, and at his death there were only three men in the whole clan who were older, and four or five others in his own age-group. Whenever one of these ancient men appeared in the crowd to dance unsteadily the funeral steps of the tribe, younger men gave way and the tumult subsided. (p. 85).

There is therefore no doubt whatsoever about due respect being given to old age. However, there is a distinction (with a difference) which Okonkwo's people make between being respected and being revered which points to where the logic of their life has its strong argument. For them, old age is *not* a personal accomplisment. It is more like something that happens to a person, like being born into a particular family where one inherits a lot of property and makes a judicious use of it. What is really admired in this particular case is the beneficiary's ability to husband wisely what was placed at his disposal. Long life is very much like that.

Achievement is quite different. It is seen as a form of creating and bringing into being that which was not previously there. It is not just the transforming or the increasing of some pre-existing wealth. In the particular case of Okonkwo, his achievements

become even more spectacular when the obstacles on his way to greatness are taken into consideration. Okonkwo is a good example of a self-made man who never had the normal start in life. "He never inherited a barn nor a title, nor even a young wife". (p. 13). And yet he made it in a substantial way. Achebe spells it out clearly for us when he maintains that Okonkwo's prestige was based on "solid personal achievements" (p. 3).

The idea of the solid and the substantial runs like fibre through the texture of his people's concept of achievement. It is not enough to barely make it through to the next harvest. No, the barn must be full to overflowing. We are given an insight into this at the very beginning of Okonkwo's efforts at building his own barn. When he went to Nwakibie (a name that means literally "a child that is greater than its age mates") for seed yams, he expected at most four hundred. Nwakibie was indeed greater than his colleagues, a solid man, a man of substance who recognised the potential greatness in Okonkwo, and said as much. So he gave Okonkwo "twice four hundred". (p. 16). That was not all. "He (Okonkwo) hoped to get another four hundred yams from one of his father's friends at Isiuzo". (p. 16). In addition, the first four hundred seed yams he planted with the first rains "were his own, the harvest of the previous year". (p. 14). So, at the start of his farming efforts Okonkwo had one thousand six hundred seed yams. And it was not just sheer quantity that counted. The quality of the crop must be taken into consideration. While his mother and two sisters grew such crops like beans, cassava, and cocoa-yams, Okonkwo went for the very best — "Yam, the king of crops". (p. 16).

Okonkwo's people were known to be generous with their relatives, friends and neighbours, almost to the point of wasteful prodigality. Thus, during their annual New Yam Festival, so much food was cooked that "no matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relations they invited from neighbouring villages, there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day". (p. 26). The classical example of abundance at the New Yam Festival was the often told story of "a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other ..." (p. 26).

Similarly, Obierika (Okonkwo's friend) was a solid man who liked doing things the way they should be done. For the celebration of his daughter Akueke's *uri* to which the entire clan was invited, he had to send somebody all the way to Umuike market. "The market of Umuike is a wonderful place". It is so closely packed with people who come to buy and sell that "if you throw up a grain of sand it would not find a way to fall to the earth". (p. 79). That was the proper place to buy three very fat goats for the occasion: two to be

slaughtered for making the soup, and the giant one to be presented alive to his in-laws. Although the latter were known to be from a miserly village, they were aware they were dealing with a people of substance and were expected to bring at least thirty pots of palm wine. They eventually brought forty-five pots to the nodding approval of Obierika's people. Characteristically, from the beginning to the end, "Okonkwo never did things by halves". (p. 117). And so, instead of two goats' he killed three to thank his mother's people after his seven years of exile with them. "There was so much food and drink that many kinsmen whistled in surprise". (p. 117). "We all know him, and we expected a big feast. But it turned out to be even bigger than we expected". (p. 118).

Okonkwo's accomplishments were many. He was a very successful farmer both at Umuofia and at Mbanta during his period of exile there. "As the years of exile passed one by one, it seemed to him that his *chi* might now be making some amends for the past disaster. His yams grew abundantly, not only in his motherland but also in Umuofia, where his friend gave them out year by year to share-croppers". (p. 121). Okonkwo was also a great wrestler, in fact, "the greatest wrestler in all the land". (p. 19). It was a fame he acquired quite early in life when he threw "the Cat in the greatest contest within living memory". (p. 28). He was indeed "a great man whose prowess was universally acknowledged ..." (p. 27). At the last count as he was going into exile, he had three wives and eleven children (p. 91) and had already taken two titles. These were indeed "solid personal achievements".

They were called achievements because they were the results of hard-work and perseverance. Okonkwo's society crowned its heroes for having successfully overcome obstacles. It is very much like moral goodness which consists not in the uprightness of untested virtue, not in the sheltered life without trials and temptations, but rather in the successful triumph over those trials that come one's way. Okonkwo did not get there on a free ride. He had to pay his transport fare. He built up his barn by means of share-cropping, "a very slow way of building a barn of one's own. After all the toil one only got a third of the harvest". (p. 16). In addition, he had to feed his father, mother and two sisters "from his meagre harvest". (p. 16). There were still more obstacles on his way to greatness. There were all sorts of natural disasters the year he embarked on his barn building through share-cropping. It started with an unprecedented drought which claimed the first four hundred seed yams he had planted with the first rains. Although he had some consolation in the fact that the ruined seed yams were his own and not from the ones people gave him, it was also very discouraging to realize that he was like one who never before owned any seed yams. The natural disaster of that tragic year did not end with the

drought. It was coupled with another extremity of weather — too much rainfall. "Rain fell as it had never fallen before. For days and nights together, it poured down in violent torrents, and washed away the yam heaps". (p. 17). When it stopped pouring in torrents it continued to rain in drizzles for an extended period without the normal intermission that would have allowed the sunshine to get to the crops. This spelt another disaster for every experienced farmer knew "that without sunshine the tubers would not grow". (p. 17). It therefore came as no surprise that the harvest that year was a complete failure which affected adversely the fortunes of many a farmer. Some farmers "wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams". (p. 17). One farmer went as far as committing suicide. But Okonkwo was not the type of person to give up easily. He went into it with renewed energy. And then, when his efforts started paying off, and when he felt he was getting there, there was a detour. Another misfortune hit him: the accidental death of a clansman sent him into exile that was to last seven years. In addition, there was the destruction of all he had acquired up until then. It was as if his life came crashing down right before him. He now had three wives and eleven children to feed, and one thousand five hundred seed yams to start off a new life in a new environment. Age was also catching up with him. And besides, it is well known that "Yam, the king of crops, was a very exacting king". (p. 24). It demanded handwork and very close attention. Okonkwo was aware of it and that was why he felt that to be able to feed one's family "from one harvest to another" not with any cheap food stuff like beans, cassava and cocoa-yams, but with the king of crops, was no mean accomplishment. And so, if at the end of it all Okonkwo triumphed, it was not by luck but by hard work and perseverance. And that was why Achebe says that Okonkwo's palm-kernels had *not* "been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself ... If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo". (p. 19). That explains also why Okonkwo's clan "judged a man by the work of his hands". (p.19).

There is no doubt that Okonkwo's story is one of heroic success. A close look at the account, however, reveals different degrees of successes as well as different attitudes of the people towards achievements. The first thing that strikes one is the value Okonkwo himself attached to his achievements and to what people might think of him. Even though value is difficult to define, one can describe it loosely as that worth or estimation we place in people, things, events or actions because we find them intrinsically good in themselves, or more suitable in satisfying our needs or more worthy of drawing people's approval. Fundamentally, every value is subjective in the sense that each value is related to a person who as a subject does the valuing usually in comparison or preference to

something else. In a much more strict sense, a value is purely subjective when we show certain arbitrariness in our choices or preferences. In other words, a "thing has no intrinsic worth, at least for us, but we give it a value because of our peculiar prejudices, our psychological conditioning, our unaccountable tastes and fancies"[3]. There is a third sense in which value is subjective that is, when something has an intrinsic worth or quality but because of some "peculiar prejudices" or "psychological conditioning", an individual or a society places on it some exaggerated or undue estimation, thereby making it subjective in the sense of being personal to him or her. This is precisely what the present author sees as Okonkwo's attitude towards successes and failures in general and towards his and his father's in particular. When we speak about objective values in general, we refer to certain qualities that are good in themselves and that we have reason to believe are present in certain things. Here it is good to make a distinction between absolute objectivity and relative objectivity. It was stated above that every value is fundamentally subjective, consequently there is no absolutely objective value in the sense of a value that "does not contain a subjective component"[4] and has no "relation to a valuer". Nevertheless, values are objective in three important respects. In the first place, certain things possess certain qualities that make them more suitable to the satisfaction of certain needs or desires and so our reasons for preferring them are not arbitrary but based on the reality of things. Secondly, certain values are objective in the sense that under normal circumstances people do actually find these values most desirable. Such values as life, health, wealth and beauty are objective in these two senses. Finally, there is a third kind of objective value that is slightly different from the two preceding ones. Certain qualities are objectively present in things but are not easily appreciated or even recognised by all. One has to be of certain intellectual development and mental capacity to be able to appreciate them. Although they are not accessible to everybody, they are by no means arbitrary or subjective. On the contrary, they are more valuable than other values because they satisfy higher human needs, namely, the intellectual and the moral. They, thus, constitute an objective standard by which other values can be judged. Such values the author feels are like rare birds, they are found in remote places; and among Okonkwo's people such values are appreciated by very rare individuals like Obierika. In the light of the above, we can now return to our analysis of *Things Fall Apart*.

Even though Okonkwo's achievements were universally acknowledged, empirically observable, yet subjective meanings and motives can be read into them. He was consumed by a great passion to be a success and to be seen as successful. This is generally con-

sidered an Igbo common or national trait, a very intriguing phenomenon, considering the fact that the Igbo do not have an explicit word for the term "success" or "hero"[5]. Nevertheless, their whole life revolves around success or failure. "To succeed or not to succeed; that was the question confronting every Igbo man"[6]. However, the fact that every Igbo man writes success with capital letters does not by itself prove that success is an objective value; it may merely indicate an element of intersubjectivity. In Okonkwo's case, the craving for success went beyond the usual element of Igbo common characteristic and became a consuming passion. It was very important to him that he should never be like his father — a failure. The fear of failure and of being considered weak drove him to do certain things that normal people, free from such obsession, would not do. "To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength". (p. 20). One may add here that the strength in question was physical strength. It required a lot of moral courage and strength to resist an urge or suppress an impulse. But Okonkwo could not possibly understand nor appreciate this. He said and did certain things, not necessarily because they were good in themselves, but because he considered it manly to say or do them. In fact, some of the dispositions he deliberately cultivated (like anger) were not virtues at all. However, he considered them manly and therefore important. That was why he continued to beat his third wife Ojiugo during the Week of Peace even though he was being reminded that "it was the sacred week". He needed to sustain the impression that "Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way, not even for fear of a goddess". (p. 21). Even when he recognised he had done wrong and was repentant, "he was not the man to go about telling his neighbours that he was in error" (p. 22). The turning point of this obsession was his role in the death of Ikemefuna. Ezeulu, the oldest man in Okonkwo's quarter of Umuofia had earlier come to tell him that the gods had decreed that Ikemefuna must die, and advised Okonkwo not to participate in the killing because the boy called him father. Nevertheless, out of fear of being considered weak, "Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down". (p. 45). Sadly enough, it was the very moment the poor lad was running to him for protection. He could not diagnose correctly the remorse that overcame him after that horrible event. Instead, he felt that such feeling was to be found in "a shivering old woman" but not in Okonkwo, "known in all the nine villages for" his "valour in war". (p. 45). Similarly, he could not understand why his friend Obierika "refused to come with" them "to kill that boy". And then of course jumped to the conclusion that it must have been because he (Obierika) was afraid of blood. Then came the reply: "You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood;

and if any one tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families". (p. 46). Okonkwo could not understand how the goddess would punish him for obeying her decree. Then Obierika made a distinction between disputing the decree of the gods and being the one to execute it. The truth of the matter would seem to be that Okonkwo was so preoccupied with being considered manly and successful that he became blind to other values. When, therefore, we describe some of the values presented to us through Okonkwo as subjective, the main point being emphasized is the personal worth that Okonkwo attached to them. His colleagues, friends or relatives might not value them in the same way.

Some of the fears that drove him to do or avoid certain things were equally subjective in the same sense. Present in the consideration of any value is its polar opposite or corresponding disvalue. It might be more accurate therefore to say that Okonkwo was influenced by certain values as well as by their corresponding disvalues in a subjective manner. He enjoyed the fact that he was successful but he perhaps enjoyed more the fact that he was not a failure like his father. Consequently, at the bottom of this euphoria was a deep rooted fear, fear that his father's past failure might come back to plague him. And fear that his first son might turn out to be a disappointment. The fear was objectively founded but Okonkwo allowed his whole life to be dominated by it, to the point of becoming a near neurosis. Achebe gives some hints to the nature and extent of Okonkwo's fears. "Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic...." (p. 9). It was not normal fear that is more or less a dreadful emotion. It was a complicated psychological conditioning in which "Okonkwo was ruled by one passion — to hate everything that his father, Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (p. 10). This explains why Okonkwo was uneasy about festivals. His father loved festive occasions with the eating and drinking that went with them.

Besides, Okonkwo was basically a traditional hero and it is characteristic of traditional heroes that they were not polyvalent[7]. Thus, all Okonkwo's achievements have a common denominator — they are all related to physical prowess — he was a great farmer, wrestler and warrior. All of them could be seen as fundamentally belonging to the category of physical strength. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that our hero was not a hunter. "In fact he had not killed a rat with his gun". (p. 27). The only thing he very nearly

killed with it was his second wife whom he had just then beaten on a feast day for having "cut a few leaves off it (banana tree) to wrap some food", and who tried to taunt Okonkwo with his inability to hunt by referring to "guns that never shot". This incident reveals clearly the limitations of Okonkwo as a traditional hero even within the same range of physical prowess. It also shows how deeply sensitive Okonkwo was to anything associating him with failure. He could not stand being told that he was a failure when it came to the art of hunting. It is a well known fact that "occasions and the environment can make a brave man out of even a weakling"[8]. It is not difficult to imagine Okonkwo pushing himself beyond normal limits in order to succeed in life, in order to be one of the lords of the land; to distance himself and his children, both sons and daughters, from any trace of failure from the less successful and particularly from the memory of his father's failure. Both success and failure add some personal flavour to the story of Okonkwo's life, and from that point of view are subjective, even though they are based on things that were tangible and empirically observable.

The admiration Okonkwo's people had for obvious and observable achievements was so conspicuous and "loud" that the impression is often created of a purely materialistic society that had no room nor sympathy for the less successful and the less pushful. This impression is reinforced by the names they give to their children, Maduka, Akukalia, Nwakibie, names with comparative and superlative prefixes and suffixes indicative of a society dominated by the spirit of competition and challenge. But there were also other values, unadvertised, but at the same time more "solid" in the sense of being more enduring and stable than some of Okonkwo's vaunted achievements; and more valuable in the sense of being the judge of other values. Among the Igbo the wise man is preferred to the hero even at the time of war: "That is why in spite of his strength, courage, ability, superhuman attribute ... *oka ilolo* is preferred to the *dike,* at all times, including wartime"[9]. The *oka ilolo* or the wise man is the reasonable fellow and not the merely logical individual. He is the reflective type, possessed of objective knowledge in the sense of a correct perception of the true situation one has to deal with, including not only the true nature of things and events, but also the proper relation between them. He has also a correspondingly judicious response proper to any case that arises. In the case of Rev. Brown it was a matter of knowing what the people of Umuofia believed in, deep down in their inward being either as friends or foes before he could adequately respond to the occasion or devise a proper strategy. In the case of Obierika, it was a much more comprehensive wisdom. He was the embodiment of the objective values and virtues of Okonkwo's people. He was a successful man, more successful than Okonkwo. He had

already taken the ozo title, but did not make a big show of his successes. One of his sons Maduka, might turn out to be the future wrestling champion of Umuofia and yet he was quite modest about it. This is a very interesting situation because modesty is akin to humility which is generally considered a Christian virtue in the sense that most of the pagan civilizations in the West before Christ had been known to regard pride as a virtue and humility or modesty as a vice or disvalue. It is also a known fact that many Igbo both past and present including Okonkwo are known to be lacking in modesty and humility. So Obierika stood out as an ideal. He exemplified the model of friendship, taking care of Okonkwo's yams during his seven years of exile; and helping him "build two huts in his old compound where he and his family would live until he built more huts ..." (p. 115), and not wanting even explicit thanks for all the troubles he took. As far as he was concerned, that was expected of him as a true friend.

Obierika, a reflective type, able to see things more clearly than most, noticed that Okonkwo was worrying too much about the future of his first son Nwoye. Okonkwo could not understand how Ogbuefi Ndulue could have one mind with his wife Ozoemena to the extent that "He could not do anything without telling her", and at the same time be a strong man (pp. 47 & 48). Obierika on the other hand saw no contradiction in that, and confirmed categorically that "He (Ogbuefi Ndulue) led Umuofia to war in these days" (p. 48). Okonkwo was a man of instant justice, of unreflecting frantic activity who saw the answer to the problem posed by the white man's presence, only in terms of the unity of Umuofia and the chasing of the white man out of town. Obierika, on the other hand, saw more clearly the situation facing his society, the complexity of the problem created by the presence of the white man. He felt that simply driving the white men out of town would not pose a major problem since there were only two of them. The more difficult problem was what to do with those relatives of theirs who had joined the white men, their religion and their government. The situation was quite complex. If Umuofia tried to kill the two white men as the people of Abame did, what happened to Abame would also happen to her — a total extinction. If they tried to kill their own relatives that would be a crime against the land. A deeper problem was the falling apart of the people of Umuofia brought about by the presence of the white man. "How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is clever .... Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (p. 145). It is not be accident that Achebe put into the mouth of this unassuming reflective thinker the motif of the entire novel: "We have fallen apart".

Achebe goes beyond that. He makes Obierika's standard of judgement the voice of reason and of morality, and therefore, superior to the dictates of religion and of the capricious gods. It is possible for something to be logical in the sense of being consistent without necessarily being reasonable or moral. Thus, it was considered strange by the Igbo for human beings to give birth to more than one off-spring at a time, a phenomenon quite common among the lower species. In fact, it is still considered fortunate among this people for one's pig to give birth to a litter of several piglets at a time. Since the same phenomenon is unusual among human beings, it was considered evil. The reasoning was quite logical and consistent: Only lower species of animals give birth to more than one off-spring at a time, so it must be evil for human beings to do so. And so their thinking moved from there to the killing of twins. Obierika saw through all that. He also saw through the illogicality and the inconsistency of some of their laws and customs. He distinguished clearly between the requirements of a religious decree and a moral obligation, and felt that if a conflict occurred between them the ethical should take precedence over the religious. Unfortunately the capricious gods must be placated, otherwise their wrath would descend not only on the guilty but on the entire clan, a situation Obierika found unacceptable because it was both unreasonable and unfair and therefore fundamentally unethical.

Conclusion:

What Achebe is saying amounts to this: that even though life and health are objective values, they are not the highest value, they are not as highly rated among the Igbo as "solid personal achievements" which are actually *"revered"*. It is true that one has to live long enough and remain sufficiently healthy to be able to accomplish anything significant. The importance of longevity is highlighted within the background of the Ogbanje experience: the cycle of births, deaths and subsequent rebirths. "Ekwefi had suffered a good deal in her life. She had borne ten children and nine of them had died in infancy, usually before the age of three". (p. 54). So there is no doubt about the value of life and health. More significant however was what one did with his or her life. Living to a mature old age without anything to show for it did not impress the people much. The fact that people risked their own lives for others like Ekefi's night of ordeal showed the relative value of life. Success, we are told, was much more important. However, the mere abundance of visible property was not enough for one to be considered successful. It was important to consider how one acquired his or her property. Besides, one had to exercise some

restraint in the pursuit of success. And having succeeded, one must know how to enjoy his or her success without conceit, and without a neurotic fear of losing it all to a subsequent generation of unmanly descendants. This was a situation that created in Okonkwo a very subjective disposition towards objective conditions.

Still higher in the scale of values is the power of discernment, the ability to comprehend the true nature of things and events and the essential relationship between them. It is a capacity developed through the habit of reflection, the application of which ranges from the judgement of simple daily events and activities to the more complex relation between man and the gods. Thus the people of Abame did not discern properly what the Oracle meant by saying that the white man "would break their clan and spread destruction among them" (p. 97). Similarly, Okonkwo did not distinguish between disobeying the command of the gods and not being the one to actually execute it. Nor did he ever reflect upon the possibility that the laws of the land might pose a problem of, not only logic and consistency, but also of morality and justice.

It is ironic that Nwoye who was the source of so much heartache to his father for not being the kind of manly son he would have liked him to be, displayed a more discerning disposition and a better understanding of certain important things and events than his father. When he was younger, he preferred the type of nocturnal stories his mother told them, stories full of ethical meaning, to the violent and bloody narratives from his father. He was greatly disturbed by the cry of twins abandoned in the Evil Forest. He could not accept the death of Ikemefuna. So when the Christians arrived in his neighbourhood wth their own explanations of events and things, he first listened to them and then made up his mind that they had better answers than his own society to the questions that disturbed his mind.

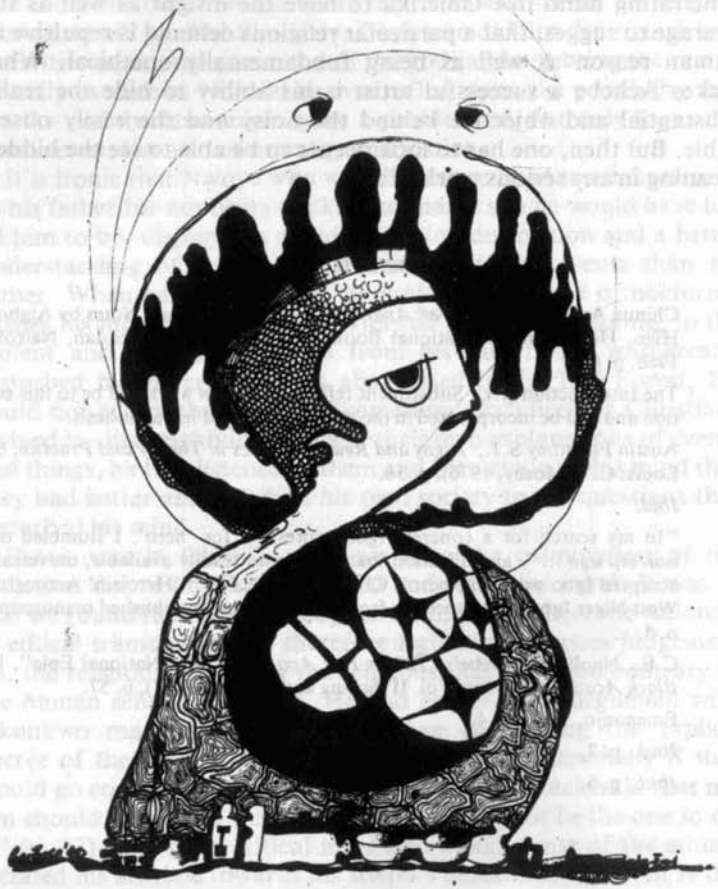
But it was in Obierika that we have the culmination of the judicious disposition in a balanced and reflective mind. It was in him we found the climax of objective standard, where the rationally ethical transcends, and therefore legitimately passes judgement on, the religious, especially the religious that appeared contrary to the human sense of fairness. He had earlier in an argument with Okonkwo made a distinction between challenging the explicit decree of the gods and mindlessly executing it, expecially if that would go contrary to natural piety. "But if the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it" (p. 47). The same critical mind and a high sense of the ethical dictated his attitude towards his friend's banishment, as well as the people's treatment of twins. Achebe sums it up in a long passage:

> Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his *obi* and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? .... He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land nd not just on the offender. (p. 87).

Here the critical and reflective mind questions the morality of a bad and an unjust command coming from the capricious gods. This amounts to saying that a religious obligation can sometimes fail to satisfy the dictates of morality. It would require a deep and penetrating mind like Obierika to have the insight as well as the courage to suggest that a particular religious demand is repulsive to human reason as well as being fundamentally unethical. What makes Achebe a successful artist is his ability to hide the really substantial and objective behind the noisy and the easily observable. But then, one has to look deeper to be able to see the hidden meaning in any serious work of art.

FOOTNOTES

1. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, with Introduction and Notes by Aigboje Higo, Heinemann Educational Books Limited, London, Ibadan, Nairobi, 1986, p. 6.
2. The Introduction p.v. Subsequent references to this work will be to this edition and will be incorporated in the text and enclosed in parenthesis.
3. Austin Fagothey S.J., *Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1976), p. 56.
4. *Ibid.*
5. "In my search for a concrete Igbo expression for 'hero', I stumbled on *otu/etu ugo ...*", an indication that there is no readily available, universally accepted Igbo word for 'hero'. Cf Emenanjo E.N., " 'Heroism' Among the West Niger Igbo: A perspective from Orature", an unpublished manuscript, p. 5.
6. C.E., Nnolim "Achebe's *Things Fall Apart:* An Igbo National Epic", in *Black Academy Review*, Vol. II (Spring and Summer 1971), p. 57.
7. Emenanjo, *Ibid.*, p. 4.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 6.



'PEACE OFFERING'
— Barthosa Nkurumeh, 1990., Pen/Ink.

Joseph Bruchac, III

OSNABRUCH
Hinter dem Felde

The prints of a roe deer
splayed into spring earth
a map leading into
the old heart of this land
at the edge of a field
flowing green into rye

& later, black-backed
as shadow
dark tail twitching a message
above its white, rump
we see that deer's brother
grazing beneath
the wide wings of a kite
measuring the sunset

the grey and black feathers
from the tail of a killed pigeon
flutter the evening

& a thousand new songs
from birds never heard before
blend with that wind
to lead me further
down roads of vision

more ancient than
the great sacred linden trees
which remember circling fires

FIRST DAY IN EUROPE
for Hartmut Lutz

At the edge of a plowed field
near Osnabruck

A man bends his knee to moist earth
its touch is dark
piercing as a note of music

He places his hand
in the track of a roe deer

A bird whose name he did not yet know
before it spread wide wings in flight
carries his eyes up over the hill
towards the west

When he speaks
the names of the deer
he speaks the names
of his family

BULL AUROCH

In the Hannover Zoo
I was stopped by the pose
of a great horned bull
its head raised and proud,
its legs stretched forward and back
still as if frozen in time
like a painting on stone.

I saw in that moment
that its shape
was that of those drawn in the caves
colors coming out of darkness
by the smoky torches' light.

All of human time
compressed into a moment
when those ancient beings
which sustained the old hunters
stretch again their limbs
the great Brown Bear,
the wind-shagged Horse,
the Moose and the Elk
stepping over the years,
a hundred thousand seasons
no more than a single drop of water
falling from stone down onto stone.

And in the torch light
the still face of this man
who crouches, his hand

cradling a spear or a pen,
his heart singing, singing this gift.

AT ONE A.M. IN EAST BERLIN

Returning home,
towards the west,
the taxi speeds
down empty street.
Only a few lovers
are out, a boy and girl
holding each other,
in arms and eyes.

The river Spree winds
between banks which are
the same on either side.

In the sky where the Sun
disappeared,
taking with it the light
we see the face
of that old one who walks at night,
Grandmother Moon.

then, thinking
of yesterday,
moving towards tomorrow,
I say a small prayer

Grandmother, lead us,
lead us back.
We travel on
your silver path.
Our hearts grow stronger
from your light.

CROSSING INTO WEST GERMANY

There are borders in earth
and lines on maps
colors and barriers,
human names
stuck to the land
as if the soil

could speak
our tongues,
as if the hawks
looking down in long
flight
saw nations, not havens
among hills and forests,
places to live, to hunt,
care for their young.

But the wind still blows
from the western sky
across the wall into Berlin
and soil that is sifted
through the hands
of farmers on each side
responds the same to drought and rain.

Ask me now what nation
I belong to
and I will answer
in a song without words,
the language all
our ancestors spoke,
one learned from the flow
of clear streams towards the sea,
from the birds giving praise
to each new dawn.

Chukwudi Anthony Njoku

DEATH HAS FLED

Courage!
Death,
has fled your neighbourhood,
never to return.

Were an academic epidemic
to descend on this dungeon,
its mortal lashes,
will fear,
the hot Vengeance,
of the Careful Midwife,
that delivered such plump babies
who bear your name.

Look,
see,
the new shrine,
by every homestead...
dazzling in the sunshine,
fluttering with fresh feathers
of generous sacrifice,
frothing with new wine,
poured in thankful libation
gorgeously smeared with red blood
of willing lambs.
Behold a new shrine,
a great ancestor is born!

Chinua,
Death has fled your neighbourhood,
never to return.

'TITLED ELDERS'
— Barthosa Nkurumeh

Chima Anyadike

ACHEBE AND THE TRUTH OF FICTION

Chinua Achebe in his latest novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*,[1] undertakes a bold, imaginative exploration of important issues which are either absent or not developed in his earlier fictional work and which because of their importance, this essay seeks to highlight and comment upon. The most important of these are: the root cause of the abysmal failure of contemporary African governments, the problems raised by and some of the shortcomings of the different forms that struggle takes given this failure and finally, the different roles in this struggle of firstly, women, described in the novel as "the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world" (p. 98) and secondly, artists (more specifically, novelists) in whose "new-found utterance our struggle will stand reincarnated before us" (p. 125) and whose "lies do no harm to anyone" but "float on the top of a story like the white bubbling at the pot-mouth of new palm-wine," the true juice of which "lies coiled up inside, waiting to strike...". (p. 125)

Since Achebe is primarily a novelist, we are naturally led, given these preoccupations, to deliberate on his "new-found utterance" or as the title of this essay suggests, truth of his fiction. But first, we must remind ourselves that the search for the truth of fiction involves more than a test for verisimilitude or exact correspondence between life and fiction. After all, the truth of fiction, arising from the creative order of the imagination, differs from the truth of life which arises from lived human experience.

If this were not so, then we would be at a loss to decide on what constifutes the truth of life that the truth of fiction must correspond to. Is it not one distinguishing feature of fiction that in contradistinction to life, its truth does have degrees of completeness and may, given the limits of its concerns, aspire to the "whole truth"? The point then is that in fiction, more than in life, we expect not mere correspondence to life, but also consistency and completeness. It is because of these qualities that fictional worlds, through the process of empathy, can engage in the mind of the reader, the world of everyday, thus enlarging that mind and imparting to it, disciplines so useful for the successful and mutually beneficial enounters and identifications with others.

This leads us to the root cause of the failure of African leaders and governments, as Achebe explores it through the perennial tragedy of bad leadership in Kangan of his novel. The visit of the taxi drivers to Ikem provides the occasion for the clarification of this matter in his thoughts:

> The prime failure of this government began also to take on a clearer meaning for him. It can't be the massive corruption though its scale and pervasiveness are truly intolerable; it isn't the subservience to foreign manipulaltion, degrading as it is: it isn't even this second-class hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed; nor is it the damnable shooting of striking railway-workers and demonstrating students and the destruction and banning thereafter of independent unions and co-operatives. *It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nations being. (p. 141)* (my emphasis).

This thinking provides the structural principle guiding the form of this novel; its plot, characters, point of view, symbol and even tone derive from the need to demonstrate the consequences of that failure. The actions leading to the conflicts and their resolution in the novel are centred around the determination of an alienated leadership to arrogate to itself proprietory rights over the state power. Power becomes, not an instrument for the transformtion of society, but a possession for self glorification. With the possible exception of Ikem, are the principal characters of this novel still able to relate meaningfully and interact successfully with ordinary people of Kangan, the Elewas the Braimoh's? Where are their families? Witness how Chris lacks the simple common sense he requires to successfully go through a police check point!! What does the President's Guest house, the retreat at Abichi, symbolise? And the cacophony of pretentious, self-conscious points of view providing targets for the savage ironical tone of the entire novel? It all adds up to the grand self delusion of a bunch of alienated characters living in an alienated world. When, therefore, the bubble disappears and another begins to form, it is only Beatrice and a few others who have been prepared to see through it all clearly. And so with them, as anthills of the Savannah, the reader realizes the first truth of Achebe's fiction:

> This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented... (p. 232).

But after this realization, can Beatrice, Emmanuel and Abdul significantly change anything in Kangan? What is to be done? We are therefore led to consider Achebe's views of struggle.

There seem to be three options which we may broadly designate: revolution, reformism and cynical resignation to the situation. Again, we may safely assume that Ikem, the novelist and editor of National Gazette, expresses some of Achebe's views on these matters[2]. He is disturbed by his observations — confirmed by his encounter with the taxi-drivers — of "... a tolerance verging on admiration by the trudging-jigger-toed oppressed for the Mercedes-

Benz-driving, private-jet-flying, luxury-yacht-cruising oppressor. An insistence by the oppressed that his oppression be performed in style!" (pp 138-9) He, therefore, wonders whether any half measures could hope to cure that diseased propensity among the generality of the people, instead of "a root and branch attack". (p. 138). But then he knows that ".... in dictatorships of the proletariat where roots have already been dug up and branches hacked away, an atavistic tolerance seems to linger, quite unexpectedly, for the stylishness of dachas and special shops etc. etc., for the revolutionary elite". (p. 139). He therefore considers that "what is at issue in all this may not be systems after all but a basic human failing that may only be alleviated by a good spread of general political experience, slow of growth and obstinately patient...." (p. 139). He had earlier on written in that "Strange love letter" to Beatrice:

> ...There is a universal conglomerate of the oppressed. Free people may be alike everywhere in their freedom, but the oppressed inhabit each their own peculiar hell. The present orthodoxies of deliverance are futile to the extent that they fail to recognize this...
>
> Experience and intelligence warn us that man's progress in freedom will be piecemeal, slow and undramatic. Revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable stretch of quagmire, but it does not confer freedom and may indeed hinder it. (p. 99).

In this view then, cynicism and apathy stand strongly condemned, and contrary to general beliefs, revolutions are at best half measures that solve immediate problems. Reform, it is claimed "is the most promising route to success in the real world". (p. 99). But there is a problem here. Isn't Ikem in his various activities, the crusading editorials, the speech at the University of Bassa on the imperative of struggle, his entire life-style and the risks of opposing the government, a revolutionary in the best sense of that word? Is revolution synonymous with orthodxy and always limited to "the sweeping majestic visions of people rising victorious like a tidal wave against their oppressors and transforming their world with theories and slogans into a new heaven and a new earth of brotherhood, justice and freedom"? (p. 99) Isn't it true that "a good spread of general political experience, slow of growth and obstinately patient" (p. 139) concretizes through the accumulated influences on people's psyche over the years of both individual and collective revolutionary acts? In other words, that any significant input into this experience results from the quality and usefulness of lives lived individually and collectively? We may, therefore, consider the view that revolutionaries are defined not so much by their beliefs in the instant transfornation of their societies through a "root and branch attack", as how they come by the understanding of their lives as leaving them with only two real

alternatives, namely, a meaningless life full of unnecessary and demeaning sufferings and a principled death which has a chance to make a real contribution to Ikem's "good spread of general political experience". The reformist believes of course that it never comes to just these two extreme alternatives and is therefore content with rearranging "some details in the periphery of the human personality" (p. 100) the core of which is irreducible and unchangeable. For him, revolutions are not only unnecessary but may in fact be dangerous and there is enough evidence in world history to show that this is so. Afterall, people are not equally awake or equally conscious of the significance of immediate experience. Why does the wise old man advise the Abazon people in Bassa to leave Ikem alone? Suppose the reformer is right and the revolutionary may be needlessly throwing away his life and those of others, which in this view, can never be completely rendered meaningless by oppression? On the other hand is there something in the view that the source of power for the true revolutionary lies in his transcendence of the dichotomy between life and death? Is this the meaning of Ikem's death and the birth of Amaechina?

This brings us back to our original question: Why does Ikem choose to die a revolutionary death, for he does have the choice to remain silent (as Chris and Beatrice advised) after his suspension as editor of National Gazette? I suggest that the answer lies in the truth of Achebe's fiction. In spite of what Ikem or Achebe may think on the value of revolutions, it would have been out of character for Ikem to "lie low" rather than speak his mind at the University or support the delegation from Abazon, actions which he clearly knows are courting his death in the circumstances. He deliberately makes that choice and thereby distinguishes himself from Chris, who as a reformer, becomes a naive victim of circumstances. The difference of character between Chris and Ikem is so fundamental and crucial that it invites a comparison of the two friends. It is no accident that Ikem's life and career have a positive and decisive impact on the lives, not only of other characters in the novel, but the people of Kangan in general. If he thinks as a reformer, but lives as a revolutionary, it is not only because like Walt Whitman or Graham Greene, he contains "multitudes" and "feels in his blood the ultimate enmity between art and orthodoxy;" (p. 100) and that "revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable quagmire"; (p. 99) the reader is also thereby prepared for another truth of Achebe's fiction, namely, that we should expect difficulty in all attempts to pattern life even to the advantage of others. If this is so in fiction which in its wholeness and consistency approximates to the 'whole truth" within its universe, it is even more so in real life which is a flux of

contradictions.

What emerges from all this, therefore, is that Achebe and Ikem are not against revolutions but against orthodox, text book revolutions. The revolutions that have lasting value for them do not come from great organised movements involving gun-carrying armies with banners and manifestoes, or the so-called trade union workers and peasants, but from the emergence of new kinds of persons and communities brought together by similar interpretations of life experiences. Ikem, Beatrice, Captain Abdul, Elewa, Braimoh, Emmanuel are individually and collectively emerging new persons brought about by the dying, putrefying leaves and stalks of Sam and his functionaries. To carry the image further, the whole point of struggle is to ensure that the new mutations obser vable in these new seeds are provided the right environment for growth and fructification. The fruit expected seems to be nothing more than a deep respect for the human person underlying and determining behaviour at the individual, social and governmental levels of life organisation.

From this *sine qua non* of all human activity, we go directly into another major theme of Achebe's novel: the role of the artist, specifically the story-teller or the novelist, in the struggles of his people. The old man from Abazon tells us that "Agwu picks his disciple, rings his eye with white chalk and dips his tongue, willing or not, in the brew of prophecy; and right away, the man will speak and put head and tail back to the severed trunk of our tale. This miracle man will amaze us because he may be a fellow of little account, not the bold warrior we all expect, nor even the war-drummer. But is his new-found utterance, our struggle will stand reincarnated" (p. 125). The old man in his wisdom decided that of the three parts of struggle; sounding the battle drum, the fierce waging of the war itself and the telling of the story afterwards, important as each is to the struggle, the telling of the story afterward is the most important part because it is the story that "can continue beyond the war and warrior" and "Save our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence". (p. 124). Does the old man forget that, as Fanon puts it, every generation must discover its mission and either fulfil or betray it? Is the war between Umuaro and Okperi of *Arrow of God* for instance, fundamentally different from the war the Ikems, the Emmanuels and the Beatrices of Kangan have to fight? In his wisdom, the old man may have sensed that this objection to his hierarchy of elements of struggle will arise and so takes care of it with his story of the leopard and the tortoise. The import of that story leads to another truth of Achebe's fiction which is that struggle which is essentially between two unequal forces, will probably go on as long as there is life and that the weaker force, in order to go on in the

struggle, needs the craftiness of the tortoise as well as the knowledge of how its predecessors put up the fight. This makes the task of the story-teller central. And when we remember that apart from struggles against oppression, human beings as long as they exist, engage in other struggles, for example against the elements, for love and recognition, which the old man did not mention, it becomes even more glaring, the need that the human society has for the story-teller who throws a lot of light on the intricacies of the relationships involved in all of life's struggles. One important significance of Achebe's literary career is his varying artistic restatement of the view that how positive our life is, depends on how we handle the other side of the coin of human experience which we cannot wish out of existence especially as human history points to its formidable force. It would appear that to Achebe, any blue prints or recipes for handling these negative forces lie outside the proper concerns of the artist and story teller whose proper province is to provide insightful renderings of the activities of the human species which political leaders, activists, scientists or revolutionaries, among other groups of people, may benefit from. Yet he would acknowledge that an artist or story teller, if he has the ability and the opportunity may also be a political leader of his people. One may agree, of course, with all these and yet point out that a good story may leave its readers in the cold, indifferent, apathetic or it may inspire them to act on their condition. And that the reason this happens may depend on whether the story is 'reflectionist' or 'refractionist' (or both) of the human and social realities. many critics have therefore offered the view that Achebe's stories may make one wiser about human conditions in Africa but that it is another matter whether they can inspire one to do something about those conditions. Perhaps there ought to be some kind of division of labour even among story tellers! I do, however, believe, to come back to our *Anthills* ... that Ikem and Beatrice, whatever their shortcomings as middleclass individualistic characters, may inspire progressive thought and action among members of their class.

Be it as it may, the mention of other kinds of struggles, like love, immediately brings to mind the kind of human beings often central to them and whose power is often ignored to man's detriment. I refer of course, to women. It is, therefore, not accidental that Beatrice is the most developed character who plays a crucial role in the action of the novel. Achebe uses her to typify the denigration of women from the beginning of human societies and the progressive realization by men, that women should not only be free of oppression based purely on their sex but assume roles in the running of society that are more timely and constructive than those of "a fire brigade after the house has caught fire and been virtually consumed". (p. 97). From the circumstance of her birth to parents who

desperately wanted a male child after three female ones, her childhood experiences of her father's oppression of her mother, through humiliating experiences in the hands of a boy friend, Beatrice manages to preserve her dignity through the help of Ikem and others. She is thus able to go beyond the oppression of women by men and women by women so that her growing relationships with Ikem, Chris, Agatha, Elewa and her performance at the head of state's party exemplify the positive and constructive role of women in the overall struggles of life. If we ignore this role or underrate the powers of Idemili and our daughters like that randy Nwakibie in the traditional story, then our societies, like that of Kangan, will continue to go round in circles. That is yet another truth that comes out of Achebe's fiction. Okonkwo ignored it in *Things Fall Apart* to his detriment. Perhaps only Ikem and Beatrice have come to fully recognize it.

This leads us finally to a comment on the form of Achebe's new novel. In his earlier novels, an omniscient narrator tells how the more powerful communal ethic checks the extravagances of haughty individualism (Okonkwo, Ezeulu) or how the powerlessness of that ethic in a non-tribal setting either helps in its consequences to mature a character like Odili Kamalu or is exploited with disastrous results (Chief Nanga, Obi Okonkwo). *A Man of the People,* indeed, signalled the death of the power of tribal community with its unified vision of life and values. What we find in this new novel, therefore are the beginnings of a new community which at this stage is not unified in terms of accepted values and dominant world view but which is nevertheless "stronger than kindred or mere friendship". (p. 218). We are told that:

> Like old kinships this one was pledged also on blood. It was not, however, blood flowing safe and inviolate in its veins but blood casually spilt and profaned (p. 218).

How that blood is casually 'spilt and profaned' is variously told in that novel by intellectuals, women, taxi-drivers, old people, and traditional myths that may come from the Igbo culture, but which have equivalents in other cultures. The ommiscient narrator and the egotistic hero of the earlier novels thus concede to the power of collective heroism. In the end, it is only the truth of fiction that can make the power of Chris' "spilt and profaned' blood bring together such unlikely companions and strangers like Beatrice, Elewa, Buraimoh, Adamma, Emmanuel and Captain Abdul together in Beatrice's house for "weeks and months" empathising with and sharing each others fortunes, and even engaging in a little "ecumenical fraternization". (p. 224). If we, the readers of this novel, also share in these truths, it is because literary truth is universal truth. And there may be a point in the view that the

greatness of art may possibly reside in its unreality[3]. What is more, is it not true, as Beatrice observes at the end of this beautiful novel, that truth is beauty? It is becoming increasingly inevitable for a meaningful survival that we increase the osmotic pressure that makes it possible for such beauty to pass on from fiction into our lives. The importance of Achebe's new novel lies in its demonstration of the consequences of not letting the truths of fiction transform the truths of life.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (London: Heinemann, 1987). All references are to the Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Ltd. (Ibadan 1988) edition.
2. A reading of many Achebe's essays and interviews reveals so much of Achebe in Ikem's thoughts.
3. See Oscar Cargill's "The Validity of Literature" in *An Introduction to Short Fiction and Criticism*, ed. by Emil Hurtik and Robert Yarber, (Massachussets: Xerox Corp, 1971).

Larweh Therson-Cofie

MIDNIGHT

The Artist draws up beautiful countenances
Of ugly and horrible faces;

The Photographer puts masks
Upon the front of the humankind;

The Poet and the Prophet
Sing of love and bliss
In a tragedy of hate and woe:

The Vocalist drowns audience
And the Drummers, dancers
In a quagmire of filth and fuck;

The Verdure of the Earth Mother
Sags and withers
And the Milky Clouds of the Silvery Azure
Turns sour.

The Tomb gives up its ghosts
The River flows in blood
And the noon-day Sub turns dark
And dies.

HERITAGE

In the Stone Age
Man slept in stone

In the Iron Age
Man buried himself in iron.

In the Electronic Age
Man electrocuted his mind.
In the psychoronic and Mental Age
Man killed his soul
And disinherited the Earth.

In the Golden Age
Man returns to Earth
From Spirits, source of his being.

Nwatabu Okantah

BREAKFAST AT THE IBIS

each morning
she slips in a side door.
only i notice her.
circumstances make me
a willing accomplice.

hungry people roam streets
everywhere
in this world.
in picture post card
London, they
haunt train stations,
Bobbies herd them up from underground:

she stands,
still,
statue-like, mindful
not to disturb
the thick European air;
India beauty,
battered,
too far from home
to be hungry in strange lands.

English, American, French, German
tourists breakfast
at the Ibis.
they have European eyes.
they do not see her.
they stare;
pretend they do not see me.

through white shadows
only i notice
she has dance-dared
to move about the buffet now.
our eyes meet.
she makes her way to my table.
invisible,
we both eat ...

AFRICAN TREE

Nigeria's giant silk cottonwood,
massive,
mystifying, majestic,
standing the tallest tree in the forest.

mighty tree, how many rains,
how many dry seasons
have you wind-song weathered?
how many times
have your leaves whispered
the stories of black ages?

talk to me old African tree,
tell me our story
from unknown pages.
talk to me,
master of the forest tree,
standing tall,
greyish green white against the horizon.

teach me to stand Nigerian tree.
your kidnapped now
lost children
are in need of tall trees
to grow masters of a hostile forest.

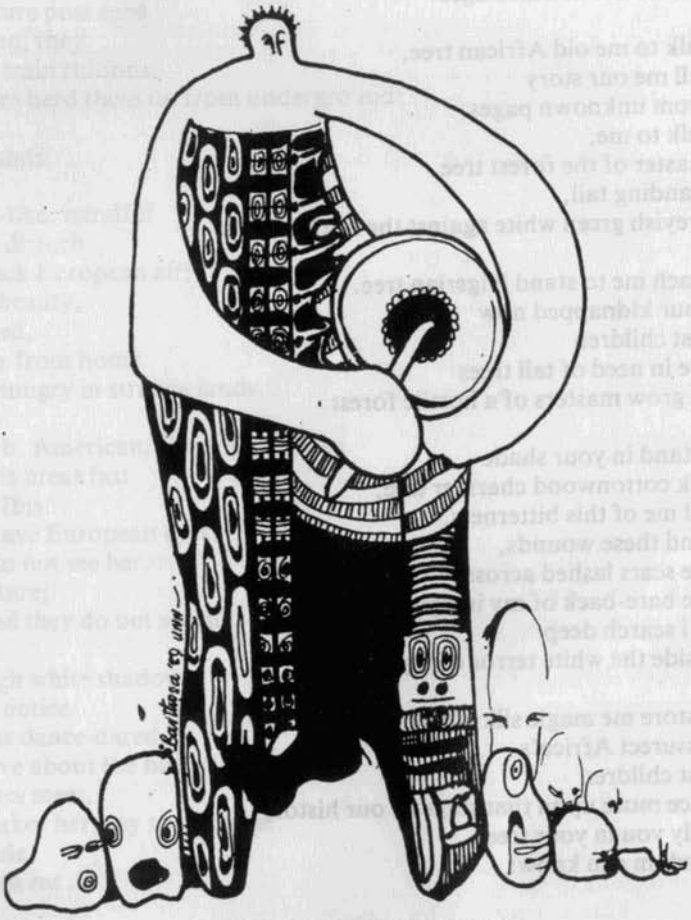
i stand in your shade
silk cottonwood charmer tree,
rid me of this bitterness,
bind these wounds,
the scars lashed across
the bare-back of my imagination
as i search deep
inside the white terror of my wonder.

restore me magic silk cotton,
ressurect Africa's
lost children
once more upon that stage of our history
only you in your tree-
wisdom can know:

grant me harmony
old African tree, protect me
inside the Ogbunike
black warmth of your long shadows.

i stand before you ancestral tree,
envelop me in
the darkness of your
Niger area
love ...

Afreeka



'COMMUNICATION SIDELOAD'
— Barthosa Nkurumeh, 1989.

J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada,

THE SHORT STORY AS A REPOSITORY OF THE SOCIAL HISTORIES OF TWO THIRD WORLD CULTURES: SAMUEL SELVON AND CHINUA ACHEBE

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, in that gray vault: The sea. The Sea has locked them up. The sea is History.
>
> — Derek Walcott

The above epigraph refers to the nexus of heritage between the Caribbean and Africa. The slave trade which led to the colonization of the Caribbean islands, but left the inhabitants bemused, is what Walcott poeticises in the above passage. For the Africans who have no direct experience of being uprooted from their ancestral home, it is colonialism that represents the source of the erasure of their own "tribal memory". However, the people of the Caribbean have the singular misfortune of having been taken away from their original cultural milieu, and thereafter colonized. The sea that Walcott says is history is ironically not the fertilizing one; it marks one big "gray vault" which the divided peoples have not yet realized ought to be probed. If the sea has not completely locked up the monuments and battles and martyrs, it has at least slowed down our mutual recognition of the links that bind us.

In spite of the exiguity of interaction between Africa and the Caribbean, there is, in their works of art, particularly literature, a spontaneous similarity of vision, apperception and approach to their common memory. Literature by its very nature is an evocation of social ethos, a re-creation of history and experience, a crucible of unique sentiments about a people. Anyone reading the literatures of the oppressed peoples of the world would easily pick this common social consciousness. This is not surprising, considering that "people of the same period and community, who have lived through the same events, who have raised or avoided the same questions, have the same taste in their mouth; they have the same complicity, and there are the same corpses among them" (Sartre, p. 50). The truth is that the artistic vista which seems to establish the interrelatedness of the heritages of Africa and the Caribbean is the peoples' common texture of social history which their writers cloak in poetic humour.

In this short paper, I intend to narrow my obervations to the short stories of two prominent Third World writers: Samuel Selvon and Chinua Achebe. Both are pioneer writers in their respective

regions, and each has as much as possible evoked the lives of his people in novels and short fiction. In the writings of the two novelists, the fate of their peoples—Trinidadians and Nigerians—at a crucial stage in their evolution has remained a central concern. Faced with a dire desire to re-create the social histories of their peoples, the two writers have had to temporarily abandon the long fiction and resort to the *pètit* tale. Perhaps their decision to do this has much to do with the realization that "in the short story, as in the poem, the writer trains his light intensely on a single concentrated moment, and in the process uses flashes to illuminate trait of behaviour for that brief awesome speel" (Mphahlele, p. 11). In trying to illuminate a "trait of behaviour", a people's social history is often called to question because whether the behaviour under portraiture is personal or public, the very foundation of society's cultural and philosophical matrix is evoked. By 'social history' one is referring to the structure and process of human actions and inactions as well as interactions as they have taken place in sociocultural context, especially in relation to a people's historical and cultural experiences. In their stories, Selvon and Achebe reveal in depth and detail very intimate areas of human experience even if such experiences are often limited to a comparatively short-span, owing to its mode of narration. As social history deals with the story of how people have lived, of what they have eaten, worn or done for a living, of their homes and habits, of their beliefs and superstitions, their pleasures, their manner of speech, their arts, etc. *(Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences,* P. 455), so do we find in the short stories of these two writers composite pictures of the existential environment of Trinidad and Nigeria (particularly the Igbo area) at the instance of their experience of slavery, colonialism and the aftermath of an inferiorized culture.

A socio-historical question that is still as important as it was a few centuries back when slaves were imported into the Caribbean islands from various parts of the world is that of colour. Having come from disparate roots, the inhabitants have tended to see themselves as an inferior hotch-potch of citizens. George Lamming captures this fact in the following passage in *The Emigrant* (1954);

> England, France, Spain all of them, them vomit up what them didn't want, an' the vomit settle there in that Caribbean Sea. It mix up with the vomit them make Africa vomit, an' the vomit them make India vomit an' China an' nearly every race under the sun... (67)

In any event, Selvon's Trinidadian characters use every opportunity to question the second rate slot into which the White Legacy in their country had sought to place them. The white personas either look down on them or take them for granted. However, people like Sookdeo in "Johnson and the Cascadura" will oppose a white man

for making love advances to their daughter. Johnson—the white man—interacts with the local people with a sense of condescension. He comes to the Caribbean in order to obtain the "background material for a book he was writing on superstition and witchcraft" *(Sunlight,* p. 13). To satisfy his sexual lust, he seeks out a poor, little Indian girl, an agricultural hand in Franklin's farm. But Sookdeo, her father will not accept such an association. he complains to Franklin:

> Mr. Johnson is a white man, and I respect him, but he must respect we Indians too. Urmilla not for him, and I want you to tell him to leave the girl alone... (26-27)

The narrator of the short story had earlier spoken about white people in this vein: "White people feel they are stepping down when they fraternise with coloured people: they don't always seem to realise that it is just as shameful if not more so for the other party".

'Superstition' which brings Johnson to Trinidad is in fact a major issue in Selvon's stories. As in the life of Third World people, superstition in West Indian life is as a result of the transitoriness of what now constitutes the cultures of the ex-colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Such is the belief in the efficacy of the magical that Selvon cannot but create an alternative reality in which the quaint is either possible or is believed to be possible. In his "Obeah in the Grove", for instance he gives credibility to what ordinarily could have been greeted with disbelief. In this story, four Jamaican youths who had been living happily elsewhere in London are enticed to move into a building "down by Ladbroke Grove" owned by a white couple. They do so without knowing that they are being used to achieve a certain motive. As always, their arrival and presence irk the all-white tenants who had been living in the place, and one by one they move out of the block of apartments. The white landlord called Jack not only has an opportunity to inflate the rent but also to complete the arrangement to hand over the building to an estate agent for a better deal. No sooner had the coloured tenants settled than the landlord ordered them to move out. With his white tenants, it would have been impossible for Jack to get them ejected because of their protection by the law, a protection which non-whites do not enjoy. In other words, the West Indian youths have merely been used as repellants, being members of an unwanted race. Fiji, one of the aggrieved youths, places an order for *obeah* from Jamaica and before long it arrives in a registered packet. Jack's building soon comes under the spell of the charm. Meanwhile,

> Four people in all come to see the house to buy it but all of them went away: in fact, a week later one of them was mad. Then the walls start

> to crack, the roof falling down bit by bit, the concrete steps under the tree in the front start to crumble *(Sunlight,* p. 173-74).

Like in his other tales — "The Mango Tree" and "Johnson and the Cascadura" — the mysterious is raised to the status of respectability and credibility; it becomes the only way by which the weak and the disenchanted can earn justice, or influence the worth of their own existence. This is not so with Timothy Callender, another West Indian short story writer who in his "Obeah for the Obeak Man" applies an ironic twist which exposes the magic man to his own antics. The *Obeah* man is not only shown to be a greedy fellow who demands more and more from Matilda, his victim but is also portrayed as one who can go to any length to have his 'pound of flesh'. In the end, what he has set out to harm Matilda with for her refusal to continue patronizing his trade boomerangs on him.

The West Indian tale never fails to call attention to the poverty of a large chunk of the people. The poverty situation must be traced to the slave background of the people, as well as the legacy of capitalism bequeathed to them at Independence. There is also the poverty of the natural resources caused by their having been dumped on islands not known to possess mineral potentials. The result is a harsh existential situation in which competition is further hightened, and survival more demanding. In such a circumstance, thievery is easily a way to outlive the day. When the ordinary person has little or no right to a decent living, the alternatives to survival are various forms of roguery. In "A Drink of Water", indigence and crass poverty reshapes Manko who ordinarily could have remained an upright citizen. He is so desirous of remaining a sincere person that he warns his son against stealing from Rampersad's well water, saying, "You must never thief from another man, Sunny. That is a big, big sin" *(Sunlight,* pp. 115-116). However, as Rannie, Manko's wife is almost dying as a result of the drought that visits Las Lomas village, Manko's essential humanity breaks down. Ironically, Manko and his son meet at the well, each ready to steal Rampersad's water. Selvon's sense of humour at this point is classic; the reader is completely taken by surprise as idealism and pragmatism come face to face.

"A Drink of Water" equally highlights the depth of interpersonal relationship in a face-to-face community which capitalistic tendencies can, and do destroy. The first few days after Rampersad had struck water in the well, he makes it freely available to the people. But this gesture is soon discontinued because Rampersad's wife is against a free-for-all use of the well. Rampersad fences the place, buys a dog to guard it and purchases a gun to drive away those who would not pay. The story, therefore, assumes a parabolic significance not only for its portrayal of capitalism but also for the metaphoric level to which rain as a symbol of life and fertility is raised.

Recurring issues in West Indian stories as a whole include drunkenness, masculinity and violence. These are products of the time, a time when an individual beset with the problem of identity, and of personal worth easily takes to alcohol, and must prove himself a man. The rootlessness of most of the characters, no doubt, is contributory to the place which inebriation occupies in their general lifestyle. In most West Indian stories, the quality of the social environment at specific moments is mediated by rum consumption — or any liquid comparable to rum. In "Johnson and the Cascadura", it is said that "Chanko would need a drink to wet his throat for him to continue, and as the labourers favoured rum more than whisky Franklin usually had a bottle of local rum to hand" *(Sunlight,* p. 15). It is in the same story that Sookdeo who had come to complain to Franklin about Johnson's scandalous relationship with his daughter is said to have lacked the will to do so until his host gives him some alcohol: "Half way to the door he (Sookdeo) stopped and turned again. The drink had given him the courage he needed to talk" *(Sunlight,* p. 26).

In "Holiday in Five Rivers", the peasants are said to live "simply out of touch with happenings in other parts of Trinidad, in a little world where food and shelter and a drink in Chin's shop on Saturday night were all the requisites for existence" *(Sunlight* p. 51). On a Saturday night, it is a common sight to behold men, women and children sitting around Chin's store "like a regular bazaar with shouting and drinking and smoking and gossiping" *(Sunlight,* p. 52). The outcome of an indulgence in alcoholism by West Indian characters is often a proneness to masculinity and violence. Masculine-assertion is exhibited in wife-beating which appears to be common enough in West Indian domestic stories. In "Cane is Bitter", a woman tells Doolsie who is just getting married to Romesh that "some of these men too bad. They does best their wife too much-look at Dulcie husband, he does be drunk all the time, and she does catch hell with him" *(Sunlight* p. 72). While this kind of violence is detested by women who are normally its victims, men think it is quite normal. In a Naipaul short story — "Love, Love, Love Again" — Toni Hereira, a chronic drunk who regularly beats his wife is challenged by Hat for over-doing it. Says Hat: "Is a good thing for a man to beat his wife every now and then, but this man (Toni) does it like exercise, man" *(Miguel Street* 106). Toni Hereira must be the likes of Tiger in Selvon's novel, *A Brighter Sub* (1952) who needs to assure himself from time to time of being a man by beating Urmilla, his wife at the least provocation.

Having highlighted some of the features of Selvon's stories that point to them as authentic sources of Trinidadian, and West Indian social history, let us turn to Achebe's tales to see if we could say the same thing for his stories. Yet, in seeking to establish

equivalence,the intention is not to erect or draw perfect similarities or symmetries since that would entail a much more detailed work than this. Our task is to show that in Achebe's stories, it is possible, as in Selvon's to perceive aspects of Nigerian, and particularly Igbo sociocultural inheritance, and especially the flux to which the Igbo heritage had been exposed as a result of its historical experience. Chinua Achebe is one African writer whose declared artistic intention has been that of re-establishing the positive image of his people. However, in his short stories he is more interested in depicting the social imperfections and contradictions arising not only from the logic of the tradition but also from impositions from outside.

There are two prongs to the socio-historical experience to which Achebe's novels are always returning: Igbo culture before European intervention, and Igbo life after the introduction of Western influences. His short stories are, however, a different kettle of fish. Of the twelve stories in his *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972), only one — "Akueke" — can be said to belong to the first prong. The remaining eleven have a variety of modernity about them which suggests that perhaps Achebe considers the short story as essentially a medium for the portrayal of recent and current social history. Although "Akueke" is set in the past, its thematic thrust is an all-time emphasis on the need for us to have a humane regard for the sanctity of the life of other human beings. Akueke's ailment for which she is dumped into the 'bad' bush is after all not incurable. Thus, Akueke is the female opposite of Unoka (in *Things Fall Apart)* who before he was carried to the Evil Forest where he spent his last days, had asked for his flute. Like Akueke too, Unoka seemed to have died a happier person than most of his fellow villagers who saw nothing good in his lifestyle. In Akueke's case, her ailment may have been exaggerated by her brothers who see her as a troublesome sister. Her eventual rescue by her grandfather and her new name of Matefi (meaning 'be wise') become both an implementation of the Igbo proverb which says that when an object is thrown away, those who know its value safeguard or utilize it, and a symbolisation of the regenerative spirit of the generic man.

The short story, "The Madman" could be realised in both the past and the present, but its setting at a period in Igbo history when "mammy-wagon", "highways", zinc roofs, etc., had become a part of the people's culture suggests its relevance to the present. The circumstances which lead Nwibe, an *ozo* title candidate to exchange roles with the village madman who is well-known for his insanity have much to do with the social value placed on wealth, and on acquisition at a critical stage in the life of a people. The technique of narration — tight and taut — achieves its intensity in the use to which it puts wry humour and biting irony. The reversal of the im-

age of the sane person and the neutralisation of the negative social estimation of the established psychopath — even if temporarily — point to the Igbo belief that there is a streak of insanity in the actions of every ostensibly normal person. Nwibe's irascible decision to catch up with the madman in order to retrieve his cloth is due to the burden society places on every able-bodiedperson to prove his or her sanity at every turn. This burden is not only in the area of psychological worth, but also in social, economic and political spheres. Nwibe represents the callous subordination of the individual to a society that breeds insane people while the madman is society's representative victim.

Most of Achebe's short stories are direct outcomes of the African tutelage under the European 'civilizing' mission. The result has been a chaos of experience for individuals and for social and cultural institutions as well as the overthrow of the moral tone of the traditional society. In "The Voter", Rufus Okeke's individual moral forte breaks down as a five-pound note is placed in his palm. He is being asked at the very last minute to vote for the party he had all the while opposed and campaigned against. Having been given the money and made to swear to the dangerous *iyi* oath, his mind is bound to be set in confusion, but Rufus is in charge. He is as dishonest as the politicians and the political parties he is working for, and as unscrupulous as the newly independent nation whose moral direction is now in doubt. On the balloting day, and before the ballot box "a thought leapt in Roof's (Rufus's) mind" *(Girls,* p. 19). He tears the single ballot paper he is entitled to vote with into two, putting one each for the candidate he openly canvasses for and the candidate from whom he had recently received five pounds! By this act he assures himself that he had 'voted' for the two people without contradicting the *iyi* oath he swore to. What exposes Rufus to the moral quagmire over whether or not to accept the five pounds is the need to satisfy the social demands of his time. But his logic is that after all "what could a single vote cast in secret for Maduka (the candidate buying his vote) take away from Marcus's certain victory?" *(Girls,* p. 17). He has rationalized it, but in the polling booth, he suffers his passion, evident in the time he overspends in the election shack. Again his last minute decision to 'democratize' his ballot paper is a far cry from his initial specious reasoning that after all a single vote for Maduka would not stop Marcus from winning.

Such stories as "Marriage is a Private Affair", "Vengeful Creditor", "Dead Men's Path" and "Uncle Ben's Choice" are the direct result of the introduction of an alien value system into a cultural setting whose own moral suasion and sentiments have suddenly been cast aside. In "Dead Men's Path", the path is closed by the new headmaster because its atavistic signification has been

made to lose its meaning by the new wave of cultural intrusion. The overzealous headmaster assures the priest of *Ani:* "The whole purpose of our school is to eradicate just such beliefs as that. Dead men do not require footpaths... Our duty is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas" *(Girls,* p. 73). The villagers will not fold their arms and watch their ontology with higher forces broken by someone who knows next to nothing in these matters. In "Marriage is a Private Affair", old world-views are sharply contradicted by new cultural contacts. Nnaemeka's father will oppose his son's decision to overcome ethnic barriers and marry Nene Atang from Calabar. This is a common theme in a number of African stories, but the cathartic impact of this tale is sustained by the extremism of the old man's hard-line rejection of a daughter-in-law he had never seen and the daughter-in-laws almost Job-like resignation to the unwarranted hatred.

The war stories — "Civil Peace", "Sugar Baby" and "Girls at War" — reflect a separate social history of the Igbo people during and immediately after the Nigeria-Biafra war. In "Girls at War", the story-title prepares us to behold the behaviour of girls during the Civil War. We do not see the 'girls'; we only see Gladys where pathetic deterioration marks the moral lossess of the Igbo people as a whole. Feminists and feminist sympathisers who will read a chauvinistic attack in the short story must first know of the central symbol which the female sex or the feminine principle stands for in Chinua Achebe's writings. Gladys is not just a female, she is Biafra. Her slow change from a highly idealistic girl insisting on the proper checking of motorists at checkpoints at the initial stages of the war to one whose interests are new centred on money and sex calls to mind the gradual eclipse of the initial ideals of the Biafran revolution. And Gladys' end in an air raid attack marks the total death of the ill-fated ambition to establish a model African nation.

In "Civil Peace", another dimension of the predicament of the Igbo people at a socio-historical moment is also evoked. Jonathan Iwegbu is the typical Igbo person and his resilience as the Civil War ends: "He got a destitute carpenter with one old hammer, a blunt plane and few bent and rusty nails in his tool bag to turn this assortment of wood, paper and metal into door and window shutters for five Nigerian shillings or fifty Biafran pounds" *(Girls,* p. 84). He built himself a ramshackle shelter. His wife and children, equally accepting the challenge of survival, work daily to generate a unique family economy. The climax of this struggle is the moment he receives the twenty odd Nigerian pounds paid to him as ex-gratia award for "the rebel money" he had turned in. However, later that day, he is visited by armed robbers. The casual manner in which the money is taken away from him by the dangerous robbers shows that this kind of roguery is a direct out-come of the Civil War. The

leader of the robbery gang assures Jonathan thus: "We no be bad tief. We no like for make trouble... No Civil War again. This time na Civil Peace" *(Girls* p. 87). Jonathan may have lost a very important source of his survival and that of his family at such a critical moment, but his spirit is the stubborn will of the human species: "I count it as nothing.... What is *egg-rasher?* Did I depend on it last week? Or is it greater than other things that went with the war?" *(Girls* p. 89).

In these short stories by two accomplished Third World writers, we are presented with vignettes of human predicament in two post-colonial cultures at a time in their development. The humour observable in the speeches and actions of the characters as well as the situational irony to which most of these characters are exposed may after all be deceitful since the tales are serious social comments that elucidate the people's social history at a period of cultural flux. The truth is that having been humiliated by vulgar imperial forces, a people who had overwhelming fire — power, the will to dominate, the religious spur to cheat the unwary and the naive, and the superior organizational knowledge to control, Third World writers in the treatment of their people's social history tend to do this with a large dose of humour. Embedded in such humour is their disappointment and a superior understanding of the historical forces which have shaped events. For the West Indian and the African humour is the answer to an inverted world, a world dominated by economic and military power, where existence is both precarious and uncertain. Therefore, the use of humour by Selvon and Achebe is certainly an evidence of a superior understanding of the logic behind the behaviour and comportment of their characters, and perhaps the belief that these contradictions are after all transitory.

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'DANCE OF THE MAIDENS'
— Barthosa Nkurumeh, 1989, Pen and Ink drawing

Margaret Folarin

IDANRE — MORNING

(Ideally to be accompanied by a flute and a film of the heights of Idanre).

Look out at the nude rock
look through the crumbling, crest-falling forest,
through the eroded walls of this deserted town
sunk to its neck in grass

Look at the peaks
that commune every day with simple cloud-mist,
at the grand, crystalline shoulders of the hills
braced to receive in force
the scorching
purities of sunlight.
On the rock, the rock, the pristine vigours persist,
fighting for first footholds.
The have learnt to grasp
the drifting mist
and the intangible
radiations of the sun,
to make their islands,
their dense mats of vegetation,
even there where the rain and the noon-heat tear off
the sheer hills' shoulders.

When the town that has grown up on these felt footholds
becomes a town of old men,
when the core of its tough civilization
is whittled down to these religious rituals —
on the rock
the bold and humble lichens,
the little glues of algae and fungi,
still follow the weather's work,
those first roughenings,
that let them get their feet in.

Out on the rock —
the tired, blood-red
tongues of the parrot's tail
can burn again
around the heads of the dancers.

FIRST RAIN

(to be accompanied by drum and cymbal)

Today
on an extreme point
on a spit of land
at the reservoir
the wind
that seemed to draw the rain along in its wake
that whipped up water to a leaping froth
that stripped down
the last seeds of
cotton tree

in snowflake swirls
where egrets sailed
like gulls
hooking themselves to the ecstatic
roller coasters
of its currents
that wind sprang at us.

But it was no winter blast
nor was the cotton blown snow.
That wind tore us along too —
its enthusiasm
for the first steps of the new season
being wildly infectious.

Pamala Karol

WHY I CHOOSE BLACK MEN FOR MY LOVERS

Acid today
is trendy entertainment
but in 1967
Eating it was eucharistic
    and made us fully visionary

My girlfriend and I used to get cranked up
    and we'd land in
    The Haight
    and oh yeah
    The Black Guys Knew Who We Were
    But the white boys
    were stupid

I started out in San Fernando
    My unmarried mother did not abort me
    because Tijuana was unaffordable
    They stuffed me in a crib of invisibility
    I was bottle-fed germicides and aspirin
    My nannies were cathode tubes
    I reached adolescence, anyway
    Thanks to Bandini and sprinkler

In 1967 I stepped through a window pane
    and I got real
    I saw Mother Earth and Big Brother
    and
    I clipped my roots which choked in the
        concrete
        of Sunset Boulevard
    to go with my girlfriend
    from Berkeley to San Francisco
    hitchhiking
    and we discovered
    that Spades were groovy
    and
    White boys were mass-produced and
    watered their lawns
        artificially with long green hoses in
        West L.A.

There I was, in Avalon Ballroom
in vintage pink satin, buckskin and
patchouli,
pioneering the sexual
revolution
I used to be the satyr's moll, half-woman,
and the pink satin hung
loose about me
like an intention

I ate lysergic for breakfast, lunch and
dinner
I was a dead-end in the off-limits of
The Establishment
and morality was open to interpretation

In my neighborhood, if you fucked around, you were a whore

But I was an emigree, now
I watched the planeloads of white boys fly
up from Hamilton High
They were the vanguard
of the Revolution
They stepped off the plane
in threadbare work shirts
with rolled up sleeves
and a Shell Oil, a Bankamericard,
a Mastercharge in their back pocket
with their father's name on it
Planeloads of Revolutionaries
For matins, they quoted Marcuse and Huey Newton
For vespers, they instructed young girls from
San Fernando to
Fuck Everybody
To not comply, was fascist
I watched the planeloads of white boys
fly up from Hamilton High

All the boys from my high school were shipped to
Vietnam
And I was in Berkeley, screwing little white boys
who were remonstrating for peace
In bed, the pusillanimous hands of war protestors
taught me Marxist philosophy:
Our neighborhoods are a life sentence
This was their balling stage and they

were politicians
I was an apparition with orifices
I knew they were insurance salesmen in their
hearts
And they would all die of attacks
I went down on them anyway, because I had
consciousness
Verified by my intake of acid
I was no peasant!
I went down on little white boys and
they filled my head with
Communism
They informed me that poor people didn't have
money and were oppressed
Some people were Black and Chicano
Some women even had illegitimate children
Meanwhile, my thighs were bloodthirsty
whelps
and could never get enough of anything
and those little communists were stingy
I was seventeen
and wanted to see the world
My flowering was chemical
I cut my teeth on promiscuity and medicine
I stepped through more windowpanes
and it really got oracular

In 1968
One night
The shaman laid some holy shit on me and wow
I knew
in 1985
The world would still be white, germicidally
white
That the ethos of affluence
was an indelible
white boy eyes
like blue eyes
The Volkswagons would be traded in for
Ferraris
and would be driven with the same
snotty pluck that snivelled around
the doors of Fillmore, looking cool
I knew those guys, I knew them when they had posters of

Che Guevara over their bed
They all had posters of Che Guevara over
their bed

And I looked into Che's black eyes all
night while I lay in those beds,
ignored
Now these guys have names on doors on the 18th floor of
towers in Encino
They have ex-wives and dope connections.
Even my girlfriend married a condo-owner in Van Nuys.

In proper white Marxist theoretician nomenclature, I was
a tramp.
The rich girls were called "liberated".

I was a female from San Fernando
and the San Francisco Black Men and I
had a lot in common
Eyes, for example
dilated
with the opacity of "fuck you"
I saw them and they saw me
We didn't need an ophthalmologist to get it on
We laid each other on a foundation of
visibility
and our fuck
was no hypothesis

Now that I was worldly
I wanted to correct
the nervous blue eyes who flew up from
Brentwood
to see Hendrix
but
when I stared into them
They always lost focus
and got lighter and lighter
and
No wonder Malcolm called them Devils.

'COMMUNITY RITE'
— Barthosa Nkurumeh, Pen and Ink

N.F. Inyama

PARALLEL ILLUMINATION IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

> 'A mad man may sometimes speak a true word,' said my father, 'but you watch him, he will soon add something to it that will tell you that his mind is still spoilt. My son, you have again shown your true self...''
>
> Hezekiah Samalu talking to Odili, his son, in *A man of the People*[1].

A Man of the People, Chinua Achebe's fourth novel, has as its most obvious theme the crisis of post-independence politics in Nigeria. But as with his other novels, Achebe anchors this public theme in an aspect of the family which runs through his other works: the father-son relationship. Achebe's fascination with this aspect of Igbo family life is not accidental; neither does he introduce it into his novels to merely 'thicken' the plots. It is, I think, a reflection of his own family world and upbringing — that aspect of it that had the more significant impact on his consciousness. This seems to be confirmed in his short autobiographical essay, 'Named For Victoria, Queen of England'. The salient portion of the essay deals with Achebe's keen awareness of the peculiar quality of the relationship between his father and his grandfather. Between the two men, he writes,

> There was something... that I find deep, moving and perplexing, And of those two generations ... there was something I have not been able to fathom....(2)

Achebe also recounts that his grandfather was the 'very embodiment of tolerance insisting only that whatever a man decided to do he would do with style (p. 8). His tolerance was such that his own son's efforts to convert him to Christianity never precipitated 'an open rift' between them, and 'They remained very close to the end'. What it is that Achebe finds 'perplexing', and which he has not 'been able to fathom' is, I think, the contradiction between his basic perception of Igbo father-son relationships and this apparent harmony between his own father and his grandfather. Whether Achebe is accurate in this unique perception of an aspect of the Igbo family world is debatable. But at the same time, there could be a good deal of credibility to his viewpoint if we take into consideration the stresses that are possible in a traditionally polygamous, patriarchal and patrilineal society, where a father's anxiety over the fate of his estate after his death and the kind of sons who bear his name could lead to harsh assessments of the sons' ways and actions.

At the same time, though, we recognise that the father-son tension is a feature that is common in mythology and other forms of literature. It is also a recognised trait of at least one other West African cultural group: the Tallensi of Ghana. According to Professor Meyer Fortes[3] the Tallensi father sees his son as a kind of dangerous rival and regards him with considerable hostility. The Tallensi son lives in virtual exile until his father dies. Igbo family culture does not reflect this extreme of father-son tension, but Achebe considers the level of such tension that is existent significant enough to constitute a prominent sub-theme in his novels. *In A Man of the People,* we are once more confronted with a situation in which a father, Hezekiah Samalu, tries to control his son, Odili, and direct his activities from his — the father's — perspective. As with Okonkwo[4] and Ezeulu[5] in earlier novels, this effort on the father's part creates tensions and high temper. Happily, however, *A Man of the People* accomplishes a balanced resolution of issues, and which ultimately leads to the father's recognition of his son's right to an independent viewpoint. But more significantly — and this is the main point the essay wishes to establish — the father receives an education that advances the essential moral message of the story.

Achebe's near-prophetic insight into the ultimate end of post-independence Nigerian politics, his skill in the ironic portrayal of character, and so on, are aspects of the novel that have been discussed by previous critics, and so do not need to be revived here.

Odili's tainted idealism is probably the most obvious thing about his character. In spite of his occasional introspection and admission of this fact, it still colours the reader's response to, and assessment of the protagonist's actions. Indeed, it diminishes his credibility as a political and moral reformer.

However, although Odili fails in his more grandiose aim of winning Chief Nanga's constituency (though he wins a wife off Nanga), he does make a different kind of achievement, one that has its significance in the re-orientation of the ordinary man's perception of public morality and politics. Odili's accomplishment lies in the political re-education of his father, through his own example. It ultimately leads to the establishment of mutual respect between them and the accommodation of their differences. The latter aspect is even more significant, since through it Achebe somewhat resolves the sharp and painful dilemma which he had battled with in his presentation of father-son conflicts in his previous novels.

In *A Man of the People,* we again witness a scenario of negative cross — judgements between father and son. The prologue to this essay bears the core of Hezekiah Samalu's attitude to his son and his ways, and echoes Ezeulu's reactions to Edogo, his first son, in *Arrow of God.* Odili digresses sufficiently at the beginning of his

tale to give the reader a picture of his family background. Apart from the brief mention of the fact that he was considered a "wicked" child for causing his mother's death at his birth, Odili's emphasis is on the state of affairs between him and his father. We discover immediately that they assess each other with severity, and even bias. Each one's achievements mean nothing to the other, and such achievements are mutually derided. Odili informs us, for instance, that his plan to go abroad and study for a post-graduate certificate would be seen by his father as another example of his foolish ways:

> But I knew in advance what he would say. He would tell me that I already had more than enough education, that all the important people in the country today — ministers, businessmen, members of parliament, etc., did not have half my education. He would then tell me for the hundredth time to leave 'this foolish teaching' and look for a decent job in the government and buy myself a car. (p. 35).

Hezekiah Samalu's severe and negative responses to his son's actions began as far back as when Odili was a secondary school pupil. Once when he had tried to spend a few days' school holiday with a friend, whose father turned out, unfortunately, to be one of Samalu's numerous enemies, the older man had not looked charitably on this innocent mistake. According to Odili,

> ... all my father did was to rave at me for wandering like a homeless tramp when I should be working at the books he sent me to learn. (p. 34).

Hezekiah Samalu casts a disappointed and negative eye on his son's ways and shows little fatherly pride in his achievements. But Odili reciprocates with equal severity in his assessment of his father's actions. Samalu is portrayed by Odili as little more than a lecherous dipsomaniac: "All the old man does is buy himself a jar of palm wine every morning and a bottle of schnapps now and again". As for women, Odili says:

> The trouble with my father was his endless desire for wives and children. Or perhaps I should say children and wives. Right now he has five wives — the youngest a mere girl whom he married last year. (p. 35).

To Samalu, a man of the old order, marrying many wives and begetting numerous children — he has thirty-five of them — are sterling and prestigious achievements. He scoffs at Odili's academic achievements which seem to have no visible material benefits, but Odili sees his numerous offspring as a kind of procreational profligacy. As far as he is concerned, his father is actually irresponsible: "Of course he doesn't even make any pretence of providing for

his family nowadays. He leaves every wife to her own devices" (p. 34). On one occasion Odili "had told him to his face that he was crazy to be planning to marry his fifth wife... (and that) he was storing up trouble for others' (p. 35). Neither does Samalu merit any credit for his son's education, because Odili recalls that during the school holiday incident he

> should have told him then... that he had not sent me anywhere. I was in the school only because I was able to win a scholarship. It was the same when I went to University (p. 34).

We notice, then, that from his childhood to his university graduation, the relationship between Odili and his father is marked by strain, and neither has done anything which has impressed the other favourably. Odili might have impressed his father with the solidity and material value of his academic achievements by perhaps helping to educate his many brothers and sisters. But this possibility is frustrated by his father's vow, after one of their more explosive quarrels, never to touch his money.

The polarisation in the personal relationship between father and son overflows into their responses to public issues, and for a long while in the story each person clings to his view, if for no other reason but to discomfit the other.

In spite of his shortcomings, Odili represents a group that wants to rid the nation of a corrupt class of 'chop-chop' politicians. Even as one of the underlying reasons for his entering politics is to settle a sexual score with Nanga, we still recognise that material gain is not his prime motive of action. On the contrary, Samalu not only thinks that his notion of unseating Nanga is hare-brained, but perceives politics as a game played for maximum material gain. It is this material consideration that nullifies for him any contradiction in his being the local chairman of Nanga's P.O.P. party and at the same time accommodating a son who is the major candidate for a rival party. As far as he is concerned, the important issue is that he and his son are getting cuts of the 'national cake' from different sides. As Odili informs us,

> ... I expected that his house would not contain both of us. But I was quite wrong. He took the view ... that the mainspring of political action was personal gain, a view which, I might say, was much more in line with the general feeling in the country than the high-minded thinking of fellows like Max and I. The only comment I remember my father making ... was when he asked if my 'new' party was ready to give me enough money to fight Nanga. He sounded doubtful. But he was clearly satisfied with what I had got out of it so far, especially the car which he was now using as much as myself. The normal hostility between us was put away in a corner, out of sight. But very soon, all that was to change again (p. 128)

At this stage in his political development Hezekiah Samalu is incapable of seeing beyond the material worth of political action, so that when Nanga comes with two hundred and fifty pounds to buy off Odili, he sees it as a fair trading bargain and strenuously urges his son to accept the money and leave the field free for Nanga. Odili's contemptuous rejection of Nanga's offer, because his acceptance would mean betraying his principles and his friends, is incomprehensible to his father. To Samalu, at this stage, political principles — or any principles for that matter — have little or no validity beside the lure of ready money. Odili's action becomes for him one more proof and confirmation of the young man's foolishness. When he chides Odili for this particular foolish performance his lament emphasises the material loss:

> ... When you came home with a car I thought to myself: good, some sense is entering his belly at last ... But I should have known. So you really want to fight Nanga! My son, why don't you fall where your pieces could be gathered? If the money he was offering was too small why did you not say so? Why did you not ask for three or four hundred? ... let me ask you something: Do you think he will return tomorrow to beg you again with two-fifty pounds? No my son. You have lost the sky and you have lost the ground. (p. 136).

Hezekiah Samalu's particular response has developed partly from his working career. In his working days as a district interpreter he had been in the powerful position of relaying messages to the colonial administrator, and in this position he could extort benefits at will from those who had business with the colonial officer. He had exploited his position, as Odili informs us, without much inhibitions. Having been nurtured on this exploitative philosophy, he cannot see Nanga in the sinful light that Odili sees him since, to him, only a fool would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed on his tongue; so he cannot appreciate the foregoing of good money for seemingly insane principles.

While we recognise the basic weakness in Odili's political armoury, ranging from his flawed motivation to his comparatively meagre material resources against Nanga's, we are equally conscious of the negative influence that Samalu exerts on his son's political venture, for he is constantly close by to remind him of the futility and foolishness of his escapade. On the other hand, it is also probable that this constant jeering from his own father catalyses and reinforces Odili's determination to remain in the fight, for each is usually out to score points at the other's expense. All this is consonant with their total relationship of conflict, and with Achebe's apparent perception of father-son relationship as essentially coloured by tension. Hezekiah Samalu's relationship with his son is a constant test of wills in which one tries to subdue the other, and where each deliberately contradicts the other's expectations by his

actions. For a larger part of the novel, whatever fluctuations that manifest in their relations rarely negate this state of affairs.

Shortly after Nanga's offer is rejected, Odili's election campaign is formally launched by the C.P.C. from his father's premises. Following this event, Hezekiah Samalu is 'ignominiously', dismissed from his post as local chairman of Nanga's P.O.P., and then subjected to other forms of victimisation by Nanga's thugs and agents. But the most significant of the incidents that happen to Samalu is that he is asked to sign a document dissociating himself from his son's 'lunatic activities'. The document also said that

> ... the so-called launching of (Odidi's) C.P.C. in his premises was done without his knowledge and consent and concluded by affirming his implicit confidence in our great and God-fearing leader Chief Nanga (p. 152).

In return Samalu would be reinstated in office and, even more crucial from his materialistic perspective on issues, he would be refunded the new inflated tax which had been extorted from him because of his brief accommodation of the C.P.C. Samalu flatly refuses to sign the document, an action that is remarkable in a keen political horse trader such as he is, and especially as his refusal means the permanent loss of his money. When Odili tells him later that his refusal to sign was a mistake, Hezekiah Samalu gives him an answer that is surprising and striking because of its implications of a new morality and a different outlook on public issues, which is represented in his immediate environment, no matter how imperfectly, by his son, Odili. At last, Achebe begins working towards a resolution of the father – son tension he began to trace from the dark days of *Things Fall Apart*. 'You may be right', Samalu tells his son in reply to his criticism, 'But our people have said that a man of worth never gets up to unsay what he said yesterday. I received your friends in my house and I am not going to deny it'. (p. 152).

Hezekiah Samalu's answer embodies a new awakening to moral principles, a new awareness that was absent when he urged Odili to sacrifice principles and honour for Nanga's bribe money. Therefore, Hezekiah Samalu's new morality can only be attributed to the example of his son's firm and contemptuous refusal of Nanga's money; for as the Igbo say, *'anaghi amu aka ekpe n'nka'* 'one cannot learn to be left-handed in old age'. After a working life of extorting bribes from others, Samalu's long-atrophied sense of honour needed an unusual example to bring it back to life, and for him this could only be an action that could mean the foregoing of a substantial amount of material gain: Odili's action serves this purpose. Just as Nanga had changed his opinion of the writer, Jalio,

after observing the deference accorded him by diplomats and other prominent guests at the book-launching ceremony, Samalu has certainly been impressed by his son's steadfastness. Even if he has done what he has just to prove a point to Odili — that is that he too can forego money — it ultimately serves the dual purpose of reforming him and projecting an authorial viewpoint: reformation and morality at the public level can only be achieved when these two qualities are anchored in the private world of the family. However, the point needs to be emphasized that the political education of the people, the struggle by Odili and his friends to rescue them from the bribes of the big politicians and awaken in them a new sense of morality and outrage — all of which had met with their derisive indifference — these are what Odili achieves in his father by his example of refusing Nanga's money and remaining in the struggle.

One does recognise the limitations of this change, in the sense that it is mainly symbolic in its value, since Samalu is numerically insignificant in relation to the larger population. But by anchoring the meaning and value of this change to the fluctuations in Odili's relationship with his father, Achebe highlights his interest in family politics and acquaints the reader with the ultimate substance of Odili's earlier statement, that the state of affairs between him and his father was to 'change and then change again'.

As earlier stated, the underlying secondary theme of *A Man of the People* deals with the mutual negative judgements which Odili and his father pass on each other. Yet we have seen that at a point in the story Samalu emulates his son in one critical respect. But as the last main incident in the story shows, Samalu's transformation is not confined to his response in matters of public morality. At the private family level he also learns to watch his son's decisions or actions with some respect, even if not with total approval. There is no longer that jeering eagerness to point out to Odili the foolishness of his actions. When Odili decides to pay back all that Nanga had spent on Edna, for example, his party in the marriage negotiations are shocked, not least because his father had argued validly against such a payment:

> 'Our custom', said my father firmly, 'is to return the bride-price-finish. Other bits and pieces must be the man's loss. Is that not the custom?' Our party said yes that was the custom.
>
> As indeed it was. But... I did not want to go through life thinking that I owed Chief Nanga money spent on my wife's education. So I agreed — to my people's astonishment — to pay everything. 'Let us go outside and whisper together', said my scandalised relations. I said a flat no and they shrugged their acquiescence, astonished at my firmness — and pleased because we admire firmness. (p. 165).

One recognises that Odili is far from being the pure idealist. We even know that he 'borrowed' the bride-price money from redun-

dant party funds. But in *A Man of the People* Achebe resolves a nagging theme that runs through his four novels. Here there is a refertilization from son to father which yields respect and accommodation, a realisation that a son can grow into an independent man. Achebe sees an uncomfortable tension in Igbo family culture, a tension whose active and emotional centre he places in father-son relationships. The novelist's outstanding achievement is the exploration of this theme without making it obscure the public themes. His competence in this process of synthesis has resulted in the failure of critics to emphasize adequately the familial content of the novels, especially in *A Man of the People* which is so obviously 'public' in theme and topic. But one cannot fully appreciate Achebe's works without at the same time being aware of the family dimensions they embody.

As if to emphasise further the central nature of the family subject to the overall theme of *A man of the People.* Achebe makes the father-son relationship the subject of one of the earliest conversations between Max and Odili. Again we are dealing with a situation of tension for, like Odili, Max and his father rarely see things in the same light. Max's jocular tone highlights, more than it conceals, the essential tension of their relationship. According to him, his father's frustration arises from his profession, that of church minister, and so

> '... he hasn't got much out of independence, personally. There simply weren't any white posts in his profession that he could take over. There is only one bishop in the entire diocese and he is already an African' 'You are unfair to the old man', I said, laughing. 'You should hear some of the things, the old man says about me. I remember when I last went to see him with Eunice he said who knows I might get a son before him. Oh, we crack such expensive jokes'. (p. 165).

However, Achebe's main focus in *A Man of the People* is on Odili and his father. Odili's public adventure brings into high relief the private conflict between him and his father. At the end of its all Odili recognises his personal and public weaknesses as a reformer, and his father rediscovers an important moral aspect of life; he also begins to respect and accommodate his son's ways, for as the Igbo say, 'Onye ara na uche ya yi' 'Even a mad man is accompanied by his own thoughts' It is in this parallel illumination for father and son that *A Man of the People* has its core, and in the process of achieving it, Achebe's technical skill attains a prime height.

NOTES

1. Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (London: Heinemman African Writers Series, 1966), p. 135
2. In Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann Eduational Books, 1975) pp. 65-70.
3. Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship Among the* Tallensi (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 160.
4. Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).
5. Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* (London: Heinemann, 1964).

'OTUTUNZU QUEEN'
— Barthosa Nkurumeh, Pen & Ink.

Tanure Ojaide

SONG FOR MY LAND

More and more the land mocks my heart.
Where are the evergreens of my palm;
why is the sun of salvation eclipsed
by coups and intolerable riots?

Wherever I pass, mockery of the land,
naked trees flaunt sterile bodies at me—
my blood is hot but not on heat;
the winds gossip loud my dalliance
to embarrass me from washing clean
the tainted face of my love.

Every step I take on the land
is fraught with torments—
my clan no longer contains me;
where I am the adopted son
I am asked for marks I don't possess
before I can be embraced.
I need the entirety of the land.

The song needs the soil
for deep roots and fresh notes;
the land needs the song
to revive its strength
and raise itself.
And what celebrated union isn't beset
by one trouble or another?

I have sat through harsh winds
and alternating hot and cold seasons
but have not lost my skin;
my nerves are better guards than ever.
I have made love to all tribes
and absorbed the strength of their warriors.

But still, more and more
the dear land mocks my loving heart.

THE ARROW-FLIGHT

And for them, there's an only advantage:
the hare's over the crestfallen cock,
the lion's over the goat.
And they exact it to the last breath of their victim—
Shylock is only a dim star in their galaxy of blood;
they have closer mentors...

They command the world to attention, riding
through waves of tears in a vain-lift.
They only have what it takes to seduce hungry patients:
placebos and fufu-ful promises of wellbeing.
Of course, the sick will fall back on their beds, dead,
after the quacks have made away with their cash
into asylums in their masters' coveted caves.
And the hungry cannot be heard from high places.

But let them not confuse
muscles with metal,
fanfare with fame.
There's a terrible divide, a gaping hole
into which the king falls when stroked
beyond the propriety of his robes.
How can one be commanded to love them
born of incestuous parents?

May this arrow-flight pick wings from the angry wind
and pluck
the spider in the centre of his web,
the tortoise in his moving fortress,
the hyena in his bone-furnished den...
And no Ogiso, a plagued dynastry of beasts,
should be allowed to live a full life.

COMPATRIOTS!

My worst enemies are gathering strength.
They not only brought down the eagle
but felled irokos on sight, incapacitated
the saviour-totem and razed its winghold.
They discouraged the savage thrust against our bane
and turned the phalanges' lances
into mere wooden paddles—
they cashed on the absence of stars
to supplant the land of its proud name;
they cashed on the eclipse of the sun
to change the love anthem into a rampage drum.

My worst enemies are gathering strength.
Priests without a creed,
see nailed to their shrine-door
forged tablets of faith;
see the guardians chronic lechers—
where else than their lovers' beds
will hold them at night?
And what a hoax of a vigil!
Let their bells ring dumb in my ears;
I''ll not share in their communion.
Who does not know of their ritual murders;
who does not know that they fortify themselves
with vicious charms
to live beyond their tenure?

As soon as they had their hold on the land,
they upset the customs of truth.
Now they have blunted the sacred sword,
how will justice be executed
when the metal is no longer a blade
and the beast escapes communal rage?
My worst enemies, my compatriots!

ASE (FORCE)

Idris O.O. Amali

THE NEW BROOM

Show me the one who says new brooms
Sweep more than the aged?
As our new brooms too tender to sweep
Our debris of mounting heights.

In our streets
The ganga and Ajigo drums, the aligata and kalangu,
the trumpeters paid
did their jobs as studios of music
overwhelm our streets
whether right or wrong:
the chorus !
New Governor!!
Threatened!
And before the lyrical songs....
The bardists goiters of inflated ballons
Threatened and deafened the earth with songs
Of war victories dug from our archieves
I stopped short and pondered!
What great feats and victories have beseiged
Our wanting land wombs
The already troubled lands?
And who are they that have strength
To threaten the earth
With clenched fists
While others like chameleon beg to walk their own earth
as they like death have snatched
and rubbed against the rock
our hopeful hands for the platform.

A new broom they ventured has arrived:
To sweep clean debris
on our ways
construct boulevards to our bed rooms
(Where not more than a soul shall walk the way)
Erect hospitals every/kilometer/one
(Where lizards shall mate and make a home)
Construct new schools in every hamlet
(Where a teacher mans thirty classes)
Import millions of gadgets
(Where the corrosive tropical rains and suns
Shall be site engineers to assemble parts)

From your soiled stool
Proclaim orders:
Only four seeds
a man's long life shall sprout
(Where we hang our manhood and watch
our dear ones ripe unvisited
as cocoulding shall be our doom?)
Open all gates, gates of hell
where all that is life's comfort flood
our land abandoned
as the aroma of the goods
shall be only what we take?

And before the house of comfort is re-erected
Those who proclaim hate for comfort
with daringly ravenous knives, bayonets and buzzled cannons
to chase in hot blood, comfort the evil?
besiege the house of comfort
only for them to be drenched and meshed
in comfort abhored.
My friends!
my chant is no chant of the trembling heart
but a chant that takes its owner to where
Those you call evils dwell.

JOS

Calm acknowledged city that is Jos
Whose faces have long been:
notched, sculped into crying contors
by the leprotic hands
of imperial powers
and those of our blood
rose
charged at dawn boiling!

The extinct cones and craters
that stood here towering nature's terrain
silently for years
natures edifice
put on their active costumes
the protagonists:
the hot air smoke charged
the sweeping lava flow

the hot dust that overwhelms us
the molten magma.
The audience:
those that undermine nature
those that defile nature
that lift the table smooth land
into depressed shattered terrains
and the city is charged for treasonable felony.
As the protagonist:
The hot air smoke charged
the lava flows
the hot dust that overwhelms us,
the molten magma
through the numerous cones
long cocked beneath earth crust
sought a hearing:
A recognition
As men of deceptive martial tones
wage rusty barrels
that know no war
other than spilling home blood unmarked!

MAIDUGURI

We have sat for months
baked in the thunderous
earthen wild winds
of north east sahara prone.
Daily we waited patiently as the drops linger
on miserable ridges
and those who have hurried
their seeds eagerly
mourn the departing fields
even the weeds
the strider perchings
on our roots of life
have given no accounts
of their battle aimed.
And Maiduguri weather
daily gathers strength
for a scorching surge
and into harmattan
the wet season of hope lies charred
Yet

the soil
the land
must be held
tightly for life.

THREATS

What we daily harvest
Are threats of rains
drumming hard!
as seeds of tomorrow lie awaiting fertile mating
when dangling threats ripen and descend
and their cords of Buffalo strength
cut by the sharp edges of time
the threats sweep clean
ridges of hopes
into channels of our woes.
We may petition
to part with the rains
for ever
to seek
a new resolve
and plan.

LAGOS

Virginia A. Anohu

CHINUA ACHEBE: CULTURAL TRANSFERS AND THE FOREIGN READER

One of Achebe's pet themes is that language is a form of identity. As Gareth Griffiths observes in "Language and Action in the Novels of Chinua Achebe",

> For Achebe the novel is a vehicle of self-discovery. Writing is an activity through which the African can define his identity and rediscover his historical roots.... This concern with identity is rooted in the African writers problem with langauge. The very choice of language involves him in a deliberate public stance; his use of dialect, or of phrases in his native langauge, are cultural gests as well as rhetorical devices; while his movement from one register to another in the recording of speech is a direct sociological comment[1].

In a similar vein, Peter Young comments that "the business of the modern African writer is the reintegration of identity, and this is clearly reflected in the cultural, formal, and linguistic reintegration of his art"[2].

In Achebe, recognition of the need for reintegration of identity through language results in innovative uses of the idioms of English. That these uses are not just innovative but consciously so is revealed in Achebe's essay. "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation". The writer, Achebe maintains,

> can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas .... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English to accommodate African thought patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence[3].

As one critic has observed, "the acceptance of a principle of language experiment reflects a deep dissatisfaction with the medium and a consciousness of the need to rework the internal relationships of a literary work of art"[4].

Though critics are nearly unanimous in describing Achebe's narrative prose as "idiomatic English", to accept this simple view is to ignore the ideological impulses behind Achebe's artistic manipulation of this so-called "idiomatic English". Admitted that the narrative exposition is conducted in Standard English, it should also be noted that the Standard English is pressed into service to embody the novelist's attitudes and ideological contentions. This pressure results in syntactic relaxation and a conscious use of certain linguistic devices. This paper discusses two such devices: Direct Rendering and Appostitional Rendering.

Direct rendering and Appositional rendering, each with several variants, all working in concert with one another, effectively enhance Achebe's cross-cultural rendering of idioms.

Direct rendering, either through syntactic balancing with the conjunction, "or", or through bracketted English translation equivalents, or through explanatory introductory clauses can be identified in this regard. Direct rendering is the easiest and the most explicit of Achebe's devices for making his local terms accessible to foreign readers. First is the use of explanatory tags in syntactic parallelism to render an English translation equivalent of an Igbo term or *vice-versa:* the immediate provision, in brackets, of an English translation equivalent of an Igbo phrase, clause, or sentence; and the use of an introductory sentence fragment to cue in an English translation equivalent of a local phrase, clause, or sentence.

It is also interesting to note that these patterns of language use are found most frequently in the two rural novels. These rural novels are the ones which embody Achebe's cultural-nationalistic strain most strongly. It is in these also that we find the most obvious and sustained stretches of sociological exposition in the narrative prose

Direct rendering from *Things Fall Apart* include: *agadi-nwayi,* or old woman (p.8);

b. The elders, or *ndichie* (p. 9)·

c. His own hut,or *obi*)p. 10);

d. *chi* or personal god (p. 13);

e. *eze-agadi-nwayi,* or the teeth of an old woman (p. 25);

f. five rows of *jigida,* or waist-beads (p. 9);

g. ancestral spirit or *eqwugwu* (p. 49);

i. *Nneka,* or mother is supreme (p. 95);

j. outcasts, or *osu* (p. 111);

k. *"nno"* or "welcome" (p. 140).

To these, one may add three instances in which both items are already in English: "medicine house" or shrine (p. 10), the rope or "tie-tie" (p. 39), and (Holy communion" or *"Holy Feast"* as it was called in Ibo" (p. 123).

Some of Achebe's direct renderings cannot be said to be completely successful, linguistically. For, while the rendering of "Holy Communion" as "Holy Feast" can be justified by a need to show the cultural gap between Christianity and Umuofia culture, there is

little justification for " 'medicine house' or shrine" and "the rope, or tie-tie". The flaw in "medicine house" or "shrine" lies in the fact that this is an example of prolixity. If the two items have the same meaning, it is unnecessary to explain one in terms of the other. On the other hand, it may be that the narrator merely wants to show that a "medicine house" in this culture serves the social or ritual function served by a "shrine" in some other cultures. In that case, the conjunction, "or" (or any other coordinating conjunction for that matter) is wrongly used, for under such circumstances the two lexical items would not be semantic equivalents. They would be syntactic equivalents. What is needed here is either a structure of apposition (the medicine house, the "shrine") or an adjectival clause. As for "the rope, or *tie-tie*", the problem is two-fold. First, "rope" needs no explanation, since it is a very common English word and is employed in an entirely denotative sense in the passage; it is even more comprehensible to Achebe's non-Igbo readership than *tie-tie,* a pidgin English word. Besides, as a word of English derivation, *tie-tie* is an anachronism at that stage of Umuofia's life. Since no Umufian had by then seen a white man or heard a word of the English language, and since the white man had not established himself in any community nearby and the rope in question is of local manufacture rather than acquired by way of trade, it is impossible that Umuofia could have a word with an English base. this instance pedagogy seems to have led the novelist into ignoring historical logic.

Direct rendering is also employed in *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God.* In the former, the reader meets "bean cakes or *akara*" (p. 16), and "identical dress or *aso ebi*" (p. 18). In the latter novel one meets "Ogalanya or Man of Riches" (p. 39), "*anwansi* or magic" (p. 146), and *mgba Agbagho* or the Wrestling of the Maidens" (p. 193).

To a reader who pays attention to Achebe's handling of local items from novel to novel, and who has on several occasions met *ndichie* translated as "elders", there is bound to be some confusion, even if of no thematic or linguistic consequence, when he comes to the passage in *Arrow of God* where the *ikolo* drum is beaten "to summon the elders and *ndichie* (p. 140; also p. 149). The impression is that elders and *ndichie* are in fact different sets of people. This confusion is never cleared. Fortunately similar cases are very rare. In one other special case, the conjunction, "or", is used not to balance translations but to balance cultural equivalents. Thus, in *No Longer at Ease,* in the sentence "Everybody was properly dressed in *agbada* or European suit" (p. 31). "European suit" is not a translation equivalent of agbada. It is a cultural equivalent: these types of clothing serve as formal dressing in their respective cultures. Unfortunately, the foreign reader

has no way of making this inference, and is more likely, from other examples, either to take "European suit" as a translation of *agbada,* or agbada as the local name for "European suit".

The use of bracketted translations is quite restrained. It occurs only once in *Things Fall Apart,* in the explanation of the local name of one brand of cattle: Oji odu achu iji-o-o! (The one that uses its tail to drive flies away!" (p. 80), and once in *No Longer at Ease:* "Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves)" (p. 4), and surprisingly, it also occurs in *Anthills* (also only once) to give an English paraphrase of the local name for baptism: "baptism (translated in their language as Water of God)" (p. 105).

The restrained usage of this device must be explained in terms of Achebe's having realised its obtrusive nature.

Much more widespread is the use of introductory phrase or clause to give a hint of the meaning of a term that is used later in the sentence! Alternatively, the term is explained through lexical or semantic reiteration; or through using the term in one language as a nominal adjective to modify the semantic equivalent in the other language. Thus in *Things Fall Apart* there are such cases as "dancing *egwugwu"* (p. 4), "Eneke the bird" (p. 16), "the little bird nza" (p. 22), "the clever *ege* style (of wresting)" (p. 35), "the bird eneke-nti-oba" (p. 38), "udala tree" (p. 57). *No Longer at Ease* supplies such examples as *"egwusi* soup" (p. 21), "Oga Master" (p. 96), *"uli* tree" (p. 126), "the little bird nza" (p. 148). And from *Arrow of God* one gets such examples as "an ogbu tree" (p. 68), "old, ragged *egbu* tree" (p. 80), *"asa* fish" (p. 116), "string of *gigida"* (p. 116), "afa oracle" (p. 126), "strings of rattling *ekpili"* (p. 2223), and *ayaka* spirit chorus" (p. 221).

In most of these cases, one can see that the meaning of the term in English is already contained in the term in the local language. But the local word designates the specific item whereas the English word designates the larger or general class to which the specific item belongs. It is really the general class which the foreign reader understands and not the real meaning of the local word. All the reader is given to know is that *udala, uli, ogbu,* and *egbu* are trees; that egusi is a kind of soup; that asa is the name of a fish, and the Eneke and Nza are birds. This, of course, is not the normal practice in English or even Igbo. Unless the occasion specifically calls for it, an Englishman simply names a tree without adding the word 'tree" to the name; and so does the Igbo. One related usage which deserves note is that of translation through a post-modifying phrase. There is only one occurence and that is in *Things Fall Apart* where we have "Iguedo of the yellow grindstone" (p. 84). "Iguedo literally means "grindstone" *(igu* is "grindstone' and *edo* is "yellow").

Much more aesthetically pleasing and artistically successful,

because they are more smoothly integrated into the narrative are cases in which the meaning of a local word is revealed within the flow of narration so that there is no interruption to the flow of syntax. In *Things Fall Apart* the Igbo pronunciation of "court messenger" is given in the sentence immediately following that which contains the English term: "They were called *kotma"* (p. 123). Thereafter *kotma"* is employed in all but one of the subsequent mentions of the detested men in this chapter. Very early in the novel, the meaning of agbala is similarly conveyed; "... even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate told him that his father was *agbala.* That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title" (p. 10). In *No Longer At Ease,* we have: "This room was called *pieze* in Christian houses" (p. 50); "In the first verse he had pronounced *ugwu* as mountain when it should be *circumcision"* (p. 52). The sole instance of such direct translation in *Anthills* comes not in the authorial narrative but in Beatrice's narrative: "A world inside, a world without end. *Uwa t'uwa* in our language" (p. 85).

Sometimes, however, a direct and undisguised translation is given because the foreign reader's understanding of the story and his insight into the theme depends on his understanding the local expression used. Such is the case in *Arrow of God:*

> Tun-tun gem-gem
> Oso mgbada bu nugwu
>
> The speed of the deer
> Is seen on the hill (p. 225)

Some of the cases discussed so far constitute obtrusive translation, and their usages suffer from not being fully integrated within the narrative syntax. It is obvious that the pedagogical impulse, rather than major artistic necessity, dictates their usages.

Of a much better integrated device into the English syntax and consequently more aesthtically pleasing is the use of Appositional Rendering. This is a device in which a non-English lexical item is rendered in English in a syntactic structure, which has an appositional relationship with the non-English original.

Appositional rendering in Achebe's narrative usually takes the form of immediately reformulating in English a word or expression that has just been given in the local language. From *Things Fall Apart* are the following examples:

a. *Ani,* the earth goddess and the source of all fertility (p. 26);

b. the *ilo,* the village playground (p. 30);

c. ... the child was an *ogbanje,* one of those wicked children who when they died, entered their mother's wombs to be born again (p. 54);

d. *Ogbu-agali-odu.* one of those evil essences loosened upon the world by the potent 'medicines' which the tribe made in the distant past against its enemies but had now forgotten how to control (p. 73);

e. *Umuofia obodo dike,* the land of the brave (p. 84);

f. *efulefu,* worthless, empty men (p. 101);

From *No Longer at Ease:*

a. Obiajulu — 'the mind at last is at rest' (p. 6);

b. Nwanyidinma — ' a girl is also good' (p. 6);

c. Obi Okonkwo wa jelu oyibo — Obi who had been to the land of the whites (p. 29);

d. ... a man's inlaw was his *chi,* his personal god (p. 42);

e. He is Okonkwo *kpom-kwem,* exact, perfect (p. 48);

Arrow of God also contains several such usages:

a. What happened next was the work of *Ekwensu,* the bringer of evil (p. 24);

b. ... his *ikenda,* the strength of his right arm (p. 24);

c. ... *Nne ofo,* the mother of all staffs of authority in Umuaro (p. 70).

And in *Anthills* we find many appositional renderings. The first occurs quite early in the novel in the President's word: "finish' kabia" (p. 1). Others include "Nwanyibuife — a female is also something" (p. 87; *"Nneka,* they said, Mother is supreme" (p. 98); Eke-Idemili itself, royal python, messenger of the Daughter of God" (p. 105); Amaechina: May-the-path-never-close" (p. 222); and *Ife onye metalu* — what a man commits;; (p. 202).

A sensitive re-examination of the use of appositive structures reveals that there are actually three forms of appositional renderings. One involves the use of a dash to distance the English equivalent from the original. In this case, the typography calls attention to the identity of the English equivalent as an explanation interpolated within the syntax (for example: "Obiajulu — the mind at last is at rest").

Another form involves the use of a comma to separate the two items. Commas are not as eye-catching as dashes, partly because they do not create the abruptness created by dashes (what may be called a "creak" in the machinery of assembling words to form a

syntagm). The third involves the separation of the two items with a colon, as in the translation of "Amaechina".

Of the appositives separated with a comma, one also notes some variation: those in which the English equivalent is modified by a determiner or a genetive pronoun, and those which are not thus modified. The latter kind are the fewest and probably the most artistically subtle and aesthtically pleasing, for they provide the least perceptible "jerks" or "creaks" in the syntagm. Compare, for example, "the *ilo,* the village playground" with any of the following: *"efulefu,* worthless, empty men'; *"ori oda, bloody fool! ";* kpom kwem, *exact, perfect". Whereas in the first type the appositives are loudly proclaimed to be forms of repetition, the latter look like narrative continuations.*

All in all, there is a pattern of increasing sophistication, refinement and variety, in Achebe's devices for making local words accessible to foreign readers.

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ARIYA (Merry-making)

Onuora Ossie Enekwe

INTERVIEW WITH CHINUA ACHEBE

Enekwe: Why are you returning to Nigeria at this time, and what do you plan to do there?

Achebe: I'm returning to resume my life, if you like, in Nigeria. I came to the States on a short visit, to begin with. When I left Nigeria in 1972, I thought I would be here for one year, or at the most, two years. But it's dragged on beyond that to four years. So it's an overdue return, and I'm looking forward very much to my work at Nsukka.

Enekwe: What would you like to do, specifically, at the University of Nigeria?

Achebe: Well, I have so many things, I really don't know where to begin. I have so many ideas; there are so many things that need to be done, so many possibilities — you *know;* one is terribly excited, but at the same time, you're almost confused, because you don't know where to begin. But one can start from a personal angle. I'd like to complete the novel I'm working on. I had hoped to have at least the first draft ready here before going back. It didn't work out that way. I hope to complete it in Nigeria. So that's the first thing. Secondly, I want to see the work of the magazine, *Okike,* developed in its natural soil, with people who share the same kind of vision as I have. Thirdly, I'd like to pursue my own understanding and study of Igbo culture, which excites me more and more everyday. You can't do that from America—you need to get back to the soil. So, I'd like to get back, but I'm not sure just what specific areas.

This is one of the major cultures in Africa, and it's received scant attention. And somebody ought to get down to work on it, you know, just to uncover the mainspring of Igbo thinking. This is a major undertaking. And I'm not certain just what aspect I shall begin with, but that doesn't matter — this is the major area that needs to be attended to. So, that's the next thing that I'm excited about — getting back to Igboland, getting back to the study of Igbo people and Igbo culture.

Enekwe: Now, about your novel... does the delay have to do with what you wrote in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* — that we should not forget the past? Is it related to the

problem of delving into the causes of the Nigerian crisis? Or is it simply part of your slow and meticulous writing habit?

Achebe: Well...I've had this question in a different way before, and I'm sure I'm going to contradict myself here. I would say that the reason I didn't come up with another novel was the civil war, the crisis in Nigeria and the problem of finding the kind of emotional and artistic stability—peace of mind, if you like — that is needed. This is part of the answer, of course. I think the crisis had something to do with it because I did abandon a project of writing that I was already embarked upon. But I think that, as I look back on that, there is a second element, which I have not until now talked about. And that's the fact that I don't really feel that there is any obligation on my part to produce a novel every other year. It's not my style, and perhaps I was really making this point — it may have been unconscious—that one can get into the habit of being pressured by one's publisher, one's readers, one's fans — you know, everybody saying: "We read the last novel. Now when is the next one". And I think that is something that, for me, is not very desirable. I think I have to fight to work at my own pace. I think probably why I began to think of this was that I saw a TV interview that somebody did with Bernard Shaw on one of his visits to the United States. You know, Bernard Shaw never liked Americans, and he was always off-hand. So this interview was interesting because Shaw was almost anticipating his interviewer, and saying: "Don't ask me what should we do because when I was last here I told you what you should do and you haven't done it". So I think that I have a kind of feeling of: "Well, I've written these novels, which are important in my view, and they have not been fully, adequately, dealt with. So why should I write a fifth, and a sixth? Now, that's one point of view. You may think that this is just an excuse, but in a way I think that there's something quite fundamental there. I think that the job of my readers is to get the maximum out of what I have done.

I too have to sit back — especially after the number four — and assess, what I have been doing, ask myself questions and see if there is need for new departure. Because it's so easy to get onto the same routine. A novel every two years; perhaps, improving technique. But I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in doing

something fundamentally important — and therefore, it needs time. And what I've been doing, really, is avoiding this pressure to get into the habit of one novel a year. This is what is expected of novelists. And I have never been really too much concerned with doing what is expected of novelists, or writers, or artists. I want to do what I believe is important. And so I've been thinking; I've been working out things in my mind, and part of it is the Nigerian crisis. I have to ask myself: "What happened to Nigeria? What happened to my relationship to Nigeria? What happened to the Igbo people in relation to Nigeria? And how are we going to deal with this in future? Should this kind of thing ever happen again, how would we deal with it? How does Nigeria move on into this stage of evolution". And these are very important questions. And I don't think you can answer them if you're busy churning out one novel after another.

So the kind of thing I want to do in the interim is a book of essays, which could pull together some of my thoughts in the past, but also include some of the more recent things that I have been thinking about. And this seems to me necessary. You can clarify your own thinking much more directly in an essay than you can do in a novel. A novel is like life. I mean, there is no way a novelist can be held to account for what happens in a novel. I mean, even a character you like can be totally odious to other people. So a novel is not a way to clarify your mind. An essay is — it's logical. And so I think probably I needed to take time off to attend to the logic of a situation.

Enekwe: Thank you very much. You talked about dealing with some aspects of Igbo culture. You would like to get back to study the Igbo culture. Some time ago I heard that you were planning to write an Igbo dictionary. Is this true If so, what are your plans?

Achebe: No, it's not true. I'm not planning to do an Igbo dictionary.... I think that's something that people in Linguistics should be dealing with.

Enekwe: In 1974, during a conference in Columbia University, you disclosed that you were developing an inclination— or rather, that you have a talent for the theatre. Earlier, in an interview at the University of Washington in Seattle, you had expressed an intention to write plays in Igbo language. What is your concept of theatre?

Achebe: Well, I don't know that I can answer the question of concept, because I really would prefer to produce a play and then from that play, discuss my concept of theatre. In other words, there is a certain artistic inevitability in creation which I do not want to anticipate, to pre-empt. I have certain ideas, certain theories about theatre and language in our situation, which I'd like to try out before I begin to pontificate.

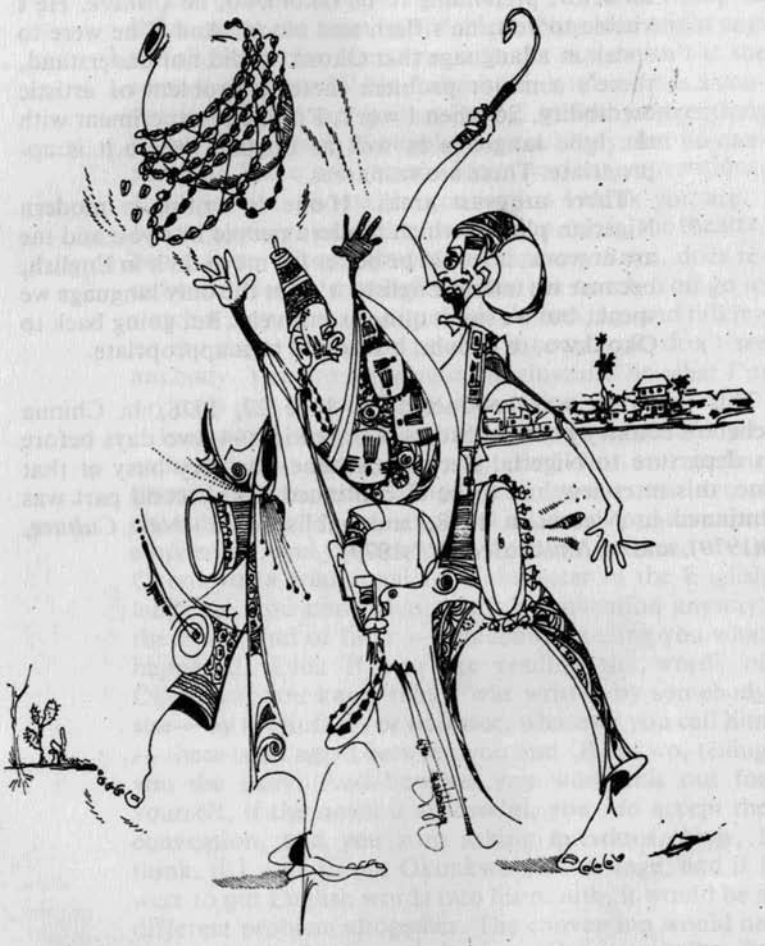
I think, for instance, that one of the problems with modern Nigerian theatre is the language — the English language. You are likely to produce theatre for the West rather than theatre for Nigeria, if you didn't stop to think about the language problem. Now you might say: "Well, isn't that the same with the novel; isn't it the same with poetry?" No, I don't think it is. Art is a convention. There are various forms, various conventions, which are applied. Probably you could say that no convention. There are various form, various conventions, But once you choose the convention I think you are *bound* by the rules of that convention. Now, the theatre, being a very direct, almost participatory form, does require a different convention from the novel. You go to watch a play, you see actual people moving, and talking on the stage. If you are reading a novel, you don't see anybody. You are using your imagination. So what I'm saying is that it's a different convention.

In a novel, once you accept that the whole thing is make-believe; once you accept that you are reading printed words on a page, and you come across characters, and so on, this is all a kind of pre-arranged convention, and you accept it. And so if you read about Okonkwo, a traditional Igbo character in the English language, you know that this is a convention anyway; there is a kind of filter — somebody's telling you what happened. Even if you are reading the words of Okonkwo, you know that it was written by somebody else— by the author, or narrator, whatever you call him — there is an agent between you and Okonkwo, telling you the story. And however you work this out for yourself, if the novel is successful, you *do* accept the convention, and you stop asking questions. Now, I think, if I were to put Okonkwo on the stage, and if I were to put English words into his mouth, it would be a different problem altogether. The convention would no longer hold. Because each time Okonkwo talks, he would be violating something quite fundamental. He

would be talking about experiences and life and history in a language which has nothing to do with that life or experience or history. And each time he opens his mouth, the audience is reminded that there is a convention — a translator, a medium — between him and the audience. And I think this is almost an insuperable problem, and this is why I began to think that if you are going to work in the theatre, at least, part of the action, part of the dialogue, of this theatre must be in the language of the characters. Because you see a character is there on the stage, alive, and even though he's only an actor, pretending to be Okonkwo, he's *there.* He's visible to you; he's flesh and blood. And if he were to speak in a language that Okonkwo did not understand, there's a major problem there: a problem of artistic credibility. So when I work, I'd like to experiment with the Igbo language as well as English, where it is appropriate. There are vast areas

There are vast areas. If one is writing a modern Nigerian play in which modern people like you and me are at work, it would be better for me to do it in English, because we talk in English, it's not the only language we speak, but we use it quite extensively. But going back to Okonkwo, to Ezeulu, it seems to be inappropriate.

This interview was conducted on June 27, 1976, in Chinua Achebe's country home at Storrs, Connecticut — two days before his departure to Nigeria. Because Achebe was very busy at that time, this interview had to be discontinued. The second part was continued in Nigeria in 1978, and published in *New Culture,* 19(1979), and in *Nsukkascope,* 7)1979).



ARIYA II

Ernest N. Emenyonu

A LITERARY READING OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH AND CHINELO ACHEBE'S THE LAST LAUGH AND OTHER STORIES

It is very hard to capture effectively in words the symbolic significance of the event for which we are here gathered today. Our people in their infinite wisdom have cryptically stated that when an individual cooks for a community nothing remains of the dish, but when a community cooks for an individual, you have more left-overs than at the biblical feast of three loaves and two small fish. However in the Nigerian literary arena, we have a reversal of this truism, for when Chinua Achebe cooks for his literary community everyone feeds to his delight and what is left can feed multitudes of passers-by, the world over.

What makes the dish we are about to partake in, even more extra-ordinary today is that the 'Master Chef' has brought with him an enchanting helper, tutored by him. Men in these parts of the world may be adepts in the pounding of foo-foo but the delicious soup that goes with it, (and in Anambra it is "OFE NSALA" OR "OFE ONUGBU") is the exclusive specialty and preserve of the female hand. So the foo-foo before us has been prepared with the dexterity and agility of the adroit male hand, while the soup exhudes the rounded-blending aroma of the accomplished female touch.

We are witnessing today the unique hat-trick that only Chinua Achebe and his inseparable publishers the Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited, can foist on unsuspecting minds.

For twenty-two years after his seathing political satire, *A Man of the People,* Chinua Achebe kept the literary world in a tantalizing vigil. Today when the masquerade has emerged, he has come with a new dance. While the world was waiting, our master mid-wife *cum* mother was, unknown to us, busy making a new baby. If Chinelo Achebe had appeared on this stage alone today the cynics among us would quite justifiably had quibbled and querried, "Chinua we know, Heinemann we know, but who are thou?" "This literary launching today, therefore, serves a dual purpose. First, it marks the public return of the Chief-Priest after twenty-two years of consulting with his ancestors; secondly and perhaps more significantly, it serves as the introduction of a loving daughter by a caring father.

It is not only the sins of the fathers that are visited on the children, for today we are assured that the blessings of the fathers shall in no small measure, be passed on to their children. Chinua

Achebe has reproduced his kind and the literary world is the more blessed for it.

It is significant that the influence of Chinua Achebe on Chinelo is not visibly rooted in *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God* but rather in the eclectic tone of *Anthills of the Savannah.*

Enthusiastic young scholars of African Literature may have a subject for study there. The enormous and pleasant but unenviable challenge which this occasion exposes Chinelo to is that unto whom much is given, much is expected.

Our Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* was biased in favour of his young, sprightly, sensitive, intelligent and almost precocious daughter and quite often wished that Ezima and not Nwoye had been the son, A bowl of pounded yam could throw down Nwoye in a wrestling contest.

Nwoye was the epitome of cold impotent ash begat by the flaming fire. Ezima could read her father's mind, could feel her father's inner-most thoughts, and in a manner totally uncharacteristic of the expectations of Okonkwo's culture and tradition, had offered infact, to carry her father's *Ozo* stool to the village square. Okonkwo being the type of man he was, resisted the gesture of this formidably perceptive daughter. Today we, and the whole world, are irrefutable witnesses to the ritual act of Chinelo carrying her father's *Ozo* stool to the market sqaure. It is an unusual act by an unusual young lady. Although hereafter all people shall call Chinelo blessed, all people shall also look upon Chinua Achebe's biological daughter to indeed be Chinua Achebe's literary daughter.

When Chinua Achebe speaks, the whole world stands and listens, and when he speaks, he speaks loud and clear. Even as a young man, Chinua Achebe spoke as an elder in clear resounding tones, believing always that an elder does not sit aloof while the goat dies in its tether.

Thirty years ago, like Ezeulu peering cautiously and scrupulously at the tricky new moon striving to break through the obliteratig clouds, Chinua Achebe began to examine more closely the nature of his society and the chequered history of the African vis-a-vis the assertions of his uninvited guest, the white colonialist who contended that before the coming of the Europeans, the African had no history. African history was according to the obsequious white imperialist, simply the history of white presence in Africa, for before then, there was nothing happening that was worth writing about. Indeed in the course of world civilizations, contended the ethnocentric European colonizer, Africa had always been a borrower and never a contributor.

Like 'Zebrudaya', the young Achebe cried foul! He began by writing novels set in the past asserting quite unequivocally that "if

my novels, especially those set in the past, accomplished nothing, I would be quite satisfied if they told my readers that Africa did not hear about culture for the first time from the whiteman. Indeed, "Africa was not one long night of savagery from which the early Europeans acting on God's behalf, delivered them". Africa had culture. It had beauty. It had history. But the African predicament, indeed, where the rain began to beat the black man wherever he may be on earth today, had its source in his tragic encounter with the misguided and over-presumptuous white crusader of the missionary fame. Picking his words carefully and enthrallingly logically, Achebe, in what may survive as the most pungent attack on the whiteman of that era in the African novel, states passionately:

> "The whiteman is very clever. He came peaceably and quietly with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay.... Now he says that our customs are bad. Our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad..... Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart".

The most enduring thing about Chinua Achebe's imagery is that it is capable of expansion and multiple piercing interpretations that transcend time and place. The nefarious whiteman in *Things Fall Apart* is the physical European imperialist. He is the same in *Arrow of God.* In No Longer at Ease *it is the ambivalent, culturally disshevelled African "been-to".* In *A Man of the People* his place is taken by the ebullient, loquacious and grab-maniac politician that succeeded the white imperialist on the post — independence African soil.

In *Anthills of the Savannah,* we see him in the garb of a military dictator.

Indeed, in this novel, Chinua Achebe probes with disarming sensitivity the subject of army rule in Africa as elsewhere. Anyone who has followed Chinua Achebe carefully and objectively, would know that sooner or later, this type of novel was bound to emerge.

It is the logical thing to follow after his polemic, *The Trouble with Nigeria.* In that small book Achebe had diagnosed the ills of the Nigerian society and certified that the trouble with Nigeria lies in its leadership. In this unmistakably imaginative sequence, *Anthills of the Savannah,* Achebe dissects with clinical precision the trouble with leadership in Africa, and quite possibly, particularly in Nigeria, although one must hasten to add that the setting of the novel is an imaginary nation called Kangan.

Coming twenty-two years after the scathing political satire *A Man of the People, Anthills* is an unmasked criticism of military leadership in Africa. It is significant that at the end of *A Man of the People,* the author did recommend and indeed saw to the over-

throw of the corrupt civilian regime represented in that novel. Power was subsequently taken over by the military.

It seems that within twenty-two years, the novelist has discovered that the military as substitute government in Africa, indeed has its own flaws. The author has identified the acute flaws of military leadership in contemporary Africa as mediocrity and terrorism in governance. Early in the novel the author states quite succinctly an interesting theory about the military vocation: "According to this theory, military life attracts two different kinds of men: the truly strong who are very rare, and the rest who would be strong. The first group make magnificent soldiers and remain good people hardly ever showing let alone flaunting their strength. The rest are there for the swank". (p. 46). The novel is about the second group and the novelist specifies their type: "The real danger today is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America, and from all those virulent, misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa sired on Africa by Europe. Particularly those ones" (p. 52).

There is no doubt therefore, what type of military leadership the novel sets out to attack. It is the terror disguised as saviour; the eccentric military rule identified in the book as being in the hands of "leaders who openly looted our treasury, whose effrontery soiled our national soul". (p. 42). At their lowest level we have the reckless, drunk-driving new recruit who "walks with the exaggerated swagger of a coward" (p. 48), to whom the life of a civilian is no more than the life of a dog. At the apex is the carefree, president-for-life, larger-than-life ruthless dictator, in the Kangan state house who builds a barricade between him and the masses; is intolerant of their wishes and indifferent to their precarious destiny. He was seen. at his inception by the masses as their Messiah. He went down in the annals of their history as their tormentor and betrayer. But the tyrant does not act alone. He has in his camp, the civilian elite as part of the leadership. The author characterizes the gang as follows:

> I am not thinking so much about him as about my colleagues, eleven intelligent, educated men who let this happen to them, who actually went out of their way to invite it, and who even at this hour have seen and learnt nothing, the cream of our society and the hope of the black race (p. 2)

And in what is capable of an interpretation of an elucidating revelation of authorial pre-occupation, the embittered novelist adds:

> "I suppose it is for them that I am still at this silly observation post making farcical entries in the crazy log-book of this our ship of state. Disenchantment with them turned long ago into detached clinical in-

> terest. I find their actions not merely bearable now but actually interesting even exciting, quite amazing!. And of course, complete honesty demands that I mention one last factor in my continued stay, a fact of which I am somewhat ashamed, namely that I couldn't be writing this if I didn't hang around to observe it all. And no one else would". (p. 2).

Anthills can, therefore, be summed up as Achebe's disenchantment with leadership in Africa, his artistic articulation of the trouble with African leadership at the turn of this century. The setting, however, can be said to be universal for the novel effectively applies to any country or human location where decadence and tyranny are the rule rather than the exception.

The structure of the novel is consciously designed to enhance the theme. There are eighteen chapters, some of which are significantly titled, as we find in chapters one and six with the headings: "First Witness — Christopher Oriko" and "Beatrice" respectively. This flex of muscle obviously lays the necessary emphasis on the selected personalities and experiences. Achebe's characterisation is purposeful and perhaps offers the most effective means of appreciation of human nature and experience under the onslaught of tyranny. Realised in two major categories, his characters include Chris, Ikem and Beatrice as representative of the educated elite, while Elewa, the police constable, and the taxi driver and others of their kind represent the uneducated, the masses. Ikem and Chris assume a messianic stance and die in the course of seeking redress for the oppressed in the society. Chris is the Commissioner for Information who is gagged. Ikem is the editor of the government-owned newspaper who breaks loose with his pungent editorials. Through these editorials, Ikem condemns the "Sport" that is the execution of armed robbers while "the looters of our treasury, whose effrontery soiled our national soul", are "celebrated". In the same vein, Chris, the voice of reason earns his death from the barrel of the gun of a soldier whose brazen abduction of a young innocent girl, he dares to challenge. Chris and Ikem are childhood friends of the Head of State and do not seem to recognize the veracity of the Machiavellian Philosophy which implies that those who help others to power soon become the victims of the power. Their experiences in the hands of His Excellency are a clear demonstration of the inherent danger in fraternizing with a wild beast, for some day, the beast may break loose and devour even its attendant.

There is a handful of female characters, but two are given prominence. Elewa's mother is treated with respect, Agatha, Beatrice's house-help with pity, but Elewa and Beatrice, alias BB are more or less the centre-piece of the novel. The American journalist is portrayed as the typical cheeky white girl, who sees His Excellency as one of those African buffoons, and Achebe shows a clear dislike for her, via BB.

Elewa, a complete illiterate finds herself an indispensable woman to the famous journalist, Ikem Osodi. Inspite of her limitations educationally, Elewa has a surprising degree of confidence and absence of inferiority complex. Even when she makes statements such as "I no shy, but I no sabi book" she does not grovel, or feel sorry for herself. She says it as a matter of fact.

Achebe creates her, perhaps as a link between the two worlds the principal characters are living in. These characters, Chris, BB and Ikem, are sophisticated and educated. They are in the corridors of power and holding the positions they hold, it is not expected that they would be familiar with the way the less privileged in society live. These English-educated characters are brought down to the level of the Taxi drivers, the Trade Unionists, and the struggling market women through Elewa, who is very much at home with this class, and yet, not over-awed by the company of the sophisticated.

Elewa is the only real "survivor" in the whole novel, because she reproduces her kind. She is the avenue through which Ikem's lineage is continued. From the innocent Elewa the only life in the savannah of ant hills emerges. Achebe gives Elewa a daughter and not a son, further re-emphasising his faith in women. By causing Elewa's uncle to be late for the naming ceremony, Achebe seems to say that, with our present state of affairs in the country, men may gradually relinquish their positions to women, since Beatrice is clearly, the unopposed leader of the small group at the naming ceremony. His confidence in women is extended to portraying them as instruments of religious tolerance. In the society where religious intolerance is the order of the day, Agatha the religious fanatic sings christian songs, and Aina, a Moslem, dances. when BB expresses surprise, her response is sharp.

> "Them talk say make Moslem no dance when christian de sing?"

Beatrice or BB is portrayed as a remarkable character, a "goddess," Achebe calls her. She makes a First Class in English in England, and is a Senior Administrative Officer. She is very sensible and practical, always acting as the umpire between Ikem and Chris, both of whom she regards as acting childishly.

In the whole novel, BB is the only character who stood up to His Excellency and challenged his action. She stubbornly refused to be intimidated into matiness with the American journalist, though she knew the consequences of that stubborness. In spite of her detached attitude at His Excellency's party, she shows how practical she can be by throwing herself at HE, and flirting openly with him, just to lure him to the balcony. She does not mind being the centre of attraction by her action, as long as she achieves her objective. She shows her distaste for hypocrisy and power play by rejecting the of-

fer of the new Head of State to give Chris a State burial.

There is an air of tragedy about BB. Her childhood, and her status, first as Chris's girl-friend, and later a lonely woman not even privileged to be Chris's Widow, leaves her with a feeling of utter hollowness. The kind thing would have been to leave her carrying Chris's baby from that night in the mosquito infested room of Aina and Braimoh, but she is not so lucky. Is Achebe excluding education, dynamism and leadership from motherhood, or vice versa? He seems to be saying a woman can't expect to have all the qualities BB has, and still expect to be a mother. Leave motherhood with the likes of Elewa who have nothing else.

By denying BB Chris's baby, Achebe is really eliminating Chris who has no child that we know of in the whole novel. BB however, survives.

Writing for both the elite and the non-elite, Achebe does not want to bandy words. He thus uses received and pidgin english to reach the two categories of his audience. Beyond the use of pidgin the novelist makes a vivid record of impressions such as the clicking of the light switch when it is brought alive. Works like "Harmoney" for *harmony,* "grin" for *green* are used to humour the scenes and impressions created while at the same time deriding the objects in question. Achebe still believes that proverbs are like the palm oil with which words are eaten and makes a generous use of them in the novel. Readers and critics who seem to miss the proverbial witicism of the earlier novels should look more carefully again and listen more carefully to the voice of the old man in Chapter nine of the novel. Achebe now speaks with the shrill voice of the leader of the masquerades. It is a voice known and yet unknowable. The dance is different, the drummer and the voice are the same.

Achebe reveals in *Anthills* his concealment of frustration about the Nigerian society. All real political happenings in Nigeria seem to be at variance with his political beliefs. Thus, there is abundant evidence of parallelism in the context of the fictitious and the real characters in the novel. It is to the credit of the author that in the hot political setting of the novel, he brings his writing skills to bear to justify the need for transferred meanings from within the text. But in Achebe's characteristic style, there are ambiguities in the parallels drawn in the novel and the reader is left to the wisdom of his hand sight. Equally significant is Achebe's use of some small prints, capital letters, bold prints and poetic verses to capture attention and for more emphasis on the issues he is raising. Through these stylistic devices, Achebe presents the society in the novel as being in continual need of salvation. This act of salvation is not necessarily a mass act; it comes through the vision of individuals who end up as victims of the society they wish to save. Whether the

Society in turn benefits from their vision is not quite clear. The clash between the individual and the society which Achebe has often portrayed in Nigerian and African terms is a universal phenomenon. The martyr, the supposedly positive product of the clash is also universal. However, Achebe seems in *Anthills* to go beyond the relationship between the individual and society to examine the fate of the individual within the milieu of a terrorized society. Considering his characterization, the collective and individual experiences of the characters, it seems that Chinua Achebe is clearly coming to a socialist position where the elites, the taxi drivers, the market women, and the like can now come together as comrades. Equally significant in the socialist context is the role Achebe assigns to women in the novel. The novel ends with a socially vital comment:

> This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented .... And particularly absurd when it is not even talented..... (p. 232)

Indeed, *Anthills of the Savannah* can very well be Achebe's socialist statement.

When we turn to Chinelo Achebe, apart from the apparent striking similarity in names, and identical intrinsic moral preoccupations with the father, the first image that comes to mind is that enigmatic, nimble-witted power-wielding prophetess of nearly the same name in her father's curtain raiser *Things Fall Apart.* The obvious question by the anxious student of modern African fiction is, is it really like father, like daughter? The foot-path to the literary top looks identical. There have been studies, may be not half as much as they should be, on Chinua Achebe's stages of development from the short-story writer to the novelist. Significant echoes of Chinua Achebe's short stories are evident in some of his major novels.

Chinelo Achebe's literary debut is a collection of seven short stories entitled, *The Last Laugh and Other Stories.* Perhaps, it should have been called *The First Laugh and Other Stories* since we expect to hear Chinelo Achebe's more laughters after this. What marks out these seven stories is the consistent vitality of young Achebe's narrative techniques. The stories are full of life. Their creator manifests a seriousness of purpose unusual for an author appearing in print for the first time. Although most of the stories are set in modern locations and focus on contemporary themes, the author is able to vary her narrative tone to suit the peculiar circumstances of each story. She is able to rotate her style from the cadences of stylish black American speech, to the staccato of youthful pedantic slangs, to the sonorous incantatory chants of the ancestor worshipper. It is the voice of youth, a concerned youth

that the reader hears all the time. Even when she writes about the forces of vanishing traditions, she is able to recreate the events in the language of her own generation. Two stories stand out clearly among others in the collection, namely: "The Last Laugh", the title story and "Reunion". The former is built on layers of ironies and flabbergasting suspense while the latter is characterized by its fast-paced narrative mode. It is not only Mike's in laws in "The Last Laugh", who laugh last at Mike, the reader cannot help but laugh at the frailty in human nature which Mike portrays. It is significant that Chinelo Achebe spares the youth of undeserved agony which the adult world seeks at every turn to hurl at them. And even when the young are subjected to some forms of adult brutality, their innocence remains the resilient source of their rescue. Children are not allowed to be sacrificed to appease adult indiscretions and inanities. It is to prevent a harrowing uncertain future for Orlando and Mike Jnr. that the kidnap attempt had to be foiled. Let parents quarrel to their hearts' content, let marriages crash and crumble, but innocent children must not be scape-goats and must not be enslaved so that their parents can attain their misguided self-centred liberation. As in most of the other stories in the collection, the values allowed to prevail in "The Last Laugh" are those that protect innocence, extol the virtuous and foster godly essence. The "Reunion" shares "The Last Laugh's" pursuit and preservation of basic moral values but it is distinct in its language economy and precision. Its apt incorporation of dialogue will remain one major attribute that singles it out as the best story in the collection. The story is pitched at such a high level of tension that the reader gasps continually for breath as the narrator takes him through the pulsating thrilling drama interspersed with convulsive emotional outbursts of four intimate young ladies whose love for each other has turned sour. Chinelo Achebe is able to recapture most effectively in this story, the pranks, idiosyncracies, foilbles, animosities, delights and absurdities which form as they vibrate and sustain the female adolescent ephemeral world.

The Last Laugh and Other Stories will survive as a work of literature because of the author's vigorous narrative techniques, her easy ability to enter and re-enter the world of her characters and describe them with compassion and authenticity; her inimitable versatility, and a masked sense of humour as scintilating as it is over-powering in its grimness. Sophisticated irony is a quality that even the casual reader cannot miss in Chinelo Achebe's art. If the reader of this collection has any sour taste, it is the rather bewildering ineptitude of Chinelo Achebe's editor or printer or both. There is a generous spray of printing or typographic mishaps so splashed throughout the book that they must be mentioned for rectification in any future editions. As a rule, punctuation is most haphazard

throughout the entire seventy-nine pages of the book, with pages nineteen to fifty as the worst bleached. There are such embarrassing infelicities as in..." they would have ended up in my bedroom" (p. 15).... 'I'm not surprised that you think the way you so..." (p. 21); "Her horrified parents had been horrified" (p. 24); "Mike the and two boys got down with the rest of the passengers..." (p. 32); "And she gushes endlessly about the dress I listen, bored..." (p. 37); "Maureen was dying to impart a bit of malicious gossip she had picked up the morning to me" (p. 43);... " wondering frightenedly at the sounds forced out unwillingly form our beings" (p. 52); "His last words were drowned in choking sounds which omitted from his throat ..." (p. 57); ..." Ojiaku's rage steemed from the betrayal he felt at his former friend's duplicity ..." (p. 59); "I was no longer frightened or him ..." (p. 60); "My brother and I looked away, quite enable to meet his penetrating gaze" (p. 64); "His voice change and was full of disgust" (p. 65); "The battle with the Tembemene had proved too much for his aged souls" (p. 67) etc. Spelling and capitalization irregularities are as outrageous, finding their climax on page 40 where "embarrass" has two different spellings on the same page. It is necessary to go to these details because one thing a publisher must not become to a budding artist such as Chinelo Achebe, is avoidable liability. Heinemann Publishers should treat the young Achebe no less circumspectly as they have done the father over the years. What is good for the goose is good for the gander.

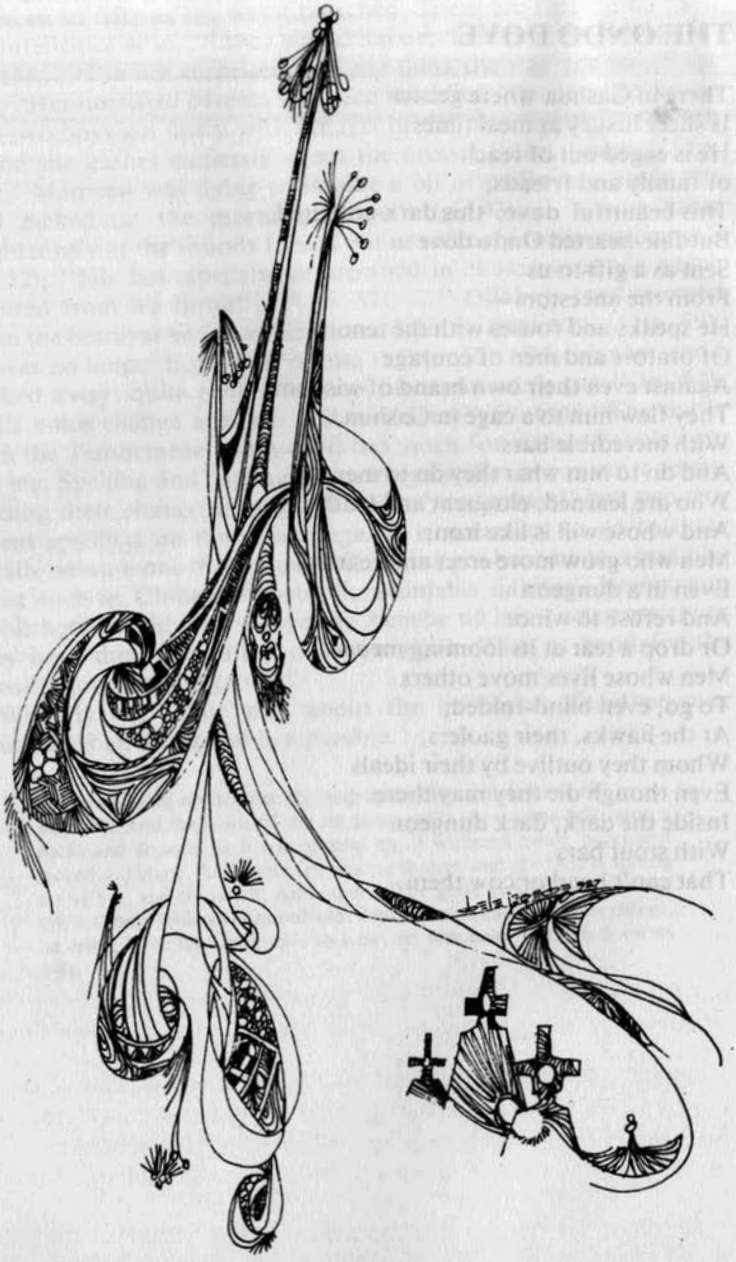
What is left to be said about the influence of father over daughter shall be uttered in a parable.

> "A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock: and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns: and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang, up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear". (Luke 8 verses 5-8).

Tony E. Afejuku

THE ONDO DOVE

There in Gashua where geisha
Is sheer luxury at meal times
He is caged out of reach
of family and friends,
This beautiful dove, this dark-coloured
But fair-hearted Ondo dove
Sent as a gift to us
From the ancestors —
He speaks and rouses with the tenor
Of orators and men of courage
Against even their own brand of wisdom
They flew him to a cage in Gashua,
With incredible bars
And do to him what they do to men
Who are learned, eloquent and truthful
And whose will is like iron;
Men who grow more erect and fearless
Even in a dungeon
And refuse to wince
Or drop a tear at its looming menace
Men whose lives move others
To go, even blind-folded,
At the hawks, their gaolers,
Whom they outlive by their ideals
Even though die they may there
Inside the dark, dark dungeon
With stout bars
That can't bend or cow them.



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Ifi Amadiume

CLASS AND GENDER IN ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH — A CRITIQUE

There are those who, like Nuruddin Farah, (see *West Africa,* 21 Sept. 1987), revere Africa's political novelist, Chinua Achebe, too much to bother to present us an objective analysis of this latest book *Anthills of the Savannah.* Their immediate concern has therefore been to offer a congratulatory message to the master story-teller. There are on the other hand others who are too steeped in their age-old controversies with the man that they are not able to carry out consistent appraisal of this present work without prejudice. There are yet again those 'big names' in African literature who have not made any comments yet. And one wonders why enough critical attention is not being paid to the new challenges which Achebe has forced on his people.

It is for this reason that I hasten to get a word in edgeways before Africa's tiny circle of in-bred literary elite monopolises the dialogue to the exclusion of everyone else, for so is the tradition of elitist patriarchal monopolistic culture. It is therefore important that *Anthills of the Savannah* is examined on two critical issues, namely, the extent of Achebe's commitment to socialism/revolution and feminism.

On a British Television interview with Achebe, during the recent Booker Prize award ceremony, October 1987, Achebe said that he was conscious of the ambivalent attitude to women in African literature. Therefore, in *Anthills...,* he has tried to suggest a more creative role for women in our societies. In an eariler more direct and precise statemnt in *The Guardian,* 26th September, 1987, Achebe recalled the redemptive role which women have had in African history, their ability to assume power from r en and act to save the society in extreme or hopeless situations. He however regretted the fact that today's African women are not yet organised. African women, in his own words, 'ought to know that they have had a redemptive role in our history, and that it should be available again'.

Achebe therefore sets off writing *Anthills* with a commitment to feminism. In order to assess the extent to which he fulfils this commitment, I shall examine female characterisation, female symbolism and how they feature in the theme, plot and events in he book.

We find that Achebe has not messed about with what the theme of the book is about. The very first pages show at once that *Anthills...* is about men and power games. The self proclaimed

military President of Kagan is in fact a dictator and a petty tyrant who has 'the cream of our society and the hope of the black race' dancing around him like cowards and idiots. For those who, like the narrator of this section of the story, Christopher Oriko, Commissioner for Information, show any independence of thought, the President threatens them with his eyes or silence. While others like the Commissioner for Education are de-manned and made rubbish of. Men are boot-licking and crawling into holes like animals. A particular professor, who is Commissioner for Home Affairs, is actually called a buffoon with no political morality:

Through the mouth of the narrator, Achebe lashes out mercilessly at the university intellectuals for their sychophancy and envy of the military in power. While the military President, who had no preparation for political leadership, wears, mufti and surrounds himself with professors, ' the crew from the university aspire to the military look'. The Cabinet which is full of all these men is described as incompetent. Even the military President heaves contempt at the half-baked professor who sinks so low as to resort to gossip, which African stereotyping regards as a woman's thing. The President himself is described as a half-wit, who is surrounded by a 'solid wall of court jesters';

In these few chapters, Achebe rips the mask off and shows us so vividly the incompetence and inadequacies of these men in government. Achebe also makes an important point about revolution right from the beginning of the book. It is the fact that the military with all its arms feared unarmed civilians and feared demonstrations most.

If this was going to be a book about 'the people' or giving women power, we would have expected to encounter the main characters in their capacities as leaders or representatives of these interest groups. It does not take long before we find out that the book is not about 'the people', but the elite classes and their individualism. Opposition to the corrupt President comes from two intellectual elites in the persons of the main characters Chris Oriko and Ikem Oshodi, poet and editor of the *National Gazette.* The important political dialogues and debates are between these two individualistic men.

As for the author's commitment to feminism, we find that the story has already taken shape before the female characters are introduced. The females in fact come in as 'subordinates' or in 'service relationship' to the men. We meet a first female in chapter 3. She is secretary to a main character, Ikem. Then we meet Ikem's girlfriend, Elewa. She is not very schooled but ordinary, solid and sensible.

It is through Ikem that we get the second part of the plot. Under threat of a repeat of the history of dispossession in modern post-

colonial times, people of a particular province, Abazon, which had not voted for the military President during his presidency referendum, decided to make a deputation to the federal government at Bassa. We later find out that the delegation consists of men only.

It is however directly from the very articulate and logical Elewa that we get a statement about the predicament of women as exploited sexual objects. Says she to her boyfriend Ikem in popular English, 'If I no kuku bring my stupid nyarsh come dump for your bedroom' (had I not left my vagina at your disposal), he wouldn't have been kicking her about as if she were a football. She was in an unequal relationship in which she felt exploited. She generalises her predicament to all women — 'woman done chop sand for dis world' (woman had had a hard time in this world).

The two female characters that we have encountered so far are therefore servicing men, one as a secretary, the other as a sexual object. When Elewa and Ikem fall out, her anger does not last. The loving and showing of care are all from her. He is preoccupied with 'great' ideas in his head, such as the state of the nation: Achebe scores a point here by showing the contradictions in this supposed great poet, great journalist and nationalist, who at a personal level sexually exploits a grassroots girl. Ikem states his reason for not wanting a woman to spend the night in his bed, ' I simply detest the very notion of waking up and finding beside you somebody naked and unappetizing.

In their sexual act, it also seems that it is Elewa who is doing the uplifting. As far as attitude to and ideas about women go, Ikem is a total swine: Women are seen as distractors. Sleeping together for him also prevents work — 'If we are to improve on our fathers' performance in the invention business we must learn the sweet uses of hard work. I couldn't write tomorrow's editorials with Elewa's hands cradling my damp crotch':

Elewa is cast as a shop sales girl. All the main characters are highly qualified educationally and have studied overseas. Against them, Elewa's freshness is described as appealing. This makes one wonder why Achebe did not cast her as the main female character, since she has amazing potentials for linkage with the grassroots, which Achebe's favourite female, Beatrice, does not have.

Beatrice, whom Achebe casts as the main female character, does not appear until in chapter 4 of the book. Intellectually, she is on equal level with the main male characters. Like the men too, she is connected with Western capital cities, having obtained an English Honours degree at London university. She is described as absolutely sound and very strong. Like Elewa, Beatrice also takes the initiative in love-making.

But in spite of Achebe's effort to elevate Beatrice above Elewa, Elewa still comes across as the most conscious of the two women.

Achebe for example describes Elewa as sticking to these intellectual elites and understanding little, while this is not strictly correct. This shows the author's lack of understanding of female issues. Elewa is usually the first to pick up the issue of the sexual exploitation of women and call for female solidarity, which she does not initially seem to get from Beatrice. For example, on hearing the story about His Excellency (H.E.) being fixed up with a girl, when the main characters were still students at London, it is Elewa who bemoans the suffering and exploitation of women in this world.

Even with Beatrice, we find that there are inconsistencies in the development of her supposed strong and independent character in lines such as when Chris says that she asks 'inconvenient questions like a precocious child''.

Beatrice takes the narrative from chapter 6. She is invited to a party by the President. Chris does not seem to be worried by the fact that she might be exposed to sexual harassment and convinces her to go to the party by herself. H.E. introduces Beatrice as 'one of the most brilliant daughters of this country'. However, they all seem to be only paying lip service to this claim, including the author. For, we find that the real relationships, the real poetry, historical and political speeches come from Chris or Ikem, although Beatrice is not coy and can participate in conversations about penis sucking and sperm swallowing (p. 69). The women consistently feature more in dialogue on sex or sexual exploitation.

Even though Beatrice's position or status is enhanced by being cast as Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, we find that it is in fact the American woman, Lou, whom we encounter at the President's party, who comes across as strong, very determined, very articulate, very confident and expert at her job, which is safe-guarding American interest — she is most likely a CIA agent.

It is again through body language that Beatrice is made to rescue her nation from foreign dominance, which is symbolised by the American girl's sexuality. Beatrice in her rescue attempt encounters the President's penis in the symbolism of the python signifying erection and the shrine signifying the vagina:- The big snake, the royal python of a gigantic erection began to stir in the shrubbery of my shrine as we danced closer and closer.

Achebe is at his best in the use of language, colour, imagery and symbolism when he lashes out at our pathetic weak rulers. This is what he says through a very shocked Beatrice, 'If I went to America today, to Washington DC, would I, could I, walk into a White House private dinner and take the American President hostage. And his Defence Chief and his Director of CIA?' And His Excellency replies, 'Oh don't be such a racist, Beatrice. I am surprised at you. A girl of your education:'

Beatrice says correctly that her country is the story of three men, whom Chris refers to as three green bottles standing on a wall, H.E., Ikem and himself. In actual fact, they are fragile nonentities who can so easily be knocked down. And this is what finally happens.

The shocking and depressing experience with her country's President forces Beatrice into a reflective and analytical mood in which she does a resume of her life so far. Achebe now exposes some of the contradictions and ambivalence in beliefs about women and attitude to females in Igbo/African culture. Because Beatrice is a so-called 'strong' woman, she acquires an undeserved reputation as using 'bottom-power', as being ambitious. She is even called 'the latter-day Madame Pompadour'.

It is significant that there is no disguise in Beatrices's origin. She is Igbo like Achebe himself: Through her, Achebe states his own position on the woman question. Criticising Ikem's lack of clear role for women in his political thought, Beatrice says, 'But the way I see it is that giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough... It is not enough that women should be the court of last resort because that last resort is a damn sight too far and too late:' (p. 91-92). This is exactly what Achebe has had women do in this novel — pick up the pieces after the three green bottles get shattered.

Beatrice might air her views on various issues when she is by herself. But, it seems that once in the presence of the men, they take over the dialogue, even on the issue of sexism. For example, when it appears as if Ikem is becoming repentant about his sexism, he says that women should be consulted for the new role of modern women, since they have never been asked before. In which case, he says, 'everybody had better know who is *now* (italic) holding up the action' (p. 98).

Ikem goes on to say that women are the biggest and oldest single group of oppressed people: But, he immediately contradicts all this sudden sexism awareness in his very next statement by his sexist language of 'man', 'his', 'brotherhood' as collective nouns, which makes women again invisible. Of course, Ikem's chauvinism is also made apparent, since a supposed strong woman is right there before him and he does not ask her, but goes on with his great speech and his great debate to which Beatrice is simply a listener, giving emotional and sexual comfort and encouragement. She reacts sexually towards Ikem after his great outburst, even though it is his friend Chris who is her boyfriend. What is Achebe trying to say here about female sexuality?

Perhaps, it is on the basis of this political speech of Ikem's (p. 99), that revolutionaries would claim that Achebe is a sell-out, for

it seems that all the gains of world progressive revolutions are denied in this statement, 'Experience and intelligence warn us that man's progress in freedom will be piecemeal, slow and undramatic. Revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable stretch of quagmire but it does not confer freedom, and may indeed hinder it'. Ikem therefore settles for reformism.

Achebe's paradigm is masculine. The skeleton of the story is power relations between men. Even when introducing the concept of divinity in chapter 8, which he titles 'Daughters, Idemili', He makes God a 'he' and a 'man'. I do not know any direct translation from Igbo which would render God a 'he' and a 'man'. Achebe subordinates the all powerful divine goddess Idemili to this he-God by making her his daughter. Again, I do not find any cultural prescription for this subordination. I know that she is usually given a husband, but not a father.

Achebe yet again assumes that the first Power was male, hence he writes, 'wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty' (p. 102). Only men ever wore loincloth. There is also a contradictory use of the royal python as sexual in the incident of the President's encounter with Beatrice, where the python conjures up the image of erection. Yet, the royal python is a sacred symbol of the goddess Idemili as Achebe writes on page 105. It is the messenger of the goddess.

In a sense, Achebe breaks new grounds in this book by breaking the sexual taboo which has stifled the issue of sexuality in elite African creative writing. In *Anthills...* there are a couple of scenes in which the main characters make love slowly and in detail. Beatrice, for example, takes the initiative and command as Achebe writes, 'with such power and authority... Clearly this was her grove and these her own particular rites over which she held absolute power'.

Beatrice is however not seen as just any woman who is sexually aroused. She had to be made sacred as a priestess or goddess. All the sexual feelings described are those of men. Beatrice also orders her boyfriend's erection and sends him to momentary paradise. Her own feelings and experience are left out of the narrative. It is therefore as if Beatrice has 'serviced' Chris. Achebe writes, 'He woke like a child cradled in her arms and breasts her eyes watching anxiously over him'. This points to the portrayal of women as the eternal one-way nourishers and comforters.

The plot develops, still centred around the three men. With the President's suspicion of Ikem and Chris comes a trumped up charge of treason, then Ikem's suspension and elimination. The elders from Abazon are also arrested. Chris, sensing that his life is in danger, goes into hiding. He establishes links with the drivers and students unions and takes on Ikem's cause to expose the op-

pressive regime of the military President.

Revolutionaries will argue that the grassroots should have been used to analyse the political situation because they know and can speak more directly. 'This our country na waa. Na only God go save person', says Ikem's neighbours who witness Ikem being taken away by soldiers in the dead of night. The elder from Abazon makes a brilliant political speech alright, but he is a patriarch and steeped in the old chauvinism that Achene seeks to reverse.

Again feminists will point out that there is no relationship between the women. Elewa and Beatrice had not even been friends enough for Beatrice to know Elewa's address, even though their boyfriends are friends. They do not even bother to discuss their men. It is in fact Elewa who proves to be the link with the grassroots, namely, her mother who is a market woman and the taxi-driver with whom she had entered into conversation and who later helps her find Beatrice's flat.

When it came to the crunch, it was the grassroots and their modes of communication which finally proved most effective and useful in struggle. VOR, the Voice of Rumour, described as the 'despair of tyrants and shody dealers in high places' was put into action against the government. Again, the Student Union which Ikem had castigated was to take up his fight with the government which in their words 'has now committed suicide 'and Chris capitalises on that by telling the students 'this country counts on you'. Many committed revolutionaries will admit that the dialogue between Chris and the president of the Student's Union (P. 172) brought tears to their eyes:

It is only after the death of Ikem and the revelation of Elewa's pregnancy that the women become close, comforting and supporting each other in spite of their class differences. Elewa's strength and confidence mean that Beatrice's class superiority over her does not affect her in any way. Not so Agatha, Beatrice's illiterate maid, through whom the power that the bourgeois classes of women have over other women is demonstrated very well indeed. Beatrice had the power to bring tears through insensitivity and indifference or to bring smiles through kindness and care to her poor maid.

When events finally reach a crisis and there is need for resourcefulness, the elites prove to be dwarfs beside the grassroots. This is demonstrated through Chris when he is in hiding and on the run and has to drop his status of Commissioner for Information and become a dirty common peasant in his disguise. He is not even quick with his tongue. In other words, he does not have 'mouth'. Elewa has 'mouth'. The taxi-drivers have 'mouth' too. They can forge a convincing response as the situation demands. As Chris discovers,' to succeed as small man no be small thing'.

In the final alliance with the grassroots, it is Chris who asks in

relation to the Student's Union 'Why did we not cultivate such young men before now'. He does not say young men and women or even young people. Such is the male-biased language of the book. Chris hammers at the lack of realisation of the imperative of a mass based struggle.

It is only when Chris goes into hiding that Achebe describes the arena of the grassroots and their one room family life in which they raise their numerous children. The book has been about the elites and their struggle, not about the masses. Yet, in crisis, the masses do all the thinking, planning and make all the sacrifice, like Braimoh, the taxi-driver and his wife giving up their bed for Chris's comfort. Only one week in Braimoh's one-room apartment, Chris looks haggard and worn-out.

The inconsistency in dealing with the woman question is such that even under serious and dangerous situations, such as when Chris and Emmanuel, the Student Union president, are on the run, travelling by bus, Emmanuel finds time to chat up a 'most attractive; girl, Adamma, on the bus. That is obviously sexual harassment. A proof of this is the sexist cracks and jokes about the girl between Emmanuel and Chris. Chris teases Emmanuel about not 'getting' the girl, perhaps because Emmanuel was in rags. 'Your sterling quality would shine through any rags', says Chris to Emmanuel.

A second proof of sexual harrassment is the fact that the girl was not conversational. According to Emmanuel, she spoke one word per hour, the word being 'yes' or 'no'! Soon enough, a drunken police sergeant does his own harassing of the same girl in his own way — attempted rape. it is in trying to force him off the girl, that the drunkard shoots Chris dead. What a wasted death: Chris had only just heard news of a coup in which the President had been kidnapped and his Chief of Staff had taken over.

A new and very interesting character which emerges during Chris's hiding is in the person of Captain Abdul Medani. Even though he works for State Security, he is a gentleman, who shows the women respect. He later proves to be the man sending anonymous phone calls to Beatrice, providing information and advising about hiding and moving Chris. Furthermore, he gives Beatrice a lot of support after Chris's death and finally becomes an ally and joins in the gender and other political discussions and education which take place at Beatrice's flat between the various interest groups.

One recognises Achebe very much in Ikem through whom Achebe airs his views and argues his points, especially on the role of a writer versus that of a revolutionary. Ikem declares that 'writers don't give prescriptions. They give headaches' (p. 161). But, this is not strictly correct of *Anthills*... For, much as socialist revolu-

tionaries and political activists want to indict Achebe for not proffering a solution to Africa's political woes, it seems to me that the last chapters do make that prescription for a revolution.

The prescription given is a populist one in the alliance which develops between the various interest groups, namely, the individual elite or intellectual activists symbolised by Ikem and Chris, the Student Union represents the youth; the taxi-drivers union, Elewa and Agatha represent the grassroots women; a mole in the military in the person of the politcised Captain Abdul Medani, Beatrice who represents the educational elite women is the co-ordinator; Elewa's uncle represents the grassroots men; Elewa's mother represents the market women. Through the rebellious statements made and rituals demonstrated during the naming of Elewa and Ikem's baby, they over-rule 'outdated' customs and beliefs and propose new gender relations and a new society which should transcend sex, ethnic, religious and class divisions. But at no point in the book does Achebe deal with the material basis for that social transformation.

Who knows, perhaps in Achebe's next book, it might be this Captain Abdul Medani, who will be mandated by 'the people' to stage a useful coup. By that time hopefully, Achebe would have come closer home to the Goddess Idemili and his sisters for more lessons of Feminism.

Said the Goddess Idemili,
Great old woman;
woman with ivory-anklets,
whose mercy shields all her children;
whose canoe of bounty
carries all her children home;
overpouring pillar of grace,
whose river is never empty;
women of the ivory-wristlets,
whose messenger python
reveals all in dream.
Said she to her favoured son Chinua,

'Oh favourite of children,
your journey has been a long one,
you are weary and long to sit down
and drink white wine of the great palm,
your sisters, children of your mother,
await in readiness,
with rounded pots,
balanced on their padded heads.

But watch out,
Oh my favoured one,
your sisters demand more:
insatiable daughters of mine,
in their anger and mischief,
they have laid prickly spikes
in your seat.

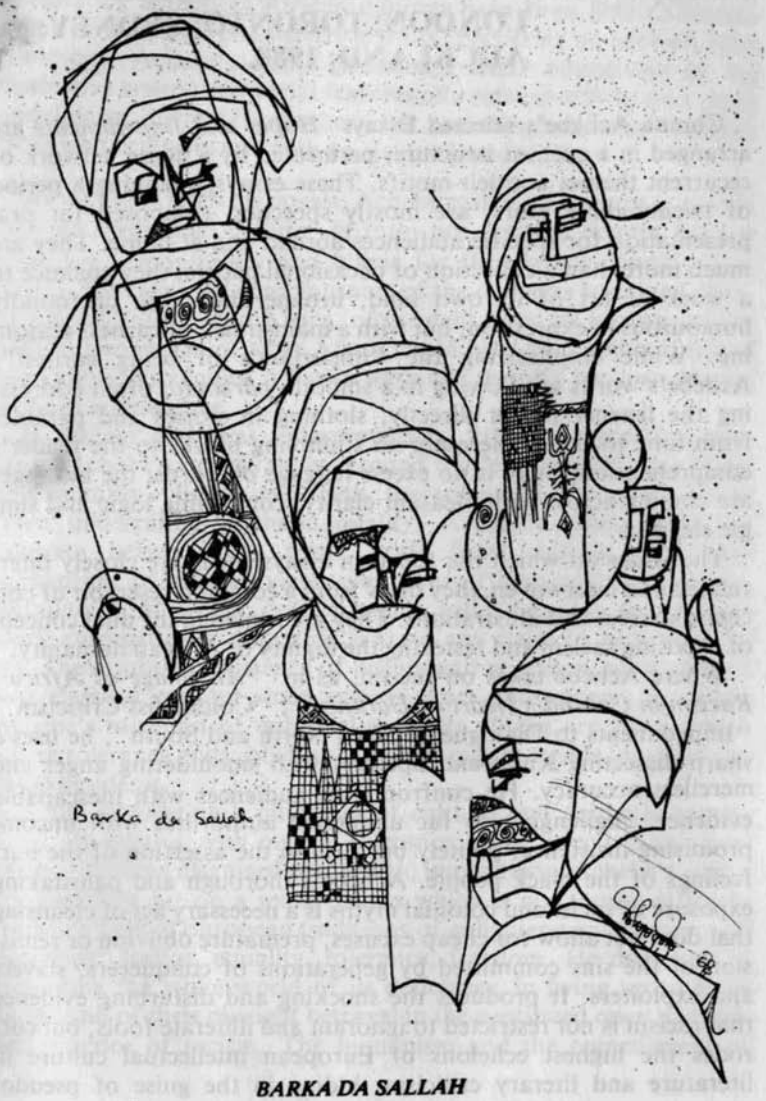
They await with songs and dance,
one by one,
you will pick out the spikes,
now made naked before your very eyes,
these spikes of the people
with wickedness in their eyes,
wickedness in their tongue,
wickedness against us women,
who bring you to this world,
who nourish you to manhood.

Oh favoured child of mine,
your supplications reached me.
Through your sisters,
I gave the holy sign;
now you wear white feathers
in your red cap:

Your tongue has been washed
to speak truth:
holy man of your people,
your sisters will drop
their tears of pearls
on your hands,
one by one,
as you pick out the spikes,
one by one.

Only then may you sit down
for a rest well deserved.
So have I spoken.
My word is law.
There is no man above me.
No! No!
No man reigns above my naked head.

The Goddess Idemili having reasserted her supremacy, we must acknowledge the fact that *Anthills of the Savannah* is a most important and serious work, which addresses directly contemporary political issues and dialogues in Africa today. Even though Achebe has dodged committing himself to a specific ideology, he has written a very emotional story with honesty and courage.



BARKA DA SALLAH

Edith Ihekweazu

BOOK REVIEW

AUTHOR: CHINUA ACHEBE: HOPES AND IMPEDIMENTS. SELECTED EASSYS. PUBLISHERS: DOUBLEDAY: NEW YORK: LONDON; TORONTO; SYDNEY; AUCKLAND; 1988.

Chinua Achebe's selected Essays *Hopes and Impediments* are arranged in a cyclical structure, permeated by a dense network of recurrent themes and leit-motifs. These essays, spanning a period of twenty three years, are mostly speeches, composed for oral presentation for specific audiences abroad and at home. They are much more than a collection of occasional papers; they coalesce to a work of art of its own kind, urbane and often profoundly humourous in expression, but with a mainstream of earnest reasoning. While emphasizing the "importance of being earnest", Achebe's words are flowing in a smooth *parlando,* often addressing the listener/reader directly, slothing in stories and parables from time to time. There are no stumbling blocks to the reader's comprehension; there is no excess luggage of words; the messages are coming across with pleasant clarity, compelling logic and simple elegance.

The issues on which the fourteen essays focus are closely interrelated and interwoven, they draw from a common reservoir of concepts, sources and illustrations. They are rooted in the dual concept of exposing racism and restoring the dignity of African humanity.

Where Achebe takes on racism, as in *"An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness"*, "Colonialist Criticism", "Impediments to Dialogue Between North and South", he uses a sharp dissecting Knife and operates with smouldering anger and merciless accuracy. He confronts his audiences with inescapable evidence, challenging so far unqueried authorities with uncompromising insistence, politely but firm in the assertion of the hurt feelings of the black people. Achebe's thorough and painstaking exposure of racist and colonial myths is a necessary act of cleansing that does not allow for cheap excuses, premature oblivion or remission of the sins committed by generations of conquerers, slavers and exploiters. It produces the shocking and disturbing evidence that racism is not restricted to ignorant and illiterate fools, but corrodes the highest echelons of European intellectual culture in literature and literary criticism, hiding in the guise of pseudo-

logical rhetorics and phrases. It needs the sensibility of the tormented victim to detect the racist undertones in widely accepted or even acclaimed products of European origin.

Achebe offers no apologies for insisting on what others have labelled the "colonial litany" and he does not allow for any discount on the responsibility for the damage done to African peoples over the centuries, even if offered by fellow Africans. He does not give credit to the colonizers for the fact that, inspite of their devastating activities, African cultures have been able to sustain many of their own characteristic traits. Focussing on his own Igbo traditions, Achebe's essays produce a lively impression of the distinctive artistic and social features of a culture with its own pride and dignity, distinct from others, but not an embodiment of others from white cultures and with no claim to universality.

As we know from his novels, Achebe makes no attempt to glorify African traditional culture *in toto,* nor does he exempt Europe from her responsibility and blame for the present conditions in Africa. He keeps the consciousness of the damages sustained alive, of wounds inflicted on Africa, of the debt owed by Europe, of the painful knowledge of what Africa could have been today if it had been allowed to follow her own ways and to fulfil her own destiny without interference.

In literary criticisms, interpretations, tributes, theoretical concepts, Achebe's essays revolve around the fundamental issue of art and morality, fiction and truth, literature and commitment. Far from underrating aesthetic quality, Achebe's vision does not separate beauty from truth, craft from mission, art from humanism. In his own view, symptoms of inhumanity as racism, colonialism, or facism, destroy beauty and if found in any creative work automatically disqualify it from any claim to be a work of art. The symbiotic existence of beauty and goodness, art and truth is a classical concept since ancient times and appears to defeat Achebe's rejection of universal concepts. There are basic tenets, where tolerance ends: obviously, where racism stands, nothing can stand besides it.

While advocating a pluralism of cultural and aesthetic expressions, co-existing with mutual tolerance; while rejecting universal prescriptions as disguised eurocentric impositions, Achebe's essays are founding art on a set of values which is not totally different from the best of European traditions of enlightenment: reason and humanity, justice, equality, tolerance, freedom. He does well in reminding the white world of its deficiency in living up to these values and of their outright betrayal in the continued open and hidden practice of racism. The humanism and the commitment of

Achebe's writings are certainly of universal scope and relevance — see the last words of his tribute to James Baldwin:

> As long as injustice exists, whether it be within the American nation itself or between it and its neighbours; as long as a tiny cartel of rich, creditor nations can hold the rest in iron chains of usury; so long as one third or less of mankind eats well and often to excess while two thirds and more live perpetually with hunger, as long as white people who constitute a *mere* fraction of the human race consider it natural and even righteous to dominate the rainbow majority whenever and wherever they are thrown together; and — the oldest of them all — the discrimination by men against women, as long as it perists; the words of James Baldwin will be there to bear witness and to inspire and elevate the struggle for human freedom.