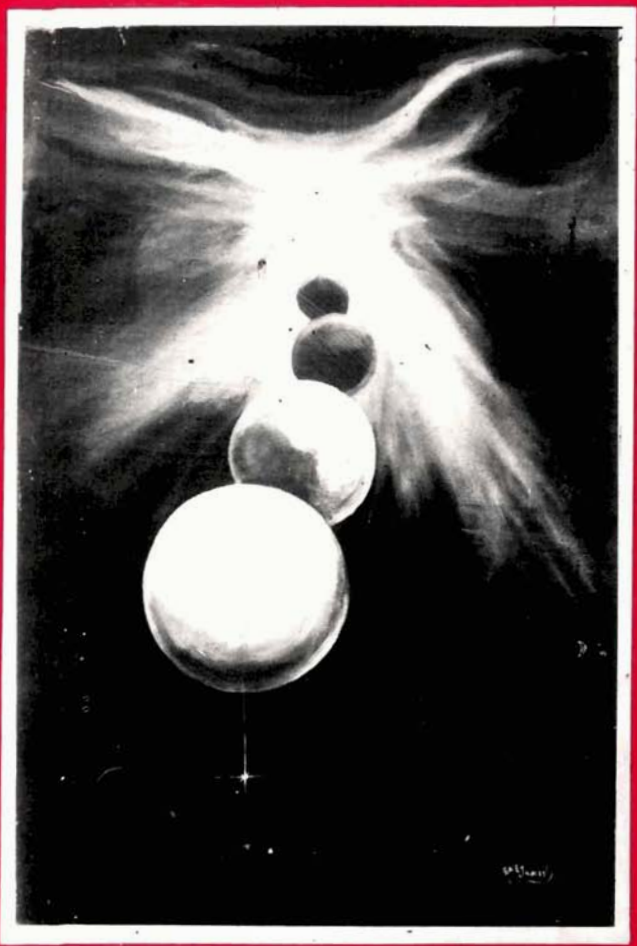
Okike

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITIN



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OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

NUMBER 36, JUNE 1997

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ISSN 0331-0566

OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

NUMBER 36 June 1997

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Poetry

Art

James Onwurah Eneh is a painter, graphic artist and singer. A graduate of the University of Benin, he is currently the Studio Head of Dawn Functions Nigeria Limited, Enugu, Nigeria.

Cover: In the beginning

Acknowledgement:
This publication has been made possible by a grant from the Heinrich Böll Foundation of Cologne, Germany.

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IK AKONOBI

Coup

Intoxicated
harmattan breeze
drums
on tree leaves.
An old music
an old dance begins.
Suddenly
season's pawns white-haired
swim the streets
drawing dust-curtains open
groping
for a pathway.
The season's coup ...
a new tenure
a new regime
another season
even so ...
flowers wither.

EZE CHI CHIAZO

the other sex education
(for all the circumcised women of the world)

close your eyes
let's look for the way
use the veil, if you like

husbands have right
to their desires, daughter
we have not

every woman is for a man
therefore, daughter be
for your man

for what does the she-goat
have it behind?
avoid his eyes, the sight

women have no desires
...?
it is so, daughter, it is so

why then are we circumcised?
if not so

everyday
every means

The soldiers are marching

they march all the day long
night falls over us

they march and crush
flowers tremble
humus weep
butterflies recoil their lips

they march all the day long
children refuse to show their heads
even at the tenth month

the soldiers are marching
as though meteorites fall
the snails would not crawl out

soldiers are marching
we can no longer hear
the sweet laughter of children

the soldiers march and streets are empty
only prostitutes show their bodies
and they that have guns laugh

night falls
soon there will be
sighs
groans
barks
howls

will you march along with them?

at last

... and finally
the cock left the hen
and crowed loud

the hen looked at me
stretched the neck
to ask whether I witnessed

I saw it , hen
the earth saw it

PATRICK TAGBO OGUEJIOFOR

Solitude
(for Vayo)

Must I be told of the impossibility
of returning to a most cherished reality?
Shamelessly I guess heavenwards
staring at the moon, pleading
for the return of the harmattan nights
to have you beside me in warm embrace.

But the grooves of the gods have been
deserted long before our love seasons;
you remember our nightly reading of the HOLY BIBLE
how we cannot open our books
until chapters after chapters of the Holy Scriptures
have been buried in our heart of hearts
But I can now see, Vayo,
the illusion of happiness
and the reality of sorrow
I can now see.

OSITA OBI

The Spider and the Grave-Digger

(For Chinelo)

As soon as he sensed a sudden burst of sunlight in the silken threshold of his burrow, the spider stirred drowsily and woke up. He crawled to the entrance and thrust his head out into the cool air and the warm sun. The sudden vibrance and warmth of the forestbed lit up by spotlights of rays from the canopy pleased him; he couldn't have hoped for more. He came out quietly in the manner of one accustomed to dignity and solitude and crawled toward a piece of rotten wood, where with the chip of the sun falling on the other side, he rested himself.

But on this other side on which the sun fell, a plump little grasshopper began to chirp, having felt itself threatened by the presence of such a hideous predator. Then it took a swift leap into the air, spread its wide membranous wings out and flew away. The spider merely moved slowly backwards and settled himself again, apparently unagitated. For as aggressive as he was, he hardly attacked unless he was touched, hungry or threatened. But at the moment he was neither threatened, touched or hungry. The night before he had an extremely mouth-watering meal of a yellow-flecked, black millipede and wouldn't be hunting for a day or two. As he sat there, basking in the sun, it seemed nothing in the whole world could stir his peace or ruffle his repose.

Even in this quiet repose, the tarantula spider looked extremely hideous. His head was a rough creation. Thickly clothed with a mat of hair, his head easily appeared larger than it was, not in the least helped by a pair of blob-like compound eyes, a couple of coarsely gleaming fangs and a crack-shaped mouth made worse by some hairy protrusions called pedipalps. His large thorax, darkish brown

and speckled with tiny spots of ash and black, was equally thickly clothed with hair - some short and woolly, some long and stiff.. It was from the sides, beneath this broad and tough expanse of the thorax that his eight solid legs protruded, counterbalanced further backwards by an equally large and bulbous abdomen, segmented and studded with hair right to his anus. Beneath this hair, from his head to his abdomen, he was well-clad with a horny skeleton which was impermeable to the attacks of his fellow lower species.

Yet the tarantula spider never left anything to chance; he was ever sensitive to his surroundings. Around him, the bush steamed with sunlight and warmth. Above, the canopy looked like one giant dome perforated with fingers of sun that prodded deep into the forestbed. The birds sang and the crickets chirped. The wind rustled the leaves and drops of yesterday's rain pelted the ground. And the glints of the sun on the wings of insects that flew above flashed intermittently across the sky of green. The forest once again teemed with life of varying shades: earthworms wriggled in their burrows and ants trooped out to forage for food. And in the pods and in the buds and in the loose ground around, caterpillars and larvae stirred ceaselessly to the sudden breath of life.

In all this, the spider relished his solitude reacting occasionally to the movement of the air around him, for he depended largely on the extreme sensitivity of his hairs for the continuous battle for life. And he knew how delicate and precarious existence had proved to be.

So when he presently felt a shadow fly across the sun overhead, he twitched his pedipalps and started. Again the shadow darted over his head. He needn't see what it was; his sight was poor. So his response was swift. He rose on his hind legs, lifted his front legs and brandished his fangs, his long and stiff hairs complementing this menacing posture. Ordinarily, he knew that this posture was a tremendous scare to his fellow spiders and insects alike and that even some rodents and birds readily flew from it. So when he again saw the shadow dart off toward the sun he felt his judgement vindicated. He however retained the posture awhile, then dropped back to the ground and walked a few paces backward.

But he was wrong. The digger wasp was never in the habit of backing off from a posture like that, especially when it was from a tarantula spider. She was equally a formidable creature, with as much an advantage of a really painful sting as had the spider; though not as fearsome but certainly as lethal if it went for the kill.

And it wasn't long before the wasp came buzzing again. This time she flew low over the ground, so low the wind of her broad wings rustled the dead leaves and twigs on the floor. Again, she flew over the spider and the sun shone on her wings. The spider took on his menacing posture once again. But the wasp flew a short distance away and perched on a dry leaf on the floor, then crawled toward him until she faced him.

It was like the meeting of the beauty and the beast: the spider hairy and monstrous with all his eight hairy large legs all about him, looking macho and immovable like marble, the wasp decked with a beautiful deep shiny blue all over, a stunning slim waist, slim legs, slender antennae and broad transparent wings over an oval shaped smooth abdomen. Although nature hadn't manifested any such depravity yet, still the thought of a courtship easily crept into the mind.

But it soon became evident that the wasp had other things in mind as she quickly skirted the spider and again walked up to him and began to stroke him with her slender antennae. She stroked his hairy legs and she stroked his hairy abdomen. But he just stood there dumb and immobile. Yet she would not be discouraged. She walked over to the other side and tickled his pair of hind legs. That did it. He immediately jerked up on all his eight legs, hanging up there as if he were on stilts. One would have expected an immediate and a swift attack. But the tarantula did nothing else! Was this really a wasp? Was there a spell involved or some kind of sexual stimulation? Which insect in this world could molest a tarantula like this without instant repercussion? What was this that defied sense and reason? Tarantula spiders, to say the least, were never known for tolerance. And this one, he neither lacked the vigour nor the venom of his species. Sluggish as he appeared he was designed for speed and always he counted on it. It was

awesome to imagine that his attack and seizure of prey could be so swift that a motion picture taken at the rate of 64 frames per second could only show the result and not the process. His reflexes hardly failed him. But here he was hanging high above in this unfolding drama.

Suddenly the wasp became more urgent, more daring, her movement sharply rhythmic. She crawled around him prodding him with her antennae and her legs. She scurried under him, she walked over him and all he did was walk this way and that way. Then she flew a few inches away and settled herself. As quickly as she did that she set to dig the ground. With her legs and jaws she undertook the task, working so rapidly and diligently as if she worked for time. Then and again she stopped to look at the spider and then went on with her digging. She worked so feverishly that she soon disappeared in the hole she was digging. But again and again she popped out to get a glimpse of the spider. Then she went in again and continued her digging. After a while she crawled out and took a look at what she had done and wiped her limbs.

And somewhere in the bush a wild pigeon broke into a husky tune which rumbled vibrantly in the belly of the canopy. The sun now larger and crimson kept its slow but steady descent down the horizon. The wind came on strong, shaking boughs and tearing down yellow leaves. Insects chirped and flew across the wind. Bugs curled up to rest inside petals of graying flowers. In silence caterpillars ate their crunchy meals, while larvae stirred in their cocoons patiently waiting for the day they could flirt with the wind and frolic in the sun. And somewhere at the back of a serrated leaf a little swallow-tailed butterfly went on laying a bunch of cream-coloured eggs. Life went on best as life could indifferent, disinterested.

Again the wasp flew toward the spider and began another assault. With her antennae she felt him all over again. Then she bent her abdomen and shot out her sting. The spider sensing the renewed urgency in her actions began to back away. Dramatically, the wasp turned on her back and slid along the ground trying to get under his belly. The spider quickened his sideward retreat, the wasp

relentlessly pursuing him, until he came to a dead stop, obstructed by the rotten wood. Then he felt the wasp's powerful jaws on one of his legs. It was then that the venom shot into his blood; this provocation couldn't be tolerated any longer. He thrashed his burly hairy legs about in defence. But the wasp yielding no ground dug herself further into position. He kicked forward, he trashed backward. He dragged her this way, he dragged her that way unto the rotten piece of wood. But the wasp held on, all the while searching with the protruding sting for the membrane at the point where the spider's leg was hinged to his breast – the only spot through which his horny armour could be penetrated. Fiercely engaged now they tumbled from the top of that wood and began to roll over and over on the ground. It was more than apparent now that this interlocking of legs and the snapping of jaws had nothing sexual to it; it was the fight for life pursued with such terrifying viciousness that sent the dust up high.

For many frightful minutes they continued this combat with no less pertinacity as when they began. Then suddenly the wasp got the spider wedged to a stump of grass. Swiftly she thrust her sting into the soft spot of his leg and squirted her poison into him. Instantly, a hazy stillness in time swept over both combatants, like in the dropping of the great bomb at Nagasaki. The spider stiffened and fell over on his back, paralysed to his hairs.

The wasp quickly unlocked her grip and surveyed her enourmous victim whose legs twitched momentarily and ceased. She cleaned herself on the ground and wiped her slim legs. She saw the blood oozing from the wound on the spider's abdomen and sucked it dry. Then with her jaws she clasped his leg and dragged him deep into the hole she had dug. Whatever ritual it was that she undertook deep in that dark hole for hours, no one would perhaps ever know; since laying her egg and attaching it to the spider's abdomen never took beyond a few minutes.

Soon afterwards, she crawled out of the spider's grave and began bit by bit to fill it up with soil. When satisfied she trampled on it and on the ground around, evidently without spite or malice but with obvious intention to conceal any evidence that a fight for the

continuity of her species was fought and won on that piece of ground. She never thought it worthwhile to erect a statute or leave behind a memorial slab to what was easily a milestone to humans. She quietly spread out her wings wide and flew off, once more in the direction of the vanishing sun.

Deep River Woman

GBENGA AJILEYE

The Withered Rose

Once you sent me a rose bud
Attached with it, a pencilled scrawl
Poetic message of a virgin love
Unexplored, unfathomed, a fold of mystery.
Guarded and protected
The poisoned arrow garnishes the foyer
Of my excited, gasping heart
But this poison is sweet
In its slow, delicious travel.

Next you sent a rose in bloom
Betraying its mysterious sweetness
Intoxicating, warm, heady flush
Submerging and incapacitating
Reasoning faculties and reasons
If this is life in love, then I yield.

But now you send a withered rose
Faded, scentless, wrinkled petals
Like brown tongues hanging on their sides
Disenchanting and discouraging
The beauty of life and love.
The sheet is blank
My senses are gone, no reason.
Or is it all over for us?

They Have Problems Too

See the butterflies of this world
Flitting and flaunting their pretty wings
Be not deceived by their dainty flips
Everything is not all roses and nectars
For they sure have problems too.

The silent sheep grazing in the green
Lazily moping in regal fatigue
A metaphor for peaceful indolence
That marks concerns and troubled minds
Within them, they have troubles too.

Those houses solidly erected
Indifferent to rain and raging wind
Providing shelter and warm sanctuary
When they develop cracks then you'd know
That they also have problems too.

The eagles high above the earth
Gliding with eyes ever untiring
Belligerent in their watch over the world
Companions in your distress they are
For they sure have problems too.

YVONNE KING

Sunshine for His Other-Half

His brilliant yellow belly and
Deep olive arms with an
Exotic black mask that
Fails to hide his uniqueness.

He appears out of nowhere,
Visiting daily, And
Whenever she hears the
Familiar knocking at their
Special window,
She goes to greet him.

He peers at her through the glass,
And sometimes through the opening
Their eyes meet
But, he never accepts
Her invitation to come inside ...

His visits are brief but consistent
Just long enough to know she is well,
And to feel her warm utterances,
"Oh, my beautiful, brilliant, yellow bird."

She believes he was sent by her other-half
To watch over her until he is able
Otherwise, he brings sunshine into her life -
As beautiful and brilliant as the masked one.

Transcending the pain of the past
She fell in love with him again

He reciprocated and told her that
"Old love is like old wine -
Stronger, purer, tastier, perfect."

She used to think that
She loved him too much
But later realized that
She was just being honest,
Following her heart
Instead of only her mind

Love can transcend anything
She and her other-half believed
And, now he sends her
A bit of sunshine every day
With a yellow belly, deep olive arms
And an exotic mask.

Changes During the Change

She changed her scene before the Change
Went to Africa hoping to make a home
He wasn't ready and neither was she
Still going through too many changes

Being in Accra was not being in Chicago
And eastern Nigeria was hardly like any part of the States
She had ever lived in.
She had never heard the sound of monkeys
Running across a zinc roof

Or seen them playing outside her kitchen window
Or swing on banana and mango trees and eating guava
She discovered a rhythm within her that flowed
With the changes in nature's tunes.

Five years later they got back together
Talked again about making a home.
Changes before the Change
His culture requires a child from her womb
He wanted to wait, so they did.

After parting, she began to plan and pray
Will it be too late?
Her biological clock was ticking away

At home she has no alarm clock
It broke four years ago and was never repaired
Because the birds wake her every morning, never late
There are certain ones, as if they've been assigned
Mother Nature always seems to provide

Her heart soared dreaming about the renewed chance
To be with him and to make a home
But, then her clock stopped ticking.

He doesn't even know because
He stopped writing
Ironically, the same month it stopped flowing.
Changes during the Change

Has he changed his mind?
Unfortunately, Mother nature never does.
Thank God, every morning the birds still sing.

In the Garden of Life

The sweet smell of the gardenias
Is one of the best rewards of the rains
Remember how she used to keep freshly-cut
Gardenias in the parlor?

The rains finally came this year
And when the first gardenia bloomed
She became nostalgic for the time
When their love blossomed
In and between the lines of their letters
and during the precious few reunions
Under the awesome African sun.

Now she puts freshly-cut gardenias
In a vase inscribed
"Friends are the flowers
In the garden of life."
But, friendship has yet to blossom
As their love once did
Even though the gardenias remain
As beautiful with their sweetness.

JONATHAN HAYNES and ONOOKOME OKOME

Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Production

Unlike in most of the rest of Africa, in Nigeria (and something similar seems to be happening in Ghana also) film production has been absorbed into the realm of popular culture. Elsewhere, particularly in the francophone countries, film makers have been, for the most part, educated, self-conscious artists, often with political or social motivations, and the system for producing films has included a crucial role for European funding sources and international distribution to film festivals and other non-commercial outlets . In those venues at least, African films tend to be categorized as "art cinema."

In Nigeria, what have proved successful are films, but, since film-making has become prohibitively expensive, dramas are shot directly on video and sold as video cassettes, produced by artists from the Yoruba Travelling Theatre tradition. These artists work outside the international circuits, sustaining themselves, instead, as a form of popular culture in immediate relation with the working classes in Nigeria's cities, particularly those with a considerable Yoruba population. We will briefly discuss this art form and the concept of the African "popular arts' as it has been elaborated by scholars such as Biodun Jeyifo, Karin Barber and Christopher Waterman, before turning to our main theme, which is the recent boom in Igbo video production. This is a very new phenomenon, dating only from 1992 or so. Our remarks on it must be very preliminary, but it appears to be markedly different from the Yoruba Travelling Theatre kind of production, aesthetically and – perhaps even more strikingly – in terms of economic and social organization, and the evolving class and ethnic character of Nigerian popular culture.

There have been a number of excellent studies of the Yoruba Traveling Theatre; the seminal work of Biodun Jeyifo (1984) and then Karin Barber (1986, 1987, 1994) have been the most sophisticated in theorizing its relation to popular culture. Jeyifo argued for the term "popular' (rather than "folk"), as meaning not only that the audiences were large and enthusiastic, but, more specifically, that they embraced "the entire range of occupational and socio-economic groups and classes" (1984:1); the troupes "substantially played to the people as a whole", rather than to exclusive, partial groupings or strata of the population, as is the case with the modern English language, literary theatre" (2). In fact, because class formation in Africa is far more complete, this theatre was also "popular" in the sense of expressing the point of view of the mass of the people as a whole, rather than of some ruling stratum:

> the emergence and growth of the Traveling Theatre [are] bound up ... with the rise and phenomenal expansion of "certified" populations in modern Nigeria whose division into distinct groups and classes on the basis of education , status, wealth and political influence have so far been so fluid that no particular group or class has created a hegemonic culture, art form or life-style . In other words ... no integral, dominant ruling class "high culture" has been created in the modern Nigerian society (though there are definitely aspects and fragments of elite culture and life-style largely based on a composite mix of Western middle-class forms and neo-traditional approximations) (3-4).

In her lucid essay "Popular Arts in Africa," Karin Barber gives a summary definition of what she means by "popular art":

> Popular art can be taken to mean the large class of new unofficial art forms which are syncretic, concerned with social change, and associated with the masses. The centers of activity in this field are the cities, in their pivotal position between the rural hinterland on the one hand and the metropolitan countries on the other (23).

Barber develops the common tripartite model for defining the popular arts, as being located in the shifting, indeterminate zone between the "traditional" and the Europeanized/elite, both of which

work through more clearly defined conventions and institutions. The popular faces both ways at once – hence the vibrant eclecticism of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, which draws at once on "deep" Yoruba verbal arts and the traditional cosmography evident in the works of Chief Hubert Ogunde, and at the other extreme, the conventions of American situation comedies.

As they straddle cultural origins and genres, the Travelling Theatre practitioners also straddle several media: Barber points to how the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes might be simultaneously involved in stage productions, film, television records, and photo-play magazines, as a way of diversifying their resources in an intensely competitive, marginal economic niche (1987:31). It is of course because the Travelling Theatre troupes had already established a relationship with their audience, outside the commercial cinema distribution system, that they survived as film and video makers while the collapsing economy drove nearly everyone else out of business (on the move into the film and video, see also Balogun, Ekwuazi, Richard, Okome and Haynes). While the formal characteristics of their work have undergone rapid metamorphoses (Jeyifo 17, Barber 1986: 8), Barber sees their socio-economic origins (she follows Waterman and Jewsiewicki in pointing to the nascent petit bourgeoisie as the social layer most involved in producing this sort of art) and their socio-economic organization as the more or less constant elements.

> The Yoruba theater companies are small business enterprises operating like others in the Nigerian informal sector. The conditions of their artistic production affect their relations to the mass media; their structure as organizations and, correspondingly, the structure of their plays; and their relations to tradition and modernity .... The company retains its organizational integrity in relation to television, importing its personnel, its production methods, its style, and its subject matter more or less intact into the new medium. Rather than imposing the uniform stamp of mass culture on these plays , the television seems to be invaded by chunks of the living popular culture that flourishes around it (1987: 65).

As Jeyifo says, the Travelling Theatre practitioners have a strong artisinal, guild consciousness – "extensive relationships of cooperation and competition between the companies [have led] to the very strong sense of corporate group identity and vocational distinctiveness that exists among them today" (7). This has helped preserve their integrity, but it has also proved a limiting factor: their method of distributing their films restricts them to an artisinal basis rather than an industrial and international one (Richard, 163-4); they have seldom attempted to master cinematic technique on a fully professional basis, and have tended to have rocky relationships with cinema professionals or those perceived as interlopers.

It has always been problematic simply to equate the work of the Travelling Theatre artists with "Yoruba" cinema or video production -- such ethnic labels are always dangerous, and we will come back to these issues at the end of this paper. The social basis of Yoruba-language production seems to have blurred as the professional video production houses in Lagos entered the picture, along with actors and directors who came from television or elsewhere, and who have tended to produce dramas set in the glamorous urban environment that are characteristic of the new Igbo videos.

In any case, the production of the Igbo videos is organized very differently. To begin with, Igbo video production can be much more highly capitalized – instead of relying on the resources of a struggling small-scale entrepreneur, the actor/manager of a theatre troupe, these videos draw on the wealth of the Igbo business class. They may be backed by big merchants from Onitsha or Aba or elsewhere, and the properties used to represent the lavish lifestyles which are a normal feature of these videos come through business networks of fashion houses, real estate brokers, car dealers, and so on, who are often eager to provide sponsorship for its publicity value. Directors and technicians are drawn from a pool of professionals, and there is a concerted effort to build a star system of actors with name recognition, whose presence (as in Hollywood) will guarantee the investment in the project. Current stars have mostly made their reputations through television appearances, but vehicles such as the magazine *Nigerian Videos* are designed to

create an arena of publicity based in the videos themselves. Drawn by the prospect of relatively huge salaries (stars can make ₦50,000 for an appearance in a video), would-be actors are flocking to the new industry from modelling careers, State Arts Councils, and the universities. The financial muscle behind these productions is also brought to bear on the distribution end: large numbers of copies of the cassettes are made at once and distributed through numerous channels, to discourage pirates and maximize publicity. There are large profits to be made: in an interview the producer Okechukwu Ogunjiofor said that with the ₦1,500 he had on him and a loan of N3,000, he immediately embarked on the shooting of *Circle of Doom*, from which he was able to buy a Benz and secure a comfortable home (*Nigerian Videos*, Vol. 2 No. 1, p.20).

These videos reach an audience that is almost entirely different from that of the original Yoruba Travelling Theatres: the differences extend along axes of ethnicity, gender, age and class. The ethnic difference is the most obvious. Yoruba films and videos are fairly seldom subtitled, and only a few have been made in Pidgin (*Jagua* is a conspicuous exception); in general there has seemed to be little interest in making the concessions necessary to attract a non-Yoruba speaking audience. The Igbo community has naturally offered exciting support to its new cultural expression, but the videos are normally subtitled or contain a fair amount of English and/or Pidgin, as if aiming at an audience beyond that of the Igbo ethnic group.

The gender issue is perhaps less obvious but of deep if largely unexplored, significance. Everywhere in Nigeria cinema-going is predominantly a male activity, and, for that matter, an activity for younger, poorer, and rowdier males; it is considered of more or less dubious respectability for girls and women. As Brian Larkin has pointed out in the context of Northern Nigeria, the advent of television and then video cassettes has opened up to women a media environment that was largely closed to them before (25-27).

The class character of the audience also needs to be investigated through empirical research. It would of course be a serious mistake to imagine that the luxury that appears in these videos corresponds

at all to the life-style of its audience, in these days of SAP and the near annihilation of the Nigerian middle class. One might remember, for the sake of comparison, that Hollywood consolidated its role as dream factory during the depths of the Great Depression, and that *Dallas* and *Dynasty* had their greatest following among the American lower middle and working classes. One of the signs of the incomplete process of class formation in Nigeria is that – particularly in cultures like the Igbo (and for that matter, the Yoruba) where individual dynamics is much prized.– nearly everyone aspires to rise socially and imagines there is some prospect of doing so, however slim the chances really are, so that the dream vision of an elite lifestyle is in some sense common property (Barber 1987:18?, Waterman).

It is perhaps safe to make a couple of assertions. One is that ownership of a VCR and television set, while now a nearly universal aspiration, is in fact restricted to a large minority of the urban population. The younger and rougher cinema-going crowd may have access to these videos through video parlours, but in general one imagines this sort of production being consumed in a middle class sitting room, by small groups of people linked by family or close social ties. The audience is in any case assembled in a privatized manner quite different from that of cinemas or the live audience of the Yoruba nation. Without entirely inscribing this process within a sentimental narrative of the breakdown of an original, traditional, unmediated community into modern alienation, we must recognize that video cassette production is a much more commodified form, a fact that has deep social as well as aesthetic consequences. Gone is the excitement generated by the presence of the actors at screenings of their films, and the general excitation of a popular neighborhood by a sound track advertising the film or the performance. The best studies of the Yoruba performance arts, or indeed of African arts in general have stressed how central are the immediate contact between performer and audience in the moment of performance, and the characteristic emphasis on social process rather than isolated aesthetic object. Only more or less dim echoes of this can be caught on video cassettes; once the videos stop being

essentially records of performances in another medium it is natural for them to move towards an aesthetic formed on a different basis exploiting different values and potentials.

The rise of the Igbo videos also corresponds to, among other things, a decline in public safety which makes going out at night a dubious proposition for the middle classes. The Igbo middle classes did not for the most part have the habit of going out in the evenings to things like theatre or cinema anyway, so that in their case the video cassettes do not displace an anterior indigenous cultural form as much as they claim a share of the market in televised and recorded video products, most of which are imported. It is no accident that the new Igbo videos have stirred up this depth and breadth of excitement, not least in the fairly broad layers of society that have grown up saturated by products of the international, chiefly American, culture industry. They were ready to make a response.

"Hollywood" is constantly invoked as the model or inspiration. How are we to understand this? Partly it refers to the attempt to create a proper entertainment industry. The differences between Hollywood and Igbo video-making, in scale of finance and in specialization and intensity of labor processes, not to mention the aesthetic and cultural differences in the products, are much more impressive than the similarities. Nevertheless perhaps enough has been said to suggest that the emerging production structures represent an attempt on the part of dynamic and modern operators to set up audiovisual production on a full capitalist, industrial basis, aspiring to the technical capacity to copy the look of at least the minor Hollywood genres. This will have to develop gradually with the market, and will have to contend with formidable difficulties – the general parlous state of the Nigerian economy, for one thing, and the fact that most of the sources of Hollywood's revenue are currently unavailable (theatrical release in cinemas, video rentals as opposed to sales, and sale of television broadcasting rights). Still the beginning that has been made is immensely promising and perhaps will provide the basis for a true film industry at some point in the future when circumstances again permit sustained production of celluloid. This is no small thing.

"Hollywood" is also the name of a cultural aspiration, to imitate the world's most powerful cultural formation. This aspiration is ambivalent, as this sort of colonial/post-colonial imitation usually is. It is meant partly as an assertion of African cultural power and dignity within the world media environment: it is frequently said that the Igbo videos are meant to provide images of a modern and prosperous urban Africa for Nigerians abroad to show their white friends who imagine Africa as all bush, villages and wild animals. It seems unlikely that this scenario is actually enacted very often, but psychologically and symbolically it is important. This imitation also contains within it an admission of distance and insufficiency. From a certain point of view – a point of view pretty well represented among Nigerian film critics[2] – the invocation of Hollywood might seem like a betrayal of African culture in the face of the neo-colonial invasion of foreign media. The real object of imitation is certain American television genres (rather than block-buster films) – particularly melodramatic TV movies and evening soap operas. Generally this tends to exclude the sort of cultural spectacle patented by Chief Hubert Ogunde, created at an historical moment when it coincided with anti-colonial cultural assertion, providing an image of a "usable past" governed by a noble, colourful, and intact tradition. This has remained one of the resources of the Yoruba filmmakers and videographers. The new Igbo work certainly encodes responses to modernity, urbanism and so on that are specifically African, Nigerian, and even Igbo, but it mostly does without overt, formal reference to a "deep" ethnic tradition and world view. The main reason for this would seem to be historical. These works are the expression of an aggressive commercial mentality, whose fields of activity is Nigeria's cities – and not only the Igbo cities. Attention is resolutely turned towards sources of wealth and change; the villages tend to figure only in more or less cursory backwards glances or, in the case of *Ikuku* for instance (see below) the village itself is fully caught up in the process of change. The nation, the state apparatus and the ethnic political claims are invisible, doubtless mostly for generic reasons, but probably also because they are being by-passed in despair. Beyond Nigeria's cities are international circuits in which

Igbos are famously active as traders, from which a commerci cultural imagery is being imported. Nigerian video production it elf has important material links with the Nigerian Diaspora: post-production may be done in London, videos are sold to the Nigerian community abroad, and, significantly, the magazine *Nigerian Videos* has a London edition.

In the "post-colonial" theory being developed principally in the West, cultural hybridity and transitional networks are celebrated as positive values. The creative spirit of Africa is being looked for less in the form of an eternal, uncorrupted traditional cultural essence, and more as something realized through the historical process of interaction with other cultures, African and non-African. The story of the tortured relations between colonized intellectuals and European and traditional African cultures is familiar enough; interest is shifting to the apparently much less conflicting way in which popular culture has absorbed foreign influences – Barber is summarizing this train of thought when she lists syncretism as an essential feature of the popular arts. There is a long history, all over Africa, of the influence of American (and Indian) film culture, particularly among youth groups, who may construct an alternative culture for themselves out of such materials (sporting the names of movie stars and so on) (see for instance Jean Rouch's film *Moi, un noir*, and Ranger, *255;* Bayart, *28;* Hecht and Simone, *passim*). This is a way of playing, more or less subversively, with Africa's dependent position in the world system; it is also likely to be a strategy for escaping from the control of elders and other local authority figures. According to Jean-Francois Bayart, "extraversion" – pursuing resources from abroad – has been a game ruler and ruled have played competitively against one another throughout African history (21-29). It makes sense that the most extraverted of Nigeria's ethnic groups should turn to this strategy with a vengeance at a moment when the national situation is so full of trials and frustrations.

This dynamic popular culture is doubtless in play in the imitation of American forms, but still the situation has to be evaluated as a specific historical instance, which may certainly have negative

aspects. The producer Ogunjiofor himself sees the degree of imitation as a sign of immaturity:

> It is Ogunjiofor's belief that the video-film world in Nigeria has not started yet.
> We have a long way to go, he opined, adding that we are imitative; we produce in English and adopt western concepts which are lost on our people who buy our films. (*Nigerian Videos*, 21).

This is perhaps the price paid for being insufficiently rooted, abandoning the cultural nationalist project so completely that one abandons one's own culture and people. A model-turned-actor interviewed by *Nigerian Videos* expresses a dream of escape into a foreign fantasy world of individual advancement:

> I'd always wanted to be famous and had always looked to a career in acting or sports as a way of realising this dream which, at the same time, I had felt could only be possible in either Europe or American. But when I wasn't making a headway in this direction I turned my sight inward and tried to see how I could achieve the same dream right here in Nigeria (14).

There does seem to be something alienated here – not the subversive play of a subordinated social group, but a strategy for finding an individual loophole in the world system. The nation becomes the place where a second-best imitation of the real thing can be constructed, using, as the mise-en-scene, the life-style of an elite which is detaching himself more and more decisively from the life of the rest of the nation.

The conjunction of the representation of a luxurious elite life-style and an incipient organization of video production might suggest that there is a serious tendency towards consolidation of a bourgeois art form that would detach itself from the category of the "popular arts." But this is probably misleading, or at most only partially true. The essential heterogeneity, fluidity, and unboundedness of social groups in Africa makes it difficult to talk of fully formed "classes" in the European sense at all. In Nigeria the class situation is further destabilized because of extreme underlying economic instability, the possibility of rapid mobility for a limited few, and nearly universal

aspirations for individual advancement which tend to inhibit the formation of class consciousness (Waterman, 223-28). In addition to the remarks quoted above on the failure of the African ruling class to create a hegemonic culture, Jeyifo has pointed out that, with a few exceptions, "the exclusive appropriation of theatrical form by a social group, or class did not, and has not historically advanced far in Africa." (31) This will almost certainly remain true for video production, even if sectors of it become more heavily capitalized and industrialized, given the existing models of very low-budget production and distribution in the formal sector. The popular audience is not apt to let video production slip entirely out of its control. Some of the ways in which the popular imagination asserts its sway over the videos are discussed below in reference to *Living in Bondage*.

Still the "popular arts" themselves are not a monolithic ahistorical formation, and in determining the specific class character of the Igbo video productions it helps to look at the elite from whom the money for these productions usually comes. This is not the older educated elite, tied to nationalist ideologies. It is also not the state institutions (including the universities), which had a deeper connection to the European elite culture which it also sought to displace. This is rather a commercial elite, much less educated but now exercising a considerable ideological hegemony over a generation that would previously have looked to the universities as a path for advancement. They may well be directly connected to the global economy through import trading or emigration, but culturally their commerce is with American mass culture. This social formation shades at one end into the culture of mushroom banks, 419, pirated American Videos, imitation car parts, fake electronics – all the products of the legendary Igbo wit for producing simulacra of the industrialized world.

At their worst the video dramas produced on this socio-economic basis, and with the plainest commercial motives, are thin and false, advertisements for unbridled acquisitiveness and an elite lifestyle which can hardly be attained honestly. But this is of course not the whole story. The spectacle of luxury is normally accompanied by a

moralizing commentary which appeals to more traditional values. In this they resemble Indian films, which have similarly vested forms of melodrama borrowed from the West with a conflict between a materially attractive modernity and a morally normative tradition, a conflict which is quite foreign to Hollywood (see Larkin, 9-12, and the references he cites).

Living in Bondage, which was the first Igbo video hit, exemplifies the characteristic handling of the urban scene. It takes place in Lagos. Andy, the main character, gets entangled with a group of upwardly mobile dubious Igbo business men. He is avaricious, gullible, and envious of them. He seeks to join their group, and is gradually let in to their secret world. Finally, the real price of membership is demanded of him: he must present his wife for sacrifice. Entered so far with them, he cannot opt out. He kills his wife in a bizarre ritual scene, and immediately begins to prosper.

The narrative brings us to this point very quickly. Now we watch Andy enjoying his wealth for a time, in the style of his upwardly mobile friends: philandering in bars, frequenting posh hotels, and generally conspicuously consuming in the most crude and flagrant manner. This is the sign of his "arrival", as he accumulates the markers of his new social position.

But even as it records the lifestyle of this dubious and thieving elite, the story turns towards teaching a moral, as it must do. Andy's problems start when he tries to marry a new wife. His first wife begins to haunt him as a nightmarish apparition. For a while he copes with this, but eventually goes mad, raving and picking morsels from rubbish heaps in downtown Lagos. The news gets to his village, where a family council is summoned and a delegation sent to bring back the mad son from the city. The rest is a story of rehabilitation. Andy is taken to one of the Pentecostal churches, and when nothing else works he is removed to a *dibia's* home for herbal cures and spiritual exorcism.

The threads of the story which are left unexplored are revealing. Many social issues are touched upon but then dropped immediately, such as the options open to Andy as he initially faces the problems

of unemployment and coping with the city and its attractions, or the episode in which his wife is thrown out of her job because she will not sleep with the boss. Her death does not lead to a criminal case, and the fortunes of the other members of the group of ritual killers are not investigated. When Andy goes mad he is not sent to a modern asylum for the mentally ill, but back to the village, the church, and traditional healing practices. Once Andy's personality breaks down the scene and point of view become that of the village community, for whom the city and its attractions are of little importance. Personality and identity are thus presented as complex and layered, and it is the more modern and individualized part that falls prev to the devouring city, and has to find redemption from tradition. One might be tempted to say that it is a traditional moral scheme and narrative imagination that figures the drama of city life as one of ritual murder – except that the urban vampire story is one propagated in the cities, by city dwellers, to make sense of their own condition. It has passed through various ethnic groups, forming part of the mixed, modern culture of the cities – many parallel instances can be found in Yoruba films and videos, or even those being produced in Ghana.

We are then not really dealing with a polarized opposition where modernity and the urban scene are on one side, and tradition, magic and the rural village are on the other, and serve as the answer to all problems. Andy's story doesn't intersect with modern legitimate institutions which would solve problems of mental health, missing persons, sexual harassment or unemployment, because such institutions aren't available to the mass popular audience, which has only family, traditional healers and churches to fall back on when the city overwhelms them.

The representation of the city is subsumed by a logic of acquisitive desire and magic because this same vast floating desperate mass of the population needs figures for the social processes of post oil boom Nigeria, which seem occult because they have so little to do with work or productive social processes (Barber). They are organized by cliques and cabals enriching themselves at the expense of others, following the slogan "chop make I chop."

Upward mobility is everything, and there are very few people in a position to demand, or even interested in, accountability or transparency from those who have made it. Andy repeatedly replies, to questions about his identity, "I am a businessman" – a supremely vague description in this situation where it means everything and nothing. There is little in the way of available political ideology that really makes sense of this mess. Popular consciousness, built on a disposition in traditional Igbo culture to favor individual dynamism and ambition, is fascinated with the art and strategy of getting ahead in this world, and of course admiring of the spectacle of luxury that accompanies it, even as it registers horror at the moral anarchy. It is therefore very easy for the video dramas aimed at this audience to misrecognize the real social and political issues facing the urban masses, representing them in a way that falsifies the problems and makes solutions unimaginable. In Hollywood and the Indian film industry, both under the control of a consolidated bourgeoisie, mass culture is certainly designed to have a politically soporific effect. In Nigeria the problems are rooted more in limitations inherent in popular consciousness, though it is possible that in so far as something like a culture industry is set up in Nigeria it will begin to resemble these other cases.

One recurring form through which this anarchy is expressed is the sacrifice of marital relations on the altar of greed, to support a glamorous urban lifestyle. This happens with allegorical clarity in *Living in Bondage*, but it also features in a number of the other most popular Igob videos, such as *True Confessions* and *Glamour Girls; it* is given a mythological turn in *Nneka I* and *II*. These dramas all invest their female characters with immense frightening power – the nightmare projections of the males who control video production, but which resonate with everyone whose psychological relationships have been rendered insecure by the precarious struggle for existence.

While the urban scene is dominant in the Igbo productions, we do not mean to suggest that they are limited to any one location, physical, social or ideological – their openness is one of the most promising things about them. *Ikuku/Hurricane,* written and directed

by Nkem Owoh (Andy Best Productions, 1995), is set in a village, and takes a village perspective on things; but it does something that is quite rare in the Igbo productions, which is to present the village in historical fashion, as being in an uncompleted relation to the forces of modernization, rather than as being a pure repository of uncorrupted values or as the scene for essentially timeless stories of magical encounters.

The village is beset by a terrible wind (which is never really represented) because the priest of the Ikuku shrine has died without a successor. A diviner says the priesthood will fall on the Ezigbo family, and eliminates as a candidate one of its members, the town drunk Osuofia. The only other known male is Dr. Raymond, a nuclear physicist living in Lagos, recently recalled from abroad by the Government. Nobody knows that a boy called Stephen is the illegitimate son of Osuofia – he's obviously the right candidate as he suffers visions of the oracle and of his father, but the film never gets around to a discovery scene which would resolve this situation. A delegation is sent to visit Dr. Raymond in Lagos. Found in his luxurious home, he treats the delegation rudely, with no respect for kinship, let alone the shrine to whose priesthood he has been called. Eventually, however, he is forced into returning to the village by a series of catastrophes that befall his life in Lagos: his chickens all die, somebody poisons his dog, his grant letter goes missing, and the engine of his Volvo car knocks.

Much comedy is made of his cultural alienation once he returns to the village. He speaks English to the oracle, puts on surgical gloves to handle kola nut, expects there to be files on the job as priest and a bank account to support sacrifices, and allows his foreign wife to commit various sacrileges, for which she suffers magical retribution.

In a parallel plot, the Igwe's son and heir has also returned: Jeff has acquired a fake American accent in Lagos, along with the dress and manners of a street hustler, and he brings along a fiancée called Jenny who can't cook and has no intention of learning how to. Jeff will clearly never be able to succeed his father. The theme of acculturation to the wider world is carried on throughout the film

through many incidental jokes, not necessarily connected to Raymond or Jeff, about who does or doesn't speak English – French and even Latin also come up. The village has been thoroughly penetrated by the languages of modernity.

The satire on modern, alienated sons of the soil is balanced by discredited village figures who insist on their traditional titles. The main one is the drunk Osuofia, who insists on his status as elder and relative as he gives a prurient lecture on sexual morality to his niece, and demands that the waitress in an Igbo restaurant in Lagos bend down as she serves him in difference to his rank, but really so he can see down her dress. When he is thrown down after provoking a fight in the village bar, he makes a big deal of how a titled man's head should never touch the ground. Similarly, the diviner is also pushed to the ground (on the periphery of a fracas involving his fierce hen-pecking, adulterous wife); from this position he announces he won't arise unless placated by the sacrifice of a cock. Nobody really notices.

The film, then, is made from the perspective of a real village, shot through with problems and in the midst of negotiating responses to the wider world that impinges on it. The Lagos scenes, let alone Dr. Raymond's career, are less realistic, being the fragmentary impressions of bewildered outsiders. At every turn Igbos are found in Lagos (car mechanic, restaurant); really no one else is visible.

The notion that Raymond should abandon his career as nuclear programmer /physicist in Nigeria's space programme (!) in order to become the priest of the village oracle seems absurd even to the film, but it does endorse the community's claim on its members – Raymond should negotiate, as his friend in Lagos tells him: go home, give gifts, and see what can be arranged. Raymond is much more ridiculous, and more clearly in the wrong, than the village ever is. But the village also has to negotiate, to keep channels of communication open.

There is an important sense, the plots tell us, in which the tradition can't defend itself, has broken down, suffering interruptions: the Igwe looks and functions like an Igwe, but he has

no plausible successor; the priesthood has devolved on a family whose male members are the alienated and absurd Raymond, the utterly corrupt and incompetent drunk Osuofia, and the illegitimate and unrecognized boy Stephen. Still, generally, one has a sense of life going on in a way that prevents any sense of an acute crisis. The supposed hurricane is forgotten – certainly it isn't blowing at the end as the masks come out and everyone dances. Throughout the atmosphere is of resilience and humor, not tragic civilizational crisis as conceived of by an intellectual.

We would like to close by offering a few tentative thoughts about ethnicity and Nigerian video production – pausing first to notice the emergence of video dramas in Hausa, dating from about the same period as the Igbo videos, a development that is beyond the scope of this paper and the competence of its authors, but which is of undoubted significance and deserves further study. (See Larkin). The degree to which video and film production is organized along ethnic lines in Nigeria is quite unusual in Africa -- elsewhere films don't carry their ethnicity on their sleeves because production is organized on a national and international basis. The positive side of the Nigerian situation is the immediate relation to a popular audience; the negative side is that in some ways at least it reflects a situation in which many dimensions of national life and being re-ethnicized as the national institutions deteriorate. One needs to ask what the relation of the popular arts arising from each ethnic tradition is to a national culture, and perhaps these days one will answer with less assurance than did Biodun Jeyifo in 1984 when he placed the Yoruba Travelling Theatre "solidly within the pale of an emergent national popular culture," though one that was not monolithic and had many ethno-national streams (5).

The Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa videos all emerge from specific circumstances which give them markedly different characters. This perhaps extends even to a certain non-equivalence of categories, to differences in the extent to which they are marked as ethnic. The Yoruba videos seem more imbued with an ethnic spirit, for diverse reasons that have already been touched upon: their immediate artistic lineage goes back to a moment of cultural nationalism (one

wonders how the Igbo films would look if they had begun production in 1967); they are seldom translated out of Yoruba, and the "deep" Yoruba verbal arts play a great role; the original structure of the acting companies is more closed. There are perhaps other cultural dispositions at play too. While Igbo films also frequently involve magic, they are much less likely to invoke to a whole traditional cosmology and pantheon of deities. The Yoruba films are much more liable to be historical in the sense of appealing to a legendary Yoruba tradition, which is not easily seen to flow into a modern pluri-ethnic nation. Even dramas with modern urban settings very seldom hint at the existence of other ethnicities, whereas Igbo videos not infrequently do. All this is apt to make non-Yoruba viewers feel culturally excluded.

We do not mean to make invidious comparisons, or to slight the rich cultural meanings which are mobilized in the Yoruba videos. But the recent Igbo production seems perhaps even more promising as a basis for the future, in its cultural and commercial elasticity, which will cause it to pursue and develop a national market. In any case, the entrance of Igbo and Hausa videographers is a healthy development in Nigerian popular culture.

Observation:

1. We would like to thank the Rockfeller Foundation for our month-long residency at the Bellagio Conference and Study Centre in Italy, during which this essay was written. Warm thanks also to our fellow residents there, with whom we had profitable discussions – particularly, Catherine Acholonu, Lucia Nagib, and Sandra Dunn.
2. The title of a collection of essays and speeches by the Managing Director of the Nigerian Film Corporation, Brendan Shehu, is precisely *No... Not Hollywood* (ed. Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yacubu Nasidi, Jos: National Film Corporation, 1992).

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CECILIA D. KATO

Our Children Are Coming

Our children are coming
Says Chukwuemeka Ike
It is a mission accomplished
A time fulfilled desire.

Our children are coming
To uncover the pits behind our yards
Their peering eyes shall see through the blinds of nakedness
Their ears will hear the things we have said in secret.

They will come with giant trumpets
Heralding their arrival
To jerk our sleeping conscience back to life

The carcasses in Zango Kataf
Will tell their story
The blood rivers in the streets of Zaria, Kafanchan,
Kaduna, Kano ...
Will sing and clap for joy
When our children come.

The clouds at the panels will give way
Monster tribunals will vomit their contents
And the hunt shall hunt the hunter
And the captives shall capture the captors
And the jailed shall jail the jailer
And the iced hearts shall bubble with the laughter of a new dawn.
Our children are coming
They are coming with long ropes

To pull lobes that have lost their hearing
To spit into unseeing eyes.

Our children are coming with questions on slates
Demanding
That History be rewritten
Beginning from 1914
To 1960
To 1967
To 1970
To 1977
To 1980
To 1987
To 1989
To 1990
To 1991
To 1992
To 1993
To 1994
To 1995

They will ask how we became
Hausa Bakwai
Banza Bakwai
Arna
Northerner
Southerner
Westerner
Emirates

They will ask how Mary became Mariam
They will ask how Ezenwa became Abdu
They will ask how Erete became Yakubu James
They will ask how Ojo became Aliyu enjoying another state's scholarship.

They will ask about the oil boom
The Kano pyramid
The citadels of learning
They will ask about the teachers
The schools
The children

They will ask about the economy
IMF
SAPPING SAP
VAT
Debts owed
Launchings and Lunching

Our children are coming
With water in gourds
To douse the blazing fires.

It Will Rain Again

It will rain again
On this side of the planet
And the earth shall be wet
With the blood of slain heroines
Who for the sake of their offspring
Have counted dozens of hardship years.

It will rain again for mothers
Who have withstood the taste of wars
The labours of endurance
For these ones whose hands move the earth
It will rain again.

It will rain again
And the earth shall be soaked with sweat

Of modern endless struggles
And men shall take cover under the umbrellas
of their forgotten spouses
Heroines whose combined efforts keep the
earth moving.

For these ones it will rain again
These, whose faint voices shall be washed by
heavens own waters
Shall encompass the world
And wrap it up in love it knows not
For these ones it will rain again.

Golgotha (The place of a skull)

BIODUN SOWEMIMO

Do Not!

Laugh if you want.
Grin if you can.
I care not, my heart is deep.

My skin is black.
My hair is nappy.
Laugh, if you want.
Grin, if you can.
I care not, my heart is deep.

My shoes are torn.
My clothes are rags.
My books are shreds.
Laugh if you want.
Grin if you can.
I care not, my heart is deep.

My heart is deep.
How deep; Lord knows
Laugh, Grin but DO NOT,
DO NOT SMILE AT ME.

TITI ADEPITAN

The House of Judas

Easter-time. Juwon watched as the crowd came. He was nine years old, and this was his third year participating in the ritual of simulated outrage, until the accident of a few moments ago. *"Judasi! O pa Jesu je! Ole"* They shouted as whips and cudgels rose and fell and missiles flew. He leaned forward and clutched his big toe, riding the pain that tore through him and made him grind his knees together and grit his teeth. He was among the crowd when they set out, but in his frenzied zeal, he had bashed his toe against a rock. Rather than turn back, he hobbled ahead of the multitude to a vantage position from where, sitting now, he cast a baleful look at the approaching carrier, ignoring the split nail which jutted out, drenched in blood.

The old man staggered on with his load. He silently thanked God the journey was almost over. In his twenty-five years of carrying the Judas effigy he had never gone through anything as gruelling as this. He had a disquieting feeling that the crowd actually believed he was Judas. He knew, for instance, that many of the stones thrown had been aimed directly at his head, saved only by the weight of the effigy which bent him forward a bit. And the lashes, too. Quite a number had found his person instead of the effigy. But years of experience had prepared him for that - he had on several layers of clothing to take the sting off.

"Judas! Thief! Killed Jesus! And ate him up! The thief!"

For generations, members of his family had carried the effigy. He did not know how this came to be. All he remembered was that after years of grooming, his father had called him twenty-six years ago and told him he would carry the burden round the following Easter. Ever since, he had become used to children meeting him on

the way and calling him "Baba Judasi." He now even loved the name. But a few months after his first experience, he had been alarmed, when he was met by six youngsters who promptly scrambled for pebbles at a building site nearby. He had not waited to find what they were up to.

"Judasi! Ole! O pa Jesu je! Ole!" They chanted as they - young and old - whipped up inherited grudges against an ancient villain. And while Judas Iscariot reposed in his unknown tomb, Judas the Effigy was in tatters from relentless drubbing. The rags and pieces of cloth which made up the inner padding had almost gone, and Judas lay on its carrier's back, tired, torn and broken. The old man waited for a few minutes of grace for the crowd to expend their last reserves of passion, and then he entered his house.

The crowd dispersed.

From where he sat Juwon looked on. He had hardly paid attention to his companions Duro and Feyi who had come to sympathize with him. Even now that he spoke he did not look in their direction.

"Another time. It was God who saved him today. I would have broken his head."

"Why would you want to do that? What did he do?" It was Feyi.

"What did he do?" Juwon countered, genuinely surprised and a little bit angry that everything had to be explained to this big-headed idiot who was a year older. "What did Baba Judasi do? So you mean you don't know his great-great-great grandfather killed Jesus Christ?"

Feyi laughed. And stopped. He was looking into Juwon's eyes. They were two flaming fires of rage. But beyond that, the eyes had an unnatural glint in them which the two boys always found unnerving whenever Juwon lost his temper - which was often. That was really why they always tried to be chummy. It was for them a demonstration of loyalty to a boy both knew neither could take in a fight.

"Baba Judasi? I mean Judas could not have been Baba Judasi Judasi's great-great-great grandfather." Feyi looked uncertainly at Duro for support. "Judas was white. All of us are black, including Baba Judasi.

"Rubbish. So you have never seen the drawings in our Religion text book?" The eyes were still glinting. "Or don't you ever listen when Sister Maine comes for her weekly catechism? She said Judas was a black, sooty-minded criminal who sold our Lord Jesus Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Those were her words."

"Sister Maine couldn't be serious, then. How could she say that?" said Duro, also ten. Though the three were in primary five, Duro attended a different school. "How could Judas be black when Jesus his childhood playmate was not born in Africa! It's .."

The words died in his mouth as Juwon whirled. One moment, his toe was hurting, but the next moment the pain was no longer there as his fist crashed into Duro's startled nose. Before the boy could begin to feel the pain, Juwon had heaved him sky high and smashed him into the mud. He looked through glazed eyes at Duro's nose, now streaming with blood. "I should have known," he said. "Someone told me he and your mother are related." He limped away.

In truth, nobody told him any such thing. But looking *through* the helpless boy, somewhere in his head it had suddenly seemed someone had.

Even the years as they rolled by did not change Juwon's impression of Baba Judasi. But ever since the fight years ago with Duro, he had never again told anyone of his malice for the oldman. On occassion, he would sit at a distance and watch as Baba Judasi sat at his sewing machine, unaware of his presence.

Olosi! Says he's a tailor. That's where he finds stuffing for a new Judas each time the old one is slain. And every year he must come out to revel in the infamy of his forefathers. I'll get you!

He knew the house inside out. It was an old, rickety, one-storey structure. The outside was built of burnt brick, but the interior was of wood and planks. Anyone passing by outside could easily hear the occupants footsteps as he descended or climbed the wooden staircase whose rungs had become hollowed out where countless feet had etched nondescript signatures of their forgotten, anonymous passage. He had always wondered what crazy man it was who

erected the staircase. It stood almost upright against the upper floor, so that when one was climbing one had a giddy feeling of walking up a wall.

But the house was the most famous in the street. It was the landmark for explaining the way to strangers, and also to children sent on errands. "*Ile* Judas", they called it.

Juwon had another reason for keeping watch in front of the House of Judas. Baba Judasi had a daughter, Ruth. He knew she was a year younger but could not remember for how long he had been in love with her. All he remembered was that a few years back when he, Ruth and other children were playing house inside the famous landmark, she had rejected him.

Someone had nominated Ruth to play Mother, and Juwon promptly volunteered as Father.

"No, not with you," Ruth said. "Otherwise, let Bisi be Mother."

Juwon's eyes shot up, with their glint. "Why not you with me?"

Ruth looked into the eyes and crumbled under their fiery intensity. Then suddenly defiant, she returned the gaze

"Your eyes, they are too cruel. You will beat your wife."

In some hidden, unfamiliar territory of his mind, Juwon felt a stirring. This totally strange feeling urged him to reassure the girl that if she would play "Father and Mother" with him for real, he would never beat her. He would be her protector, and would gladly take on all the boys in the street for her sake. Instead, the eyes glinted.

"You mean as we beat up your father every year?" And the laughter which gushed through him bent him double almost at the same time that the shocked girl burst into tears.

"Bastard! Get out of our house! Or I'll call my father!" She rushed at him.

Involuntarily, Juwon raised his hand, his fist clenched. But Bisi and another girl had restrained Ruth. As the girl thrashed and glowered at him, Juwon suddenly realised that his arm was raised and his fist clenched. He lowered it and looked into his open palm, deeply puzzled. Why had he raised his hand against Ruth, the only person he would gladly kill for? Abruptly, he turned and left the house.

That was six years ago, when he was eight. He had since tried everything he could to worm his way back into the girl's affection; but Ruth, now a pretty, promising thirteen-year-old, had ignored him with the same doggedness. Still, he had never stopped hoping.

Still the years rolled by, and Morayo Street acknowledged their passage. The road was now tarred and street lights had been installed. New houses had been built and one or two of the older ones had crumbled. But the House of Judas stood in its rickety majesty, disdaining time.

Juwon had somewhat outgrown his child-like association of Baba Judasi's role as carrier with Judas of the meretricious kiss. But his hatred had not diminished one bit; in fact, it grew. Ruth was now a beautiful, full-blown girl of eighteen, and everyday when Juwon woke from ambitious dreams to find the bed empty and his pants wet, he cursed Baba Judasi. For he held Baba Judasi responsible for Ruth's lack of interest in him. A huge youth of nineteen, with a frozen scowl on his face, he still liked to prowl past the House of Judas.

One of the new buildings was a two-storey residential block which housed a heavily-bearded young man. People said he was a teacher at the new university out of town. Everyday, at dusk, the man would sit on the balcony and read far into the night.

Juwon became friendly with him the day the man brought home his new car. The boy had been passing by.

"Hello, Sir. Perhaps you need some assistance?"

The man stopped and brought his head out of the gleaming bonnet of the showroom-fresh Datsun Bluebird and looked, surprised, at the lanky youth towering over him, "Er, not really. Thanks. Actually I was only making sure the mechanic removed the air-conditioner properly. The car is new, as you can see."

"What was wrong with the air-con?"

"Nothing." The man read the puzzlement on the youth's face, and he smiled. "You don't understand. Pleasure makes no sense when the masses are still shackled by the oppressive system."

"So you removed the air-conditioner?"

"There was no need for it."

Juwon's head was unusually clear and so he was able to think straight. Why had the man not bought a less prestigious car with no air-conditioner - a Beetle, for instance - instead of reducing the beauty to an empty tin? But the man was talking again.

"You live around here?"

Juwon pointed to the other side of the road, midway between the residential block and the House of Judas. "There."

They exchanged names; thenceforth, Juwon would go to Dr. Oropoju's apartment. Dr. Oropoju was willing to talk, to teach; Juwon was willing to listen, to learn.

"Y'see, what you must have in mind always is that things are not as they are because God ordained them to be so. From the farmer who works from daybreak till dusk on his farm to the idle fat-arses who belch their contentment in our faces, everyone has his place. There is a ladder in this society, in every society, though you will never see it, no matter how hard you strain your eyes. On this pyramid -"

"You said ladder."

"No matter, ladder, pyramid; pyramid, ladder: the same thing - just the same thing. On this pyramid, the farmer and all his kinsfolk in misery and deprivation occupy the base. Now you must realise that the base is the bottom-line - no, the bottòmline is the base. No matter. It's vice-versa. Some tiny, tiny ignoramuses who think they are smart occupy all the rungs between the base and the apex, never tired of trying, no, never tiring of trying to join the other few at the top. Trampling on the farmers at the foot of the staircase in the process..."

As he talked Juwon's mind travelled to and from the staircase in the House of Judas...

"... and those at the apex. Traitors. Judases. The vermin who contaminate everything. It's of them a great writer - I don't remember who: Ngugi? No, not him - wrote: they neither toil nor boil, or something like that. They operate from their giddy heights and fart on us down here. And it is our historic duty to exterminate

all of them. *Patapata!* They think they can change the course of history with their political jiggery-pokery. No way!"

Juwon knew Dr. Oropoju was drunk, as he very often was. But he had become used to the drunken sessions over the months. As a result, he had learned to separate the sense from the nonsense in his instructor's utterances as the man could not be serious: when he said there was no God, for instance. Dr. Oropoju could not be serious: when he said there was no God, what did he mean? That there was no God the Father? No Holy Trinity? Or that Jesus Christ never was? But see the other side. Traitors, and Judases, and the historic duty. When the time came, he knew what his duty would be and on whose head he would perform it. Still, how could a man say there was no God and admit at the same time that there was a Judas! After all, it's vice-versa. *Dr. Oropoju likes to talk and un-talk, untalk and talk and un-talk and - maybe one of these days I'll smash his beer bottle down his head to help him think straight and stop un-talking what he's talked.*

"Doctor, you said it's our historic duty to exterminate the Judases. Why not now? They might escape."

"No way! They couldn't even if they tried. They can run but they can't hide. And we must await the historic moment."

"When will it come?"

"Everything must come in its own good time. For Russia it was 1917 - you had not been born then. Neither had I. For Cuba, 1959."

"But this writer you mentioned. I read two of his novels, and I think he's stating and doing what he believes in. That's action - and he's not waiting for any historic moment."

"There, you're wrong. They had their historic moment. In 1952, the Mau Mau -"

"I know about the Mau Mau, Doctor" Juwon could not keep the exasperation out of his voice. "We discussed it last week, remember? But this man, he did not because Mau Mau had come and gone throw his typewriter in the lake or keep a distance from the people."

In a tiny part of his brain, not yet colonized by alcohol fumes, Dr. Oropoju cautioned himself. Nothing more dangerous than for you to have an overzealous student who thought you the teacher were yourself part of the problem he was trying to find a solution to. *And those eyes! Yeepa! When I was still a Christian I'd've cried Jeezas!*

He cleared his throat. "Not so fast. Revolution is not possible until the people - sorry - the masses, all the masses are educated. Until then whatever effort we make will be lost on them. They may even try to oppose us, to subvert us. Imagine! In any case, what do you expect when you have to fight on behalf of millions who are illiterate, ignorant, rustic and eternally hard put to it telling their assumed friends from their imagined enemies - er... now does that make sense? - I mean, telling their staunch allies from their inveterate foes!..."

As Dr. Oropoju rambled on, Juwon's mind did its own simple deductions. *Too bad. Such smooth talk drowned in beer and inaction. To hell with the historic moment! I don't even have a wrist-watch. The revolution has started. First, that foolish old Judas who* - Dr. Oropoju was shaking him.

"It's part of the grand design perpetrated by the traitorous bourgeoisie to banish the hapless proletariat to aeons or servitude. But we won't let them.

A o ni gba fun won! Rara!

It suddenly dawned on Juwon that all the talk about his eyes being cruel and unnatural was just rubbish. He was not only one, nor were his eyes the only pair. Looking into Dr. Oropoju's dilated, blood-shot eyes he knew he had found a kindred spirit.

Had anyone posed the question to him, Dr. Oropoju would almost certainly have justified his regular celebration of bombast as the fulfillment of his own historic duty; and that he failed to make this quite logical claim must be traced to the alcohol which served both as his own vehicle to inspired heights and the truth-serum which teased out the indirect confession of his fence-sitting. And he might even have taken himself seriously; for the curse of his generation was the hollowness which had become the lot of words, the

purposelessness which had become the end of rhetoric. It did not matter the subject - religion, politics, anything each theorist and would-be teacher dug his haunches into his shallow, arid hole of ill-digested notions from where he proclaimed to the whole world that the limitless mass of land which contained even his own tiny hole was no longer *terra-firma* but a huge cloud of illusion which only fools would walk on. You listened and all you heard was the echo which bounced off the cavernous emptiness that was the speaker's mind.

That Dr. Oropoju was a university teacher was merely a coincidence, although, that profession did help, particularly in ensuring that the individual spent an entire lifetime conquering and defending a turf no bigger than the size of his own palm, and got conceited imagining it to be an entire universe. But in reality they were everywhere, the manic moulders of the minds of men, victims of a generational affliction out to spread ideas about a reality that they had spent the greater part of their frequent escapes into nirvana running away from. And it was not always easy to determine the consequences, except, to go back to Juwon, when something went overboard.

The young man sat down heavily, and the blue plastic keg which he had brought in from his father's garage lay by his side. His head felt heavy and he had a sensation of hot air being pumped into it from both ears. He tried to focus, but everything in the room now had a twin. He rapped his head with his knuckles repeatedly, shaking it violently at the same time. He must think.

When he first met Dr. Oropoju, the man had asked about his education and Juwon had lied that he could not go beyond school certificate because there was no money. But, in truth, he was undecided who or what to hold responsible for the premature end to his education: the father who was too engrossed in his business to care, the mother he had never known, or the momentary madness of the day in higher school when he just walked out of the examination hall, and had never looked back.

He never could forgive his mother for dying before he was old enough, and he was convinced that a day would come when he

would write VENGEANCE on his father's chest with the jagged end of a broken bottle. For they were both Judases. Betraying their son, leaving him all alone to cope, as they damn well knew he couldn't, with the hostility of half-brothers and half-sisters and the malice of step-mother whose undisguised wish was that the next bolt of thunder should strike him dead.

The sexton in their church was another Judas. Or why should he eject him from the front row in church, saying the seats were reserved for the fathers of the church? And he, *he* Juwon, had spent all his life defending the church, defending Jesus Christ against the Judases! *Betrayal. Yes. Betrayal. The kind for which that foxy old Judas must regret tonight. Betrothing his daughter, my girl, to some crazy old man without any thought for my feelings!*

God! There are not one but many Houses of Judas and those houses are full of Judases who must be exterminated - at the baseline or the bottom and the apex and the middle. Traitors! They must pay for their traition. No Treachery. Gbogbo won! *All of them. Including that tiny, tiny word-monger who thinks he's smart. Talking and untalking. Can't go among the people - hates their breath. Says their songs are silly, their philosophy bush. Raises the peoples' hopes with words and dashes them with inaction. Traitors. But first of all, the topmost Judas who wants to ruin my life*

Juwon looked up and saw the poster. He had got it two weeks earlier from Dr. Oropoju. As always, his eyes picked out the words:

JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE
PARANOID
DOESN'T MEAN THEY WON'T
GETCHA!

Okay. Let them try. Just let them try. Not finding any scrap of paper around, he ripped the poster off the wall, rolled it into a ball and plugged the mouth of the keg. He got up, took the keg and stalked, unseeing, out of the room, leaving a heady smell of gasoline hanging ominously in the air.

Investigations were not necessary. Juwon gave himself up when he learned the morning after the House of Judas went up in flames that Ruth lost her life in the fire that raged all through the night till early morning. During the trial, the clamour of the people for his head soon gave way to pity when the psychiatrist's report indicated that Juwon should not be held responsible for his actions.

They put him in a home.

It was perhaps in the nature of such ironies, in order to tear at heart-strings, that Dr. Oropoju's colleagues at the university with whom he exchanged opinions on the incident did not know of the several sessions of inspired monologue which flowed from cranky master to a neurotic protégé. Dr. Oropoju's verdict ensured they did not. "Somebody ought to have noticed. Afterall, the poor boy has a family - and playmates." If he recognised any act of betrayal, he acknowledged it to no one.

Juwon was still in confinement two years later when Dr. Oropoju, "unable any longer to resist the preternatural tug of the wonderful culture" of his "very beautiful people", burnt his books and shaved his beard and took a traditional title, the Chief Akamolede of Jengboran, his hometown.

A.N. AKWANYA

Characterization in Soyinka's Fiction: A Study in Typology

The patterns of characterization in Soyinka's fiction have often been discussed in gender terms, and critical remarks, in the literal sense, passed on the writer for reifying the female into a sort of fetish or marginalizing her as an accessory: in either case, displacing her from participation in the action (see, for example, Brinda J. Mehta, 1997). Reification may be a weakness particular to the characterization of women in these narratives, but the mode of representation of the male participants has features which suggest that they may be as much de-realized as the female ones. Often they seem to be constituted for the roles they are to play in the narrative; and this is especially the case in *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*. Only in *Ake* do we see individuals, male and female, participating fully in terms of generating action or sequences, and influencing their orientation by the force of personality. This essay is a contrastive study of characterization in *The Interpreters, Season of Anomy,* and *Ake* . But the thrust of the discussion will be on *Season of Anomy,* as it is here that typology is most consistent and pervasive.

In literary studies, the first importance must be accorded to theory, as a strategy of sense-making which enables the critic to grasp a literary work as a totality, and to grasp it along with a range of other works at a higher integrational level that de-emphasizes the singularizing aspects by which each of them may claim for itself uniqueness. Without such a theoretical framework, criticism degenerates to a confused and haphazard reviewing of literary works: haphazard because it is incapable of building up to a system or a body of knowledge, having no idea what it may be looking for; and confused, for want of a controlling idea to help sort out the

literary from the non-literary. Yet there is a certain level at which the work demands to be read for itself, on its own terms, without preconditions. This practical criticism functioning as a close reading has the next most important place in literary studies, despite that in practice it usually involves reading with the help of models both to enable the discovery of structural and significant patterns and in order to explain these. There always hovers in the background a set of models against which to relate the new material, so that *reflection* is fundamental to any form of genuine encounter with a literary work.

Literary criticism shares with all the theoretical disciplines the capacity of a double movement from the rule, the general statement, to the object being described, and from this individual object back to the rule. This double movement presupposes that it is by means of the general statement that one distinguishes the object, that is to say, perceives it as a ***work***, and as literature. The difference is that for literary criticism, the study of the individual object is not merely for a confirmation of the rule, it can be a self-contained activity because of the quality of uniqueness that is claimed for each and every object it may concern itself with.

Criticism understood as theory is, in Mulder and Hervey's sense (1980), functionally *axiomatic*, in as much as it proceeds by reference to a general statement of the kind, *Literature is XXZ*. This is the axiom itself. But an axiomatic theory also must needs have, in addition, secondary statements: in criticism, these comprise the notions defined as `literary terms', such as *Character, action, narrator, rhythm,* and so on. Differences in the statement of these notions signal more than differences in techniques of criticism, as they affect the kinds of conclusions that may be attained. For the secondary statement forms part of a chain specific to the particular general statement. Hence the notion of *narrator* in most post-structuralist critical writing means something quite different in sociological or Marxist criticism. To the model builders among the critics, the axiomatic statement is everything, not just because it marks the difference between one school and another, but because it describes the extent or adequacy of the critic's grasp of literary

phenomena, whether one may have competence in the novel, drama, or poetry alone, or whether one may grasp them all by means of one and the same instrument.

Of course, unanimity exists at the most general level of statement, that literature is a way of doing things with words; but this is because the statement is not particularly informative. Hence it is at the next most general level, where the kinds of things that are done become more specific that the differences emerge. For some, it is a way of using words to convey messages from one subject to another; for some it is using words to describe social realities and experience, while there are traditions within post-structuralism to which words function in literature for the representation of thought, first of all to oneself - which means that for these critics, literature is a mode of thought; still others see the organization of words as constituted to create something totally new, which has no use, except being itself. Many more interpretations of the functioning of words in literature exist, each describing a path of thought that is the motive force of one critical tradition or another.

But more than merely setting one's theoretical statement to work, a critical reading may and ought to be used to test the validity of the theory itself. For instance, in Soyinka criticism, the personages that appear in the narrative are often treated simply as 'characters', and analyzed by approximation to individuals in real life. According to Rabinowitz (1980), the reason for this instinctive reference back to the real is the presupposition inherent in the imitative theory of art, that it 'implies an art/life metaphor' (251). The critical discourse, therefore, presupposes a very high level of what Aristotle calls probability, the critic faced at every turn by the question 'whether the [dis]harmony found in the work is a quality of the art or of the world' (Rabinowitz, 251). A critic like Olaniyan (1988), reflecting upon the corruption, bleakness, and violence reflected in every phase of *The Interpreters*, concludes that the disharmony is a function of this novel's misrepresentation or partial representation of the facts: 'We are not denying all these happenings in the Nigerian society of the novel's first appearance, or even today. Our objection is based on the irrefutable fact that ... there remain ... strips

of verdant greenness stubbornly resisting the epidemic of yellowness,' which the novel has failed to draw attention to, (1988:104).

Criticism of this sort usually shifts to a different mode of writing, such as biographical analysis, when the literary work is not a novel, but a poem, say, Okigbo's. For example, in 'Initiations', the spear-wound of the Crucified, first transferred to the Crucifix, and said, proleptically, to have been inflicted by a `red blade', is finally appropriated by the speaker remembering himself a schoolboy chastised by Kepkanly. But if the speaker, a human character, is at once the individual experienced, and Christ as *pharmakos* ('scapegoat'), and equally Christ's cross itself, in what way could he be a historical consciousness? This interpeneration of persons and objects is rarely picked up or closely questioned, as it is assumed that a poem can afford to be bold in flying in the face of common sense; and it is not compared with structures in other kinds of literary works, such as Soyinka's fiction, because fiction is thought to obey a different set of rules than poetry. The result is that the critics specialize increasingly in things like African fiction, romantic poetry, and so on, or even in Okigbo, Okara, or Achebe.

This narrow specialism, which fashions tools for analysing Achebe, or someone else, but not in such a way that the same tools may apply to Rainer Maria Rilke or Boleslaw Lesmian, respectively of German and Polish modernisms, is also bolstered by another widely held notion - that there is such a thing as literary criticism *itself*, which is conducted without recourse to theory, an attitude which clearly needs rethinking now. For example, the concept of probability in Aristotle applies not to fiction as such, but to 'poetry' (1965:43-45). As far as I know, no one has demonstrated that in the light of the present state of criticism, the term should henceforth be reserved to the analysis of fictional characters and situations; and if the restriction be allowed, one would immediately be faced with such works as *Season of Anomy*, with plot depending on a set of circumstances that is at best improbable. An interactive reading, on the other hand, will be prepared to question the theory to yield up

the art that unites *The Interpreters* and 'Initiations', a questioning which may in turn lead to the revising of the model itself.

This task is avoided when the text apparently flying in the face of the ruling rationality about the functioning of words in literature is labelled 'experimental'. The truth is that most of the really significant works of literature are experimental. Some may mix up the genres in a way that had not before been attempted - in Soyinka's oeuvre, *Aké* does something of this sort with the genres of biography and fiction. But this is already a well established pattern in literary history. Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Dostovesky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, and so on, though acknowledged to be high art, have all been scrutinized for biographical data. Mostly, the literary artists, unless they are also model builders in our sense above, work within specific traditions of writing, which would include broadly fixed notions about the nature of literature. However, they do not generally attach the same values to the so-called literary concepts. It is at the level of analysis of the work as an aesthetic object that many texts are found to work at bending the accepted rules, as they experiment with everything, including the notions treated in criticism as having fixed values.

For example, whereas in many works of fiction place names are realistic indices, and fix the scene in a physical way, the sense of place in Soyinka is frequently as part of the framework of the narrative, and constitutes significant patterns, based on the atmosphere the place set up. In *Aké*, a place may have *tones* and *phases* as well. As a result, it demands of the character to enter into a relationship with it, almost as if it were a personality in its own right. Soyinka's places and place names are therefore, tied to the story situation and are purely textual; not in any real sense geographical. In *Aké*, they are at best what Lukács calls a 'historical place' (1962:22), which superimposes upon the geographical determinants, thereby surpressing then, the economy of emotional investment. This is quite different from *Season of Anomy*, where the scene of action cannot be mapped, having no distinctive physical features. The only geographical features associated with Aiyérò, for

example, is the water-way that divides it from Aiyétòmò. This river has no name, and leads to no place in particular, only to the outside world. But Aiyérò is a place with a 'heart-beat' of its own, having a power that manifests in different and subtle ways - something that Ofeyi is constrained to engage with to try and comprehend. It lures him to stay on and on, brings out from Iriyise unsuspected realities, and transforms her beyond Ofeyi's recognition (p.7). Moreover, the place has power to hold its children in a permanent bond which nothing can break. The sense is that Aiyérò is an influence, subtle and irresistible; in short, an ideology. But it is an ideology that is entirely homogenous, and without the internal contradictions which, according to the Marxists, is constitutive of every social practice: in Àiyéró, we have ideology functioning in its pristine state, before relativization and weakening (Lukács, 1965/76:444) have set in.

In contrast to these children, all of whom behave rather alike, it is the town itself that manifests 'character', with both the power of independent action and the exercise of functions that are usually assigned to human persons. We read:

> It was an act of faith by the commune to send the restless generation to work at whatever new industries were opened in the rest of the country, trusting that the new acquired skills would be brought back to aid the already self-sufficing community. And this was the unusual feature which intrigued the cocoa promotions man. They all returned. The neon cities could not lure them away. The umbilical cord, no matter how far it stretched, never did snap (2-3).

Ofeyi is to determine by his second visit that this influence the town exercises over its children, and which distinguishes it from all other places is the integral communal existence modelled on the earth's natural cycle (11). He understands this, of course, in contrastive terms, with Ilosha as the opposed other, that 'shallow world of jingles' which is exposed to the still 'greater debasement of exploitation by the Cartel' (19).

Character is an accolade which, in Soyinka, pertains to a very select few, *who* may be persons, places, or even collectives. As we

see in the case of Aiyérò, all is well and honourable, if the collective to which the individuals belong, and to which they are attuned, has the right values. In *Aké*, the attribution of *personal* traits to non-persons, such as Bishop's Court, rather marks out a child's consciousness, and is something to be corrected as part of the development to an adult consciousness. But this is precisely the kind of perception that marks out the highly developed and many-sided awareness in *Season of Anomy*. Only gross personalities like Zaki and Batoki are content with surfaces. The importance of the forms of perception specific to each work is that they connect to the genre in which, and by means of which the work has been generated.

In the heightened perception of *Season of Anomy*, individuality is not as sharply determined as the distinction by names would suggest. What is *seen* is rather the Collective. Among the individuals within this collective, and linking them individually to the very atmosphere in which they live and move, flow what Foucault (1970) has called a common sympathy. In the perfect society of Aiyérò, there is no place whatever for difference. The same ideas, values, attitudes, and interests flow and hold all the citizens in a common bond. The only difference is in the matter of functions: there is a Custodian of the Grain, and there is a Chief Minister to the Custodian of the Grain. This differentiation of function is very important; for it is clear in the move to recruit Ofeyi to succeed the Custodian that there are qualifications, that all the people are not equally *good* or reliable.

Just as the same beneficent sympathies flow within Aiyérò, reducing all the individual members to *types* of this collective, the opposed sympathies circulating in Ilosha are bound to reduce its people to copies of itself. Ilosha and Aiyérò are anti-types, and constitute a binary structure of antagonism. Between the two, the tension of this text is to be fought out. The conflicts in which the characters participate are first of all conflicts of collectives, before they are personal ones. For example, there is no personal quarrel between Ofeyi and Batoki, whose daughter calls 'Uncle'. But they are drawn in, in the opposition of one social system against another -

Batoki by necessity, as a member of the Cartel, Ofeyi by revolutionary idealism, despite being a member of Batoki's class, as the man's daughter has occasion to remind him.

Something broadly similar is seen in *The Interpreters*, where Oguazor, Faseyi, and so on, are types of the colonial 'half-caste', neither really Westernized, nor the true grain of the cultural group. As split personalities, the Western values they try to project sit uneasily on them; whereas there is homogeneity in *The Interpreter* between the person and his values. At least, he does not experience in projecting them what Hegel calls a 'false consciousness'. The reason for this is the ability of the interpreters to synthesize a new, yet authentic self. As individuals, the personality, in the case of Egbo is assimilated to that of a demonic other, the 'spiritual agent' (Greek: 'daimon') of which he is the type; while it is assimilated, in the case of Kola and Sagoe, into the function, artist and journalist respectively (177-182). The fashioning out of a new self from the dual experience of the cultural tradition and the Western system is encountered as a question in *Season of Anomy*, where the Aiyéró utterly reject in favour of the old tradition the foreign way of life, which their parent community Aiyétòmò clings on to (10).

Imprecise delineation of character is a methodological move in Soyinka, yielding agents that are 'larger than life', and so expanded as to accommodate within themselves and, in fact, to be able to act in the character of mythic personages, or even other persons. Thus does Ofeyi accommodate in himself mythic Orpheus. The full significance of this move is that it alters character from the personal and humanly measurable to the symbolic and protean. If we have observed, Ofeyi discover Ahime in the simple words 'Food is sacred', spoken in an unlit hut in a cross-river jungle (p.215), it is because of the echo of the revelation scene at Emmaus, when the disciples discover the resurrected Jesus at the breaking of bread. The scene, a re-enactment of Emmaus, necessarily implicates Jesus. And there is nothing outlandish in Jesus appearing in this situation: it only confirms his occultation in the personality of the Chief Minister of the Custodian of the Grain. By hindsight, 'the religion of the Grain' (10) is nothing short of a Eucharistic religion: Ahime is more than a

chief priest performing sacred actions as prescribed in the ritual: his being, as in Jesus, is intervolved in these actions. For example, in the blood sacrifice we see in the middle of 'Seminal', the figure of Christ more than peeps out from 'the folds of his cloth':

> Ahime was a reed of life in the white stillness of a memorial ground, a flicker of motion among marble tombstones. An intuitive priest, he knew better than to disturb the laden altar until his mass for the dead emit vibrations of abundance, potency and renewal, binding the pulses in his own person, building a force for life within the circle of the pen until he judged the moment right for the magical release (16).

It is the text of the Empty Tomb, of searching for the living among the dead, and of the life-giving presence of Jesus in the sacrificial meal that is reconstituted here. But in addition to the re-presentation of Jesus, Ahime is also a function. As 'the god in the machine', he is secretly in charge, secretly directing the life of Aiyérò, the resistance, and the subversion of Ilosha and the Cartel. At this level of analysis, characters may often be explained in terms of abstractions and adjectives. For example, Demakin, the Dentist, is *controlled-violence*; while Ofeyi is *curious*, the eternal asker of questions.

The art in Soyinka's narratives has much to do with this distanciation from the world of our experience and from everyday probability, whereby things are always more than their known essences. This art can involve characters interpenetrating, or at least substituting for one another, to the extent that one may function as the other's double. An issue somewhat similar to this is discussed by J.I. Okonkwo (1980), who argues that *Season of Anomy* is a continuation of *The Interpreters*, though in a slightly different format, and that accordingly, the names of the characters, and in some cases, the names of places, in the later work are superimposed on traits and attributes of those of the earlier, Ofeyi on those of Egbo, Iriyise on Simi's, Aiyérò on the character of Ossa, and so on (1980:112-113).

Undoubtedly this is an interesting line of inquiry upon the two narratives. Our concern, however, is with sets of characters functioning quite as the markings on either side of a coin quite as if

the model is the original Greek idea of character (*charagma* = 'graven', 'mark'). For example, if as we have said, Ofeyi is a type of Orpheus, it would be Orpheus without his lyre, unless Zaccheus, called 'the mouthpiece' (*Season of Anomy*, 82), be taken along as the expression of the hero's musical nature. In this regard, Zaccheus is not a distinct personality, but an aspect of Ofeyi's personality. Another pair is Iriyise and Taiila who, in contrast to Ofeyi and Zaccheus, never meet; for when one is on the scene, the other is not. And yet they play the same identical role as the stabilizing factor in Ofeyi's consciousness, without the one displacing the other. In point of fact, we are assured from the start that Taiila, for all her striking beauty and attractiveness, is not a threat to Iriyise; nor does Ofeyi sorely miss her at the end, when he has gained the comatose Iriyise - he expects to meet her 'again at the next intersection' (320). But it would seem that in addition to serving as an earthing device to stabilize Ofeyi the two figure in his consciousness as two contrary images - virginal innocence and carnality, both crucial to his sense of wholesomeness. Hence the two characters are aspects of the same personality.

The ability of Iriyise to be reconstituted in the person of Taiila, when she is in reality a captive of the Zaki signals something more in this character: her limitless capacity for change. This is something Ofeyi discovers for the first time in Aiyérò. Towards the end of the narrative, we glimpse that she is not only able to pluralize, she is in fact collective - the Body Collective over which Ofeyi and the Zaki contend.

It seems to me that the major coup in *Season of Anomy* is precisely the manifold uses made of Iryise's body - a space for religious, aesthetic, and political investments. Her capacity to transform in this way in the hands of people who know how to handle her is observed early when she is among the women in Aiyéró. In the ritual event that follows, we are told of her 'ivory neck-piece' merging 'with hidden rapids in the [bulls'] convulsive throats' (16), the bulls arranged for immolation being 'fourteen ivory throats tendered to the sky' (15). But she is more than a sacrificial victim. Called 'Iridiscent' and 'Celestial', these are metaphors that

are clearly extravagant: but they would only be so if they were really praise-names. Rather they reflect the art that locates more essences than one in the body reserved for one only. Iriyise is the perfect work of art, which one talks about and writes about, but which cannot be broken down and taken over because of a certain 'surplus value', and a constitutive quality of otherness or sacredness. When she is abducted, and the Zaki thinks he now has her, she actually slips away, reappearing elsewhere, in another form. The proper response to her, apparently, is veneration; hence Ofeyi's profound shock at the Zaki's contact-man, Aristo, suggesting that Iriyise might be shared by Ofeyi and the Zaki, the taking of *slices* off her by the two antagonists a simple matter he himself could arrange.

But we see that the salesman knows much better by his taking to his heels at Ofeyi's suggestion that he might take her for himself, instead of negotiating on behalf of another. Ofeyi and Zaccheus, however, are not embarrassed to worship her:

> 'Well?' She had turned to the two men, her arms hanging down and the palms turned outwards to them, joining them in a casual intimacy.
>
> Conjurer, incantatory words floated through Ofeyi's lips... Zaccheus, the mouthpiece merely wetted [ ] his lips... Iriyise, still, except for her eyes which followed Ofeyi's motions, and Ofeyi in the loose white wrap, sanctified by love-stains, prowling her on cat's feet, priest and vestal in mutual adoration... Iriyise [presenting] within her person a harrowing vision of the unattainable.
>
> Zaccheus wetted his lips, conceding to the general air his ultimate accolade, 'Madammadonna... madammadonna...'
>
> 'He's right' Ofeyi said, his eyes unwavering from the presence (82-83).

It is possible to see in the portrayal of Iriyise a re-writting of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* in such a way that the conflicting values of virginal otherness and sensual attractiveness or carnality which Sergius sees respectively in Raina and Louka are collapsed one into the other. Zaccheus and Ofeyi fully appreciate this rarity in Iriyise. Her other admirer, the Zaki of Cross-river does not. His attitude is to seize and ravish, if not with her compliance, then by force - which is

how his quest for her triggers off the campaign of extermination and 'clean sweep' of Cross-river of 'strangers from the South' to make it safe to the Zaki to control and exploit freely (125, 158-159). Thus does Iriyise become involved as a bone of contention in the struggle between the Aiyérò and the cartel. But it is surprisingly the man of action, Demakin, who first articulates her central importance in this struggle:

> 'We must acknowledge the fact [that] pimps, whores, thieves, and a thousand other felons are the familiar vanguard of the army of change. When the moment arrives a woman like Iriyise becomes for them a Chantal, a Deborah, torch and standard-bearer, super-mistress of universal insurgence. To abandon such a potential weapon in any struggle is to admit to a lack of foresight. Or imagination' (219).

Because of the real and potential axiological investments in Iriyise, she has become for Ofeyi and the leaders of Aiyérò the motive of the struggle - in the double sense of the origin as well as the final goal.

Her becoming the point of intersection of the movements of force and desire involves a partial eclipse of the public political issue of domination by the Cartel, which Ofeyi has sought from the start to tackle (27). But the struggle only gains in vigour by being centred on a person; paradoxically, the political question also gains in density, as Iriyise's body is put for the body of the nation. In the hands of the Zaki's agents, this body is grossly abused, the same body that the women of Aiyérò had adorned and venerated, preparing it, as it were, for the passage through abuse and 'death', from which, however, it is ultimately rescued, with the potential of a new and higher vitality. Therefore, as the structure of meaning at the heart of the struggle, to have her is to have won, and to lose her to have lost everything.

A great struggle is also involved in *Aké*, but the story is much more straightforward, as demanded by the form of *historical realism*. Two crucial qualifications distinguish the historical sequence: first, that it is concerned with a cultural revolution (Jameson, 1981:95-98), in sign of which, in Lukâcs's words, 'hostile forces, bent on one another's destruction' are seen to be everywhere colliding (1962:37);

and second, that it develops as a story by the appearance of the 'passionate partisans' of the respective sides (37) in confrontation with each other. These elements are not reflected in *Season of Anomy*. First of all, no cultural revolution takes place. The savage blood-letting and upheavel end with the status quo basically unchanged. As individuals, the opposers of the Cartel have suffered certain reversals; but in reality, neither side is defeated. Nor are there grassroots movements on either side, so as to generate as leaders 'passionate partisans'; there are only leaders *using* the ordinary people as a projectile against the opponent. The form of this narrative is the projection of the old tragic motif of man facing that which is more than man, in which the humanity of the hero may be overridden by the viewpoint and value system that he expresses, and human action is conditioned by the movements of necessity.

Of course, the mode of action, whether tragic, historical, everyday-experiental, and so on, describes the dominant pattern, which plays the decisive role in determining the style of the given sequence. Apart from the circumstantial realism of everyday experience, which may be entirely in the common narrative style based on the past simple and chains of sentences of the propositional type, whereby it 'creates such a strong illusion on the narrative level that its readers may almost forget that it is art' (Rabinowitz, 1980:245), the style specific to each mode tends to occur as instances of discourse in the body of the narrative, connected by the common style to form a pattern of continuity. Close to the style is 'tone', something else that derives from the mode of action represented. Hence the tone of high seriousness in *Season of Anomy* - which is much grimmer than what we see towards the end of *Àké*, where the action moves up from the naturalistic plane to that of a historical struggle.

One of the reasons why *Aké* is determined as fiction is the obvious patterning, whereby the historical struggle to unfold colours the entire naturalistic phase, shaping its style, tone and characterization. For example, the description of Isara (pp. 66-67), which, being heavily rhetorical, would be rather *excessive* in everyday realism, but not so in the historical mode:

> But the walls have retained their voices. Familiar voices break on the air, voices from the other side of the rafters. Isara was second home - Essay's natal home ... another kind of home, several steps into the past. Age hung from every corner, the patina of ancestry glossed all objects. Our older relations were differently aged from those in Abeokuta.

Metonymy (the walls having voices), metaphors (voices breaking on the air, the past having steps, age hanging from corners, and so on), and contrasts (aging in Isara and in Abeokuta, and so on) are some of the rhetorical features in this short passage. Perhaps the most important of these is the contrast: already insinuated is the clash of systems that is a marked feature of the historical narrative.

Historical action is serious, but not on the scale of 'the encounters of man with more than man' as in Sophoclean tragedy. Accordingly, the characters in *Aké* are entirely of human scale, and the sense of the 'historical process' - the sense that the confrontation with the Ogboni was always inevitable and that the renewal of society only comes about in this way - is attained, at best, at the level of suggestion. The character, though truly human, is found to be appropriate to the action in which he is involved; and since the nature of the outcome depends to some extent on him, the narrative is bound to preserve a sense of one being selected or thrown up, as it were, by the historical process itself for the particular role. On the other hand, the renewal of society is directly enacted in *Season of Anomy* in the blood ritual of 'Seminal', and it is only by grotesque imitation that the massacres in 'Harvest' could be said to recapture the ritual event, albeit at another plane.

Quite unlike the tragic action of *Season of Anomy*, Beere initiating the campaign of public enlightenment, and her confrontation with the establishment headed by the Ogboni becoming a special and highly effective form of this campaign, till it turns out an unstoppable popular movement, have to be judged by a stricter standard of probability, despite the patterning of the character into the role. If this work succeeds as fiction, and I think it does, it does so as a historical novel. But the standards of probability

required by this form are not as strict as those of the realist novel proper, the realism of everyday experience.

We have shown that in practical criticism the value of a theory is estimated in terms of its usefulness in the identification of the features which determine the work as art. Perhaps the most important of these features is the form which governs the work. Whether the characters are to be seen in purely symbolic terms or as psychological entities, whether in Aristotle's terms they are to be treated as *better*, as *worse*, or as the *same* kind as ourselves will depend on this governing form. Soyinka's fiction does not differ from the other works of our tradition in being peculiarly dependent on form, but in that its forms vary more widely. The others are as strongly tied to the forms, whether these are historical realism, circumstantial realism, or satire; and the reading of any of these will be as confused as the criticism of Soyinka's fiction has tended to be, unless the forms and their implications are first worked out.

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The Flood

JEKWU IKEME

I have come of age,
the age of adolescence.

The forest beckons
on my antelope agility
to comb her of
animal fleas.

The farms
invite my pubescent muscles
to till her belly
to a plantation softness.

My youthful gazelle
is sought in alien lands,
to run errands
for their bulging fluorescence.

My seeds of fertility
have been used
to sire genii.

And then the womenfolk,
they behold my chest
with a pleasant shyness.

I have come of age,
the age of innocence.

But yet my father
wears a reproachful frown.

of encumbrance
on my potentials.

And every other day
along pallid stakeouts,
between debts and drawbacks,
you will see me
scurrying back to rust
at end of midyear rains,
despite standing overtures
from the lips of prospects.

HELL-BOUND noose descend

on gallows
for sinners
for prisoners of ravages,
like Judas Iscariot
like Idiamin
like wreckages,

such is your fate.

Fates intertwine
like barbs on thorns,
for suture
for future
for the nemesis of solaces,

such is your fate.

FETTERS are colourless

Credos, grievances, ambits, flatulence;
flammable catalogue unquenchable,

shallow, drifting hellward
like the praying-mantis*,
strips colour hideless
like unshelled kernel.

Banners break into a ripple-tear
squeezing emotions into a muffled pit,
thunder stammers down the
parchment
of encumbrance,
rousing skeined pathways
before straddled citadels.

Haughty prodigals
proceed windward,
through canyons of harakiri,
with a mind detached from humanity,
like a solitary inselberg.

Mouthparts bolted
  with woes,
  hanging
heavy with padlock
  of encumbrance
the mouth cannot say its soothing lines.

FETTERS are colourless.

For every thunder-rasp,
they must have wrought
another blunder on armistice,
another particle must have been trapped
in the throat of spurting-bounds,

---

* The praying-mantis knows that he risks his head being chopped off if he engages in a sexual intercourse yet it still indulges in the act.

and the sky must cough out blood
to clear its trachea.

The ramble-cast in the stunning stake-out
of this catacomb which showered
missiles on the field of pain,
which pollinated turbulence;
germinating, flowering and flurried pliers
that tightened crack-naughts.
Tottery moralbase which dons
stonesteady facades
but harbours tremulousness
in the heart;
tranquil uplands shelter molten magma,
emits lava at orgasm
as hot as their cool mien,
and such is the facade of encumbrance.

Then earthquake thunders down,
rocking skiffs and ships, trembling
blinding sling and armoured tank, unconscious
soaking foam and iron, dripping
swallowing barriers and barbicans.

Encumberer is dieable
and such is encumbrance.

Our song is an insecticide
shower them on murkiness
and the mosquitoes wither.

Like the inebriated Nza*

taunting his Chi**
to come and take his life
if he could,
the junketters of wealth-plunderdom
pirouette to the lyrics
of prodigality,
with clinking glasses, carousing fodder lusts
and over-bloated egos;
massaged by the salivating slavishness
of larkeydom.

With the automation
drawn by the sweat of imbecillic minions,
more perforations are dealt on the walls of faith,
henpecking progress
to a mute surrender.

Amidst the wanton panoply,
the chief-jester of flunkeydom
with all paraphernalia
of royal gourmandism, scampers
about in a palpitating panic,
offering sacrifices on the alter
of recalcitrant mayhem,
and in the haste

to wrench approval
out of iron-caste statue,
decapitates his coxcomb
to bare his sycophantic baldness.

---

* A very small bird.

** Personal god in Igbo mythology.

Like the ostrich
that hides his head in the sand,
cocksure his body is well hidden,
but behold
his smelly rump
is bared to the sun of truth.

And from the throat of conscience, bellowed
an ululation of retribution
"no ablution will purge your disgorgements"
your sins
will find
you out.

And the WEAVERBIRD said :
Condolences.

We were told

and we believed with relish,
that
the crocodile
does not
eat the fish
that hole up
with it,
that
the dog
does not
eat the bone
hung on
his neck.

But we have seen
a mother
slice her babe

into suya sticks,
to quench
her fitful lust.

The garrulous parrot
prances about,
chirping
over our plight
over our plot
over remedies
he cannot explain.

Over our faces,
the tattoo stick
of warped impediment engraves
a new wrinkle of worry.
Every day and for each palaver,
a new wrinkle is etched
to turn our faces
into maps
of historical harakiri,
into a diary
of sequential vicissitude.

The time bomb uncoils her sting
of lead
as it approaches the hour
of detonation.

Horse hoofs of Armageddon
clatter at our gate-mouth,
but what use
are sound-based signals
to a deaf man?

Doomed are we

and all our squinting obstinacies.

After
the clouds have gathered,
what more do we expect
if not iroko-felling storm.

When
-the left-overs of humanity
-the crumbs of sublimity
-the discarded husks of creation
are the captains
of caretaker-ship.

When
minis-tarts man mini-stress
and executhieves live up
to expectation in politricks.

What song will spring from reason
if not dirges?

What *Ikoro*• will summon turn-around
if not obsequies?

He that gathers home
ant-infested faggots,
should gird his loins
for the visit of lizards.

The hen
that perches

• A loud sounding drum used mainly in Igboland to summon the people or to announce a great event.

on a palmfrond fence
dances along
with the wobbly fence.

That wrestler
that holds his thrown opponent
on the ground
holds himself captive.

The warder
that keeps watch
over prisoners
is himself a prisoner.

Puzzles
of our time

What mien
is best squirted
at the face
of demagogic cannonade
of tyranny

curl up
like a harried centipede,
and bare our rump
to the mercy of fate,

or develop
a callus carapace
to withstand
their cudgel blows,

or do we grow fangs
like a rattled scorpion,
to sting their
palpitating phalluses
as they seek - in
defiling strides -
the depth of our innocence?

If wishes were horses

EMEKA AGBAYI

Eclipse of Two Suns

Uche sat on a wooden bench outside a rickety tin-shack, ruminating on his past. An imaginative person would, most probably, liken the house to an old man tottering on his walking stick, ready to collapse with weariness any minute, for that was how the house looked. The quacking, tired voice of the old man would be the creaking sound made by the house anytime the old zinc door was drawn open. The house belonged to Omigwe, the village dispenser. Inside, Ntianu, Uche's girlfriend, was being attended to by Omigwe. Uche and Ntianu had come to Omigwe from Amanka, a neighbouring town a short distance away.

Uche sat out there in the midday sun, waiting and sweating as he thought about his past. He had come to Amanka from his very distant village where, his father, having died when he was five, he was almost begging for food. His mother, old and weary of the world, whose only zeal was to see her husband's children grow up and able to fend for themselves had apprenticed him to an uncle, John-John, a bicycle repairer.

A quarrel had bloomed when Uche was accused of stealing by his uncle. A ploy, the whole village believed, by his uncle, John-John, to throw him out, since Uche was seen as having the skill to drive his uncle out of business in the future. His mother was all for peace. Her favourite expression then was that in domestic feuds, tacit cessation of attack does not necessarily mean surrender. But Uche would have none of it. He had consequently decided to quit both Uncle and village. He was twenty-two then.

Wiping his mother's tear-stained, wrinkled face, Uche had promised to make her and his two younger sisters proud of him someday as he left his village two years ago. When he came to Amanka, he had taken care that no one knew anything about his

background. He wanted no friends at all. Friends had a way of eating into one's savings, and he wanted nothing to interfere with his decision of someday making his old mother and two sisters proud of him. He had got a job as a clerk at a cement factory and was putting away a third of his meagre income for the one Christmas day when he would return to his village triumphant. It had to be on a Christmas day, or at least during the Christmas season, the time of the year when all the illustrious sons of Ogbodo usually came home from their sojourn in strange lands. He, Uche, would be counted as one of them.

An ant crawled up Uche's foot. He stamped it off and stared at his feet. They were dirty. He had hardly had a bath since this trouble began. Yes, it really was trouble, he nodded to himself, as if aware of the fact for the first time. After all his efforts to keep from having friends - male or female, he had met and loved Ntianu. That was six months after he came to Amanka. That day, he had gone to the market to buy some condiments to make soup in the evening. The woman whom he usually bought things from did not come, and as it was a Saturday, he had a lot of time to spend. So Uche had casually strolled up the market lane, walking past a row of tables that stood on either side of him black with age and dirt, grim and glum under the weight of the wares artfully arranged on them. Amidst the din of the market women beckoning at him and shouting: "Customer, buy from me," his eyes met Ntianu's. Somehow, in spite of his efforts, their eyes had lingered. When she brought hers down, a smile had -inadvertently, broken out on her face. Uche, inadvertently too, had stopped before her table.

"Oga, good afternoon," Ntianu had greeted. Her voice was music to Uche's ears.

"Ehe, how do you sell your wares?" he blurted out, and silently wondered at his discomfiture.

She had gone on to enumerate the prices of the things on her table.

"Your goods are costly, unlike the others," he said, when she finished, waving his hands to indicate the other market women.

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"Your goods are costly, unlike the others," he said, when she finished, waving his hands to indicate the other market women.

"That's not true. I gave you the cheapest prices you can get," she countered.

"In that case I'll buy from you always," Uche offered.

Ntianu smiled her gratitude, parting thick, red lips to reveal an even set of teeth that gleamed in the noon sun. The redness of her lips inexplicably reminded Uche of blood but her smile, like a strong surf, washed the image away from the shores of his conscious mind.

"I am Uche. What's your own name?" Uche asked.

"Ntianu," she announced proudly as she packed the things Uche had bought into his bag. Uche had taken the opportunity to appraise her. She was tall, almost his height. But unlike Uche who was wry and dry she was robust. Hers was the colour of ripe pawpaw. Before he went away that day, they had become friends.

And now she was pregnant. Pregnant! The thought brought Uche to the present, and he shuddered as it occurred to him that Ntianu might be in danger. She was having her pregnancy aborted in the house by Omigwe. Uche had his doubts about Omigwe, but then he could not afford a real doctor. Already, this visit had cost him his total savings: Omigwe had insisted on payment before service. Besides, this place was good because of its remote location. One needed secrecy in such a thing as this, Uche thought.

The rickety door a few inches to his left creaked and whined open. Uche hastily looked around and stood up as Omigwe approached.

"Has it been done? How is she? Is she all right? How...?" Questions tumbled out of Uche's mouth with the speed of rats being chased by a ferocious cat.

"Ah, ah!, Relax, my friend," Omigwe interjected confidently, the bald dome of his head gleaming in the sun.

"Has it been done?" Uche repeated.

"Everything is under my control."

"Chei, my God." Uche tapped his left leg on the dusty red earth in agitation.

"I told you not to worry, my friend."

"Chei, God! What have I done to deserve this?" Uche cast his eyes skyward.

"Ohoo," Omigwe said, nodding his bald head, a tinge of seriousness in his voice.

Uche brought his eyes down and saw on Omigwe's fat face something that was not there before. Omigwe looked like he had just had a sudden enlightenment.

"You don't trust Omigwe, eh?"

"No, no, no. It's not that I don't trust you," Uche hurriedly assured him in the realization that he was at Omigwe's mercy. "It's just that one can never be sure about these things."

"Let me tell you something, my friend. I am a professional, and though I may not like garlic, I know my onions very well. It is because you worry so much that you look so lean and dry. You need multi-complex vitamins."

"I am sorry, Omigwe. Please, don't misunderstand me."

"That's better, my friend."

"Can I see her now?" Uche pleaded.

"She is resting. In twenty minutes she will be ready to go with you."

Ntianu lay in the narrow bed in Uche's room. Uche sat on the edge of the bed. He was beginning to recover his composure. Since they came back from Omigwe's about a half hour ago, Ntianu had been moaning and tossing with pain. She could hardly talk. But she had calmed down somewhat, and it seemed as if she was sleeping at last.

Uche sighed with gratitude and was stretching himself when he stiffened to attention again. Ntianu had begun to moan again. This time she was talking gibberish and her eyes were popping as if she was terrified. Uche placed his hand on Ntianu's head and began to caress her, gently murmuring some words of encouragement. Ntianu continued to moan.

"I... I...," Ntianu could not talk. Instead she began to make gestures with her hands which Uche understood after sometime. Uche then ran outside, came back with a plastic bucket which he placed beside the bed, and gently lifting Ntianu's head, he directed her to the bucket. Ntianu began to vomit. That was when Uche really got afraid. Ntianu was vomiting blood. When Uche first saw

the blood he felt like running out of the room, but restrained himself. Then his body turned cold. A deafening thought dropped into his mind: *Ntianu might die*. Quickly - as if dwelling on it might make it a reality - he pushed it out of his mind.

Ntianu stopped vomiting. Uche gently laid her head back on the pillow and went to clean the bucket outside. When he came back, there were tears in his eyes. With the back of his hands he wiped his eyes. He went to the table at the other end of the room and brought the pills Omigwe had given him. He broke each tablet into two so Ntianu could swallow them easily, and from beneath the bed, he brought out and opened a bottle of Lucozade which he had bought earlier. He poured the Lucozade into a cup, gently forced Ntianu's mouth open and made her swallow the pills. After that he took Ntianu's hand in his. It felt cold and flaccid. Uche looked at Ntianu's face and saw that her eyes were bulging once again, only this time they seemed not focused on anything and rarely were blinked. A line of blood was also slowly crawling down Ntianu's chin from a corner of her mouth. That was when Uche knew he was watching Ntianu slowly die. He stretched out his hand and cleaned off the blood.

Uche got up from the bed and went to its foot. From under it he took the small bag he had bought a little after settling in town. Inside the bag were some clothes he did not often wear, some valuables and nineteen-naira, the only money he had left. He was ready to leave. He simply could not stay and watch Ntianu die.

As Uche made to cross the room, his eyes fell on Ntianu's. Like that first time when they met, he could not tear his eyes away. And now there were tears in his eyes. Apparently she knew Uche was deserting her. She had always known every of his moves; that was one thing that endeared her to him. He stood in the middle of the room, paralysed by Ntianu's eyes. But Ntianu had to understand, he just could not sit and watch her die, he reasoned. Going back to Omigwe was out of it. For one, he did not have the money; for another, Omigwe had obviously done his best. His resolve

crumbled all the same. Slowly, he lowered his bag, walked to the bed, sat down and took Ntianu's hand in his as before.

"D... d... d dddon't lleave mmme," Ntianu spewed out and slowly shook her head as if to say it was not good of Uche and would not bring any good either. Spots of blood smeared Uche's face. She had spattered blood as she stuttered in her speech. Uche wiped his face with his hands. He bent down and kissed Ntianu good-bye, picked up his bag and ran out of the room. He hoped Ntianu would understand. He could not just sit down and helplessly watch her slowly fold up like a pricked mimosa. He could not have let her have the baby, for that would mean extra mouths to feed. He would have to stop feeding his mother to do that. Uche could not possibly disappoint his old suffering mother and his two sisters, or his uncle, John-John, would have a long and self-satisfied laugh.

Outside, early evening. The sun hung low in the sky, looking like a big, fiery ball. Its heat was gone, though. Just in front of the public yard popularly called 'face me, I face you' in which Uche lived, the obese woman who made akara balls, and yam and plantain fries was already setting out her things. A small group of naked, dirty children with equally dirty plastic bowls were gathered around her. Beside her small heap of charcoal and her for now, empty, big frying-pot yawned the reeking gutter choked with putrefying garbage.

Uche walked down the narrow and dusty street. On either side of him squatted dwarf houses looking forlorn, much like the one in which he lived. He decided he would take a train and drop at any small non-descript town far away from Amanka. There he hoped to find a job and begin life anew.

When Uche got to the railway station, the train was already moving. He quickly paid and got a ticket, ran up to the train and flung in his bag through a window. He jumped, reaching out of the metal handle beside the door of one of the coaches, missed, and fell. As he fell, he hit his head against the metal door. The impact threw him off the moving train onto the hard ground strewn with sharp stones. Uche died a few minutes later en route to the Railway hospital.

RAISA SIMOLA

The Image of Africa in the Finnish Novel (1978-1988): A Glance at Juha Vakkuri's *Afrikkalainen iltapäivä* (*An African Afternoon*, 1978), *Neljän polven puu* (*The Tree of Four Generations*, 1980), and *Päiväntasaaja* (*Equator*, 1985); Lasse Lehtinen's *Valkoinen ihmissyöjä* (*A White Cannibal*, 1986); Matti Puilkkinen's *Romaanihekilön Kuolema* (*The Death of a Character of the Novel*, 1985); and Ulla-Lena Lundberg's *Kalaharin hiekkaa* (*The Sand of the Kalahari*, 1986).

The best known Finnish novel on Africa is surely Mika Waltari's *Sinuhe, the Egyptian* (1946), which has come to be regarded as a classic historical novel. In this article I will give a general account of the image of Africa in the Finnish novel during the past ten years. It seems that only in the past decade have Finnish novelists "discovered" modern Africa.

Of our modern writers Juha Vakkuri is one who has written most on Africa: three novels concerning Africa and documentary books about Africa, too. The main character *of Afrikkalainen iltapäivä (An African Afternoon)* is Risto Vaskimaa, a scholar of about 30 years of age, who, fed up with the atmosphere of the department of sociology at his university , leaves for Africa, to an imaginary Swasotho. The stagnation in his family life is another reason for his departure. The action takes place at the beginning of the 1970's. The neighbouring countries mentioned are Tanzania, Zambia and Rhodesia.

The ways in which Risto and his white fellows sense Africa are very limited. The auditory perceptions and olfactory sensations of Risto are reported in a very general way: "new sounds and smells were everywhere" and "the food shops smelt different". Risto's visual perceptions concerning animals usually occur on the verandah, heightened by gin and tonic: goats, hippopotamuses, zebras and apes have come to drink from the floodlit river. The scenery is to Risto's mind "great". The highway is another place,

where Risto is faced with African animals: by the side of the road stand elephants and on the road there are squashed snakes and dogs.

It is no wonder if the Africans are so faceless and nameless to the whites, because they never really get to know them. The blacks Risto knows somehow are the vice-chancellor of the university and the governor of the district. The masai people by the side of the road are experienced as a part of the exotic African nature.

In Africa Risto sees theft, the corruption of the customs officers; and the African soldiers look "self-important and efficient, enjoying their role". The media are silent about the disturbances in the African quarter of the town and the assaults on critics of the government even though "everybody" knows about them. The whites, however, live in Africa as a state in a state, and the assaults do not concern them. The men play tennis with each other, have Sunday dinner with cognac and drink in their clubs. Women get bored or keep company with each other and work for charities. The whites are still treated with difference in Africa; and Risto lives in a luxury impossible in his homeland.

There is actually no depiction of Risto's work in the department of sociology in Swasotho; the emphasis besides Risto's problems with women and a general discussion of African issues is on the withering of Risto's "idealism".

To Africa Risto comes as an "idealist'. Towards the end of his stay in Africa he realizes that he can't withdraw from duty by stating that he had done nothing but teach sociology; he has been preparing the ground for Finnish trade whether he has wanted to or not. Commercial politics have been using his help. On a personal level Risto notes that he dresses himself in the disguise of a "civilized racist": he cannot stand the tactlessness of a white person as he stands that of a black: "It was learned patience, patience coming from above, a way to show one's own superiority, civilization. Or racism." Later Risto states that the mild exploiters - amongst whom he counts himself - have been the worst exploiters, because you could not hate and resist them as openly as the most blatant exploiters. Risto thinks that the "idealism" which has brought him to Africa, has availed nothing. He has simply been giving support to

the emergent African bourgeoisie, though he would have preferred to aid the birth of a classless society. The absoluteness of his denial of the worth of his own work and the comprehensiveness of the work put on the shoulders of the Africans - in Risto's opinion "the Africans should change Africa and through that the whole world" – hint at the extent of the disappointment of this former "idealist". However, in addition we must remember that Risto has expected Africa to solve his personal problems, too, but in vain. He realizes the falsity of words and the fundamental nature of economic demands: "It was not appropriate to talk about the exploiting of natural wealth. It was better to talk generally only about trade and the spread of civilization. In particular, the spread of civilization had always sounded convincing. It had always been a good pretext."

The narrator of Vakkuri's other Africa-novel, *Neljän polven puu* (*The Tree of Four* Generations(1980)), is a teacher of history who has just turned sixty. The four generations are YrjÖ Roivander, the grandfather of Jaakko (who had been a missionary in Amboland at the end of the 19th century), his only child Usko, his child Jaakko and Jaakko's, the narrator's daughter Ulla, who was born in 1947.

On his deathbed Usko Roivander advises his son - who is then about 40 years old - to have courage in life and he gives Jaakko a book called "The Talks of King Nenimh: As they were written down in Amboland by YrjÖ Roivander." Jaakko does as his father says, and lives daringly: he divorces and leaves for Africa with his inherited money; his aim is to collect material about his grandfather and other pioneers of the Ambo mission for his dissertation.

The description of Africa begins from the Gold Coast, as Vakkuri calls it, though at that time, in 1960, it was already Ghana. Sounds and smells are Jaakko's first strong African experience. When he travels on the back of a truck there is an "awful smell and noise" around him. The loud laughter of Africans, in Jaakko's ears, is malicious, too. Jaakko waits for public transport and gets tired of the heat already on his first day in Africa. He uses the stereotypes of European perception: "all the blacks looked the same." After going with tens of thousands of people to the square to listen to Nkrumah,

Jaakko begins to think of Hitler: the number of people and the strangeness of the culture generate images of fear.

Jaakko gets stuck in Cape Town in the house of an inn-keeper, Freda. The Sharpeville massacre occurs so the year is 1960. The situation turns latent racists into open ones. Jaakko, the history teacher, to begin with is not at all interested in what is going on, he is only depressed about the way Freda, a Boer, treats a servant. A priest, Gerhardus, goes still farther: he states excitedly that probably they should long ago have shot the blacks just as they shot the Indians in America, but he realizes quickly that then there would not have been people whom you could put to work in the mines. In his opinion, the Bantu's are not like the whites: neither in their emotions nor in their ways of thinking. They would have been content with little, if the communists stopped telling them that they should have a house, car and swimming-pool of the same kind as the whites. Gerhardus wishes that the police would shoot the demonstrating blacks.

When Jaakko returns to Finland his brother Paavo, excited about Sharpeville, arranges for a reporter to interview Jaakko. During the interview, it is actually Paavo who speaks more, and he dramatizes a lot. The title of the newspaper article is "Finish Brothers as Eye-Witnesses of Racism." Finnish media report looks tragicomic in other ways, too: the most important news is the winter Olympic games (in South-Africa they did not write about it at all) and the only mention in the newspaper concerning the South African disturbances is the recommendation of the Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions to boycott South African products. The article does not, however, mention which products are imported into Finland.

Jaakko's daughter Ulla also goes as a journalist to Africa, twenty years later. Ulla's first impressions concern Africa's nature. In her letter to her father she states: "When I woke up in the morning, we thought we were in an earthly paradise: the scenery was green and well-cared for – Why do they always praise Naples: See Dakar and die!" Ulla's partner Mark, who has previous work experience in Africa, connects Ulla's paradise-exclamations with historical

backgrounds: Goreé, the object of Sunday picnics, was one of the notorious slave places in West Africa.

Ulla's perceptions about African society are different in tone: of the greatness of Ghana she sees no sign but instead corruption and deception; the efforts of young Rawlings to clean the country of corruption by executions Ulla approves of "totally," for "something has to be done." Swindlers Ulla also meets personally. On the other hand modern Africa looks very ceremonious. According to Mark the Africans like official cars, uniforms and driving in formation.

Ulla's first impressions of Johannesburg are very much like her father's: everything seemed to work. The picture is, however, according to Ulla, "dishearteningly good": "In Johannesburg nothing pointed to revolution. *Because everybody knows his place! – And still beneath all this there is a volcano waiting to erupt,* – more than 18 million people without the right of citizenship. Four Finlands! so it is disgusting that everything seems to work! – Stupid, more stupid, Boer!"

When Ullà and Mark visit Zambia men attack the house and kill them. The murderers present themselves as guerrilla-followers of Joshua Nkomo, but are most probably soldiers from the Rhodesian army, who are disguised as guerrillas. Before her sudden death Ulla has started to get tired: according to a friend, Ulla had been disappointed because she has been unable to change people through her writing, and Ulla's posthumously published notebook also tells about tiredness: "Capitalism believes in the selfishness and egoism of man and gets along all right; socialism does not dare to believe in justness and goodness and therefore is content only to deny egoism without giving something else in its place, and it fails." Ulla's notes - and the whole book - end with the probable solution of the secret of King Nenimh: "The photo of Nenimh: in reality King Lobengula of the Ndebele tribe! In the history of the Ndebele no word about Nenimh, and no word about the Simhi people! Is it a question of an aphorism compilation made by Usko Roivander, the authencity of which nobody has ever doubted? Why did the grandfather create his Nenimh? Did he do so because he wanted to give greater importance to his thoughts? Or did he want to

emphasize that people are the same everywhere, that a bookseller can very well be a tribal chief? One must report this to the father very carefully so that he does not get a heart attack!"

In Vakkuri's *Päivän tasaaja ("Equator")* the setting is a former French colony in a fictional coastal state perhaps somewhere near Cameroon. The first-person narrator, whose name and background are not revealed, is a journalist who, after having written his article on Africa for the Finish press and before going back home, concentrates on his journey's most important task: to find a rain prayer statue. Unexpectedly, the narrator meets a Swedish anthropologist, Bertil Rehnquist, whose international fame is based on a scientific research work, "Kinship and Character of the Pogon," so he has done research work on the same tribe whose statue the narrator has searched for four years. With Rehnquist the narrator has an exceptional opportunity to get to the land of the Pogons.

The narrator is an old visitor to Africa. His first visit had been fifteen years previously; at that time he had argued with those who had been in Africa for a long time against the exploitation of servants and night guards in the name of democracy and equality. Africa has not changed in this respect: the rich still have their servants. But the narrator has changed: he no longer argues about servants. In this novel Vakkuri observes Africa through the eyes of a journalist, who actually is interested in politics and history, though a little bit resignedly, but who mostly likes to look at things from an aesthetic point of view. The narrator walks around in the museums and markets for art and perceives the African night with delight.

The narrator experiences theft: he has his passport, air plane ticket and money stolen. At the airport the security man pockets the rest of his money.

In this country there is official control of information. The narrator goes half-compulsorily to the minister of information to get the "truth." "Dialogue Tribune," the newspaper of the city, sings the songs of the power keeper. On the other hand, the narrator's African guide criticizes the foreign media: "I am angry and ashamed, because they talk about Africa only in the context of famine and

poverty. Or when a revolution breaks out. As if nothing else about us could be interesting."

The narrator notices the uniforms and badges, which emphasize the value of hierarchy, mostly in a comical way. The opposite of modern society is the Pogon people, who live apart, who have not approved of the "benefits" of modernization - developing schools, social services, technology, know-how etc. - nor the "disadvantages": "... we were at a sight-seeing place, where the Americans would have built a hamburger restaurant, a souvenir kiosk and a hectare-wide parking place. The Pogons did not build anything."

In the novel the central theme is the collision of the old and the new, the purpose of modern society being to defeat the minority, who represent traditional society, that is to say they exercise power. Another important theme is the idea of perfection as the "elixir of life". The anthropologist Betil Rehnquist sees Pogon society as an ideal society, and the rain prayer statue persistently sought after by the narrator depicts man as bisexual, man-woman, perfect. The third theme or rather motif is the same as in Vakkuri's previous books: the uselessness and futility of "idealism".

Connected with the futility of "idealism", Rehnquist is unable to refuse the plea of his friend, the president of the state, to act as an intermediary: the king of the Pogons should be made favourable to the spreading of civilization amongst the Pogon people. Rehnquist knows that the society of the Pogons works in many respects better than the so-called "developed" part of the country but he is not quite sure whether modern schooling would be necessary for them. Rehnquist, whose attitude is ambivalent, feels greatly relieved, anyhow, when the king of the Pogons refuses the offer. However, the "idealist", Rehnquist, has never realized that his naiveté has been exploited in the kind of power game, where the modern society has tried to fuse and force the traditional into itself: ultimately the aim has not been to persuade the Pogons to join civilization, but to get the benefit of their rich ore deposits. The book leaves it open who wins, "David or Goliath" (the metaphor contains also the hope that the game would not yet have been lost), but the benefit motif

behind politics is an essential background against which the naiveté of an "idealist" is revealed.

According to Vakkuri, the journalist assumes a realistic attitude towards Africa in the sense that, having realized he is only a tourist, he no longer imagines that he is able to influence things in Africa, as do Risto Vaskimaa or Ulla Roivander in the other novels. So the narrator of this novel does not need to be disappointed like the earlier characters. One can imagine that the journalist will return to Africa again and again to enjoy the African nights and artifacts.

The journalist-narrator comes very near to getting the statue but in the end fails; and when Rehnquist at last is allowed personally to see the death rites of the people in the land of the Pogons, he takes the knowledge with him to his own grave. Africa keeps its secret.

Lasse Lehtinen's *Valkoinen ihmissyöjä* "A White Cannibal" is a light-hearted satire about development co-operation and a fictional African state.

The government of Sweden has proposed as the new principal object of Nordic development aid a state which has been judged to be attempting to improve the quality of life of the poorest sectors of its population. "His Nobleness, the President of the People's Republic of East Africa, General Taata Musa, Light of Africa, First Pioneer of Democracy, Lantern Bearer of Progress, Lion of Kurus, Chief of Chiefs and so on and so on" would rather, however, have accepted a gift of Draken fighters or Bofors guns.

The Finnish leader of the project, Mauno Immo (he gets the epithet of "white cannibal" because he is believed to have eaten an African who has disappeared), whose main interest is to get the project ready in time, realizes that if the things don't proceed, it must be that someone has not yet received his bribe. Other kinds of obstacles in the execution of projects are mentioned; for example, "The inhabitant of the Sun-country does not know the concept of future. A far-aiming plan lasts just one day." Thus the Africans laugh at the megalomaniac Nordic project, for its way of throwing money at Africa; and they handle the situation in their own way. If the development project worker's Africa consists of mostly negative or

comic features, it is also a dreamland for a (male) tourist: big game waiting to be shot.

On the other hand, when the Finns accuse the Africans of stealing, Lehtinen reveals other thefts committed by the development workers: corruption, black market shopping, making use of tax-free cars are common practice. When the Finns wag their tongues about African cruelty, Lehtinen uses an African to remind a Finn of Stalin and Hitler.

At last the paper factory starts working; it is useless except that both the African dictator and the Finnish minister make use of it. The motto of Lehtinen's book runs: "The longer one lives the more often one sees a tse-tse fly." In the book there are lots of "tse-tse flies," things, events and people depicted in the light of the satire. The quantity of material is, however, unfortunately wasted because the style of the novel is so superficial.

Matti Pulkkinen's *Romaanihenkilön kuolema* "The Death of a Character of the Novel" caused a stir in Finland. *Romaanihenkilön kuolema* is partly a metanovel, a novel about writing a novel. Secondly, it is a depiction of its main narrator, who has the same name as the author of the book (but is not quite the same person) - the subtitle of the book is "Myth and Truth or a Delineation of a Man' which connotes for 'naive' anthropologists and development workers, mostly Finnish. It is just this Africa-section - which amounts to a half of the book of 639 pages - that made Finish people talk.

The book is a peculiar mixture of fact and fiction. Fact-like: in the book there are plenty of references to persons alive and dead, also plenty of quotations from different books. At one extreme, the Africa section is read only as fact. The writer-narrator is interested in evil, evil in himself (he identifies himself with Dostoyevsky's Stavrogin) and in the world. In the "Opening words" - which are at the end of the book - the narrator tells that this is "an interrupted draft of an autobiographical antinovel" and with the antinovel he means a novel where there is no surviving story. "I don't want to raise hopes, at least this time I have to avoid deceiving those for whom the hope is just fruitless."

Formally the Africa-section is a reply to a Tanzanian Mr. Adoro Anduru. According to his newspaper article the writer-narrator has, with his novel "The power of the Word," insulted the head of Tanzania, the people and the country and tried to ridicule not only a Tanzanian but Africans in general. In this section the narrator explains and defends his apparently negative view of Africa and on the other hand accuses many African specialists of being naive. The motto of this part is by George Orwell: "One must belong to the intelligentsia in order to believe all this: no ordinary person would be so stupid."

The writer-narrator Pulkkinen divides the Western visitors to Africa into two groups, the "idealists" and the "racists" - using for each group the title of the opposite. The "racists" regard themselves as "realists;" for example, they see the Tanzanians as lazy. The "idealists," in contrast, try to find the causes of things; they think that it is a question of "cultural difference;" instead of laziness they talk about Tanzanian "freedom from care." Pulkkinen is irritated by the pale language of the "idealist:" they talk about the Tanzanians and Africans but never dare to see any colour in them. Pulkkinen regards himself as a "realist," who believes in his own perceptions (and not in those of the specialists), and he explains the short attention span of the Tanzanians as the long attention span of the Finnish by referring to the climate and nature.

"The Power of the Word" is a novel within the novel, the origins of which the narrator Pulkkinen of the novel explains to Adoro Anduru. We come to know that the protagonists Mugalula has been modelled on a real Mr. Peter, whom the narrator once met in Africa. Mr. Peter was a homeless and rootless drop-out. Pulkkinen has had the inspiration that the African armed robbers were not the desperadoes of the ragged poor but the drop-outs who had once gone to school like Peter. The lot of the protagonist of "The Power of the Word" is ironic: Mugalula's destiny is to be shot by the police - because a certain policeman is afraid that his illiteracy will be revealed. The drop-out Peter is very much like the writer-narrator who claims to have the psychic structure of the "surplus" people. In the end-according to Pulkkinen - it is possible to write a book only

about oneself. So, ultimately, the novel *Romaanihenkilön kuolema* should be read as an image of its writer-narrator, Pulkkinen.

The action of the Finnish-Swedish writer Ulla-Lena Lundberg's work *Kalaharin hiekkaa* ("The Sand of the Kalahari" in Swedish; translated into Finnish by Veijo Kiuru 1987) takes place in the Kalahari desert of Botswana, the depiction of whose nature and scenery is in places very detailed. The outer tension of the work originates from a journey through Botswana towards the frontier of South Africa: Tom Carey, a deserter from the South African Defence Force, takes hostage a Swedish anthropologist, Klara Granroth, and her colleague and boyfriend, the American Charlie Wilderman. The inner tensions of the novel arise from the relationships of these three characters during the journey; there are tensions not only between Tom and his hostages but between Klara and Charlie, too: their relationship is coming to an end. Rather than exciting events there are depiction of these psychological tensions.

Klara, who most probably is the voice of the writer, is the main figure of the book. To her Africa has much to give; her positive attitude comes out both in her speech and her behaviour. Her monologue below contains also criticism of the simple view of Africa expressed by those Swedish people who have not been to Africa:

> they' don't allow anyone to talk about it in any but one way, or they start to accuse you of being a racist and a cynic. I was, for example, not allowed to say that I was not so much impressed by African distress as by the fantastic ability of people to adapt to the prevailing circumstances. I had again started to see man as a creative human being, which in my childhood had been self-evident but which during my school time was somehow left in the shade. In Africa I, briefly speaking, stopped believing in the quick destruction of the world, but when I said that the influence of Africa on me was not depressing but encouraging and heartening, I heard accusations that my sense of reality was faulty and that I had made acquaintance with only the privileged, and I was insensitive to the sufferings of the world.

Klara's strategy is that a friendly and understanding behaviour makes others behave in the same way. If one is not suspicious, this saves, in her opinion, a lot of energy. "Those few times when you would have needed to be suspicious you must pay the price for not needing to be suspicious all the time." According to the (anonymous) narrator, Klara puts coins into every piggy bank put in front of her. Charlie mocks Klara as naive. According to the narrator, anyhow, "Charlie assumed a sceptical attitude to collections because his own aims were not always good." Lundberg very clearly appreciates the ethical attitude of a person like Klara towards the world but not only that: according to her Klara's attitude is also surprisingly functional in the difficult world.

Thus, Finnish writing about modern Africa has flourished only during these last ten years. And this is connected with the development aid given by the Finnish state: it has opened new doors into Africa. Juha Vakkuri, for example, wrote his novels after having stayed first as a development worker in Zambia. But the development work has also influenced the Finnish novelists to write about it or more generally the attitude of European towards Africa. Often the writers use - explicitly or implicitly the opposed pair of "idealism" and "racism" or "cynicism", or "idealism" versus "realism". So, as different as these novels are, the emphasis is put in all of them on the white characters.

Publication Data:

Lasse Lehtinen: *Valkoinen ihmissyöjä,* Juva 1986, WSOY.

Ulla-Lena Lundberg: *Kalaharin hiekkaa* (originally: *Sand*, 1986), Jyväskylä 1987, Gummerus.

Matti Pulkkinen: *Romaanihenkilön kuolema,* Jyväskylä 1985, Gummerus.

Juha Vakkuri: *Afrikkalainen iltapäivä'* Espoo 1978, Weilin + Göös.

Juha Vakkuri: *Neljän polven puu,* Espoo 1980, Weilin + Göös.

Juha Vakkuri: *Päiväntasaaja,* Espoo 1985, Weilin + Göös.

OSITA OBI

A South African Negro Reminisces

We woke up unprepared
to see clouds crack in serpent tongues,
the sky a sun-baked dome.
Sunken eyes thirsted for rain,
while the land shrank from under our feet.
There was the roaring of sandstorm in the north
and I sat down and cracked pebbles
on the dry shore for water.
I turned to the east for light,
but a drop of thunder fell
with the buzz of a dying fly.
Ir the west was darkness, creeping.
There was darkness beyond all these,
beyond Transkei, this sky.

Here Comes the Snow

It came unhooded and white
this harsh, howling wintry wind
daring me to step across the threshold
never a sound of laughter
anywhere this winter
only a malignant whispering of death
from door to door
spreading a boring white across the streets
crushingly over our heads
in enormous flakes, falling.

Thro' my window pane
a snowman grows gross

unmelting, under a misted street lamp
I slump into bed...
when spring comes
somebody wake me up, please.

Uneasy lies the head

AGBO EZE

At War

I do not know
When it shall be

I do not know
When it shall be - o - o

I do not know
When it shall be

God, prevent the vulture
From seeing my corpse.

BIODUN SOWEMIMO

Welcome

I am a woman and it shows. Come into my bedroom, then you will know. My wall paper is coloured glossy pink, with lacy designs. My wall is decorated with feminine painting and drawings by female artists. Oh!, no I'm not a feminist, I just cherish the feeling of female U.N.I.T.Y.

Step into my room: to the right is my bed, a queen's size bed, big enough for me and whoever. To the left is a dresser, wide, very wide, I have all sorts on it, ranging from my make-up, to my hair creams; it is made of pinewood – yes – it is very expensive, it was designed by the leading carpenter in my village. It has the shape of a cat, a beautiful cat. I tried all the carpenters but hell no! - they charged too much and didn't have as much credibility as my female carpenter! My village is big, but I am known for who I am. I strive for perfection in everybody, I do not discriminate, male or female. However, I search for the best with special regards for the female.

Enough of my dresser, then to my shoe-rack - Good Lord! my beautiful shoe rack. It was made by a male carpenter and he did work hard to give me the best. He promised me he would finish it within a day after I got there. But on the appointed day, he told me he had more pressing matters and waved me off with his hands! My head spinned, tumbled and froze. This beast of a man! waving me aside cause I am a female ladden with feminine responsibilities, filled with female juices; he thinks I'm a fool and cannot act! Rubbish - I got all the females in town. They carried sticks, diesel and match sticks, and we all matched to his workshop. Seeing me, he was dazed. He probably thought I would have gone home and cried and probably forgotten. No way! you see, he is a new man in the village. Obviously, he had heard of me and wanted to try me. Immediately my other females got there, he was scared and started

the females and my self stood, and with our sticks, diesel, match stick and stones and watched him make a beautiful shoerack for me.

I step out of my room, out into the world around me. I feel like taking a walk now, probably into the city to get the feel of fast life. I really like the cool life out here. It really is peaceful, and believe me, less stressful. I get into the bus, the bus back here is big - very big, painted yellow with broad black lines all over it. The journey is rough but short. By the time I get down, my head feels full, yeah, this feeling that I've got too much in there and I need to let it out. Back in the village, not everybody likes me. I'm a straight forward person, don't believe in fairy tales and I set my rules. Fathers warn thier sons against me while mothers caution their daughters to steer clear me. I do enjoy that attention I receive. When I walk in the village square, heads turn for my stature is one women crave for, while my beauty is ever bright as the morning sun.

My heart is actually filled with love. I don't really have this villagers as friends but when it comes to standing out for our (females) rights, I call them and they are always ready to help. I guess I'm their conscience, their inner mind. They want to be heard, but they can't talk, their mouths are glued by the cultural belief that women are lower animals. They have allowed themselves to be intimidated.

I have had three different marriages. Though I wished from the beginning each one worked well it didn't and I couldn't allow my self to be silenced by nobody. I will continue swaying my hips, raising up my head high and taking no nonsense from anybody, fighting for my rights and being myself. I really don't care about what you think. Whatever you hear now is just the beginning.

The sun has gone to rest and the day is dull. I will go back to my village for I need some rest. The comfort of my room calls for me. Oh! well I almost forgot, you are indeed welcome into my world.

A. NICHOLAS AKWANYA

Village cemetery

We all once lived here
and kept all your observances.

And you repaid,
rejoiced with us
at each new birth,
drank your due
at the name-giving,
and marked it down
at that portion of your belly
where you keep all your records
and gather up our bones.

But you converted -
hurray, hurray!!
as the libations dried up,
and kept Christmas a festival
for our sake;
it was your chance
once in a year
to nod over our characteristic treads,
making your calculations,
to score the cry of each new babe,
a bounty from another land.

You have noticed
surely
we don't all come yearly
any more,

and some there are
put it off longer and longer:
your books can't be that good
any more.
Say, then,
there are lots of slots
marked:
To my Unknown Children -
that will be enough
when at last we come to stay.

EMEKA AGBAYI

Shrubs and Iroko

The big thieves have become big chiefs.
The big chiefs bequeath fire between the legs
to sons from thirty-six mothers in thirty-six states
– true federal men with federal character.

From city-mansions in country-sides the old breed
have waddled into the streets, duck-like.
Big chiefs, old thieves, out on the streets.
The old breed are out on the streets.

The big thieves have taught the new breed.
Now the new breed dazzle the people
with old tricks. And look ... what destruction
what havoc they wreak on the land!

The new breed strut in *babanriga*
– tall palm displaying its foliage.
The new breed are everywhere
– small thieves turned small chiefs.

The new breed's rite of passage
is the murder of conscience.

O what destruction what havoc
they wreak on the land!

---

* A long, flowing traditional gown worn by men (usually connotes affluence).

Gunning for the Rock
grey men in green khaki
pulling grey triggers with grey fingers
have deserted the barracks.

Grey men have visited.
What strange cymbals they clang.

Bullets and bayonets have visited.
What tuneful songs they sing.

What destruction what havoc
they wreak on the land!

*

The new breed politicians have mated
with the old breed.
The land is pregnant, my people.
This land is pregnant.
Pregnant with a crossbreed.

What monster shall our eyes see
what wonder ...

*

Grey men are taking off green khaki.
Old breed hand out *babanriga* and long cap.
Soon grey men shall strut in *babanriga*.
Grey men shall become the hybrid.

Soon we shall remember with nostalgia
uniformed days.

Soon *babanriga* and long cap shall become
the new characters of power.

When *babanriga* sits on the square shoulders
of grey men without green khaki
and the long cap adorns heads
fat with images of blood and fire ...

What monster shali our eyes see
what wonder ...

The hybrid's rite of passage
is the murder of conscience.

O what destruction what havoc ...!

*

Dirt is washed with water.
Dirty linen, pots and plates
washed with water.
Dirty water washed by water.
The wisdom of muddied flowing stream then.

Dirty conscience washed by blood.
Desecrated land cleansed by blood.

Yes. What lush shrubbery and iroko
sprout from rivers of blood.

Wake your bows, and guns.
Wake your machetes
from fear-filled sleep.
Feed your bows poisoned barbs.

Feed your guns fingers of steel-wills,
fingers of lead.
Sharpen the machetes.
Make them glitter with courage.

Clutch tight O so tight
your hearts in your hands.
Keep them far from fields of fear.
Let us plunge plunge plunge ...

Into the cleansing
let us plunge.

& from rivers of blood
shrubs and iroko.

Let the old breed descend
from city-mansions in country-sides
– big chiefs turned big thieves.
Let the new breed come with old tricks
– small thieves turned small chiefs.

And the crossbreed, let it be born.
Let come grey men in green khaki
with tuneful songs.
Let the hybrid arrive
in their new characters of power.

Old breed, new breed, grey men
hybrid or crossbreed - evil men all -
let them come. Pall bearers too:
bodies shall rot in the evil forest
after the flow of blood.

Madness is the sting of a million ants.
Departure is for guests.

Ah, what lush shrubbery and iroko
sprout from rivers of blood!

OSITA EZELIORA

Sesan Ajayi: Poetry and Spirituality (A Critical Review of *A Burst Of Fireflies*)

A thought on the life and times of Ajayi easily evokes memories of artists like Christopher Marlowe, Christopher Okigbo, John Keats, Wilfred Owen, Esin Dafiewhware, amongst others. These are artists who died young, but who, before their 'transition', wrote their names in the eternal register of humanity.

Richard Oluwasesan Ajayi (1959-1994) was, until his passage to the world beyond, a scholar, a poet, a teacher, a critic and a columnist, whose combination of the rigorous academic and administrative responsibilities in the English department of the Ogun State University never failed to surprise his colleagues and admirers as to how he was able to sustain his contributions as literary critic to *The Guardian* on Sunday. Ajayi, in fact , was a voracious reader, a lover of books.

As a scholar, Ajayi had always been fascinated by the themes of alienation – social and psychological – in modern literature and the arts.

In his published collection of poems, *A Burst of Fireflies*, (Kraft 1991), one observes a poetic sensibility which combines aesthetic experimentation with social experience and spirituality. Whereas Ajayi never set out to write poetry which is totally in surrender to a divine being , one reads in a greater number of the poems the inner feelings and metaphysical leaning of a poet who is consciously in agreement with, and treads the path of a divine injunction.

The poet's spirituality is, for instance, poetically represented in "Introit' – a poem which celebrates the aesthetic pleasure and sense of fulfillment which come with artistic self-expression. This, of course, is a natural function of poetry. "Introit" is not only a

statement of joy; it is both inspired and inspiring. The 16-line irregular verse is an impression of an artist in the process of recording his inspirations which come from various sources as dreams (like "glassy classified somnambulist"), haunting the sensitized artist until they are put down on paper; and when this is achieved, the artist experiences an elevation, a state of happiness that comes in the rereading of the poems ("Your joys are calcified/in wrenches of paper").

Poetry, for this artist, must be a blending of art and experience; poetry is not necessarily sounds and patterns. For Ajayi, whereas poetry must necessarily be vocalized, it emanates from the soul, and it is spiritual. But his interest in vocalization leads to a certain obsession with experimentation. For him, poetry must be artistically woven to present beautifully a relevant experience in rhythmic medium. Ajayi equates this medium with the buzzing sounds of the fireflies ("Introit": "your waltz rings of rhumba round iconic tales").

The image of the "rhumba" becomes symbolic as an 'instrument' of song, while the relevant purpose finds expression in Ajayi's "iconic tales". Thus, for Sesan Ajayi it would seem that aesthetic pleasure is synonymous with spiritual experience.

These combined experiences which define Ajayi's literary personality (the aesthetic and the spiritual) are given prominence in all three segments of his *A Burst of Fireflies*. The title of the first segment, "Muffled beats", is as inviting as it is frustrating. To "muffle" is to deaden, to silence. The idea of "muffling" evokes in the sensitive reader a sense of frustration arising from an inability to fulfill an aspiration. Ajayi's case makes it painfully so as long as one understands that inspirations for these aspirations come as abundantly as "bursts of fireflies".

Recognizing the consequences of his poetic "sins" as a mortal being, he seeks repentance and, consequently, solace in the immortality of art. Little wonder then that in another 16-line poem with a religious title, "A penitent's song", Ajayi's concern seems directed towards the attainment in art of spiritual reality that transcends the mundane. His prop is a consolatory statement of the poetic and the philosophical: "The silence of bulrush/is not a lack of

will". The image of the bulrush, a tall, strong water plant, brings out the artist's assured belief and confidence in the grace of his chosen career in spite of the hindrances to the attainment of his dreams. The poet's courage and zeal to conquer, despite all odds: "willows always saunter/astride buffets of/thorns".

Ajayi, the penitent poet, has, like 'The Scholar Gipsy' of Mathew Arnold one desire:

> In the solemnity of
> aging bulrush let
> my soul be held
> aloft floundering
> streams of bulrushes.

Unlike the Scholar Gipsy, however, Ajayi worked towards the attainment of his goal. He worked towards good poetry.

Some commentators have indirectly expressed disapproval over Ajayi's poetic manner. The reviewer of *A Burst of Fireflies* in *The Guardian on Sunday* of Dec. 1, 1991, Oluremi Olaoye, not only made some remarks to the effect that Ajayi's poetry is not easily understood, but also went further to comment on the unnecessary repetition of some expressions in his poems. Yet he was happy that "this land will not be left barren after the generation of Osundare and Harry Garuba amongst others, leave the stage". Niyi Okunoye, on the other hand, finds a predominantly Soyinkan voice in the poetry of Sesan Ajayi.

Without risking a return to Colonialist Criticism with its search for literary "Abrahams" behind any emergent artist, one admits that like most of his fellow writers who boast of a robust command of their medium, Sesan Ajayi had the tendency of occasionally lapsing into the use of recondite images and bohemian phraseology. Thus, one finds in some of his poems what Chinweizu and his colleagues of *Bolekaja* critics describe as the Hopkins virus which afflicts the poetry of most of the early Nigerian poets like Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and M. J. C. Echeruo. The consequence is a general alienation arising from "selective communication" to a 'selected audience'. It is this unconscious attempt of the bard to be lyrical and yet esoteric that informs the sensibility of 'Love':

> i became as gravel,

hurricanes racing to
a halt;
i raise pebbles to
dam up
ashen amethysts.

A perceptive reading of *A Burst of Fireflies* reveals this poet as an admirer of Christopher Okigbo. Like Okigbo's, Ajayi's poetry could be divided into the private and the public poems. What may be regarded as Ajayi's personal or private poetry explores his own psychological landscape as we witness in "Muffled beats". Many of the images are as personal as they are recondite.

Beyond this interpretation of personal experience, Ajayi, like his mentor, is a highly lyrical and emotive poet. The second set of poems in his collection, "Distant Beats" is a fine blend of art and the social experience and echoes in the best poems the lyricism of Okigbo in "Path of Thunder". Ajayi's social poetry is a thoughtful but instinctual record of impressions that both mourn and celebrate some values in the poet's environment. "The Promise of Age", a poem dedicated to his part three students in the 1990/91 class registers the poet's fears for a generation of students that seem bent on setting up castles in the sky. Again, the poem reveals another level of Ajayi's metaphysics with the persistent call on the Christian "Lord" just as we read of Okigbo's "Mother, Idoto" (as in "Heavensgate") or Soyinka's "My god, Ogun ..." (as in *Idanre*). Helpless, he invokes the spirit of his "Lord" to come to the rescue of the prodigal students.

In "a Verbal collage", Ajayi celebrates hope, arising from the fact that in spite of the seeming decay in the educational system, one still has glimpses of fireflies who hold the ace for coming generations. The poem reinforces his belief in the immortality of art. Hence:

the tale, this tale, our tale
will live in our embalmed voices.

Obviously very euphonic, "a verbal collage" is not just a poem of celebration but also one that identifies the poet as a rare artist and scholar who recognizes and appreciates the various colours of human existence: the good and the bad.

Other very melodious poems in "Distant Beats" include the elegiac piece "without a farewell" - addressed to Sylvester Onyeji, "this morning in Dugbe", and "Big Man". Whereas the poet consciously returns to the tedious tradition of English poetry in "without a farewell", combining Hopkins' sonority in a mixture of the iambic trimetre and the trochaic, in rhymed couplets, the last two poems in this set are highly evocative of the ritual tradition.

"This morning in Dugbe" and "Big man" are very beautiful poems which paint a picture of the agonized and traumatized persona in a highly frustrating and unfriendly universe. Like in most of the poems of the collection, the poet once more laments his 'hanging' dreams. The poet, it appears, is incapacitated by social tides, as he "saunter(s) through this day of storm (...Dugbe"). But the spiritual voice in the persona re-emerges, weaned, and pleading for salvation in tones of atonement and purification:

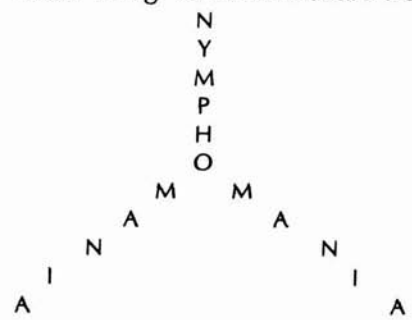
> Save me O vacant corridors
> of anguish,
> jerk me free of
> the season's talons of ridicule
> ferret out the atoming puzzles
> of age,
> dip me in translucent liquids
> of this iron fountain -
> and I'll be laced for the race.

This ritual of placation calling for the psychological emancipation of the poet-persona is most lyrically and graphically presented in "Big man", in a manner reminiscent of "Hurrah for Thunder" and "Elegy for Slitdrum" in Okigbo's "Path of Thunder". "Big man" is then a lamentation lyric which is both satirical and mournful. It scorns a class of nouveaux riches whose display of material wealth dampens all quest for spiritual realities and intellectual values. Expectedly, Ajayi describes this class of society as "Nailed corpses/on night parades", who not only "nail" this world in "manacled steps" but also "nail" his dreams in "calloused cowries". Again, in a refrain that echoes Okigbo, Ajayi's scorn in the "Big man" is sharply focused:

A world of fantasies,
three broken shells:
a world of amethysts
three broken shells:
a world of sizzling crabs,
three broken shells:
a world of pared dreams,
three broken shells (p. 31).

"Fantasies", "amethysts", "sizzling crabs" and "pared dreams" all represent the various dimensions of the persona's emotional state and his aspirations since childhood, but which have been stultified by the prevalent state of affairs, especially materialism. The refrain "broken shells" only reinforces his disgust for the mentality of the "big man" and the irrelevance and impermanence of his possessions.

Some of the finest poems in the third segment, "Up beats", include "a marriage song", "dark days of fruition", "at Christmas 1984, Ibadan", "breach the bonds" and "initiation". The segment also contains the most experimental poems of *A Burst of Fireflies,* such as "a grief shared (to all those whose mothers are dead)", "forever forraging for faith" and "to Akaraogun at Ibadan". These later poems written in very unconventional block patterns are, in a way, emblematic representations of their thematic preoccupation. The poems recall the masters of shape-poems such as John Hollander as in "A Possible Fake" and "Under the Beach Umbrella", George Herbert's "Easter Wing" or even Richard Kostelanetz's



One obvious feature of these forms is their formlessness. This formlessness is, however, the meaning. In Kostelanetz's poem, for

instance, we have a structure that appears vulgar, a form that seems formless, structure as form, and structure as meaning. This meaning becomes a social statement indicting the entire society for its vulgarity and recklessness, for its promiscuity, illicit drives and sexual debasement.

In Ajayi's "a grief shared", we not only hear the wailings, but also see in our consciousness the various mourners in the scattered shapes of the stanzas; the irregularity of the lines seems to suggest the quantity of sorrow experienced by individual mourners. It would seem that motherhood and motherly love do not mean exactly the same thing to all victims of this painful experience. All the same, because motherhood is revered, it is impossible not to feel a degree of pain, no-matter how small. And because numbers of people experience this bitterness, the poet graphically presents sorrow, here in diverse colourations as experienced by different persons.

Like Dylan Thomas, the late modernist British poet, Ajayi shows deep interest in sounds in poetry . He loves words and the beauty of sounds that come with well-arranged words, sometimes at the expense of the message. In "language merchant", for instance, Ajayi writes:

> You gore every
> dawning age of reverie
> with pallid palindromes,
> You ask to be decked out
> in a coral of
> panoplied expletives,
> Your feast of life
> is a cold carbuncle
> of squealing meteors ....

Occasionally, too, Ajayi indulges, like John Keats in some of his experimental poems, in deliberate deployment of puns, prolepsis and antonomasia in the representation of thought, thus giving birth to the best of his epigrammatic poetry. What emerges are highly paradoxical statements whose meanings seem to antagonize the very basis of their social origin, but which are comprehensible only in the

spiritual sense or by religious perception. It is probably for problems likely to be encountered in the hermeneutic engagements of the critics that Ajayi chose religious titles for most of the poems in *Fireflies*. And this, again, reinforces the spiritual basis of the entire collection of poems. Consider for instance "initiation", where Ajayi avers:

Manly cries
are
brimful cup of wrath
Manly groans
are
fruitful cask of bile
Manly cackles
are
rueful shafts of golgotha
Manly grunts
are
washful wraps of silhoette
Manly sighs
are
Mournful crest of willows
Manly hums
are
colourful rainbow of rue
Manly squeals
are
wrathful crest of willows (p. 49).

Of course, the question may be asked as to whether Ajayi's poetry is more experientially spiritual than it is stylistically experimental. As the poet addresses issues which are either of private or public interest, a predominant feature of all the poems is the fact that they spring from a fine blending of aesthetic and spiritual fountains. Ajayi's poetry is as stylistically experimental as it is experientially spiritual.

the recitations during the commemoration of this lone way-fare in mid-December 1995 at the Ogun State University Ago-Iwoye. Nothing could have pleased Sesan better than the realization that it is not yet dusk for 'fireflies'. And while we wait for the publication of his other manuscripts, it is worthy of note that *A Burst of Fireflies* is a collection that calls for critical attention. Like the Ibadan poet[1] once prayed, may Ajayi's words live after him.

Note:

1. Of course, several poets have emerged from Ibadan. But the one implied here is Professor Niyi Osundare who, on 28/6/1995, delivered a lecture of 'The Writer as Righter' as part of the events marking the Students week of the Department of English, Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye (Ijebu-Igbo annex).

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SAM ONUIGBO

Book Review

TITLE: *Bridges of Gold*

AUTHOR: Ebele Eko

PUBLISHER: Cross Continental Press, Lagos, 1990.

In the "Foreword" to *Bridges of Gold*, Ada Ugah states that "the essence of any artistic creation lies in the fact that it is a response to an existential model from a concerned observer with a fertile imagination." Ebele Eko is such an observer. In *Bridges of Gold* she re-creates situations and circumstances that reflect the broken relationships of man's life, and projects the steps towards rebuilding the broken relationships in order to re-link man with his creator and fellow man. Other works to the credit of Eko include *Effective Writing* (1983), *Wings of the Morning* (1987) and *Be of Good Comfort, Rise* (1990).

Poetry as "an art of spiritual and emotional revelation by our profoundest reflection", allows man to share his adventures and experiences with other men, and through t stir up in them, the desire to react to the experiences of the time. le Eko is not the first to make her spiritual and emotional revelation known through the medium of poetry. Okigbo, in *Labyrinths*, made prophetic utterances which manifested with the unfolding of events of the time. But while, according to Okigbo, *Labyrinths* is "a fable of man's perennial quest for fulfillment", *Bridges of Gold* is more like "a sermon on the mountain", designed this time not to recount the blessed ones, but more to trace the causes of the gradual erosion of "the edges of your peace" (p.1) and the need to quit playing the

dangerous game of pride, prejudice and hate in order to anchor "under the wings of love."

> Only there shall one find the
> Eternal truth
> Seen with wisdom's eye (p.22).

What a sermon!, given, not out of the desire to make a living as some preachers of this day do, but more out of a genuine desire for reconciliation between man, and his creator and between man and his fellow man.

Nigerian female poets have really made reverberating bangs on the stage: Catherine Acholonu's *Nigeria in the Year 1999*, Ifi Amadiume's *Passion Waves*, and Mabel Segun's *Conflict* are part of the harvest of female poetry, but Ebele Eko's *Bridges of Gold* holds great currency for an age whose conscience has been deadened by so much practiced wickedness. Poetry is, therefore, a criticism of life and Ebele Eko wants us to understand, through this medium, that the spiritual and the physical are inseparable, because the source of all things and of course, the basis of all evolution and relationships is spiritual. *Bridges of Gold* has a special attraction for us because it is a poetic commentary on life as an adventure through Discord, Reconciliation and Harmony.

The fifty five poems in this book are arranged in three sections according to the Christian doctrine of man's disobedience against God and the "Discord" that results from that; redemption of man through reconciliation that comes through Christ who is the "Bridge" reconnecting man to God, and of course, the "Harmony" which follows the reconciliation. Born to a peaceful Christian family with a reverend minister of God as her father, Ebele Eko must have been brought up under a strict Christian discipline where love "built bridges of gold between the nine of us". It is possibly this family background that informed the genius that produced *Bridges of Gold.*

The first section of the book sub-titled "Discord" starts with "A Touch of Blues" which seems to capture the short-lived bliss of man in the garden of Eden. As the devil destroys this bliss, "Pride" and "Prejudice" give vent to a "Harvest of Hate." In this poem, Ebele Eko creates a pitiable picture of man who knows more than God and

would, as a result, cuddle and kiss beasts rather than fellow man. The nineteen poems presented under Discord, gather momentum in wickedness as they appear, and in this way, each poem tends to reinforce the degeneration in man's relationship with God and with fellow man. "A Harvest of Hate" captures the general air of greed, hate, exploitation, hopelessness and death which are presented in Discord. There is a disturbing progression as each poem widens the gulf in the relationship among men with no solution in sight.

When a man
Robs a man
His birthright and peace
He lights a fire
That slowly leaks
To a powder keg

Then in "The Broken Cord,"

The bold and arrogant
Browbeat and deceive
The unarmed and unaware
...
Tens of thousands flee the land
To the hell of urban slum
(p.4)

in an unending toil which makes the poet wonder:

How long
shall mother hen scratch the ground
To feed a greedy cock?

The tone of hopelessness and despair persists in "Locked Out," "The Storm" and "Helplessness" but a new dimension of man's inhumanity to man is introduced in "The Politics of Colour", "O Soweto" and "All in the Name of Peace." The poet, however, begins to prepare the ground for reconciliation as she stimulates the reader to see the futility of man's struggles and efforts without the helping hands of the Almighty Creator. In "Vanity," man's life outside his Maker is

Like oil in the sun
Like puffs of empty smoke
Like feathers in the breeze
Like chaff in harmattan

But the light of hope is lit in the last stanza with the introduction of our Maker, the Rock. The poet shows that whenever He enters the boat of any life, there is a change for the best because

What He made He can maintain
What He ordered He can pay
And the best of all the news
He solidifies our liquidness
(p. 14)

In "Discord," man seems to have been playing with the fire of wickedness and its consuming flame, but the "Bridges" open with a ray of hope. Like the virtuous woman in the Bible, Ebele Eko starts in "Hurry Son, Come on Home," with an admonition, apparently calling the children of God to quit playing with fire and hurry onto the Rock, Jesus Christ, for in him,

There's room under the winds of love (p.19)

However, the handwriting on the wall, MENE, MENE, TEKEL U-PHARSIN taken from the Bible (Dan. 5:25) introduces a sharp twist different from the appealing tone of reconciliation. Since the language of that writing on the wall is not English, we accept the interpretation given after the writing: King Belshazzar of Babylon was rejoicing and drinking with his wives and concubines to celebrate the victory of the pride of his life when the finger of an invisible man wrote the above expression on the wall. It was a strange happening which almost shook the life out of the king and when he, therefore, asked questions, the interpretation was given as follows:

MENE - God has numbered the days of your reign and they are ended.

TEKEL - You have been weighed in God's balance and have failed the test.

U-PHARSIN - Your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.
(Dan 5: 26-28)

The story shows that King Belshazzar was killed that night. The finality of the language of that message and the immediacy of its fulfillment introduce a sharp twist which the reader cannot understand. The damnation and immediate doom which that utterance projects are contrary to the reconciliatory tone which bridges of love and peace provide for proper reconciliation. If the people whom the poet addresses are destroyed like king Belshazzar, who then remains to be reconciled to God?

The tone of reflection and appreciation is, however, quickly restored in the other poems; "Measure Not", "I Went Searching," "Discernment", and "Encouragement.". For instance, "In the Red" shows how really indebted every man is to every other man.

Think with me and count
How much I owe each day
to myriads unknown to me
Whose lives touch mine
whose labours feed me
and provide my needs
Whose wisdom I read
Whose knowledge I seek
Whose struggles and prayers
Hang gates
On walls of brass
. . .
I live eternally
in the red
A debtor to a world
I know so little about.
(pp. 24-25)

For us to understand and appreciate, like the poet does, that no man is an island in this vast world, there is the need for us to take some steps back and read again "Pride," "Prejudice" and "A Harvest of Hate," for only then shall we see the immediate need for reconciliation. But even with this awareness, Ebele Eko insists that we need the helping hands of God to achieve that:

Let Him who vanquished Death
Strenghten our will

And warm our hearts
Build up our faith
Lift up our steps
To reconcile

In "Delay" and "Wait Not," there is a note of warning which tends to reinforce the need for urgent reconciliation.

You say you'll come
When the time is up
...
But a bud may be plucked
Faster than a full blown Rose
(p. 27)

And if delay is as dangerous as the poet portrays, the question is:

Why wait for the flood
Your threshold to cross?

In "New Direction," the poet provides a smooth transition into harmony as God "gently moves me to sow in me some seeds" of love and peace (p.32). With love and peace, man begins to appreciate God in rhetorical question in "He starts my Day":

Is it too much to wake
With a smile and a
"Thank You"
To Jehovah Nissi?
(p. 33)

The poems in "Harmony" are generally poems of thanksgiving, praises and rededication to God, and the poet carefully arranges these poems in such a way that there is a steady build-up in the momentum of love, peace and harmony. The same God who starts my day, provides the peace which "will stand when all give way" (p.33) and the cheerfulness which "echoes the twitter of morning birds" (p.34). And as "my best friend", he is "the changeless Truth" who "shows the way" for the hero to fly over storms (p.35). Since patience which results from harmony is

A child of love
In Tune with God,

one is not surprised that

The squirmy worm
Shall emerge
A splendid butterfly
(p.37)

With a progressive development of the theme of peace and harmony, "He becomes my best friend," and:

He calls me love
Gives me beauty for ashes
Gladness for tears
(p.39)

One, however, wonders why the poet presents "I heard a knock" at this point when it should have been the first poem in this section. According to the Christian principle which Ebele Eko pursues, it is only when God comes into somebody's life that every mess is cleared to usher in love, peace, harmony and beauty:

He came in
Took the broom
And swept the mess away
He lit the lights
At the corners of my soul
Then He spread a feast.

The "Harmony" which the poet is exploring culminates in "Smiles," "The Golden Bridge," "He Ends my Day" and finally "Play a Tune for Him." In all, it seems that, just as "nature is never spent" in Gerald Hopkin's "God's Grandeur," the blessings of God are full and ever running over in Ebele Eko's "Full and Running Over" and anyone who appreciates God will ever ask as she does:

Where does one start to thank the One
To Whom one owes everything?
(p.46)

Another thing that has great significance for the reader is the language which is as simple as it is moving and captivating. The poet, apparently faithful to her source of inspiration, uses biblical expressions to present her profound spiritual and emotional revelations. "Pride," "hate," "birthrights," "robbed" and "sold" are words taken from "Discord," and although they are simple, they

have been carefully chosen to carry the message of wickedness which the poet is pursuing.

However, occasional use of words of Greek or Hebrew origin tends to blur the beauty of the poem where they occur. The language of such a universal message should be such that both Christians and non-Christians should be able to understand. For instance, the expression, MENE! MENE!

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means nothing to the reader since no interpretation is provided. In the same way, "Jehovah Nissi" .and "Jehovah Jireh" which are ordinary expressions of appreciation used to praise "God our Banner" and "God our Provider," respectively, may make no difference to the "uninformed" reader.

Sometimes, even when the expressions appear simple and commonplace, one may need the revealed knowledge of a Christian to understand the message. It takes such knowledge to understand, as expressed in "I Heard a Knock," that it is only when Christ comes into one's life that the filth of sin is washed away.

It is, therefore, clear that Ebele Eko has indeed written "that which my spirit urged" and in doing that, has actually exposed the wickedness in "Discord," explored the way of conciliation in "Bridges," and joyfully extolled the love in Harmony. A timely message for our decadent society!

Notes on Contributors

Titi ADEPITAN teaches in the Department of English, Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.

Emeka AGBAYI read English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and has worked as a journalist, lecturer, and administrator. He has published essays and short stories in national dailies. He is featured in the anthology: *Frontiers: Nigerian Short Stories*. (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1991).

Gbenga AJILEYE is of the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria.

IK AKONOBI is a student of English at the University of Jos, Nigeria.

A. N. AKWANYA, Ph.D, is a lecturer in the Department of English, UNN, and author of *Orimili* (Heinemann, 1991) and *Semantics and Discourse* (Acena, 1996).

Eze Chi CHIAZO studied Comparative Literature and Philosophy at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. He now lives in Enugu.

Agbo EZE is of the Departmentof English and Literature, University of Benin, Nigeria.

Osita EZELIORA teaches in the Department of English, Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria. He has contributed severally to learned journals, and is currently into creative writing.

Jonathan HAYNES is Adjunct Professor at New York University, and Professor of Literature and Popular Culture at Columbia. He co-authored *Cinema and Social Change in West Africa* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1996).

Jekwu IKEME trained as a biochemist at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His first poetry collection "Encombered, We Stand Akimbo" is with a publisher.

Cecilia D. Kato lectures in the Department of English and Literary Studies, College of Arts and Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

Yvonne KING teaches Public International Law and Legal Writing at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, and is a member of the Orient Literary Society in Enugu, Nigeria.

Osita OBI is a practising writer and poet, and an art illustrator. He has published feature articles, poems and short stories in several Nigerian Newspapers and Journals. His story was featured in the anthology: *Frontiers: Nigerian Short Stories* (Ibadan: Kraft Books; 1991).

Patrick Tagbo OGUEJIOFOR works with Africana-FEP Publishers, Onitsha. His plays have been broadcast on radio, and his poems and short stories have appeared in numerous Nigerian newspapers and magazines. His play *NEMESIS* won the 2nd position in the NYSC national drama competition in 1995.

Onookome Okome who teaches in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, co-authored *Cinema and Social Change in West Africa* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1996).

Sam ONUIGBO lectures in the Department of English, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Raisa SIMOLA is at the University of Joensuu, Finland.

Biodun SOWEMIMO is a nineteen year old accountancy student at the University of Lagos. A member of the Women Writers Associations of Nigeria, her first love is writing and acting. Her short story is featured in *Breaking the Silence: An Anthology of Short Stories by the Women Writers of Nigeria.*

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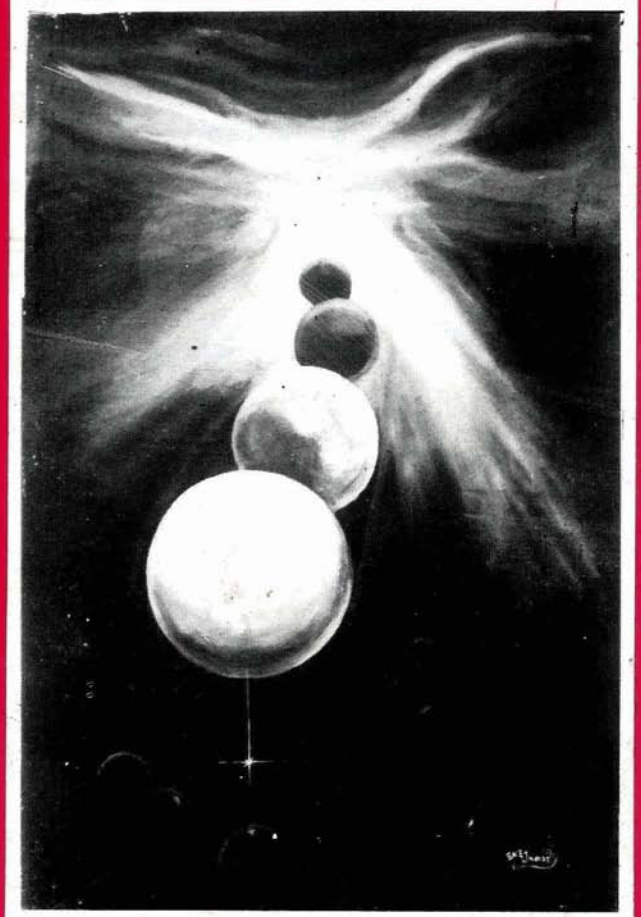

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