



# OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



41

**OKIKE**

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# READ



# Okike

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING

We keep open the channels of creativity.  
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"One of the most difficult aspects of publishing long established journals, literary or otherwise, is improving on or maintaining the standard set by its founder. While some have fallen by the wayside, others have simply refused to take root, and yet a few have blossomed as a result of the managerial skill and intellectual savvy invested in such ventures. To this last group belongs *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing* established in 1971 to, among other things, "discover new writers, publish them, and to set a new school of thought for the critical standards of African literature" - *The Post Express*

CHINYERE NNEKA MBULO

***Power as Woman***

Soft

Gentle

Lovely

Feminine

Therein lies power as woman.

In it's insidiousness

Not in its seeming guilelessness.

In it's knowingness.

In soft acquiescence masking steely resolve.

In helpless persistence masking fierce determination.

The power of the Rebeccas and the Jezebels

Is no less than the Indiras and the Thatchers.

Power as a woman in a man's world

Is to remain a woman

Not to become a man.

***Ripe Comfort***

I feel connected  
I feel real  
There are no masks  
There are no real barriers  
More like a switch into my frequency.

I feel burrowed  
I feel safe  
There are no pretenses  
There are no compromise cloaks  
More like a bird in my nest.

I have flown through high emotions  
I have crawled under low betrayals  
I have tiptoed around prostituted "sleeps"  
I have never walked tall along such  
Comfortable feelings.  
It is my ripe wish  
I am at rest at my plane.

### *The Cocky Cuckold*

Happy is the cuckold  
of a discreet spouse.  
What he knoweth not  
he knoweth not.  
In his ignorance,  
he walloweth gleefully.  
Of the abiding peace  
at home, he boasteth  
unaware from whence  
his peace cometh  
Do let him take  
the credit, for in  
his cockiness a  
cuckold he remains.

### *Black Sunrise or Dark Morning*

Sharp spasms of agony each break of dawn  
Like lesions permeating each bone  
Each sinew, each ligament.  
At such pain-ridden times  
Rising remains distanced from shining.

To lift an arm, turn the neck, shift the leg  
All become tortuous journeys into masochism  
That realm of pleasure pain.

Yes pleasure

What purer ecstasy.

What greater joy than to lift a limb, turn the neck,  
Shift the leg, thought shattered.

At such great relief, physical

Agonies remain transient.

Pleasure ultimately transcends pain.

So, though the mornings be dark

With pain and sunrise black with agony

Though the joints be slow and shivery

I remain suffused with immeasurable pleasure.

**KWABENA OPARE-AKURANG**

***To You: Fertile Sahara Desert***

I

Peroration.

We embrace your enchanting dust, Fertile Africa,  
And perfume our thoughts, lingering in the WEST,  
We reach out for your dignity and regality, Africa,  
And enshrined in your awe-inspiring dust, we  
Walk merrily in your world of golden dunes.  
Brains mechanized, eyes neonized in the WEST, we  
Still touch your dust in the navels of our birth, Africa  
The keys of our pristine birth and worldview, and we  
Gorgeously, massage your inner resources.  
Crystal as the morning dew on the golden dust,  
Warm as the rising sun on your entrancing dust, we  
Balm our snowed limbs, heal our neonized eyes  
From the fertile crevices below your fecund dust.  
Ah! Touching your inner strength is invigorating,  
Like the rising sun on your morning dust.  
Solacing on the pristine and majestic Sahara,  
Clad in the sanctuary of your navel, and  
Stored in the sarcophagus of your dust, we  
Eclipse neon signs of WESTERN morbidity.



## II

Departure.

Hunted, hounded, trapped by the WEST, with their  
Dressed guns, IMF SAPS, and transnationals,  
Packaged in elusive cargoes of mirth,  
We depart your golden footpaths of dust, Africa  
Of the Sahara, wishing no footprints behind.  
And plunge into the plastic Atlantic WEST  
To taste the sugar of the Atlantic West.

## III

Still-born.

Searchlight on our bodies and minds at airports;  
Hounded by passports of plastic visceral attachment,  
Foreign inks of filial piety, we desert you, Africa.  
Subjected to acrid immigration policies, enticed by  
Transnational cakes and addictive Atlantic toffees.  
Dancing to their senseless deluge of the cargo-cult,  
We go in search of the WESTERN cargo and solace potion  
And immigration rubber stamps rape our navels.  
Forced orgasm from mechanic copulation, offsprings  
Of mundane fertility and an aridity of our progeny.  
Then quarantined in clinics of misplaced identity,  
Dissected with official surgical miscarriage,  
Ah metallic cotton-wool on our dissected alien navels!  
We linger on the new paths of still-born identity.  
Confined to rustic life in mega-cities of the West,  
We bleed innermost daily and we yell at us  
All the plunging into the Atlantic...

All the wounds of dressed guns...  
All the acidity of toffees...  
All the weight of the cargo-cult...  
Of the new paths and old crossroads.

#### IV

Regeneration.

To you Fertile Africa, Fertile Sahara Desert  
We salute, celebrate, and pay you homage:  
We find in the gracious clouds of the WEST  
Saintly beckoning whispers of miragic truths,  
Of shrivelled seeds of vaunted decorum.  
Oh, Africa, we know now, our Fertile Sahara,  
And we clamour for you, our Fertile Sahara,  
Even in your aridity, there is fecundity.  
Soulful out in Africa, caressed by the sun.  
Soulless in the WEST, confined by the snow.  
Our Fertile Sahara, our Fertile Africa  
We have learnt now, not to wear their,  
To wear their prostheses of vaunted glory,  
Of happiness, of permuted plastic smiles,  
And thronging neon-lit sanguinary streets,  
We mourn in us against a thousand snows.

**ANU OLUWAKEMI ORIMOLOYE**

### ***Bachelor's Eve***

I can't think of any alternative; I have to end it this way. I cannot help thinking that it has been going on for some time now. It is so unbearable for me to think that I have spent years of my life in strong devotion to this unfaithful husband.'

Zenny Cole was in the kitchen, preparing food for herself and her husband while thinking all this. Since the discovery late in the afternoon, things had dramatically changed for Zenny. When she left the scene of the incident, she immediately drove to a quiet place - one of those executive clubs she used to patronise with her husband on weekends. She got a table at a very quiet corner where she could take advantage of the lagoon's peaceful breeze. But for her this evening, the breeze was not peaceful. She sat at her table and ordered two shots of Scotch whisky. Over the drink, she let her mind run through the assaulting scene, it was hard for her to even think about it. However, she tried to understand her situation and after two hours of brooding, she made up her mind on what to do. It was then she came home to prepare food.

When the food was ready, she served it into plates and emptied the content of the small sachet she had into them and put them in the oven. She then moved to the sitting-room and sat down on the couch. The magazine on the centre-table had an interesting headline which attracted Zenny as she picked it up trying to divert her thoughts from what was about to happen. She thought of her children and missed them very much. It was only last night she was thinking of asking her husband to call his

mother and ask her to send them back. They had already spent six weeks of their holidays with her and it would not do them much good to spend the entire holidays in London, for the old woman only spoilt them. Anyway, the situation at hand would not require their presence, they would probably now have to live with her. As much as she tried to force the thought away, they kept drifting back and she now turned her full attention to it. She was immediately transported to twelve years back, to the time she met Dele, her husband...

It was during her undergraduate days at one of the first generation universities in the country. She remembered their meeting vividly and, in fact, it was a fond talking point between them. It was in the heady days of the 1978 students' riots when she was a student activist. When the police started shooting, everyone ran for their lives. Zenny, in the heat of the confusion, found herself following some of her male colleagues running along a path in the campus. She did not know how it happened but she suddenly found herself on the ground with her shoulders covered with blood. At first, she thought it was the police bullet that had caught up with her, but it soon became clear that it was the thorny branches along the path that had cut deep into her flesh. There was no time to look at the wound now, the police were on their trail and most of the students simply ran past her, none tried to help her. She was helpless and was too weak to get up. She was in tears. A few minutes later, two other students dashed past her, but on seeing her, one of them rushed back to help her to her feet. That Good Samaritan was Dele.

Dele helped her on slowly and they eventually entered a house where some of the students were hiding. He sought the help of a woman in the house to treat her cuts. After about two hours, when the riots seemed to have subsided, they all dispersed to their various hostels where they heard of the university's closure.

Zenny had just finished packing her bags and was

expecting her friend from the other block to come for her when Dele walked in. He had packed and was on his way and said he had come to collect her address so as to pay her a visit during the forced holiday. Reluctantly, Zenny gave him her home address before they bade each other goodbye.

During the holiday, Dele visited her many times and they became fast friends. When the relationship was getting too intimate for her liking, she thought of breaking it off for she was wary of starting an unsuccessful relationship. After all, this would not be the first time and this FEAR was her greatest enemy. That four-letter word stood before her like a barrier; the lonely childhood, her revered feminist fervour, Tunde's jilt and her unhappy and almost empty life until she met Dele.

Her childhood had been drab, for though she had devoted parents who loved her dearly, she had been alienated from them because of her precociousness. She never really got very close to her parents nor with any other person for that matter. Thus, she grew up with her emotions bottled-up and kept to herself; she did not have any close friend with whom to share her thoughts and fears. And as she grew up, it became difficult for her to find people who could understand her.

Because of her precociousness, her parents were always accusing her of wanting to be like a man, and she was always confronted with things a female should not do or aspire to be. So, when she got to high school, where she read about feminism, she accepted it like a religion. She developed the feminist idea that a woman did not need a man to survive and that the female dependence on the male had been the bane of womanhood. She never wanted to have anything to do with men.

However, toward the end of higher school, she met Tunde Ajayi who swept her off her feet. All her feelings and emotions were aroused. She was scared out of her wits and had it been possible, she would have run away from herself. Tunde was sweet in his talk and promised her heaven and bliss. Then she

realised the need for a man in a woman's life, she realised the need for that opposite element to fulfil her own self. She, therefore, started a relationship with Tunde. Unfortunately, she entered the relationship with her eyes closed, giving everything and not getting much in return. Four months after it began, the relationship hit the rocks as he dropped her and had her heart broken to pieces.

Fortunately for her, she got admitted into the university in the same year and this helped her to manage her disappointment. At the university, she embraced the feminist idea with more fervour and she joined the feminist movement on campus. For two years, she was very active and she applied herself studiously to overcome her loneliness. She got involved in students union activities and became a very active member. It was in her third year in the university, during one of the major demonstrations over food subsidy that she met Dele.

Zenny did not think much of the relationship when it started for she found it hard to believe that a man could be whole-heartedly attached to one woman. And since she could not stand anything short of that, she thought she might as well remain her lonely self for the rest of her life. As time went on, however, she began to realise that Dele was actually different; even after his graduation, he was still very attached to her, and she decided to get serious with him. When Dele proposed to her on the day she was to travel to Jos for her youth service, she did not say no. Six months later, they were married...

The sound of a car in the compound jerked Zenny back to reality. She looked at the wall clock, it was about six-thirty. 'That must be Dele', she thought and she was about to get up when Dele walked in with her Auntie, Julie. She greeted both of them well, as if nothing was wrong, but her aunt was not fooled. She called her and they both went into the guest room.

Dele sat on the couch and started shaking; he had never had an experience as this one. He was scared to death, for he

believed he had hurt Zenny terribly. He remembered her on their wedding day and that deadly statement she made: 'I love you very much, Dele and I will never ever be unfaithful to you. I can give you a chance tonight to go and fulfill your desire. But if you ever betray me after tonight, I will never live to think over it.' And now the worst had happened and he still loved her very much even after many years of marriage. He remembered how it had all started, this messy affair...

It was three months ago when Henry was getting married. In fact, it was at his Bachelor's eve. Zenny could not attend with him as she was slightly indisposed. Their friends had always admired them for their love for each other, though some of them also complained about Zenny's hold on her husband. For he would not go with them to a party if Zenny was not attending, and whenever he went without Zenny, he was always such a bore.

However, it was a different thing with Henry's party. He had to go alone for he could not turn down the invitation and, in fact, it was Zenny who had urged him to go. Henry was one of his closest friends and also his business associate, so, he went along with his friends to the party. Late in the night, when the party was in full swing, Dele's friends picked a girl each and also assigned one to him. He was feeling cold and was already missing Zenny. His friends encouraged him and he started a conversation with the girl. He discovered that she even resembled Zenny or may be it was the drink that was now working wonders in him. He drank a lot of wine at the instigation of his friends and they also encouraged him to play around at least for once. With wine in his head and the excitement of the party, he took the girl to the dance floor, dancing and keeping themselves company till the end of the party.

A week later, when he had even forgotten about the whole event and had continued his happy life with Zenny, a girl walked into his office in the afternoon and it was Jane, the girl he



had met at the party. As a humanist, he could not send the girl away. He entertained her and they talked, but he made sure he referred to 'my wife' more than six times. When Jane was leaving that day, she said she would call again the following week and Dele could not tell her not to, but he prayed she would not.

Dele became unhappy as Jane kept coming back and he was in a dilemma what to do. At last, Dele resolved to ask her not to visit him again but for three weeks after this resolution, Jane did not show up.

However, one morning, Zenny had to travel on behalf of her company to Kano. Her flight was scheduled for ten o'clock. So Dele had to leave her at home promising to phone her later to say goodbye. After the phone call, he became very busy with the work on his table and became lost in that until after 12 noon. The whole place was very quiet and he guessed the others must have gone for lunch. He decided to rush over the remaining files so as to clear his table before going for a late lunch. Almost immediately, the door opened and Jane walked in. She immediately rushed to Dele, hugging him and telling him how she had missed him for the past three weeks of illness. She said she was annoyed that Dele had not asked of her when she hadn't come to see him. She was by now sitting on his laps and he immediately started complaining, but she merely kissed him, telling him he should be a man.

'Why are you shaking like a kid? After all, your secretary and the clerks have all gone for lunch. Besides, they won't come in to the G.M.'s office without knocking', Jane teased him. Dele relaxed a little, but he still was not comfortable. 'It is not that. Why don't you sit on the other chair and let me look at you', Dele tried to disentangle himself.

'No, I want to sit on your laps and kiss you. After all, it's lunch hour, and you can afford to play'.

While they were still talking, the door opened suddenly and in walked Zenny. She was rooted to the spot for about two



minutes when she saw them. Then, she recovered herself and walked out of the office. Dele rushed after her, pushing Jane aside, but by the time he got to the car park, Zenny had got into the car, driving off at a high speed.

'I do not feel like leaving both of you alone, but since you said you will be all right, well...' It was Zenny's aunt coming out of the guest room with Zenny. Dele was brought back to the present by those words and he got up to escort Auntie Julie out.

'We will be all right, Auntie, don't worry. I've heard your advice, thank you, Auntie,' Zenny replied.

Dele also joined in. 'Thank you very much, Auntie, I am very grateful. I will be seeing you tomorrow'.

After Auntie Julie left, Dele was still shaking, he did not know what to say to Zenny. In fact, her calmness troubled him. When she drove off that afternoon, he thought she wanted to go and commit suicide, for he remembered those words of hers on their wedding night. And that was why he went to her aunt, the only person who was also close to Zenny, to explain everything to her. She was a little annoyed, but because she accepted his explanations, she promised to talk to Zenny. Together, they had driven through the city looking for Zenny in all the possible places she could go to since she was not at home. They never thought she could be at the club. Dele was terrified when they could not find her and was, therefore, relieved when they now found her at home. But he was still not sure what she would do.

She had gone to the kitchen now and she had started setting the table. Should he go and prostrate to her and explain or what? This speechlessness was scary to him. He decided he would talk to her to break the ice.

'Zenny darling...', he began

"Sorry dear, I don't want you to darling me tonight, let's eat first', Zenny replied.

'Please, let me explain, it wasn't like that at all, oh my God...'

'Please, let's eat first, we can talk later', Zenny said calmly.

'Okay, if you say so.'

So they both ate in silence and when they had finished, Zenny cleared the table while Dele merely followed her about.

'Please, I want to go and pray, when I come back, we can talk', Zenny said and walked into the bedroom leaving Dele to stare after her.

Dele was too flabbergasted by all that was happening. He merely sat down in the sitting-room, staring into empty space. About fifteen minutes later, he started feeling a little discomfort in his stomach. That was when Zenny started talking.

'Dele love', she began, 'I love you, I gave you my life, my whole life but you destroyed it. You are the only thing that matters to me in life, I have no other friend but you; you are my brother, my father, mother, sister and everything, but you betrayed me. When I left home this morning, I never imagined you were happy to see me leave so you could turn to somebody else. I was happy when my flight was cancelled, poor innocent me, I was happy to rush back to my one and only, not knowing he had already dumped me. God! To think you can do this to me, Dele, and I told you at the beginning of it all. You have forgotten so soon what I told you on our wedding night just eight years ago when you promised me your life, oh my God Oh, sorry, you have a discomfort in your stomach? Sorry, mine too has started... yes... You see, I cannot live to remember this day and I cannot bear to leave you alone because I love you very much, so... yes... I... I... I... poisoned our food, my dear...'

'What!', Dele exclaimed, writhing in pain on the couch.

'I'm sorry love, we are going to die together... yes... I have written a note explaining everything. I'm sure your parents and mine will take care of our children ... yes... and... I assume... the money we are leaving behind will be enough to... yes... see them through... ex...except you have others....'

Zenny could not finish the statement, neither could she wait for Dele's side of the story before she died. Meanwhile, Dele had managed to crawl to the telephone stand. He managed to dial one of his friend's house.

'Hell...Hell...llo. It...it...is...Dele...Cole...come...'

He could not finish the sentence as he also died on the spot.

A few minutes later when the friend Dele tried to call rushed in with some others, they met the two dead bodies. They saw the piece of paper in which Zenny had written a confession. The police were called in and Dele's friends felt terrible that he was to die this way. But they all agreed that had Zenny died alone, Dele would never have lived a happy life thereafter, for he also loved his wife very dearly.



*RINTA S. MOHAMMED****An Aching Void***

Amar blew out the candle light and flung himself on to the bed. Meanwhile he sat and gloated over his friend Ahmad's felicity. He was imaginative, and now he had something concrete to work upon. Nothing in the whole of life stirred him so profoundly, and so utterly, as the thought of this woman. For Safina was strange, foreign, different from the ordinary girls: the rousing, feminine quality seemed in her concentrated, brighter and more fascinating than in anyone he had known, so that he felt most like a moth near a candle. He would have loved her wildly - but Ahmad had got her. His thoughts beat the same course, round and round. What was it like when you kissed her, when she held you tight round the waist, how did she feel towards Ahmad; did she love to touch him, was he fine and attractive to her; what did she think of himself, did she merely disregard him, as she would disregard a horse in a field; why should she do so, why couldn't he make her regard himself, instead of Ahmad? He would never command a woman's regard like that, he always gave in to her too soon; if only some woman would come and take him for what he was worth, though he was such a stumbler and showed such disadvantage, ah, what a grand thing it would be; how he would kiss her. Then round he went again in the same course, brooding almost like a madman. Meanwhile the rain drummed deep on the roof, then grew lighter and softer. There came the drip-drip of the drops falling outside.

Amar's heart leaped up his chest, and he clenched

himself, as a black shape crept round the door of his room and entered silently. The young man's heart beat so heavily in plunges, he could not recover his breath to speak. It was shock, rather than fear. The form felt towards him. He sprang up, gripped it with his great hands panting 'Now, then!'

There was no resistance, only a little whimper of despair. 'Let me go,' said a woman's voice.

'What are you after?' he asked, in deep, gruff tones.

'I thought he was here,' she wept despairingly, with little, stubborn sobs.

'And you've found what you didn't expect, have you?'

At the sound of his bullying she tried to get away from him. 'Let me go,' she said.

'Who did you expect to find here?' he asked, but more his natural self.

'I expected my husband - he was here this afternoon. Let me go.'

'Why, is it you?' exclaimed Amar. 'Has he left you?'

'Let me go', said the woman sullenly, trying to draw away. He realized that her blouse was very wet, her arm slender under his grasp. Suddenly he grew ashamed of himself. He had no doubt hurt her, gripping her so hard. He relaxed, but did not let her go.

'Where did he leave you?'

'I left him - here. I've seen nothing of him since.'

'I would think it's good riddance,' he said. She did not answer. He gave a short laugh, saying:

'I should have thought you wouldn't have wanted to set eyes on him again.'

'He's my husband - and he is not going to run off if I can stop him.'

Amar was silent, not knowing what to say.

'Have you got an umbrella?' he asked at last.

'You're wet all over, aren't you?'

'I shouldn't be dry, coming through that heavy rain. But he is not here, so I'll go.'

'I mean,' he said humbly, 'are you wet through?'

She did not answer. He felt her shiver.

'Are you cold?' he asked, in surprise and concern. She did not answer. He did not know what to say.

'Stop a minute,' he said, and he fumbled in his pocket for his matches. He struck a light, holding it in the hollow of his large, hard palm. He was a big man, and he looked anxious. Shedding the light on her, he saw she was rather pale, and very weary looking. Her blouse was sodden and dripping with rain. She wore a beautiful head-gear of smooth cloth. This head-gear was wet where the rain had fallen on it, her wrapper hung sodden, and dripped on to her shoes. The match went out.

'Why, you're wet all over!' he said.

She did not answer.

'Would you stop in here till the rain stops?' he asked. She did not answer.

He waited, but she would not answer. So he lit his candle, and rummaged in the box, pulling out a large brown blanket, striped with black and white. She stood stock still. He shone the light on her.

She was very pale, and trembling fitfully.

'Are you that cold?' he asked in concern. 'Take your clothes off, and put this right over you.' Amar turned his back when he handed her the blanket.

Mechanically, she removed her head-gear. With her black hair drawn back from her low, honest brow, she looked little more than a girl, like a girl driven hard with womanhood by stress of life. She was small, with neat little features. But she shivered convulsively.

'Is something the matter with you?' he asked.

'I've walked to Nassarawa and back', she quivered, 'looking for him - and I've not eaten a thing since morning.' She

did not weep - she was too hardened to cry. He looked at her in dismay, his mouth half open.

'Haven't you had anything to eat?' he asked.

Then he turned aside to his box. There, the bread remaining was kept, and a tin of margarine, and such things as sugar and salt.

She sat down on the small rag that was spread on the floor. He cut her a piece of bread and margarine. This she took, but ate listlessly.

'I want water,' she said. When he gave her a cup of water, her hand touched his and he felt her fingers hot and glossy. She trembled so she spilled the water.

'Do you feel badly?' he asked.

'I can't keep still - but it's only with being tired and having nothing to eat.'

He scratched his head contemplatively, waited while she ate her piece of bread and butter. Then he offered her another piece.

'I don't want it just now,' she said.

'You'll have to eat,' he said.

'I couldn't eat any more just now.'

He put the piece down undecided on the box. Then there was another long pause. He stood up with lowered head. The woman sat hunched on the floor, shivering.

'Can't you get warm?' he asked.

'Don't you bother about me,' she said, almost irritably.

'I'll be going out in a minute, I've got to see if my horse is safe. You can sleep on the bed.'

'Are you coming back?' she asked.

'I might not, till morning.'

'Well, I'll be going in ten minutes, then. I've no right to be here, and I'll not let anybody be turned out for me.'

'You won't be turning me out.'

'Whether or not. I'll go.'

'Well, what if I come back?' he asked. She did not answer.

He went. In a few minutes, she blew the light out. The rain was falling steadily, and the night was a black gulf. All was intensely still. Amar listened everywhere: no sound save the rain. He stood outside, but only heard the trickle of water. Everything was lost in blackness. He imagined death was like that, many things dissolved in silence and darkness, blotted out, but existing. In the dense blackness, he felt himself almost extinguished. Coming back to the room, he was afraid he might not find things the same. Almost frantically stumbling, feeling his way, till his hand touched the wet metal. He had been looking for a gleam of light.

'Did you blow the candle out?' he asked, fearful lest the silence should answer him. 'Yes', she answered humbly. He was glad to hear her voice. Groping into the pitch-dark room, he knocked against the box, part of whose cover served as table. There was a clatter and a fall. He struck a match.

'The cup is not broken,' he said and put it into the box. He hastily blew out his match, which was burning his fingers. Then he struck another. He looked at her. She was a queer little bundle, her face peering at him. As the match went out she saw him beginning to smile.

'I can sit right at this end,' she said. 'You lie down.' He came and sat on the bed, at some distance from her. After a spell of silence

'Is he really your husband? he asked.

'He is,' she answered grimly.

'Hm!' Then there was silence again.

After a while: 'Are you warm now?'

'Why do you bother yourself?'

'I don't bother myself. Do you follow him because you like him?' He put it very timidly. He wanted to know.

'I don't - I wish he was dead,' she said with bitter contempt. Then added: 'But he's my husband.' He gave a short



laugh.

Again, after a while: 'Have you been married long?'

'Five years.'

'Five years - why, how old are you?'

'Twenty.'

'Then I'm four years older than you.' He mused over it.

They were only two voices in the pitch-black night.

'And you just tramp about?' he asked.

'He reckons he's looking for a job. But he doesn't like work in any shape or form. He was a farm labourer when I married him. He left that job when the baby was only two months, and I've been walking about from pillar to post ever since. They say a rolling stone gathers no moss...'

'And where's the baby?'

'It died when it was seven months old.'

Now the silence was clinched between them. It was quite a long time before Amar ventured to say sympathetically: 'You haven't much to look forward to.'

'I've wished many a time for death. But it is no use.'

He was silent. 'But what will you do?' he faltered.

'I'll find him.'

'Why?', he asked, wondering, looking her way, though he saw nothing but solid darkness.

'Because I shall. He's not going to have it all his way.'

'But why don't you leave him?'

'Because he's not going to have it all his own way.'

She sounded very determined, even vindictive. He sat in wonder, feeling uneasy, and vaguely miserable on her behalf. She sat extraordinarily still. She seemed like a voice only, a presence.

'Are you warm now?' he asked, half afraid.

'A bit warmer - but my feet!' She sounded pitiful.

'Let me warm them with my hands,' he asked her.

'No, thank you,' she said coldly.

Then, in the darkness, she felt she had wounded him. He was writhing under her rebuff, for his offer had been pure kindness.

'I don't know when they'll get warm' she moaned to herself.

She heard him faintly rattling the match-box, and then a phosphorescent glare began to fume in his direction. Presently he was holding two smoking, blue-green blotches of light towards her feet. She was afraid. But her feet ached so much, and the impulse drove her on, so she placed her soles lightly on the two blotches of smoke. His large hands clasped over her feet, warm and hard.

'They're like ice!' he said, in deep concern.

He warmed her feet as best he could, putting them close against him. Now and again convulsive tremors ran over her. She felt his warm breath on her toes, which were bunched up in his hands. Leaning forward, she touched his hair delicately with her fingers. He thrilled. She started stroking his hair gently, with timid, pleading finger-tips.

'Do they feel any better?' he asked, in a low voice, suddenly lifting his face to her. This sent her hand sliding softly over his face, and her finger tips caught on his mouth. She drew quickly away. He put his hand out to find hers, in his other palm holding both her feet. His wandering hand met her face. He touched it curiously. It was wet. He put his big fingers cautiously on her eyes, into two little pools of tears.

'What's the matter?' he asked in a low, choked voiced.

She leaned down to him and gripped him tightly round the neck, pressing him to her bosom in a little frenzy of pain. Her bitter disillusionment with life, her unalleviated shame and degradation during the last five years, had driven her into loneliness, and hardened her till a large part of her nature was sterile. Now she softened again, and her future might be beautiful. She had been in a fair way to make an ugly old

woman.

She clasped Amar's head to her breast, which heaved and fell, and heaved again. He was bewildered, full of wonder. He allowed the woman to do as she would with him. Her tears fell on his hair, as she wept noiselessly; and he breathed deep as she did. At last she let go her clasp. He put his arms around her.

'Come and let me warm you,' he said, putting her on his knee and lapping her with his heavy arms against him. She was small. He held her very warm and close. She put her arms around him.

'You're big,' she whispered.

He gripped her hard, put his mouth down wandering, seeking her out. His lips met her temple. She slowly, deliberately turned her mouth to his and with opened lips, met him in a kiss, his first love kiss.

**CLETUS AGWAMBA*****Song for the Rain***

Your familiar sounds are here with us  
The intimidating flashes  
Are most welcome  
For we know that in time  
The seeming chaos will wane  
To herald  
The precipitating droplets  
Which bring to us a sober calmness  
As we  
anticipate the imminent hail.

Soon,  
The balls begin to hit the trees  
And later,  
Slap the roofs with an insistent rhythm  
Cascading from the towering heights  
Towards the depths  
Beyond the deeps  
Unswervingly hitting their foci  
Before the unsullied clear drops  
Are sucked  
By the eager clays and loams  
Careering the remnants to the base.  
Long before the blue-white skies  
Are turned,

Into soaring dark encirclements;  
The children begin to ready their feet  
For the hail-fetching chase  
The old ones cling to their easy chairs  
To have insightful reminiscences  
Of their pleasure-ridden  
Pre-arthritic days  
And the young grooms  
Eagerly find an excuse  
To run in to their wives.

### *The Making of A Nation*

If we juxtapose  
The is and the ought  
And separate the sober from the sozzled  
If we recognise  
The insidious subterfuge of  
Our mendacious patron saints  
And identify the paternalistic  
With the perfunctory

If we reject  
The misleading erudition  
Of our misled elites  
And subject the doctrines  
Of our uncaring guardians  
To compulsory emendation  
If we refuse  
The sporadic disbursement

Of little sums  
And then realise  
That the totality is indeed ours  
If our lives  
Are no longer influenced  
By feudatory mandates  
And the intimidating barrels  
Are shoved aside  
By our refractory remonstrations

If we make less fetish  
Of their rehearsed elocution  
And know, amidst the flux  
That a cobra  
Is indeed a snake

Then  
We shall continuously  
Seek an equipoise  
Wilfully reversing the  
Misplaced priorities of our times  
And:  
Our nation shall be made.

**NDUBUISI NNANNA*****Song of the Owl*****First Movement****Morning. A detention cell.**

*(Apart from the small window high up on the wall, well lined with heavy rods, and the well barricaded door, the room looks like any other room, almost. Three divans are arranged at different angles. A song is heard, rendered by voices of contrasting and disagreeable qualities. The song is rendered in martial tempo, and punctuated with the sound of marching feet. Lights come in slowly, as three men, Wale, Soludo and Haliru, the detainees, are marched in by Corporal Pwajok, a squat pot bellied soldier, accompanied by two guards. Corporal Pwajok brings the marching to a stop and meticulously opens the jail door, ushers the detainees into the cell, carefully re-locks the door, and marches off with the two guards. The three men, sweating profusely, go each to his divan. Wale is in his late twenties, Soludo in his late forties and Haliru in his late sixties. As Haliru sits on his divan, he clutches his chest and starts coughing pathetically. The two other men rush to assist him).*

**SOLUDO:** They should stop this strenuous exercise! This man can't take it any longer. What he needs is to be released!

**WALE:** (His hands around Haliru) Just take it easy, Baba. But a little while and we shall be free.

- SOLUDO:      Wale, if deception is the only consolation that you can offer a helpless man, must you continue repeating yourself?
- WALE:          I am not deceiving anybody, Soludo. Our freedom is only a matter of time, and that time is here. The Libra will soon come.
- SOLUDO:        When is he coming! For over a year, we have been waking up to your delusive chant "The Libra will soon come, the Libra will soon come". When?
- WALE:          A lot of planning is involved, Soludo. I have faith in the reality of the revolution.
- SOLUDO:        (Frustrated) Why you continue to have faith in a hopeless situation deludes me.
- WALE:          Faith is the cornerstone of determination. A belief in things yet unseen.
- SOLUDO:        But certainly not in things that cannot be seen.
- WALE:          We must be confident in our ability to salvage our own circumstances. The will of the masses is the life blood of revolution.
- SOLUDO:        I can see you still find it difficult to believe that you are now in jail, in chains, helpless, impotent.
- WALE:          Above the angry cumulus is a silvery and smiling sky. When the chick is ready to hatch, the shell collapses. Believe -



- SOLUDO: Vanity! Vanity upon vanity! Our country is doomed. She has long been buried, and I don't believe in reincarnation.
- HALIRU: (Painfully) No, Soludo. A fallen man rises, dusts his soiled clothes and continues walking. All hope is not yet lost, but the watchword is caution. A hasty mouth swallows it's own tongue.
- SOLUDO: Haliru, do not listen to charlatans who pretend to lead the fight when they actually seek cheap popularity and selfish gain.
- WALE: Who are you referring to?
- SOLUDO: I am referring to the DCR. Your Democratic Coalition of the Republic.
- WALE: The DCR is not a hoax. If it were, I would have long ago accepted the government's offer and given them the information they want. All we ask is that the soldiers return this country to democracy and go back to the barracks.
- SOLUDO: You are just saying what you have been told to say. You do not know the remote intention.
- WALE: I do! I am the leader of the Youth wing of the DCR.
- SOLUDO: You were my boy. You are now in jail and you are not even the leader here.
- HALIRU: I think Wale is sincere. We are witnesses to the

continued efforts of the government to buy him over, and his untiring resistance. He has been put to tortures which all of us put together cannot endure, yet he has remained unbroken.

SOLUDO: He has not been offered enough. The more difficult a maiden becomes, the higher the price on her bead.

WALE: The DCR is not for the highest bidder. It is for change. Look around you Soludo. Human rights are abused with abandon, press freedom is non-existent, workers' salaries are withheld without reason, graduates roam in the abyss of unemployment, hoping on a hopeless hope. The corruption rate in government is terrifying! We must -

SOLUDO: Boy, with each passing day, you give me the impression that I overestimated your age.

WALE: What has my age got to do with my cause?

SOLUDO: It is youthful exuberance that has blinded you to the fact that the soldiers have come to stay and with your bare hands, you cannot fight the muzzle of their guns, caressing our brows in a lethal romance.

WALE: With our bare hands, we will choke them until they vomit our destiny from their bloated bowels.

SOLUDO: You have certainly been watching too many movies.

- WALE: I am talking from experience.
- SOLUDO: Experience! What experience could a mere child have had?
- WALE: Soludo, I was born into the pit of poverty, weaned in hopelessness and matured in bitterness. Without anyone to take care of me, I became an adult in my childhood.
- HALIRU: (With paternal interest) What about your parents?
- WALE: The only times I saw my mother each day were at dawn when she took out her hoe and cutlass and left for other people's farms, and at dusk when she returned wearing a garment of sweat and mud.
- HALIRU: And your father?
- WALE: I saw his corpse with the eyes of an infant.
- HALIRU: (Touched) Oh, my son!
- WALE: He died fighting for his right to use a piece of land belonging to him. They poisoned him, just because he refused to let go of his own property.
- SOLUDO: You certainly take after him.
- HALIRU: How did you manage to be educated?
- WALE: My poor mother trained me in primary school, while my secondary and tertiary education was on scholarship.

SOLUDO: And after all that, you still want to die like a cockroach in a poultry.

WALE: An undefined life is not worth living.

SOLUDO: My brother, you will grow up one day. I was not older than you when the civil war broke out and with all enthusiasm (demonstrates) lef Hai! lef Hai! A right turn! a lef turn! Attention! forward march! I marched into the battlefield.

(sings) *Leave your wife and  
Join the Army  
One more River to cross  
One more river, one more river  
One more river to cross.*

But the first day I came face to face with enemy fire, I fainted before my finger could touch the trigger. That day I learnt the price of revolution.

HALIRU: That war was a terrible experience. I lost two sons and a brother in it.

WALE: Gentlemen, the reason for that war has not been fulfilled. Our country is still a merciless abattoir. We must sensitise the people to rise up for their rights.

SOLUDO: Wale, I have been a journalist for over two decades, sensitising the people, until the day I wrote an article which the government did not like, and it dispatched me to this endless sojourn, separated from my family, wife and children,

from my job and my friends for four years now! When I was arrested, my colleagues made so much noise, but after some months, everybody forgot me. I have learnt to accept reality.

WALE: It will soon be over, Soludo. Even now, I can see the Libra coming.

SOLUDO: To this Jail?

WALE: Not necessarily. The Libra's coming signifies the ultimate overthrow of the forces of oppression.

SOLUDO: And you said you volunteered yourself to save this man?

WALE: Yes, the security men were closing in on him, so I decided to hold a distracting youth rally during which I was arrested and the Libra used the distraction to escape.

HALIRU: Why did you offer yourself as a sacrificial animal?

SOLUDO: Ask him.

WALE: The Libra is so precious to the revolution. If he was arrested our plans would crumble.

SOLUDO: What if he does not come to save you?

WALE: What if the night does not give way to day. (Emphatically) The Libra will come!

HALIRU: But what if he betrays you Wale? What if he stabs

you in the back?

WALE: No Baba, the Libra is a symbol of faithfulness.

HALIRU: Wale beware! Beware! More than thirty five of my almost seventy years, went to the civil service - I have seen things and people.

SOLUDO: (Points at Haliru) There is a man who will tell you about life. Thrown into prison for telling the truth!

HALIRU: (Very emotionally) Transferred from one jail to another for years, just because I told the state Governor that Adamu Bello was the right Emir of Zango and not Usman Saleh. (Almost in tears) But Allah knows it is the truth.

SOLUDO: He spoke up for Allah, but not even He could save the man from the shackles of the powers that be. Doesn't that tell you something Wale? For close to five years, his three wives and fifteen children have not set eyes on him!

WALE: It tells me that we must calm the bedlam of our nation. It tells me that the oppressive system is due for fleshing. It is only a coward who avoids the battleground for fear of death.

HALIRU: Yes, but you should look around you before you step into the battlefield, or you will be fighting a lonely war. When you get to a dark corner and look back for your torchbearers, you will see them dancing around a bonfire in your enemy's camp.

SOLUDO: (laughs ebulliently) Haliru, my brother, do not mind Wale and his peurile demagoguery. He does not know the difference between a kite and a vulture.

HALIRU: (Prudently) It is true that a change is necessary, but the fruit of revolution does not grow on low trees.

WALE: Believe in yourselves brothers! The Libra will come! He will come! (*Heavy marching is heard approaching. Shortly Pwajok and the same guards who marched in the detainees reappear, guns at the ready.*)

PWAJOK: (points at Wale) Dem wan see you for yonder.

WALE: Why?

PWAJOK: A beg see my hand, see my leg even sef see my yash. I no sabi anytin.

WALE: Corporal Pwajok are they itching for a fresh round of beating?

PWAJOK: A beg, Oga, obey before complain.

*(Wale stands. Pwajok opens the gate door, handcuffs Wale, and marches him off, with the guards following behind, alert).*

*(Lights fade)*

**Second Movement****Late morning. The interrogation room.**

(At the centre of the room is a long table with two chairs at opposite ends of it. On one of the chairs, sits Colonel Zainab Zakari, smartly dressed in military uniform. The other chair is unoccupied. It is a swivel chair with straps at both arms and legs. Behind Col. Zakari is a high powered lantern, off for now, focused on the swivel chair. Standing at either sides of Col. Zakari are an aide and a female army stenographer. Shortly, marching sounds are heard approaching, and Corporal Pwajok and the guards appear leading in Wale. The soldiers all salute Col. Zakari and stand at attention).

**PWAJOK:** Beg to report! Mister Fasheun Omowale number Op - 1332/39. (Salutes smartly, wheels on his feet and comes at attention, rather meticulously. Col, Zakari waves him off and he leaves with the guards).

**ZAKARI:** (offering her hand) It's so nice to see you again Mr Fasheun. Please have a seat.

**WALE:** (Ignoring her hand) Do I need to sit before you start using your satanic horsewhip?

**ZAKARI:** Of course, that will be quite unnecessary. You will agree with me that we always insist on cordial relationship with you.

**WALE:** Yes, I agree with you Col. Zakari. All your elements of torture are part of cordial relationship.



ZAKARI: Mr Fasheun, I have earlier explained that the rude treatment inadvertently meted out to you is not part of my orders.

WALE: So your boys are no longer zombies? Do they now act on their own? What disorder!

ZAKARI: I insist that those were not my orders.

WALE: Well Col. Zainab Zakari, why have you summoned me?

ZAKARI: I have not summoned you, Mr Fasheun. I invited you. We believe in dialogue.

WALE: Yes. Dialogue of slaps and kicks!

ZAKARI: I am sure that it shall not come to that.

WALE: I do not care. Let us talk.

ZAKARI: Well, we just received fresh information from Headquarters (*Takes a sheet of paper from the stenographer*). First, government wishes to honestly apologise for any inconveniences which you may have experienced as a result of your momentary residence here, and expects that you shall accept not to remain here a day longer than necessary. To compensate for the said inconveniences, the Government undertakes as follows:

One! To give you a scholarship for postgraduate studies in any country of your choice.

Two! That as soon as you complete your studies or whenever you may wish, you shall be given automatic appointment into any ministry of your choice.

Three! That the financial compensation earlier offered you, shall be increased to ten million naira (*Drops the paper on the desk*).

WALE: Have you finished?

ZAKARI: You must agree with me that the government is being very benevolent. I wish I was in your shoes.

WALE: But I am under your shoes. I am the one being crushed under the soles of your boots.

ZAKARI: No one intends to crush you, Mr Fasheun. You must understand that no government will overlook insurrection. Order is what we are trying to maintain.

WALE: So why don't you leave me alone and maintain your order?

ZAKARI: We cannot have order when your DCR is upsetting the *status quo* with their persistent uprising. All we want from you is the identity of the man called 'Libra', so we can approach him for negotiations.

WALE: And all the DCR asks of Col. Zakari is that the military should vacate the political arena in this country.

ZAKARI: I can assure you that the military has no intention of staying a day longer than necessary.

WALE: You have already overstayed your welcome.

ZAKARI: If we effect a hurried transition, power will fall into the hands of the wrong politicians again. In the military, a lot of planning is involved. All variables are systematically examined before execution.

WALE: Nonsense! Stop deceiving yourselves.

ZAKARI: Wale, I have a soft spot for you. I see in you the image of my late husband. He was just as intelligent, just as courageous, and of course, just as stubborn.

WALE: Incredible! You mean that a stone hearted Jezebel like you has a husband?

ZAKARI: I had one Wale, a Brigadier. He and my two sons were shot before my very eyes.

WALE: By whom... why?

ZAKARI: By soldiers on orders of the former Head of State. My husband was accused of plotting a coup.

WALE: And you have turned round to work for a government you should fight in memory of your husband and children?

ZAKARI: I know why I am here, Wale. After my husband

and sons were shot, the soldiers raped me until I lost consciousness and they left me for dead. When I recovered, I abandoned my military career and fled abroad, until the former Head of State was ousted and the present one asked me to come back and head the Military Intelligence.

WALE: And you forgot your dead husband and sons?

ZAKARI: No, I did not. I actually accepted this job because of them, to revenge their deaths. And I have! Most of those involved in their killing have been sent to their deserved ends. (*Passionately*) I shot all of them myself!

WALE: . By yourself?

ZAKARI: (*Carried away*) Yes, with these hands! I watched their blood gush out. I love the impotent look on a man's face when you point a loaded, cocked gun at his head (*laughs cynically*). More heads will roll for Audu and my sons!

WALE: Thank you. Please, tell your headquarters that I said 'no deal'.

ZAKARI: Wale, I want you to know that the net is closing. More and more of your people are being arrested and jailed. All your leaders have gone on exile after foreign currency. Get wise Wale, and become a parvenu, before another grabs what the government is offering you.

WALE: That is a vain hope, Col. Zakari. All members of

the DCR are committed to the revolution and are loyal to the Libra. We are all fed up with your oppression.

ZAKARI: (*Tensely*) I hope you realise that the patience of the Government cannot last forever, and that it is better to be a live rat than a dead lion.

WALE: I cannot be frightened by a masquerade worn by a woman!

ZAKARI: (*Barely controlling her anger*) We shall suspend this discussion. Let me know as soon as you change your mind, and the earlier you do the better for you.

*(Leaves with her aide and stenographer. Immediately they leave, the lantern throws an intense beam on Wale's face. He springs up but he is pushed down into the seat. As if from the walls, four soldiers emerge and Wale is gagged and strapped to the seat. The soldiers start torturing him mercilessly. They apply electric current to his ears, burning cigarette butts to his genitals, gun butts to his head, and kicks and punches all over him until Wale passes out. The torturers melt back into the shadows. Corp. Pwajok appears with a bucket of water which he throws on Wale. He motions to the guards who unstrap Wale and carry him away)*

*(Lights fade)*

**Third Movement****Afternoon. The detention cell.**

*(Corp. Pwajok enters with the two guards dragging Wale. Pwajok opens the jail door, and Wale is dumped on the floor. The soldiers march off. Haliru and Soludo rush to Wale)*

HALIRU: See what they did to him! When will this stop?

SOLUDO: When he grows up! When he cuts off the Libra from his body and throws it into fire!

WALE: *(Painfully)* I cannot! I will not!

SOLUDO: They will kill you! How long can you bear this?

WALE: Soon we will be free. Why do you think they are more insistent now? It is because they know the time is at hand! The Libra will soon come!

SOLUDO: I think you should see a psychiatrist.

WALE: The Libra will come! He will -

*(There is heavy commotion outside. Wale goes to the door and peers excitedly).*

WALE: The Libra! *(Corp. Pwajok enters with the two guards. He throws three wraps at the detainees).*

- PWAJOK: *Dat na your food!*
- WALE: Corporal Pwajok, what is happening here?
- PWAJOK: Wetin?
- WALE: What is all the shouting for?
- PWAJOK: Oh, na golf tournament open ceremony.  
*(Wale is disappointed. The soldiers march off, Soludo starts laughing).*
- WALE: *(To Soludo)* Why are you laughing?
- SOLUDO: Does the Libra play golf?  
*(Wale madly lurches at Soludo and both men grapple).*
- HALIRU: *(Coming between them)* Have they succeeded in turning us against ourselves?
- SOLUDO: The boy has gone mad!
- WALE: I am not mad! I am sorry for attacking you, but, please, do not make fun of the Libra again! Do not joke with the destiny of millions of people.
- SOLUDO: I am not joking with anybody's destiny. I am just saying that you should face reality and accept whatever the government is offering you. Do not think that I do not like you, but I advise you from experience. I have lost count of time, but I

think some time this year, I shall be forty eight years old. You cannot be more than twenty seven.

WALE: I cannot go back on my honour. Not after the thousands of lives those uniformed cannibals have wasted. Not after what they did to my mother.

HALIRU: To your mother? What did they do to her.

WALE: One day, the soldiers followed my trail and got to my village. There they met my poor mother...

### FLASHBACK

*(A scantily furnished room. Darkness. The sound of a car is heard as it stops outside. Footsteps. A rap at the door. Silence. Another rap, followed by heavy pounding. Lights come on slowly as Mama Wale enters from an inner room with panicky hesitation)*

MAMA WALE: Who is that?

VOICE: *(Harshly)* Open this door!

MAMA WALE: Who are you?

VOICE: Soldiers! open!

*(As Mama Wale peeps through a chink in the door, her mouth opens in fright. She makes the sign of the cross and courageously opens the door. Two military officers, Sergeants Eze and Tamuno enter, followed by two other well armed soldiers)*



SGT. EZE            Are you Mrs Fasheun, otherwise known as  
Mama Wale.

MAMA WALE:    Yes I am. Any problem?

SGT. EZE:            I am Sergeant Eze (*points at the other officer*)  
and this is Sergeant Tamuno. We are officers of  
the Military Intelligence.

MAMA WALE:    I see.

SGT. EZE:            We want to talk with your son, Wale.

MAMA WALE:    I have not set my eyes on Wale for a long time  
now. Why are you looking for him. What has  
he done?

SGT. EZE:            You have not seen him? But he was sighted  
coming here today.

MAMA WALE:    Well, perhaps he is still on his way. But why  
are you looking for Wale?

SGT. EZE:            Are you hiding him?

MAMA WALE:    God forbid. Why should I hide him? Wale  
cannot be hidden!

*(Sgt. Tamuno signals to the two armed soldiers  
who rush into the inner room and shortly we  
hear them moving furniture and other items,  
searching)*

SGT. TAMUNO: If you do not produce your son, we will go with

you (*he pushes her*).

MAMA WALE: Has it come to that? What has Wale done?. Please, tell me. That child is my only palm fruit in the fire.

SGT. TAMUNO: (*moves to Mama Wale*) Now you must come with us.

MAMA WALE: Come with you to where? Where will you take a widow this late in the night?

SGT. EZE: Get moving woman! Are you not afraid?

MAMA WALE: Why should I be afraid! What haven't I seen? I have seen soldiers before. I taught in a military primary school in Lagos for seven years before my husband died and I had to come to the village.

SGT. TAMUNO: You talk too much! (*Pushes her*) Move!

MAMA WALE: (*Resists*) I am not going anywhere with you.

SGT. TAMUNO: I can see your son got his stubbornness from you (*shoves her hand*) Move! Mother of a terrorist!

MAMA WALE: Leave me alone! My son is not a terrorist!

(Sgt. Tamuno signals to the armed soldiers who grab Mama Wale and roughly begin to push her to the door)

MAMA WALE: (*shouting*) Is there no one around? An abomination is about to happen!

(*Sgt. Tamuno slaps her hard across the mouth. She spits blood.*)

MAMA WALE: Wale! Wale! They have killed your mother just the way they killed your father! Run, run my chick, the kites are astray! Oh God - (*with more slaps and kicks the soldiers bundle Mama Wale out.*)

(*Lights fade to a blackout and come on again in the detention cell*)

WALE: (*Sorrowfully*) I came back two days later and beheld a cold hearth in an empty house.

HALIRU: (*Unable to hold back his tears*) Allah! Allah!

SOLUDO: But why didn't you give yourself up and go for your mother when you returned?

WALE: Soludo, I loved my mother so much. I could have gone for her, but my arrest at that time would have upset our plans. I did not want to disappoint the Libra.

SOLUDO: Wale! Wale! My God! So because of the Libra you sacrificed your own mother! The mother who bore you in her womb for nine months, who gave you suck and nurtured you!

WALE: My mother understood. That was why she

refused to disclose my whereabouts.

HALIRU: Where is she now?

WALE: *(Painfully)* The torture was too much for her... She took ill in jail.

SOLUDO: Poor woman.

WALE: And after a few days... she died.

*(In tears, Haliru paternally puts his hand around Wale who is now equally in tears. Even Soludo is overwhelmed)*

HALIRU: *(To Wale)* My son, please listen to me. Why not forget about this revolution for now. You have already suffered too much. Wait until the right time.

WALE: Baba, this is the time. The monster grows a tooth each day.

HALIRU: Wale, my son, we are all victims, led away by the night into the abyss of no return. But we must not press an unripe boil.

WALE: The die is cast. There is no going back.

HALIRU: Wale, I see a noose hanging above your head. Please, do not be in a haste to put your neck into it. A wound that is still bleeding cannot heal.

SOLUDO: Wale listen to him. Forget this new moon

madness.

WALE: I cannot! The time is here!

*(Sound of shooting. The three men rush to the door excited. The shooting continues. Shortly corporal Pwajok reappears with the guards.)*

PWAJOK: *(To Wale)* Dem say make I call you.

WALE: Why are they afraid?

PWAJOK: *(Non-committantly)* Dem no tell me say dem dey fear O.

WALE: Corporal Pwajok, what has happened?

PWAJOK: I no know O.

WALE: Tell me the truth.

PWAJOK: Wetin you wan make I tell you?

WALE: What was the shooting for?

PWAJOK: Ah! Na shooting practice for the new barrack.

WALE: You must be joking. If it was just a shooting practice, why are the authorities panicky? Why are they suddenly sending for me again?

PWAJOK: Panic! Who tell you say dem dey panic? Na somebody e dey find you.

WALE: Corporal Pwajok, you better pull off your accursed uniform and run before it is too late for you!

PWAJOK: Wetin dey worry you sef?

*(More shooting).*

WALE: *(With much excitement)* You cannot deceive me corporal Pwajok. Something has happened. The system has been shattered!

*(Frustrated, Corporal Pwajok signals to the guards. Wale is handcuffed and led away. Soludo stares after them. Haliru spreads his cloth on the floor, brings out his prayer beads, and on his knees, he faces the Sun with tears in his eyes)*

*(Lights fade)*

#### **FOURTH MOVEMENT**

##### **Evening. The Interrogation Room.**

*(Same as before, but one other seat has been brought in. Col. Zakari is sitting on her usual seat with her aide behind her. Backing the door is a thick set man dressed in a white suit. Shortly the door opens and Corporal Pwajok ushers in the guards leading Wale).*

PWAJOK: Beg to report - *(Immediately, the man in suit wheels to face the door and there is instant recognition between him and Wale)*

WALE: *(With utmost excitement)* The Libra!

GOMA: Wale, my boy! *(They rush into each other's arms).*

WALE: I knew it! I knew it has happened; oh Libra! I have been waiting! (*with instant realisation, he points at Col. Zakari*) But what about her? (*Advances towards Col. Zakari*).

GOMA: (*Holds Wale back*) Wale! Please sit down.

(*Col. Zakari signals and every other person apart from her, Goma and Wale, leaves. Confused, Wale sits*). (*Goma with his hands in his pockets, paces the room for some time then comes to a sudden halt*).

GOMA: Wale, what is the first principle of the DCR doctrine?

WALE: The elimination of all shadows from our national horizon.

GOMA: Thank you very much (*stands before Wale*). Wale, do you believe that behind every shadow is light?

WALE: Yes.

GOMA: And that to make the light brighter and drive away the shadows, you must approach the source of light with patience and care, else the fumes of your panting will extinguish the light and then you will have total darkness, which is worse than shadows!

WALE: I don't understand.

(*Goma stretches out his hand and Col. Zakari gives him a sheet of paper, which he hands over to Wale*).

- WALE:           *(Looks at the paper)* The new government proposal... Col. Zakari read it out to me in the morning.
- GOMA:           Sign it.
- WALE:           *(Alarmed)* What!
- GOMA:           *(Emphatically)* Sign it. *(Wale is dumbfounded)* Wale, a revolution cannot be effected empty handed. By the time you return from further studies abroad, we shall have garnered sufficient resources for the revolution.
- WALE:           *(Utterly amazed)* Is it you Professor Goma? Are you the Libra or am I dreaming?
- GOMA:           You are not dreaming Wale. It is me Professor Goma. The Libra.
- WALE:           No ... what have they done to you?
- GOMA:           A man grows older with experience and they make him wiser.
- WALE:           Then it is all over. If you are really the Libra, then the world has come to an end.
- GOMA:           Wale, the military is now committed to a genuine transition of power. We are needed to realise this objective. Now is the time to prove ourselves. We can no longer fight in the shadows.
- WALE:           *(In a reverie)* Is this possible? Has the sun gone to sleep before dusk?



- GOMA: Do not misunderstand me, Wale. I still believe in the power of the people.
- WALE: But you taught us that John Locke defines the power of the people as being in their right to revolt against the government, if and when it acts improperly. That power can be exercised through the electoral process.
- GOMA: Bobbio describes democracy as a set of rules for the solution of conflict without bloodshed. The government plans to organise elections in two months time. Let us give the process a chance.
- WALE: How much has the government paid you, Professor Goma?
- GOMA: I cannot be influenced Wale. I am a professor of international law and you know that honesty has always been my watchword. All the government has asked is that I work with it to realise the transition plan, and nothing is wrong with that.
- WALE: What is wrong with it is that the elephant has metamorphosed into a dung beetle.
- GOMA: I don't know what you are talking about.
- WALE: How could you descend so low, Professor Goma?
- GOMA: Wale, I have spent over two decades of my sixty years of existence, trying to serve this nation. I cannot go back now.  
We formed the DCR to agitate for democracy and

now the government has accepted our demands. The Head of State personally swore before me yesterday in the privacy of his house, and I know he is serious. He was my childhood friend.

WALE: How did he find out that you were the Libra?

GOMA: I do not know, Wale, but it goes to tell you that nothing can be hidden under the sun. We must step out of the shadows now.

WALE: So the phlegm you spat out and buried, you have now dug out and swallowed.

GOMA: Stop being sentimental, Wale. It is only because of my kind regard for you that I have come to rescue you. I know you were arrested in your bid to save me. So after meeting with the Head of State yesterday, I called this place this afternoon and asked to see you.

WALE: But what about those who have already sacrificed their lives for the revolution, Professor Goma? What about those you have deceived to their early graves?

GOMA: I want to prevent further casualty.

WALE: But why have you led us to the slippery edge of the gaping pit and sucked out the oil from our lamps?

GOMA: I want to save the oil for the day of darkness.

WALE: What about comrades Nnaji, Musa, and Bayo, and all the others slaughtered at the altar of darkness by the forces of oppression? What is the destiny of the child in the womb of tyranny? (*approaching Goma threateningly*). What about ...

GOMA: (*Backing off*) Wale! Control yourself!

WALE: Traitor! Coward! (*lurches at Goma and knocks him down*).

(*The door flings open and Col. Zakari's aide rushes in, his gun drawn, but Wale ducks and snatches the gun from the aide. He aims at Goma. Col. Zakari shoots Wale in the chest, the gun falls away from his hand and he clutches at his bleeding chest as more armed guards rush in*).

GOMA: I am sorry Wale, but the man who walks ahead of everyone sees spirits on the way. The true reality is what we have today.

WALE: (*Advancing painfully towards Goma*) No, Professor Goma. The true reality is ... is - (*He collapses. Goma backs him. Col. Zakari signals, and Wale is carried out by armed guards*).

LIGHTS.

**THE END**

**"If I Were . . . "**

If I were a dunce  
I would pluck my ears and let the noisy wind  
Blow past my deaf being  
And leave the plaintive birds to chirp to their death  
And the roaring beasts to roar to themselves

If I were a dunce  
I would cut off all the branches of luxuriant trees  
And be nourished on nectar like the bees  
And do nothing but build honey combs  
And guard my gate with tail raised high

If I were a dunce  
I would take up dwelling among those  
Who've traded their tongues and lynched their vision  
And swopped their limbs with snails and chameleons  
And their bellies with elephants

If I were...  
If only I were...

## *Rats and Mosquitoes*

Rats and mosquitoes  
Squeal and hum  
In the hair-corners of the nation  
breeding like a million mushrooms  
on the farm of our parastatals.

They bite and suck  
the skin of the nation  
staining files  
with blood of forgery  
burrowing holes for the exit  
of the artery of foreign banks.

Rats and mosquitoes  
wear agbada and khaki  
embroidered with  
the epaulettes and medals of  
lust and blackmail.

They live on us,  
and we for them  
till we trim our pipelines with traps,  
poison and insecticides.

## *Never to Give Up*

I will never give up  
The struggle for peace  
To reign in our land

I don't mind their scheming  
I don't mind their taunting

The pen'll never cease to write

I'll hit them hard  
The pall bearer  
The slave masters  
With my innocuous verses

I see several missiles after my soul  
But I'll keep to my goal  
To re-write Africa  
To re-create mankind

I'll never give up  
The struggle is my life  
To sing for justice  
To die for peace.

## CHIKAUTO C. UTO

**Akpukpoagu**

I am the pleasance of transition  
 So strong and yet so fragile  
 Of the cheetah skinned horrendous cat  
 Because I am notoriously agile  
 I purr or roar in echoes  
 When I figure fit

I am the pleasance of transition  
 So strong and yet so fragile  
 Before the lion I am another  
 So beautifully bespeckled  
 Whose tail you must never ever tug  
 Even when the *rigor mortis*  
 Seems to have successfully set in

I am the pleasance of transition  
 So bold and yet so shy  
 At my sight the hunter goes berserk  
 The squirrels my OTINKPU\* siren my spry  
 Presence as I prance the woods  
 In celebration of our ethos  
 The spell-binding feline freckled-hide.

---

\*Igbo term for harbinger. It is a feature of some cultures that a famous person be preceded by a forerunner who announces the solemn coming by extolling the worth of the person through praise songs.

I am the pleasance of transition  
Just like EGOIGBO NW'EZEANI\* OBIJAKA  
And Okoli EJEAGWA my mother  
So strong and yet so fragile  
Before man I am yet another  
Justifying the fascinating handiwork  
Of a Beautiful Higher Being  
The Ultimate Architect, the Almighty

I am the pleasance of transition  
Ever meekly calm and soothingly sweet  
So innocent, so naive and yet of wild ancestry  
I am so proud to be  
Like UDOCHUKWU NW'ANYERU  
And EGBUZUO my father  
Was before me  
And his father's father before him  
Akpukpoagu!

I am the pleasance of transition  
So strong and yet so fragile  
Of the leopard skin cute cat  
Being so accommodating and foolishly so  
Because I was chosen and love to be  
For with peace my key  
I rule the jungle of the meek and virile  
Where your eight kolos of peace  
Are broken with cheery chat

I am the pleasance of transition  
So strong and yet not violent  
For seven kindreds and one  
Of the clan of the RISING SUN  
Of the country of productive palms and rich oil rigs



EZIKE\*\* OKIGBO and NAWAWULU live long  
ODUMODU and AKUTURU it is well  
IFEMKAUKWO and ANYERU mothers of peace  
OHAMADIKE, UNUNUKO, UMUNNO, NKETE  
UMUIGBO AKPUKPOAGU take salute  
MBADIKE MBAOLILEANYA,  
OHA-NA-EZE Kwenu\*\*\*!  
Let none, meddle with your tail or tug  
Kinsmen, you are the riddle of Anabiosis  
Is the spell-binding feline freckled hide  
Not the leopard's ego  
I purr or roar in echoes  
in celebration of our ethos

I am the pleasance of transition  
Intrepid to the marrow  
O yes I am AKPUKPOAGUKWU  
That grabs the hunter and his gun  
Suffer not your slings...  
The African King outsmarts hunting heels of hate  
Halt then your miserable bow and arrow  
And be saved from shivering shame  
Is Akpukpoagu the tough hide  
Of the roaring jungle king?  
Is Akpukpoagu a priceless skin  
Before the tanner who works leather?  
But for you hunter I am no game  
The spell-binding feline freckled-hide  
Is our boundless fame  
Akpukpoagu! Akpukpoagu!! Akpukpoagu!!!  
Agukwu the undisputable jungle King  
The lion whose beauty is lethal  
Under whatever weather  
Is the noose of the snaring sniper

Ha, can the goldfish ever hide  
When the breeze whispers my name  
The sea ripples in fear  
And her revered goddess scurries to the rear  
Your thundergod dreads my name  
And so does sweet silence.

**\*\*Chiefs**

**\*\*\*Greetings!**

**Captain**

I love  
You young soldier and swear  
This I am afraid I  
Cannot talk to your  
Friend who smiles at sad faces  
Even more afraid I  
Cannot reach out to you  
Between us stretch  
Barricades of boulder  
There is steel silence  
In my place tonight  
As always you cuddle an aggrieved gun  
And bounce about in black burial boots

I love  
You young soldier and swear  
This love like hate is lunatic  
It chokes to death I  
Cannot talk to your  
Brother who grows by bang boom  
And flees before a full blown gloom  
Even more afraid I  
Cannot talk to you  
Old soldier in the attic  
The father of my groom  
Retired marshal  
Who markets militaria  
In the midst of mourners

**ABDULLAHI I. AHMED**

***Poetry is Not the Grace!***

Out of the charred ashes  
Of your shimmering statue  
Sprouts this anointed voice  
roused by your etherized whispering;  
Your glowing silhouette  
It elects to proclaim that:

Poetry is not the painter's  
brush dragged in the mud  
to paint a grotesque silhouette;

Poetry is not the masquerade  
of the marketplace  
wagging its whip  
at false ghosts;  
it is not a sling shot  
of the shoal;

Poetry is not the palace  
minstrel singing tuneful  
lyrics composed on harpstring  
for sumptuous kings.

Poetry is not the servile  
muse which ministers

to the caprice of shotguns  
with crimson bayonets;

Poetry is not a choosy  
bard which pitches tent here  
and snubs there like a  
strumpet blowing trumpet  
of a lover;

And the voice enthuses  
Your GRACE!  
this voice bows  
before your synthesizing statue,  
a glowing candle  
whose rays probe  
disparate cranies  
with a preponderant FLASH.

**O. K. OYEOKU**

***You are my Sunshine***

When I look in those eyes  
I see the reflection of hope  
In the lyrical lines of love.  
This I do not understand  
But will do  
When the sun shines.

You come as sunshine  
Soon after morning rain  
To awaken the flowers of my heart  
With a smile full of words  
Whispering in my ears  
As the sun shines.

Will it go on this way?  
Let it go on this way  
In the lyrical lines of love  
Which give peace and hope  
Setting and brightening our hearts  
As the sun shines.

**NNENNAYA OLUFUNKE MICHAEL*****Remember***

Remember the white man  
To whom we sold the clan  
Innocents, debtors, offenders  
For sugar, cloth and thunders.

Remember the ships that took away  
The nations we could have had today  
The condemned look on each face  
As each slave left his birthplace.

Remember the sighs and the tears  
Hearts heavy and full of fears  
The torture of red hot iron  
That made slave of a freeman's son.

Remember the chains  
In which many were slain  
On necks and hands and feet  
In freezing cold or burning heat.

Remember the plantations  
In nations far across the oceans  
Each slave in a strange kingdom  
Robbed by his kinsmen, of his freedom.

Remember the white man  
To whom we gave our land  
Who made servants of our children  
Who called our ancestors heathen.

Remember the white man  
Who had the sense to plan  
Who was taught the game  
By us to acquire wealth and fame.

Did sugar sweeten our bitter conscience  
Did cloth cover our hearts' nakedness  
Did guns not bring wars and madness  
Do we not pay for innocence, debts and offence?

Yet we gave our brothers  
And now we have his wonders  
If we hid ourselves in caves  
Our souls remain the white man's slaves.



**OLUSEGUN OLADIPO*****Historical Retrieval in Ayi Kwei Armah's  
Two Thousand Seasons***

In an interview published in *West Africa* (9-15, December 1996: 1924), Ayi Kwei Armah describes his agenda as a writer as that of building "around retrieval of lost knowledge: lost knowledge about our history as Africans, lost knowledge about our culture as Africans". For Ayi Kwei Armah, history is important for two main reasons:

*History presents us with role models and encourages us. Also sometimes history can give us solutions. We make a mistake if we think that the problems we are facing now, like problems of African unity, problems of underdevelopment and of chaotic governance, are problems which came up only in our lifetime. They've (always) been there. There have also been solutions. If we read history, we are likely to find these solutions and be motivated to apply them. If we are ignorant of our history, we will continually repeat the mistakes that we made in the past. This is what we are doing now because we don't have a clear consciousness of our history (ibid).*

Thus, for Armah, history as the collective memory of society is important, not only because it can provide us with a "time perspective" in our quest for development, but also because it can link us to "the individuals and values that sustained us in the past" (Ade Ajayi, 1983: 153), thereby linking the past to the present in the process of development. Unfortunately, African history has suffered much fragmentation. This fragmentation has

caused us to lose sight of our origins. Also, it has made us exiles from our authentic values and traditions, thereby ensuring that our journey on the path of development "has been a going against our self, a journey into our killer's desire" (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 2). In other words, we have not only lost sight of our origins, we have also become "deaf to purposes". This is why, many years after independence from colonial rule, it has not been possible for us to achieve any meaningful social transformation. It is in this context that the historical reconstruction in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (TTS, for short) should be understood. This historical reconstruction is not an end in itself. It is a means to the achievement of two interrelated purposes: first, to sensitize Africans to the dangers of getting entrapped in the present in our search for solutions to our myriad problems and, second, to demonstrate the relevance of our authentic values and traditions to our quest for development.

For Ayi Kwei Armah, the primary explanation for the African predicament is that we have been exiled from our way, the way. To rediscover this way, or at least fashion a new life close to it, we need to have a clear idea of what we were. This is with a view to not only developing the self-esteem that is required for a genuine African liberation, but also re-establishing the core values and traditions in terms of which the challenge of social reconstruction on the continent can effectively be met. What are these core values and traditions that define the way which Ayi Kwei Armah is urging us to reclaim? And under what circumstances did we become exiles from this way?

Central to the understanding of the nature of these values and traditions is a conception of society as a co-operative entity in which "the central emphasis is on the community" (Nursery-Bray, 1974: 29), and all forms of "selfish individualism" are discouraged. Associated with this conception are certain social values defined by the following features, among others:

1. A sense of justice in which giving and receiving are reciprocal: "Giving, but only to those from whom we receive in equal measure. Receiving, but only from those to whom we give in reciprocal measure" (*TTS*, 17).
2. Abhorrence of greed and exploitation and the linking of enjoyment and status to work accomplished.
3. An ethos in which work is linked to purpose and productivity is linked to needs.

This comprises the social philosophy which provided the foundations of social harmony in traditional African societies. The violation of these foundations was a decisive factor in the generation of the African crisis. It led to the abandonment of our way of perceiving and doing things. With this abandonment came the loosening of communal bonds.

It is important to note, however, that this violation would not have been possible or lasted for so long but for some crucial internal factors, the first being the emergence in African traditional societies of parasites - Kings (like Kwanche) and courtiers (like Otumfur) who were eager to wield tyrannous power over the people and were ready, for purely selfish reasons, to collaborate with the destroyers of their own people. The second factor had to do with the complacency of the people who, in a period of prosperity, could not understand nor act upon the warnings of their own prophets - the Noliwes, Ningomes and Ndolas of Ayi Kwei Armah's fictional Anoa. This was how all became "hypnotized victims" of oppression and "most were fascinated by destructions' shiny dross" (*TTS*, 104). Finally, there was the complicity of the scholars (experts in the arts of knowledge and eloquence) who, for selfish reasons, became allies of the king against the people, or had lost the courage to speak the truth, "so that they still with their minds were able to perceive treachery in the king's behaviour of betraying his own to people for sundry gifts of cloths, drinks and

mirrors from the white destroyer. They quite lost the ability to act on their perceptions" (*TTS*, 100). This complicity made it possible for the oppressors to claim that their actions "had the force of tradition behind them" (*Ibid*). More importantly, it denied the people the intellectual leadership and clarity of vision which they required to tackle the imminent destruction that the alliance between the rulers and the white destroyers represented.

A crucial point of the historical reconstruction in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, then, is this: although slavery and colonialism have proved "most disruptive" in African history, there were internal factors which made them possible or helped to make their consequences more devastating than they would have been. Colonialism, in particular, only accentuated a process of decay that had set in in many African societies by helping and multiplying the decaying class of kings and their courtiers (*TTS*, 104). The British policy of indirect rule and the creation of chieftaincies in societies that were hitherto republican (the Igbo society in present-day Nigeria, for example) readily comes to mind.

We see, then, that many of the problems with which Africans are today bedeviled - leaders who are deaf to the voices of their people and contemptuous of their collective will, the perversion of values and the misuse of skills, lack of unity, etc. - are not new problems; "they've (always) been there", as Ayi Kwei Armah says. This realisation should guard us against the temptation to try quick-fix, externally derived solutions to our pressing problems.

Ayi Kwei Armah is able to show that we can, through a thorough appreciation of our history, find endogenous solutions to our myriad problems. For instance, it is clear from this reconstruction that the menace of tyrannous power can be tackled. What is required, as the struggles in *Two Thousand Seasons* make clear, is clarity of vision, unity of purpose and concerted effort. That this belief is not a figment of the imagination of a star-gazing idealist has been made clear by some

examples in contemporary African history, for instance, in Uganda, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But even here, Ayi Kwei Armah sensitizes us to the possibility that some leaders of these popular movements may turn to do as many of our nationalists and post-independence leaders have done, counterparts in real life of Kamuzu - Ayi Kwei Armah's creation in *TTS* who joined Isanusi and his group of liberators in the struggle to seize the stone place of the white destroyers in the fictional town of Poano only to become a copy of the white governor (the chief destroyer) that had occupied the place. There is no other antidote to this disastrous possibility than vigilance.

A crucial message of the historical reconstruction in *Two Thousand Seasons* is that history is a critical factor in any process of social reconstruction. The words of Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi, written in another context, are pertinent here. According to him:

*The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued with a deep sense of continuity and apperception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power and transient wealth. Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability, and without them the future is bleak (Ade Ajayi, 1983: 153).*

We have in this passage a clear affirmation of the importance of history in the process of development. Unfortunately, the situation in Africa today is one in which there is a dearth of statesmen with a sense of history. It is within this context that we should appreciate the importance of the historical reconstruction in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, and his description of his agenda as a writer with which we opened this essay.

Two lessons of this reconstruction for our quest for freedom and development require urgent mention and emphasis. The first one is that this search may turn out to be a mirage unless it is based on clear understanding of the nature of the interaction

between internal and external factors in the generation and perpetuation of African underdevelopment. Unfortunately what we have in African scholarship today is a situation in which certain concepts or ideas which can aid our understanding of the dynamics of this interaction - the idea of neocolonialism, for example - are gradually being pushed into the background by some fashionable constructs generated and nurtured in Western scholarship. Witness, for instance, the celebration of the idea of postcoloniality when the reality on the ground is a socio-historical situation in which the formal transfer of political power from the colonisers to the colonised has not reduced in any significant manner the economic, political and ideological influence of the latter on the former. A clear historical consciousness is required for us to recognise the problems associated with the theoretical extroversion which this tendency betrays.

The other lesson of the historical reconstruction in *Two Thousand Seasons* is that it enables us to appreciate the fact that no meaningful social change is possible without a concerted struggle between those who support the status quo and those who see in its subversion the first condition for the achievement of an African renaissance. Ayi Kwei Armah's model of struggle in *Two Thousand Seasons* may appear simplistic; nonetheless, it inspires the hope (a crucial factor in history) that change is possible. What is more, it draws our attention to the importance of "Self-retrieval, self-identity, cultural recollection, cultural security, etc, as prerequisites for social revolution" (Wole Soyinka, 1988: 182).

This brings us to a discussion of another aspect of the significance of *Two Thousand Seasons*. This is that it portrays, very clearly, the relationship between culture and liberation. Indeed, what we see in this book is a consistent reaffirmation of the need for Africans to reclaim their authentic values and traditions. For Ayi Kwei Armah, it is because we have strayed



institutions in order to determine their relevance to contemporary life.<sup>2</sup> Also, there is need to examine and build on the heritage of such nationalist philosophers (and statesmen) as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Tsenay Serequeberhan, in his examination and reconstruction of the political ideas of Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon (Serequeberhan, 1994), shows the philosophical - indeed political - gains that can accrue from this reflection. But there is also the need for Africans to broaden their social vision by adapting non-African ideas which could contribute to the achievement of the goal of social reconstruction in Africa.

The point, then, is that the whole gamut of the African historical experience has to be taken into consideration in any realistic and sustained effort to establish new socio-ethical and political frameworks for social harmony in Africa. To say this, however, is not to underrate the need for a cultural base for self-identity and social reconstruction in Africa, but to caution against a reductionist interpretation of the African experience.

In all, there is in *Two Thousand Seasons* an affirmation of the reciprocal relationship between history and culture in the process of liberation and social reconstruction. Amilcar Cabral (1980: 143) provides a classic expression of this affirmation when he writes:

*Culture ... is thus an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the resultant of this history just as the flower is the resultant of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its root into the humus of the material reality of the environment in which it develops, and it reflects the organic nature of the society, which may be more or less influenced by external factors. History enables us to know the nature and extent of the imbalances and the conflicts (economic, political*

and social) that characterize the evolution of a society. Culture enables us to know what dynamic syntheses have been formed and set by social awareness in order to remove these conflicts at each stage of the evolution of that society, in the search for survival and progress.

This passage not only demonstrates the reciprocal, indeed organic, nature of the relationship between history and culture, it also draws attention to their importance in the development process. History creates an awareness of the various phases of challenge and response through which a people have passed to become what they are; culture provides the framework for thought and action and identity in a society. If this is the case, then, a situation, such as we now have in Africa, in which there is so much disregard for history and its lessons and culture is treated as a mere "folkloric epiphenomenon" can only guarantee that we remain a people unsure of what we were, what we are, and what we can be.

Ayi Kwei Armah, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, tells us clearly that this situation need not be so. Indeed, the message of the people in this work is that we can have a better life. But this is possible only on one condition: that we are ready to abandon the road of death we have been following for a long time now and prepare "paths to the way that was our way" - the way of reciprocity. This task will not be easy, Ayi Kwei Armah cautions, but it can be accomplished. The role of the African scholar in all this cannot be over-emphasised: it is his duty to prepare the way for the African renaissance by:

- (i) developing a holistic vision of the African situation today with a view to establishing the link between the past, the present, and the future in the process of change;
- (ii) becoming "the conscious mind" of society through the preservation of the link between reason and conscience, the link, that is, between knowledge and moral integrity; and
- (iii) realising that their best self is the people and, consequently,



establishing a firm link with them in their struggles for social change.

Isanusi is Ayi Kwei Armah's model of the authentic African scholar in *Two Thousand Seasons*. But Africa has also produced several exemplary figures in this regard. They include: Eduardo Mondlane, Amilcar Cabral, Augustino Neto, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, Julius Nyerere, Claude Ake and Ken Saro-Wiwa. Would African scholars remain preservers, through indifference or active collaboration, of the legacy of material and moral depression which has characterized social life in contemporary Africa or fulfil their historic mission as the vanguard of social change and reconstruction? The answer we give to this question may well determine the chances that the hope for change and reconstruction expressed in *Two Thousand Seasons* would be realised.

### Notes

1. For such discussion, see, for example, William Abraham 1992, Anthony Appiah 1992, Abiola Irele 1986, 1996, Paulin Hontoundji 1996, Olusegun Oladipo 1995, Kwasi Wiredu 1992.
2. See, for instance, Kwame Gyekye 1992.

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**AYO OLAYEMI*****God's Drummer***

After God created the Earth  
He made the divine drummer  
To beat in the background when he talks  
And to translate the sound of his voice  
His very essence  
    In heart beating and the thumping pulse of life's blood  
His benevolence  
    In soft breathing and the gentle heaving of life's bust  
His laughter  
    In the rapid rolling tumble of Tano River  
His ever-patience  
    In the surging and splashing of Atlantic waters  
His anger  
    In the rumble and resounding crash of thunder  
And His ever-presence;  
    Even in the hanging silence that remains after.

Throughout Time  
Man has invoked the divine  
And God has communed with man  
Through hollow oak and dried bull hide  
And the hand that flows bountifully with style,  
Bolstering the step of the warrior  
Lightening the legs of the dancer

Banging to the blacksmith's hammer  
And enrapturing the frenzied worshipper  
Playing paean over the drum's sonorous leather.  
    Like pestles pounding pudding from boiled yam  
Sensually from border - to centre - to border  
    Like male stone grinding spice on female slab  
Striking with whole palm - then thumb base - then finger  
    Like flurrying figs in the howling wind  
Then spreading palms over the sound to smother  
    Like rustling leaves in the gentle breeze.  
In the art of drum  
We've seen none like Odomantoma's mastery  
Although some say there must be devilry  
In his acuteness of ear, and his left handedness  
The suppleness of his wrists, and the magic in his fingers;  
How he listens for the sound of Earth's rhythms  
And beats time to the tempo of the seasons  
How he discerns music in cricket chirping  
And the clanging clash of falling dishes  
    The sweat streaming down his bare chest  
    The band of ostrich feathers round his head  
    The whirling leaps and soulful cries  
    The harkeners from far and wide  
    The roots of rhythm  
        The story of his past  
    The routes of rhythm  
        The future for his path.

**UDUMA KALU*****A Mermaid Dance***

Dance a mermaid dance, a sweet mermaid dance and let your cresting twists glide in the moon.

Dance a moonlight dance, sweet mermaid.  
Let your gliding swish catch the glimpse of a fish in a moonlight dance.

And let us watch you wipe your nose in warmed obeisance.  
Dance sweet mermaid, dance, and let the moon cast its warmth on your narrow waist.  
Let us watch your swinging hip, meander in the moon when the flutist beckons.

Twist your head again sweet silence. Nod your head again.  
And let your long wild hair tumble together like fins that glide together under the moon.

**E. J. OTAGBURUAGU*****Another Dawn***

It is yet another dawn  
Martial music reels in the air  
The anthem peels  
To announce a change of baton.

Listen  
The announcer  
With calculated anxiety appeals for calm  
Declares a dusk to dawn curfew  
A state of emergency is imposed  
For compatriots to have their freedom.

It is yet another dawn  
Martial music seizes the waves  
Fear grips the innocent  
The anthem peels  
A new note of distant, elusive hope.

Listen  
The announcer  
In a pregnant and mock heroic tone  
Declares a change of guards and posts  
Dawns in hungry frenzy  
Chase the maiden broadcast  
For power corridor and the loot.

It is yet another dawn  
Martial music seizes the waves  
The new jubilant guards  
Decree their path  
And in wanton lust and spree  
Glorious shadow chase  
And down an avalanche of decay and ruin  
On many homes.

Change of baton  
Change of hopes  
The birth of jungle justice  
In flammable austere age.



A. N. AKWANYA

***Crisis of Filiation: Exile and Return  
in Munonye's Trilogy***

In Munonye's writing, from *The Only Son* (1966) and *Obi* (1969) to *Bridge to a Wedding* (1978), exile and rootlessness are the main discourse formatives. As they comprise the character's situation, his attitudes and outlook are conditioned by them and it would be a mistake to call them themes - issues of that kind are often trivialized as 'theme' in the study of African literature.

Among Munonye's works of the middle period, only in *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973), where the action is connected to a national political crisis does the exile status of the main characters appear rather inconsequential in giving orientation to the action and determining attitudes and outlook. In *Oil Man of Obange* (1971) and *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974), exile is the state of being without a community and the individual is obliged to try and build himself one from nothing, so to speak. In its reflection on suffering and alienation, what Munonye's fiction brings to the traditional novel in Africa is a mode of questioning which is prepared to go beyond the so-called African experience into the social practice and philosophy of history of traditional society. The result is that the narrative eye rests on the individual who suffers; and because these experiences take place in the world of traditional society, traditional society being the ground (Brown, 1981) against which his experiences are mapped, the relation of individual and society is often in terms of victim or sufferer and inflicter.

The best known of Munonye's works is probably *The Only Son*. In the opposition here between the individual and his society, the system of authority is unveiled to contain major internal contradictions by reason of which the system itself seems to crumble to pieces. It is in John Munonye's writing that we see more sharply perhaps than in the work of any other writer of the Igbo literary movement a representation of traditional society as a system of authority articulated into natural units based on filiation and kinship bonds. In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, we know nothing of Okonkwo's extended family; and though we know a little of Ezeulu's in *Arrow of God*, the relationship seems to play no role at all in social organisation. In the latter work, the male characters are seen as individual members of the ruling class of elders with authority extending over the whole of Umuaro as an entity, as is the case also in *Things Fall Apart*, or they are seen as citizens of one or another of the villages that make up the community; and though these may have their own localized cultic practices, there is no suggestion of their having a political structure of their own. The exercise of power seems to be only at two levels, that of the individual household presided over by an adult male, and that of the town community. What we see, however, in Munonye is that each household, as an economic unit, has its own land, and that the exercise of control over the means of production is vested in the senior male elder in the household. But the extended family is a higher authority still where control of the land is concerned; hence it is a distinct level of the social structure, with cultural and political powers attached.

As we see in *The Only Son* and *Obi*, family lands are subdivided among the male children after their father's death, when they are old enough to set up their own households. But as Okafor, the elder of two brothers, dies early, leaving behind an infant son and his mother, the family land reverts to the younger brother Amanze, who holds it till his young nephew should be

able to take it over (*The Only Son*, 8). This model of social organisation corresponds to what early African novel critics call 'anthropological' material, and to what is called in cultural studies 'African communalism.' In these contexts, the analysis of the model is often as if it corresponded to reality. For instance, Opatá's analysis of the community-affirming implications of the 'kola sharing practices' of the Igbo (1998: 103-104), is as if these things translate directly to reality. But a descriptive model must be shown to work; minimally, it has to be shown to be descriptively adequate. The value to be assigned this model must await determination by the social sciences, but that it cannot be taken for granted any longer has been recognised in recent philosophical studies. Ekennia (1998), for instance, tells us bluntly that communalism is a 'political weapon' which has been wielded by African leaders for questionable ends (pp. 353-359). The recognition that the model may no longer go without saying seems, in fact, to have been attained first of all by literature.

In its reflective phase, indeed, it is the way of literature to let nothing pass: experience, history, the contemporary, models of experience, of history, and so on, it must re-apprehend in the dimension of thought; all must be opened and reopened, never allowed to rest in closure. The model of communalism as the provoker and sustainer of the exercise of thought is what we begin to see in Munonye already in his first novel. But this movement of thought can never yield final answers in literature, in as much as the reality with which it confronts the model is purely hypothetical: it may work or not work depending on the nature of the constituents of the hypothetical reality and the ordering relations among them. In *Obi*, where the model is seen to work, we have a caring traditional society, something that is rare in Munonye. More commonly, traditional society is unable to protect the weak because it is itself in a state of bondage under the thumb of an unscrupulous and power-hungry elder. The villain of this work is the elder Jerome, who is working his will

in the young Christian church in Umudioba, and is not involved in the main action. In *The Only Son*, the villain is Amanze, who in addition to being domineering, is also under the influence of his wives, and is pushed by them to exercise all the rights the tradition allows over his dead brother's house, but not the responsibilities. Apparently this society hasn't adequate means to defend itself against the elder with a 'strong eye' as Echewa's *The Crippled Dancer* calls him; thus people like Amanze are able to take advantage of the system to the point of destroying it. It can, in fact, be argued that the crisis in *Arrow of God* is also in some measure to be explained by this weakness in the system. Here the antagonistic forces led by Ogbuefi Nwaka and Ezidemili on the one hand, and Ezeulu on the other, appear to be equally matched; and nothing can stop them pursuing their struggle for influence to the point of destroying the institutions which sustain and hold their society together.

In consequence of Amanze's misuse of ancestral authority in *The Only Son*, the widow and her child are forced into exile to Nade, the mother's hometown, where we find a different father figure, Oji. Unlike Amanze, the latter accepts the privileges as well as the responsibilities that go with patriarchal authority. A tension is therefore set up between Umudioba, Amanze's home, the home of 'Unreason' (Bentley, 1981), and Nade, where Oji is the high priest of Reason. The contrasting notions, Reason and Unreason, with which we are familiar in Brecht's theatre, for example, in the Prologue of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* may be treated as the 'symbolized universals' (Kristeva, 1982) in *The Only Son*. As ruling oppositions in the narrative, the movement and development of the story will be necessarily by articulating one against the other, so as to form what Kristeva calls a thematic loop; and the sequence will come to a close only by the resolution of the opposition. The pattern of this articulation of reason against unreason is equally seen in *Obi* and *Bridge to a Wedding*. In the latter, the process is brought to a close in the

final triumph of the positive over the negative value. Here the cause of unreason is served by Samson and his brothers who, self-centred and grasping, initiate a process of land consolidation, beginning with jointly held family lands, using force and intimidation against their victims to further this end. The opposite interest, reason, is promoted by Ebeneto and Orazu, tireless bridge-builders, and by Obieke and Edogu, long-suffering, self-sacrificing, and community-affirming.

In *Obi*, however, the form of the binary opposition loses its sharpness as we switch to a kind of conflict in which the logic of one cultural practice, that of traditional religion, is articulated against another, the Christian one. To Chiaku and Joe's relatives in Umudioba his lack of offspring is a public issue, and they have tradition on their side in demanding that Joe should take a second wife to ensure that the situation is corrected. But the man has imbibed the Christian ethos so successfully that it is now a factor in his interpretation of experience and response to events around him. Thus he sees his childlessness as a problem private to him and his wife to solve in their own way. Accordingly, he resents his relatives interfering. For him the path of reason is to stay monogamous, while seeking medical help over his wife's condition, and in a way that would not offend against their religious beliefs. Someone like the headmaster of the Catholic school in Umudioba, in a similar predicament as Joe, has, while maintaining the appearance of being a convinced Christian, tried every remedy he knows, including the use of charms, without success. His wife's response is to give herself away to someone else to raise him offspring.

For Joe, however, appearances are not one thing, and the reality another. He seems even to have become disconnected from his people's thought patterns to the extent that when he decides to put up a big house, he is thinking of its comfortableness for him and Anna his wife. But as a family's permanent seat, in the people's thinking, this house is an *obi*, a

building that is not only useful, but more importantly symbolic: the word refers both to the edifice and the family itself, as an entity that is properly rooted in the community. In his people's thinking, the building itself is a figure of the family as a self-perpetuating entity. The kind of house that Joe is proposing to build arouses the enthusiasm of the members of the extended family who see it as prestigious. But this is not enough to quell their unease; and Chiaku flatly rejects the idea 'That a man should undertake to build such a house for rats and lizards, and snakes' (142).

The structure of this text, its centring on and narration of aspects of a great struggle whose outcome is nothing less than a social transformation, opens for it the possibility of reception as a historical novel. In the crisis of a historical novel, the character is often a figure representing one historical movement locked in a blind and passionate struggle with another historical movement (Luckacs, 1962:81). With this narrative unfolds a struggle taking place in a partisan manner. This kind of narrative is first of all Aristotelian in being a representation of action, not of a person. In Munonye's trilogy, this action consists of a movement to reconnect to the roots, beginning with initial uprooting and exile, and ending with the return and settlement. The middle member of the trilogy *Obi* comprises a premature attempt at a return to resettle the *obi*. However, the *obi* does not appear: it remains unsettled. In this work, therefore, the movement of the sequence is not completed: the sequence comes unstuck.

Thus the existence of two societies to one of which the protagonist attaches himself is a methodological, not an ideological requirement. Too often, the appearance of well known structures in Nigerian fiction results in too hasty a dismissal of the work as 'the same old thing.' As a discourse formative, however, the exile-return sequence in Munonye is an important new departure. If it be seen in relation to say, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*; it is only in



terms of a path, which might have been open to Nwoye, a path which Nwoye does not take. On the other hand, we are not looking at a clash of two worlds, the colonist's and the traditional African, as in Ngugi. In *Munonye*, rather, the exile-return sequence takes place as a historical narrative, with its oppositional format. As long as the two opposing sides are acting out the logic of their beliefs, there can be no resolution: each claims to be the superior form of rationality, in fact, the only form of reason, since it looks at the other as unreason; but neither can maintain this claim or bring the other to acknowledge its own irrationality. Hence what Joe sees as a useful and good investment, his people see as foolish and meaningless; a problem he sees as purely personal, and in any case calling for patience, they see as public, and requiring urgent action. Appropriately, it is by way of a 'coup' (Kristeva) that the text achieves closure. Obieke's wife taunts Joe with impotency, Joe strikes her with his fist setting off a chain of events that leads to her death. Exile is resumed, and the resolution of the opposition of reason and unreason under the present format is deferred. But in *Bridge to a Wedding*, it is no longer an issue, whether a house is useful or meaningful; the question has been defused behind the scene over the conflict concerning the control of family lands first opened up in *The Only Son*. But the recurrence of sequences based on the same opposed universals is only one aspect of the repetitions that we find in the three works.

*The Only Son*, *Obi*, and *Bridge to a Wedding* form one connected story, despite the fact that each one constitutes a unified and self-contained narrative. Among the connecting features are the incidents, which make up a chain linked together in temporal succession, with the result that the three works may be related among themselves in terms of a beginning, a middle, and an end. As well as this is continuity at the level of the subjectivities - the principal characters whose histories intersect, diverge, and then reconverge, and the domain of the action - the

home the exiles abandon, and to which they return at the end. I shall be paying greater attention however, to the formal aspects of these interconnections, for we do see, for example, where character is concerned, that not only are we dealing with the same individuals, having identical names, characterizing features, and basic preoccupations, but also with individuals who are functionally equivalent, even where they have different names, and appear in different sequences or portions of the story (see my *Verbal Structures* (1997: 25-29) for a full discussion of this functional principle).

Nnanna and Obieke are the two characters who continue throughout the three texts, the first mobile, moving from Umudioba to Nade and Ossa, back to Umudioba, off again to Sankia, before returning finally to Umudioba - renamed Mudi in *Bridge*. His name also changes from Nnanna in *The Only Son* to Joe in *Obi*, and Kafo, a slight contraction of his surname Okafo, in *Bridge*. But Obieke is the stable centre whose place is fixed in Umudioba and in tradition. Joe encounters different adventures, and changes over time; but Obieke is the same as ever. As protagonist, however, Joe is the character around whom all the others are grouped; and all these subjectivities are characters as well as functions. Hence Chiaku/Anna reflect the functioning of the caring female, who is mother or wife, the first dominating in *The Only Son* and a substantial portion of *Obi*, until eclipsed by the second in this work. Complementing this female principle is the figure of the protective father who nevertheless won't hesitate to launch the son into the place of danger to prove himself - Oji and Father Smith, in *The Only Son* and Ebeneto in *Bridge*. In confrontation with the character is an antagonist who is conceptualized as evil - a type of ogre; and between them a synthesis is unthinkable. The opposition is truly binary: the being of the one simply excludes the being of the other. In *The Only Son*, Amanze is the ogre; in *Obi*, it is Akueze, and in *Bridge*, it is Angus Manns. In the last text, however, the character's terrors



have largely crystallized in the form of the past, and we have, apart from the caring female and the protective father, the faithful friend, Orazu, the functional equivalent of young Ibe in *The Only Son*, and a still youthful Obieke in *Obi*. When Joe is out of the scene, as in the Mudi section of *Bridge*, Obieke takes his place as the central consciousness, and with him, as faithful friend, Edogu, who is several times misidentified as Orazu (p. 117).

Just as the characters may be seen as re-presentations of participants already encountered, the story itself develops as a series elaborating and varying the same basic micro-narrative sequence of reaction and recoil, which functions as a kind of 'textual generator.' But this differs from Riffaterre's account of textual generators (1979), in that Munonye's minimal structure is produced in the narrative as an analysable element and therefore functions not as the 'deep structure' from which the whole derives, but as an *exemplum* that each of the following installments looks back to. Typically, an *exemplum* is organised as the exposition of a procedure (Beaujour, 1980: 336) that will be reconstituted under different formats throughout the narrative or in subsequent works. This minimal narrative we see early in *The Only Son* where, in reaction to cruelty from his uncle Amanze and his wives, the protagonist confronts this family group with his bow and arrow, and hits one of the wives in the calf. As a result he has to flee to safety with his mother. The home is foresaken, and the character is an exile, though he finds the strange place congenial. This in itself is a temptation to stop him seeking to reclaim the lost home. Hence the work is organised as an epic journey to regain the ancestral home, and the focus is not so much on the hero or on whether or not he succeeds in the implied quest, but on the various moves that lead to his achieving the goal. This goal, however, is not achieved in *The Only Son*. What we see rather is that the demands that his adopted home puts on him have begun to assume the aspect of a constraining enclosure against a free spirit, whereas the church

Onuora Nzekwu's *Wand of Noble Wood*, where we can make out three distinct spheres, the world of the ancestors, the world of men of flesh and blood, and the world of the unborn, the last being a form of the future, waiting to be made present. Must we conclude therefore that in Munonye we are looking at a traditional society quite different in kind from Nzekwu's, or that at least one of them is wrong, and try to demonstrate this by reference to the 'outside facts?' These are the paths to which we are led by the elder critics, like Larson (1971: 121) and Okonkwo (1979: 86), who assert rather lightly that Munonye's writing is largely of anthropological interest. A different approach, which is what I am attempting here, is to treat the material in Heidegger's terms (1949) of what the work retains in becoming art. This is an approach that does not assume that even philosophical and moral issues that occur in a work of fiction are necessarily thematic, but that they may be open to, and should first of all be examined in a purely functional analysis, questioning them on the conditions and logic of their appearance in the narrative. This is particularly appropriate in a work like Munonye's trilogy, where the very characters themselves may be more functional than substantive.

Thus we must relate the economy of reincarnation in the trilogy to founding oppositions, whereby the preservation of community, the part of reason, is premised on its self-identity, its continuity with the past. That this unity is threatened by the exile of one of the members is implied in *Bridge to a Wedding*, where Joe's absence has opened the way for Samson to encroach on the property of the Okolis. Before our very eyes the house of Okoli is shrinking up and dying, and the consequences are grave: the Udemezues are deep in crisis and, as a result, there is a great cleavage in the Umudioba town community itself, which defies every attempt to heal it. Before this, in *Obi*, the healing of the rift within the family which had been engineered by Obieke has ended in failure, as exile is renewed. In this text, however,

another kind of absence is the issue, namely, Joe's failure to bring forth offspring. All the members of the extended family are deeply concerned over this, and the ancestors too, we learn. All the while that Joe is childless, Amanze had 'refused to be reincarnated; he was waiting to return as Joe's child' (94). Having waited in vain, he finally reincarnates outside the house of the Okolis, though still within the extended family.

But reincarnation could also be seen as a model of interpretation. As a figure of the narrative process itself, it brings to mind a text bending back upon itself (Foucault, 1970: 300) in endless self-repetition; as such the regaining of the lost home could be deferred indefinitely. Repetition works in Munonye not so much as a reassurance that we are in the old and familiar ground, but as a supplement (Derrida) which puts off indefinitely the repossession of that familiar ground.

The trilogy is highly cohesive as a story; the one striking variance in detail is as regards the circumstances that have led to the flight of the protagonist from Umudioba. The actual event as we see it taking place in *The Only Son*, and as accurately remembered in *Obi* involves Nnanna shooting an arrow into the leg of Obidia Amanze's wife. In *Bridge to a Wedding*, however, it is Amanze himself who is pierced with the arrow (217). Is this a simple error on the part of the narrator, or is he reporting Joe's consciousness forty years on, after the event has become rearranged in his memory? Joe has sufficient depth in the trilogy for his memory of events to be subject to rearrangings and reinterpretation. For instance, his memory of his second flight from Umudioba has become in *Bridge* associated with guilt (p. 28). But this had not been the case when the incident itself happened. At this time, what is uppermost in the character's mind is that it is demanded by tradition that he should go away. And it seems that this cultural requirement is purely commonsensical:

*It was custom that demanded it, but it was also a matter of common sense. For how could he stay in the land to look at the cousin whose wife he had beaten to death? Obieke who had been very kind to him and extremely helpful! And with what eyes would he continue to see the children who he had now rendered motherless? 'You it was who killed our mother - nobody else did.' That was what they would be saying to him in their hearts. It was perhaps more matter of common sense than custom (Obi, 209).*

The mind here seeks to justify the ways of custom, perhaps as a construction based on experience. At the same time, however, it reflects a sensibility for the pain it must occasion the persons directly affected by this death. We do not yet have a consciousness of guilt, but the ingredients that would later yield it as a precipitate for a perceptive and lonely soul.

The condition of Joe's existence is retreat and isolation. We find him in *Bridge to a Wedding* having adjusted mentally to this mode of existence:

*he had long resolved to remain aloof, unknown if possible, in Sankia; [ ] he was a man in hiding: [ ] his pursuer was none other than fate itself, or the devil, since, being Christian, he must not believe in fate (28).*

It is inevitable in an exile sequence that the individual is passive: for exile is an experience, something that happens to one. It is not a form of *human action*, of which Barthes (1977: 107) distinguishes three 'major articulations,' namely, desire, communication, and struggle. In Munonye's trilogy, exile is precisely what frustrates these forms of *praxis* from taking their course. And this is where it differs from his *A Dancer of Fortune* and *Oil Man of Obange*. In the latter, for instance, exile is a moral condition, and results from the closure of a struggle over family lands which has led to the near extinction of one large

branch of an extended family. For the remnant, it simultaneously opens an equally deadly struggle for survival.

In the trilogy, the kinds of interpersonal conflict which promise to be full of tension and decision are usually evaded. For example, when Nnanna leaves the village to become a mission boy, the second outward journey that changes his life profoundly, he is moving off from a site where a struggle fails to take place. He and Chiaku going their separate ways turns out to be as if arranged for convenience: the mother has accepted a proposal to remarry, and he flatly refuses to consider staying alone in the house he previously shared with her. Similarly, the heavy blow to Akueze's head, and the success of Enine hospital in treating Anna's infertility abort what had been building up as struggle with the relatives over the succession of the *obi*, and this is to have been a symbolic struggle between Christianity and its value system and the cultural tradition. But the original of these evasions is the preempting of what would have been a vast, unequal struggle with Amanze by the arrow shot into the latter's wife's leg. As rearranged in *Bridge*, this incident burgeons with an oedipal potential, by Amanze becoming the victim. But this potentially productive line is not followed through.

What helps to hold reader attention despite the evasions, is the play of distortions as a result of which each outward journey seems an entirely new experience. Hence the first outward journey is a flight for safety, the second into the embrace of the Christian and modern culture, and the third is ostensibly to avoid a blood feud erupting. But the general direction of movement is from the constraints of an inward-looking traditional society outwards towards contact and affiliation to an expanding Western culture, until one can return again, having imbibed in good measure Christianity, education, and urbanism, a powerful and confident protagonist of a new world order, so to speak.

Joe is as much pursued by fate as driven by it. For the protagonist, exile works at several levels. In so far as the past has

become a source of embarrassment, certain crucial acts of the character having metamorphosed into symbolic acts with a fearful aspect, exile is a mode of expiation. But it is also a regime of training in self-mastery. First his early impulsiveness and brute energy transform when the young man is domiciled in Ossa into an enterprising spirit. Under the tutelage of the missionaries, this in turn would become repressed. The Joe we meet in the early pages of *Obi* is a smooth gentleman on the surface, but the sign of the undefeated brute underneath remains discernible in the vein that stands out on his forehead whenever he experiences serious provocation. This is the force that would break out with a fatal outcome when Akueze flings the epithet 'castrated bull' at him (189). He spends the ensuing period of exile trying to get the better of the brute. We see him succeed in *Bridge to a Wedding*, when he feels grossly insulted by his cousin Angus in the presence of Ebenetor and Orazu:

*Kofo stepped forward; bit his lip; stared dangerously, eyes inflamed.... His body began to shake again, as did his voice when he said: 'I've had more than enough from him.' He fought very hard indeed, within himself, countering an urge to advance and strike. There, in Angus right before him, was the devil, in the form of man, dangling before him an opportunity for violence. He must resist the temptation - must hold his lip between the jaws and fold his palms in a neutralizing effect. Violence was the thing which had sent him out into a nameless world (86).*

He seems to have achieved at last the equanimity needed for coping with Umudioba. It is this non-aggressive attitude to life that the narrator projects as valid, and it is a quality that Obieke has as natural gift. But his son Obiakizu is rather of a similar temperament as the earlier Joe: already he has served a term in prison because of it, and may need the influence of his father and Joe on either hand to help him arrive at the happy state of



restraint and self-control.

Exile, finally, is for Joe the space for the shaping of his destiny as the true son, rising from the condition of an outcast. Apart from the decision in *The Only Son* to become a Christian and to go into the service of the missionaries, the major events that affect the course of his life are either set up by him inadvertently, or they simply happen to him, having been set in motion by other people. This is a weakness notable in *Obi* and *Bridge*, and the result of the character thus becoming 'de-realized' is that he is almost absent from his own story. Part of the reason for the fulsome praise that *The Only Son* received at its first publication (Carter 1969) was really that the story was seen as convincing, and the character fully realized. This is certainly not the case in the later works.

As a child, Joe had been entrusted to Amanze by custom and circumstances, but Amanze had rejected this charge. His next home in Nade proves hardly adequate or permanent. For all this, his friends would prefer him to remain in the familiar environment, and take his chance with life. But as for venturing into the wider world, particularly in the tow of the missionaries, this to them is as good as getting lost. His first return to the old home is premature; even though he has made good for himself, his lack of offspring, as far as his people are concerned, quite nullifies all the achievements. In the renewed exile, he succeeds in this too, and moreover returns at a time when the *obi* is most in danger of closure, for the resident survivors Obieke and his son Obiakizu under pressure from members of another branch of the extended family are at the end of their tether. Now they are utterly impoverished, and without a livelihood. His return is a new lease of life to a tottering house.

Comparatively little has been written on Munonye's work. Although some critics have referred to the 'anthropological material', this is hardly acceptable as an explanation. After all the same critics often praise Achebe's early essays, where the

novelist is assigned the task of telling the people who they are, which boils down to telling what the *rules* of traditional society were. The last is a metaphor of A.D. Harvey's (1988: 69), which is extended here somewhat. But if the telling of these rules in Munonye is quite different from that in many another traditional novel, one possible response could be, so much the better; all the more reason for critical notice.

We have seen, however, that there is a great deal of impatience in our intellectual culture with literature reflecting on the past, indeed with all literature of a reflective mode. The demand is rather that literature should speak to contemporary society, and tell it what its rules ought to be. Of course, this kind of demand is not unique to the Nigerian situation; but the history of, say, English literature, suggests that in many cases, the survival of the work beyond the time of its publication is by declining to do as the reading public prescribes.

It would appear that there are basically two contrary movements in the Igbo 'traditional' novel, the path of affirmation as in Nzekwu and Amadi, and the path of suspicion, as in Nkem Nwankwo, Munonye, and Echewa. The weakness of the extreme position may be seen in contrasting Munonye's writing and that of Achebe, which seems to be ruled by irony. For example, the latter's heroes succeed despite that they have contrary attitudes towards life: Okonkwo and Obierika in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu and Akuebue in *Arrow of God*. The reason is that the narrator does not seek to manipulate and use them to make a point, to be the god in the machine.' In *Things Fall Apart*, aggressiveness is Okonkwo's attitude towards life, in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi has a non-aggressive attitude. Both experience a tragic reversal, each in his own individual way. In Munonye's trilogy, particularly in *Obi* and *Bridge to a Wedding*, one rarely senses the characters as individual subjectivities existing in their own right, nor do they seem to enter into a living interaction with the sequence of incidents in which they appear as participants. We do not have



the sense of a self-sufficient world, rather it is the sense that the characters and incidents are being used to argue a point. And yet the mode of reflection upon traditional society in these works deserves attention, lest the opposite view becomes dogma, and unalterable.

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## *The Trail of a Tyrant*

The sentence, instantly passed down:  
Death on the gallows.  
Optionable, however, through the barrels  
Can evil dispel evil? Improbable!  
Can a crook administer Justice  
He Never believed to exist?

Should honesty be conceded to  
Ourselves, these old structures  
Getting too monotonous in their  
Discourse and judicial precedents  
Need urgently to be pulled down.

Our country has been  
Made barren by a succession  
Of Zombian men who call  
Themselves reformists and revolutionaries  
Each calling for selfish ends.

Down each came, with a  
Different beat and style  
Blended with political flavour  
Toeing an indisparate line of  
Plunder, tyranny and injustice

The country is wailing  
Men are weeping like  
Babies whose mothers have  
Gone to the world beyond.  
Their courage has failed them.

Our women holding their  
Heaving breasts out of  
Grief for the scene has  
Become uninhabitable for them, for  
Prospects for posterity are bleak.

Arise! you men, muster your  
Failing strength; nudge aside these  
Obstacles and fight this leviathan  
Of wild-fire consuming our  
Forest, our sweat and pride.

### ***Lest We Should Forget***

We owe a Supreme duty to our creator  
A duty to our Nation,  
A duty to our People  
Mostly, a duty to Ourselves.

We've sold our conscience  
To some unwitty tyrant  
Who affects love and care  
For his swooning subjects.

Garbed in Arabian fabric  
Exuding a savoury aura  
Tending to spell proficiency  
In his uncrowned dispensations.

A new moon is about to rise  
A transformation, or a re-incarnation?  
Heralding new prospects for us  
Penury, gagged men and polarised hegemony.

We need a passionate ground  
Where we could decide our  
Not untrue stead and destiny  
And deploy ourselves to our belongings.

It is so high, a time  
We had to Silence this long  
Persistent, and unmelodious high tune  
From a repugnant, unpopular drum.

### ***A Voice of Change***

A huge solitary figure  
in a flowing robe, standing unfirmly.  
Silhouetted against the wall  
upon the raised podium.  
Dipping his swagger stick into the air  
in pulsative counts, and ...

'N... C... H' he drawled  
His puffy neck  
retaining the tempo  
in his voice box.  
Compliments to public tills  
scrambled by inflated costs.

'P-r-o-gress and s-e-r-vice'  
Came the erratic response  
From the unthinking crowd  
while gloating eyes rested  
a brief moment  
on the solitary figure.

On went the drawl, picking  
countless prospects for the  
irritated and inattentive crowd.  
'Same message, same rhythm'  
whispered a voice from the rear,  
'always the same solo,' he ended up.

As if he understood  
their train of thought  
the figure cleared his throat  
in mid-speech, rummaged  
in his brain-stock and  
picked up a new idea.  
He thought...  
"There should be a change; Yes a change."

It was a sham, though  
it was not, in dialogue  
The drawl became pitch-high  
and he went on punctuatedly

"... in this fresh political dispensation,  
it has occurred to us  
to drive the golden ball round in order  
to reach out to the conglomerate units."

\*The charade wittingly slipped,  
stealthily past the sharp minds.  
It registered not, for all faces  
now were drawn towards  
the charivari of clinking glasses;  
sizzling and spurting bottles.  
A spectacular wild goose chase.

### *The Conquest*

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Our ears have been clogged  
Our eyes popped out in  
Apprehension of an unjust calamity.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Our lips are set in dismay  
Fists clenching and unclenching  
In a rhythmic mechanism.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Our hearts are throbbing



Making some frantic efforts  
To behold the beauty of Earth.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Our nerves are failing us.  
Goose-flesh has masked  
Our skin beyond recognition.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Who says it is an enigma.  
We are the cradle  
Of civilisation on Earth.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Is Egypt not in the African continent?  
Is she not a child of Africa?

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Our belief is really some fact::  
Greece was the cradle  
of Western civilisation.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Greece got its wisdom and  
Culture from mother Africa.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Our natural endowments had

Been stolen by fastidious  
And disguised adventurers.  
Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
In their face was something  
Much like honesty  
Coupled with genuine love  
But deep in their hearts  
Was the dreaded nest of  
Lucifer our life adversary.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
They are the child who  
When held aloft by the father  
Punctures his eyes and  
Proceeds to fatten himself  
On the father's inherited  
Treasure such an act's  
Attributable to Esau and Jacob.

Let their claims be weighed  
On the platter of a scale.  
Be it they claimed ranking  
The bravest warriors in the premises  
Of all endeavours at war  
We, indisputably, are the cradle of  
Cradles, despite their too sounding;  
Too affected, disaster-portending  
Prowess in currency.

**CHINYERE NNEKA MBULO*****Is This Guilt I Feel***

For the past two weeks, it has been my uneasy fortune to lie trapped in an orthopaedic hospital. Boring and stifling as this may seem, I am not complaining. I am in fact grateful that the gift of life which was abruptly denied to another in the car with us was renewed to me after the accident. I am even more grateful that Patrick (also in the car) after breaking his shoulder bones, leg bones and ribs, has determinedly hung on to his cheery disposition. In the face of his stoic humour, I don't dare complain about a mere pelvic fracture. It seems somewhat silly to go on about such an inconsequential burden when others are weighed down by tons of pain. Apart from that guilt of having come off too lightly, I am making the most I can out of this horrid hospital experience.

By this I do not mean that I gobble all the hospital food (which is surprisingly good) or that I gleefully squeeze my sympathy ration out of all my sympathetic visitors. I do not even mean that I give in to this desperate urge to be rude to some obnoxious nurses. Or that I do not resist the urge to snap at some impatient doctor who expects me to walk like a model even though my right leg (from hip bone to toe) hurts like hell.

All I do is sit back and absorb it all, and carefully tuck it all away in the overflowing compartment where I have always stored my life experiences. That box is my life encyclopedia, for I know that at some time I shall find need to compare this pain to other pains. I know I shall find cause to use this pain as a cathartic

when I am hurt again.

It is for this reason that I resort to poetry when I am in pain; or grit and accept when a nurse from whom I expect soothing sympathy offers scorching impatience. It is also for this that I grin toothlessly when a doctor scowls down at my bed-ridden form and pompously informs me that I am not doing as well as I should.

This is not saying that everybody is a grouchy beast. There has also been some good. I have (also) experienced a sort of telepathic camaraderie among patients as they recognise each other's pain. I have made friends so unlikely and different from those with whom I had associated that I can only put it all down to the sad peculiarity of the hospital occasion.

Also I have confirmed the love and caring of those whose love I was never really sure of. Their steady care and attention has shown me that I am indeed more loved than I ever realized.

Most of all, I have had immeasurable timeless time to think. And think I have. Through all this introspection, I have almost a clear picture of what I am. Even though, once or twice, I have been surprised by what I see.

Through it all, I still feel need to give thanks for such huge mercies that put me here.

### ***Of Women, Marriage and Cars?***

Before I start this, I must insist that I have absolutely no feminist leanings. I also insist that I am no man-hater (even though I must admit that I have had cause to be). I am simply an enlightened little woman, disgusted at the double-faced nature of many of our menfolk.

This, I-must-eat-my-cake-and-have-it attitude of theirs.

Time and time again I have racked my over-worked brain for answers. Everything I see and think leads to just one conclusion - that our men simply want to have it all. And even after having it, they would prefer to regurgitate and have it again.

Why else would I have been subjected to this irritating episode yesterday.

Our family-friend, in his late fifties, came to see me in the orthopaedic hospital where I was recovering from a pelvic fracture I 'incurred' in a road accident. Having dispensed with the usual hospital mumbling (How are you? Thank God you are still alive? I hope you will be discharged soon, etc, etc), he plunged into the main reason for his visit. This was a shocker since I had naively thought he had come to offer sympathy and nothing more. I must say this for him, he did not lay on the heavy stuff immediately, he preferred to dish out his mission in small dart-like doses.

"Chinyere, I hope you are not going to be choosey-choosey like your mother," he started, 'Eh?' I muttered.

"Your mother rejected so many suitors, we gave up on ever seeing her married," he continued. I waited for him to say more. Obviously I had just heard the introductory part of the lecture I was about to get.

"I hear there are many eligible bachelors who want to marry you and you have rejected them all."

"Who told you?" I managed to growl through clenched teeth.

"Everybody," he said airily. "I really think you should consider one of them. I am sure you know that, after a while men will simply stop asking to marry you."

"Thank you," I said, shortly.

He ignored my glare and continued as if I would not dare to interrupt. "Then to compound your problem you have a car... That is the worst thing you could have done. It will simply scare men away... If you still wish to get married, I think you should

sell that car..."

He went on and on. But I was too stunned and speechless after his last sentence.

As libran, I was struck by the injustice and bare-faced hypocrisy he was suggesting. I just had to cut him short. I am glad to say that I did not mince words in my reply.

I first pointed out that I had no intention of moulding myself into a simpering, timid female form to suit some husband to be - somewhere who would probably turn out to be a son-of-a-bitch. I reminded him that it was no fault of mine that Nigerian bachelors are so cowardly and unsure of themselves that they run scared when they see a single female with some achievement. I practically bit out that any man who would not marry me because I have a car (probably because he thinks some foggy sixty-year old sugar daddy bought it) is not worthy to lick my smelly feet. I concluded by saying that I had no intention of returning or selling the car. But I did make a concession - to drive it as little as possible or maybe even leave it in a garage, until there was someone, perhaps, who saw eye-to-eye with me on the subject. I wasn't going to sell it, however.

After much humphing and grunting, he left me to think about it.

I watched him leave in angry amazement. Was there really any limit to how far a girl should go to look or seem marriageable? Must we all be teachers, nurses or catering officers who stand under the hot sun for hours unending for a chance to squeeze into an overloaded taxi? Is it really fair for men to expect this horrific concoction of the rural/modern female who works for her living, makes some money but must remain seen and not heard?

I do realise that this is a man's world, but I am also aware that nature is dynamic. This means that since modern times have produced hardworking career women, it must produce unmarried girls who have well furnished houses and cars if possible. I do

wish our men were made of sterner stuff. They would have realised this too. More's the pity.



**UNOMA AZUAH*****An Interview With Fred D'Aguiar,  
A Guyanese Writer***

**Q:** You have travelled widely and considering your mixed racial background, how do you take care of these diversities in your works?

**Ans:** People travel and people belong to several places in their hearts and in their heads and when you stay in one place it's hard to be exposed to other influences. I travel because of my heritage African and European. I feel obliged to pay very close attention to both roots in terms of my work as a writer and as a teacher. Apart from Guyana where I grew up with my grand parents, I studied in England and now teaching in the United States. My visit to Nigeria, being my first to this continent, to me is very emotional. It is an emotional reconnection for me, in spite of the situation, the political situation.

Do you think that the writer has some role in society considering the fact that writers like Ken Saro Wiwa died for society. Must the artist be so committed?

**Ans:** Writing is a very lonely business, and there is no guarantee that you will be successful or even communicate. What we do is a social act even if it is solitary. It is a social act because we use language and



language is a social medium. Contemplation itself is a social notion because it involves drama and narrative. Organising language in a particular way, stringing together sentences and taking part in a discourse is all about community. Writers involuntarily find themselves being political just because of what they do and that is usually made worse or better depending on their point of view especially when they actually go out and take up an issue which is important to society. In Guyana, we had a poet called Martin Carter who was locked up by the British during the fight for independence. He wrote some poems called *University of Hunger*. He found himself writing poetry as a thinker and that coincided with the independence movement. He was political even though he did not try to be. He just was because of the historical moment he found himself in. History often has a way of creeping up to an individual and catching him by surprise. In the case of contemporary Nigerian politics, as an outsider I am new to the situation; I do not want to pass a premature judgement, but looking at Nigeria from abroad, we would wish that it should be democratic. The military should go back to the barracks to serve a democratic government and protect the nation. We want writers not to be people you hang but people you have conversation with. Writers have been persecuted throughout history and that will continue. Sometimes they get persecuted not only for what they write; sometimes they happen to be doing something else and they are locked up for their activity. We certainly do not want them dead; if Ken Saro Wiwa were alive today and given a life sentence, there would be a lot of noise but at least he would not be dead, his body

would be protected. To break his body, to eliminate him, implies the end of dialogue, the end of the possibility of dialogue. That makes people very angry, very upset with the regime. They see the regime as dehumanised, baseless, savage. I do not think that a regime wants to be like that. I think a regime wants to rule with an eye on their face. I think that by hanging Saro Wiwa they over-reacted. I think it was a severe thing to do, unfair and irreversible and therefore bound to be condemned. It is not a battle, it is not a war, it is not a front line. I think to contain him would have been a supreme act of control by the government.

Q: What do you love about writing?

Ans: I love the independence of the writer. I love the fact that I have not got a boss. I love the fact that I treat my politics myself. I love the individuality of it. I love the fact that it is a supreme business of being alive.

Q: What do you think is peculiar about African literature compared to Western literature?

Ans: There is an African aesthetics as well as a European aesthetics. I think the European aesthetics came out of the philosophical tradition of an individual listening to his own voice in isolation, whereas African aesthetics appears to be in communication with another who is physically there. Something of Africa survived in the countryside setting. Part of that is oral tradition. A story telling tradition. A tradition of preserving the past in a series of narratives to hand it on to the next generation through fable, metaphor, anecdote like the

Ananse tales from Ghana.

Q: How would you react to the notion that Europe hijacked Africa, even the literature?

Ans: Europe hijacking something called Africa is a corrosive and corrupting issue. I do not think we should raise it just to sow division. What we should say is after five hundred years of thinking about Europe in Europe and outside of Europe, what are the good effects. I think Africans are doing what I call creative interaction with Europe. You might say at the expense of something indigenous but I think something in there survives. So whatever you call the hijacking of African culture is dangerous. We have had the history of Europe exploiting Africa, but Africa is still around. We have had the trans-Saharan exploitation of Africa from the Muslim side. They came, took things and left Islam. It has been thousands of years but Africa is still around. Africa will still be here after we are gone. It is going to be under attack because cultures always attack each other, hug each other, kiss each other and fight each other. That is the nature of culture interaction or culture discourse. It is not death for any culture. It cannot kill a continent. You cannot kill will. You can kill individuals. You can do ethnic things. You can do language things but you cannot kill a culture that is informed by a continent. It is a big drift, a huge place. There are going to be transformations and even the transformations happening now are not guaranteed to survive. America right now is an imperial nation. Britain was, a hundred years ago, it died. It passed; before then were the Dutch; before then were the French.

Napoleon did not stay around for ever. Culture is going to be on the ascendancy. Cultures could be at the hill and would have to descend. African culture could be any where in the globe. Look at white guys singing and playing drums. The best musicians are using and relying on African rhythms to reinvigorate their forms, not because they are stealing but because they know that oral tradition wherever they exist in antiquity is protected. Africa has the wonderful ability to have both development and undevelopment untouched. It has something that is primitive in the best sense of that word - by which I mean, an art form that is untainted. It is possible to find pockets of orality. It has not been messed up. Rap is very strong for good reasons not because rap comes from the West but because oral tradition of black culture survived and has found a new shape and form in rap. The question again should not be division. It should be, how can I benefit from this transformation? How can I survive this transformation? Culture is like tentacles reaching out to the future. It does not have a fence. To try and protect culture from what might be considered foreign is a wrong move. I think it is better to examine what is coming in and feel a self assurance of what you already have and what you have to defend.

Q: What is the state of literary creativity in Guyana, and what are the influences?

Ans: Guyana has a number of poets and writers: Wilson Harris, Martin Carter, Grace Nicoles, John Egad, David Dabidin, etc. It is a small country made up of Africans, Indians, Chinese with firm creativity. What

caused that was British colonial rule which was gentle for a while but carried on for far too long. They overstayed their welcome; that sparked off a huge amount of radicalism against them. Trade union activities, artistic creation. Poetry was seen as a force people identified with, not necessarily literary people.

Q: How has your African heritage influenced your works?

Ans: I started writing my very first poem about my grandmother who is of African descent. It is called Solomon Grandi, ten lines -

Solomon Grandi, born on Sunday in the kingdom  
of Ashante  
Sold on Monday into slavery  
Ran away on a Tuesday  
'Cause she born free  
Lost her foot on a Wednesday  
When they catch she  
Worked till Thursday  
Till her hair grey  
Dropped on a Friday where they born she  
Freed on Saturday in new century.

In the seven days of a week there is an arc and a movement from slavery to liberation. The last was freedom in a new century which is about creation and freedom. It is the history of the Caribbean told to my grand mother in my early twenties. Since then I have written three novels, turning to Africa as our place. Bob Marley's *Exodus* is not necessarily a physical exodus but an articulation of the need to know our history, looking within. It is more of a spiritual quest, to examine our root and reacquaint

ourselves, reconnect ourselves. Like the blacks in Guyana who found themselves on a small island of sugarcane plantations and were told they were bad and small, they had to find where they came from and why they were being called that. I share a black contribution of that tradition which cannot be taken away. Rap and Jazz, the most original thing to be born of the century, is of the black tradition of classical music. Even the plantation rhythm - when everything was bad and they had to keep alive, they found ways of working in the rhythms of chopping canes. In that kind of blue they had to make their bodies express their moods and situation or shrink and die. That art came out of a situation of threat. I do not see Africa as a primitive place but as a vital place.

Q: What is *Feeding the Ghosts* your latest novel about?

Ans: *Feeding the Ghosts* is about slavery. It is about a real incident that happened, apparently a ship left, heading for the West Indies, Barbados. They got lost and had to retrace their part. In the course of that, they threw a hundred and thirty two live slaves overboard and claimed their insurance. I made one of the slaves survive. People have written about the middle passage a lot but I wanted to try my own point of view, to try an experience of the past.

Q: What are you working on at the moment?

Ans: A collection of poems that tell the story of the mass suicide caused by Reverend Jones a Guyanese years ago. One person survives to tell the tale.

Q: What do you want to be remembered for as a writer?

Ans: That he lived, that he faced certain critical issues, that

he believed in certain rights, human rights. People come first, feeling first. The intellect is worth protecting. Individualism is not negotiable. The arts are ways of seeing into the future and understanding the past. Writing is life.



### Notes on Contributors

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