Okike

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Kofi Awoonor Arrested

Readers of OKIKE will be distressed to learn that Kofi Awoonor, our Contributing Editor, was arrested at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, on December 31 and has been held in detention since then. The Ghanaian authorities have not given any reason so far for his arrest and detention nor allowed his family or friends to contact him.

It is sadly ironic that Kofi Awoonor whose outstanding talent and achievement have given Ghana a place of high honour in contemporary African writing should so soon after his return to that country suffer imprisonment without charge or trial.

We of this journal, which Kofi has regularly graced with his writing, do appeal to the authorities in Ghana to restore his liberty to this fine poet, novelist and literary scholar.

February 16, 1976 Chinua Achebe

Nkem Nwankwo

THE SCAPEGOAT

"No, thank you very much," the voice, harsh and depressed, rasped through the cheap recorder, "I am no prophet. No."

"Waitin be that one?" somebody asked.

"The man just de craze" another volunteered.

The proud owner of the cheap recorder fiddled with some buttons to improve the quality of reception but only extinguished it altogether. The curious audience who were seated around a rough table laden with corked bottles of beer, jostled for places near the recorder. Urgent voices berated the owner.

"Abi you no fit play your own recorder?"

"Which kin man ne this?"

"The man na only journalist. They no sabe do anything."

"Give chance!"

"Commot for that place, you hear."

In the commotion, a few bottles of beer were overturned sending the rancid smell of beer to mix with the dead fish odour of the surrounding air. At the same time, cries of anguish announced the ruin of some favorite, shiny party dresses.

The owner of the recorder, wounded by the remarks, had snatched his possession and was angrily slouching away with it when he was halted by a shrill voice.

"Whosai ee de go?" A huge coal black hunchback was standing at the head of the table.

"Since you people no want to hear . . ."

"Shut up!" said the hunchback. "Bring that ting here make I hear."

"Yessir," said the journalist slouching back.

"Shut up!" said the hunchback for the benefit of the crowd, slashing the air with his fingers and finally bringing his right fist to the table toppling more bottles.

The crowd looked at him with great respect for he paid for all the beer.

"Give us more beer!" shrieked the hunchback adding an inaudible curse. A boy ran to him with obsequiously extended hands.

The hunchback dipped his hands roughly into the pockets of his white robes, came up empty and cursed violently. "Get

us the—you with the mouth of a pig," he gestured in the direction of the boy.

The boy stood stiffly obsequious but adamant. Young though he was, he had a vast experience of these big spenders and of their strategies of bluff when they were spent.

The hunchback searched frantically in the caverns of his billowing robes and still came up with nothing. None of the other drinkers offered to help, instead there was an unusually loud chatter as if to drown the embarrassment of the moment.

"Wey madam, you son of a —?"

"I de here," said madam who apparently had been keenly interested from a distance. A huge mass of flesh lumbered from a strategic corner of the pub and stood before the hunchback.

"Oga, wetin?" she asked deferentially.

"That thing with the —" the hunchback made a threatening lunge at the boy who retreated in mock fear and goodnaturedly humoured the hunchback from the safety of distance.

"But, oga, we no sell for credit," said madam in as wheedling a tone as she could manage.

"Who want credit?" shrilled the hunchback dipping futilely into the robes again. Finally, it occurred to him to try his trousers and this time his hands came up clutching a few sodden notes which he tossed to the madam. She handed the notes to the boy with a wink of approval, and then instead of returning to her place placidly settled among the drinkers.

The pub which was variously known as Hilton Palace or Paradise was a sprawling shed made of wood and rusted aluminum. The drinkers had laid small rough tables end to end to make a party table, which dominated the long rectangular eating room. It was a busy morning; other customers came and went leaving half-eaten food and wet tables around which flies clustered.

The rest of the building was cut into little cages. In one, a dumb and deaf waiter guarded a huge refrigerator and from it reluctantly dispensed beer. In the next, a blowsy woman ladled out bowls of garri mixed with palm-oil stew.

There were other poky rooms, rented by the hour. Men constantly led sour-looking women into these. They would emerge, a few minutes later, with expressions of sheepish discontent.

The pub had a flaky, temporary look, like a squatters' shack which really was what it was for city government had banned construction on the beaches for fear of floods which had perennially been rumoured to be impending. To continue to operate, the owner constantly bought off city raiders with free beer, garri, and sex. In spite of everything, she had done very well. She had even managed to fence in her property with wooden boards painted in green, festive colours, never mind that small boys and hooligans found these walls ready ground for indecent graffiti (Madam toto na so so water! etc). To clinch her prosperity, she had gone fat. Before she started operating the Hilton Paradise, she had been cuddly. But two years after, she was more than ample: a fact for which many complimented her to her deep gratification.

The boy laid a tray of bottles in front of the hunchback and humorously ducked an unseen blow but the hunchback chose to ignore the gesture.

Scanning the appreciative faces turned to him, he pointed at one.

"Mr. Journalist."

The journalist left his place and came and stood deferentially by the hunchback.

"Mr. Journalist. Mr. Editor," said the hunchback contemptuously—

"Oga, I no be editor yet," smiled the journalist.

"You will. Mr. Editor-to-be, serve us the beer."

"Yes, sah!"

He began happily to fit a can opener to a bottle but stopped abruptly. His young, sweaty face lighted up with wonder. He shrieked:

"The lawyer!"

The cry was taken up by the hangers-on: "The lawyer! Mr. Lawyer!"

One of the gates leading out the compound had cranked open and a squat young man with a severely cicatriced face burst through it.

Deftly keeping a proper distance between himself and his admirers, the man walked up to the hunchback and greeted him:

"S.A.S.!" he roared.

"Hello, Mr. Lawyer," said the hunchback accepting his part in the ritual.

"Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs." The Lawyer followed each pronouncement with sharp bows. "M. A. Oxon! You write it . . . Your pen write it they no dash you, M. A. Oxon."

There was loud applause which the lawyer hushed with an impatient gesture; he was not half done yet.

"P. P. E. Oxon," he recited. The hunchback calmly accepted the homage.

"Politics, Philosophy, Economics, Oxford University. S. A. S. Ministry of Foreign Affairs . . . Father! Bug that eats up books!" The Lawyer's performance went over biggest with him for by the time he concluded his piece, he had worked himself into a paroxysm of enjoyment.

The hunchback took it all with smug assurance and when the lawyer had concluded his recital grandly motioned him to sit. The Lawyer was elaborately preparing a place to sit when he noticed the journalist as if for the first time.

"Hey, you there, Jr. Journalist." He dragged the youth out of hearing. "Wey the money?" he whispered severely.

"I never been to office yet."

"Waitin you de do here?"

"Oga, S.A.S. de give us beer!"

"That's the only thing you journalists know about. Drink and women. Which time your people fit pay?"

"When I get to the office. This na big story. They go pay well, well. Plenty money."

"Sh!" the lawyer looked round guiltily to see if anyone had heard the awful word "money." Reassured, he changed back to an expression of severity.

"Your editor is a crook."

"Hai, oga Lawyer, how can you say that?"

"He is. Pure crook. If you people no pay me you will never receive another story from me again."

"We go pay."

"Where is the tape?"

"The tape—"

The lawyer stared in a way to suggest he had committed murder before and might do it again.

"I kept it at home," the journalist lied.

"But your people will pay?"

"They go pay."

The lawyer hissed sceptically. "Your editor is a crook."

He turned and with new-found sense of importance swaggered back to the table.

The journalist walked back in a subdued manner that suggested he was conscious of the honour done him in being picked from the rest of the drinkers to consult with the lawyer. He searched and found a pair of sunglasses and put it on. Afterwards whenever he spoke he touched the glasses.

The hunchback, still holding court, welcomed the journalist with an explosive shout.

"Mr. Editor!" He made it sound like an oath. "Whereishdatape?"

The journalist shrunk into himself, darting guilty glances at the Lawyer.

"Play!" The hunchback banged a pudgy fist on the table causing a few of his guests to jump about in mock fear.

"But Oga"—began the journalist.

"We understand," said the hunchback in a tone he used when confounding a junior colleague at the Ministry. "The counsel for the Defense is here. With your permission, Mr. Lawyer."

The Lawyer hastily jumped up as if he had been accused. "I did my best," he stuttered. "It was a hopeless case from the start. I could have won it. But that man was crazy. I told him that in our country it is not what you know but who you know that matters. I told him to stoop to conquer. To lie down and beg for his life but he said no. He said he was innocent. Innocent! Who in this country is innocent? I warned him. It was not my fault."

"Yes, we understand," said the hunchback tolerantly. "Now we want to hear the tape—" "That's right," said the lawyer. "You hear what oga say. Play! Make we hear the man. After all in less than one hour the man go die!"

The Lawyer's eyes gleamed at the journalist with private menace but the journalist, not noticing, started the tape recorder going again.

What now emerged was some gibberish in many languages: *Confiteor deo omnipotenti . . . mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa . . .*

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen bluhn

Im dunkeln Laub die Gold—Orangen gluhn

Steson, you who were with me in the ships at Mylae. I grow old.

Rhodope, where the mountains had ears to rapture. Confiteor. Mea culpa mea maxima culpa. I am not the lamb of god. I will not carry other men's sins . . . I did not make history . . . I did not make the Manichean world of black and white. I did not create the world. I will not carry your sins. *Confiteor . . . confiteor. Mea culpa, confiteor . . . Mariae semper virgini . . . mea culpa . . . mea maxima culpa . . .* I did not make history. Carry your own guilt of blood . . . I am no prophet . . . Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa! Mea culpa.

There was general puzzlement and unease among drinkers; some who had a low tolerance level even hissed in discomfort. The hunchback's interjection "straight out of the Oxford Tripos" only added to the general frustration. It was the lawyer who finally provided a clue that broke the mystery. With a self congratulatory laugh he said "The man de pray before the Garden of Gethsemane."

'Prayer' and 'Gethsemane' rang bells to people who were brought up on the traditions of Holy Week, of the Way of the Cross and Palm Sunday. . . . Now they understood what the voice from the tape was about. When next he uttered that cry of despair they responded in unison:

"Amio!"

"Mea culpa."

"Amio!"

"Mea maxima culpa. I am no lamb of god who takest away the sins of the world."

"Amio!"

"Confiteor deo—God almighty."

"Amio!"

"Omnipotenti Almighty."

Ami! Ami!

"I am not the lamb of god . . . I did not make history. I will not take on the sins of the world . . . I will not take the burden of the black man. Your blood be on your own head. Carry your trouble commot. Your bloody deeds, pogroms, fratricide, your treachery and cowardice . . . I will not answer for the guilt of blood. You cannot lay the burden of history on me . . . History is bunk . . . The burden of your sins, of your death wish, of your blood lust. Carry the burden of your own guilt . . . Eat the flesh of your children and carry the burden of cannibalism."

"A . . . ami!"

"I am no Thracian Bard in Rhodope."

"Amio—"

"Mea culpa: Confiteor. Mea culpa . . Eloi, Eloi! mea culpa."

The ritual was unexpectedly interrupted by the hunchback. A word from the tape had triggered a recollection of the modest intellectual harvests he had made from Oxford. His sensibility, blunted by years of disuse and drink, was ignited for a moment. He took from the voice a line from Milton and completed the quotation.

> But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
> Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
> Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard.
> In Rhodope, where the woods and rocks had ears
> To rapture, till the savage clamour drownd . . .
> Both harp and voice,—

The drinkers responded to the unexpected performance with a show of uneasy deference. But one slight, young girl did not care very much for it. She had fallen wholeheartedly into the spirit of the "amio" responses. It was fun, certainly more fun than sitting down solemnly and paying attention to boors. She was irritated by the hunchback's interruption and as is her wont whenever she was irritated she rounded at once on the irritant.

"I beg una wettin de do this oga?" The impact of her act was not so much in what she said as in her manner of saying it. It was as if she held the hunchback to account for a long series of exasperations. Her patience had finally snapped and given over to hatred and contempt.

The hunchback stopped short, staring at the girl with a mixture of shock and incredulity. He had no conceivable response to the girl's onslaught than dumb incomprehension.

The other drinkers reacted to the unmasking of their patron by seeking solicitously to cover his shattered image. The journalist hastily stopped the tape. The lawyer, deep in beer, called out: "Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

The hunchback shrugged away this patent ploy. Perhaps the lawyer wanted more beer. The hunchback was determined not to give him any.

Madam tried also. Dramatically widening her large eyes to register shock, she darted a venomous look at the girl: "You better leave my house, you hear."

"Who want your house. You think say I no get home to go

to." The girl was a little overwhelmed at breaking up the party. But openly she maintained an attitude of scornful defiance. Madam did not really wish to tangle with her. The girl was full of viciousness. But many of Madam's customers fancied her hard adolescent body and Madam was not about to forgo the advantage. "No mine this ashawo," she said turning the full battery of her faded charms on the hunchback.

As if I needed comforting, thought the hunchback, bitterly. And if I did, would I go to such as she. The stupid bitch.

"You will always be my husband," Madame continued in her most wheedling tone. "My own husband. Owner of my vagina—"

The hunchback mentally brushed aside this offensive accusation. He was oppressed by a vague sense of self-contempt. What was he doing reading poetry to these rag-tag. In this seedy shack. And he one of the rulers of the land. No wonder the girl didn't honour him. The hunchback could not take his eyes and mind away from the slip of a girl with her fully developed bosom and large bottom. That kind of bottom he knew from experience went with a bushy mound. He momentarily fantasied the experience of pushing through the bush. Even her vulgarity and emptiness appealed to some gutter instinct in him. Only by fucking her would he have peace. The hunchback began to focus on a number of stratagems. Before he could evolve something, his party suddenly broke up. There was a sound of a gun going off outside and the drinkers with cries of "they don come," stampeded out the gate.

The whole city, it appeared, had come to what became known afterwards as the "beach show"; the public execution of some reputedly dangerous felons. The crowds swarmed around the few trees that offered refuge from the tiny heat sparks that appeared to be falling from the stark sky. Others stood out, squirming, along the vast expanse of sand and dunes. All eyes were focused—though few really saw the exact details—on the preparation for the ceremony. Four stakes had been set up close to the shoreline. They formed suitably awe-inspiring symbols set against the endless sea, the sea that was such an apt repository for the souls and bodies of those who were to die. As if to complete the solemn cast, two priests, one Christian and the other Moslem, stood in self-conscious piety close by. Ministers of lesser deities, too, the well-known

beach prophets in their off-white robes and ascetic weather-beaten expressions were allowed to wander up and down in the arena set out for the execution. The rest of the spectators were sealed out by a barricade formed by soldiers with their arms linked.

One of the side features of the event that went over biggest with the crowd was the ceremonial march of the firing squad. The squad circled the stakes or simply marched past it all within the narrow arena marked out for the execution. One member of the squad was particularly striking. An old veteran of three wars, sashed in red and gold, he twirled his ceremonial stick to the beat of some imaginary music. He nearly dropped it that time but, there!, he was still in control, thank you. What a sharp old papa!

The squad commandant was roaring his head off, pleased with his squad and at being afforded a chance to show off their mettle. He was unprepared for what happened next. One of the soldiers, in a careless moment, had let his rifle slip through his hands. In attempting to retrieve it he pulled the safety catch and the gun went off.

The report of the gun was variously rumoured as the beginning of the execution by the people who had no access to the firing line. The commandant, temporarily losing control of himself, dashed for the fallen rifle, picked it up and pointed it at the unlucky soldier.

"Beg for your life," he shouted.

"Yes, sir, I beg."

"Tell me to shoot you dead!"

"No, oga, no!"

"You dare to tell me no?"

"No . . . Yes, oga."

"Ask me to kill you, I say ask me to kill you!"

"Yes, oga, kill me quick."

"I will shoot you dead, now, now. Beg for your life. Go on, ask me to shoot you dead!"

"I beg, oga, Don't! Shoot me dead!"

The sergeant was recalled to his duty by being aware of television cameras which had been brought up and of press cameras clicking at him. He hastily rammed the butt of the gun at the head of the prostrate soldier and for the benefit of the crowd and the cameras, deftly changed his manner to an attitude of casual elegance. . . .

The crowds turned their attention to more exciting scenes. A carnival spirit was abroad. Merchants had set up booths and marquees to sell roasted groundnut, ice-cream, trifles and bottled fresh water. A few drummers went from scene to scene soliciting patronage. Pickpockets, too, had a field day.

A woman victim who had lost some treasured trinket was inconsolable. "God go punish them," she shrieked raising her hands in a praying attitude to the skies. Her hair coiffure, fruit of many painful hours of the hot comb, was done up in a fashion which had taken its name from the anticipated public execution. It was called *Firing Squad*. Her long dress, cheaply modish, had picked up mud but the woman was oblivious of this as she wept and tried to elicit the sympathy of the crowd.

"Why you de bring your gold for this place?" one wag threw at her; "You think say this place na church?"

In spite of the heat and the dust, the spectators were determined to enjoy themselves. This was the first public show they were having in years. The three year civil war had almost killed good public entertainment. Many people had almost forgotten what a real civic show could really be with clowns and circuses, and conjurers and masqueraders. To enable the people to make the most of the event the city government had declared a public holiday and offices and shops had closed. The government saw that the people very much needed a diversion from the strains of peace. The civil war had its built-in diversions. There had been a sense of vicarious participation in the martial exploits of the national forces. The papers, radio and television were full of these acts of carnage. By land, sea, and air, rebels were daily wiped out in their thousands. The excitement the citizens felt in these exploits was undiluted by personal danger. The civil war was fought hundreds of miles away. Casualties among the gallant national forces were slight. Only the rebels did the dying and they were of a different race and besides were rebels.

It had been a good war in other respects. Like in all wars, the normal rules of a good life were suspended, rules about not killing people, rules about honesty in business and politics, rules about reverence for life and other people, rules about respecting women. The perennial losers, by the old rules, saw in war a chance to turn the tables. But it did not work out that way. The perennial winners with their strong networks in church, government, the universities, and the army, turned

the war to their own advantage. They were winners before the war, winners during and after the war. They may have indulged themselves in the rhetoric of war but they were too smart to go up to the front and risk their winners' skins. Instead they became armchair warriors whipping up war hysteria at the rear and parlaying it into lucrative war contracts. They made the war look attractive both to themselves and the perennial losers. It was a lovely war and few wanted it to end. But the rebels, blockaded and starved out, finally got tired of dying and starving and gave up. The world celebrated the magnanimity of the head of state in sparing the lives of these half-starved remnants.

However, for perennial losers peace brought disillusionment. They had been had, and there was the conspicuous material consumption of the perennial winners to remind them constantly of it. The amity and goodwill generated by the common front against the rebels disintegrated. There was again the prospect that the perennial losers, who outnumbered the perennial winners by far, might unite against the latter. The perennial winners were suddenly frightened by the smouldering resentment of the losers which found expression in all sorts of odd ways. A successful war contractor would drive by in his luxury Mercedes, past a crowd of ragged people, without really noticing them.

Instead of expressions of admiration and respect which were customary and which the winner would acknowledge as his due, he was greeted with shouts of "thief, thief"! A few stones might even be hurled at him. The contractor would be outraged. Why me, he would ask himself. It was certainly unusual in this normally polite, friendly town to have people hurl stones and shout thief at a man who had done nothing to them.

The contractor would order his chauffeur to move on home. He would resist the temptation to suborn the police to deal with the stone hurlers. For the police themselves were becoming restive and uncooperative. Like every other group, they were finding it difficult to adjust to bland peace-time conditions. The civil war had conferred enormous prestige to their profession.

The glamour of the army had rubbed off on the police.

The army were the heroes and saviours of their country. They became its cultural heroes. It was really remarkable how

high the prestige of the army had risen. Before the civil war, the local name for soldier was the equivalent of lout. Only drop-outs and losers went into the army. In those days, beautiful girls, always an index of status, would be ashamed to admit even a liaison with a soldier. But during the civil war soldiers became the very best matches. So were the policemen.

In an atmosphere of uncertainty and breakdown of all social norms, life was cheap and every civilian's life was potentially at the mercy of the policeman. People were unusually subdued at the mere sight of the man in uniform.

But the return of peace changed all that. People with the resilience of human beings were bouncing back to their former confidence. They began to make less and less of the mystique of the armed forces. A group of motor-park louts even forgot themselves so far as to beat up a soldier. And if they could do that to a soldier what could a policeman expect?

So the police, to their chagrin, had to be circumspect in proceeding against perennial losers at the request of perennial winners. There was one group of the perennial losers who were not content simply to hurl stones and shout "thief!" at their betters; they decided to take desperate measures to gain entry into the charmed circle. In the half-light, before the dawn, the transition from war to peace, when the rules of social life were decreed but not yet established, they made their desperate gamble, still relying on the weapons and rules of war.

The most visible symbol of perennial winnership is one's own car. Losers became winners when they had a car. The war had taught the desperate perennial losers that a quick way of owning a car was to kill a car-owner and seize his car.

In the first two months of peace, hundreds of car owners disappeared. Some were later dug out of shallow graves, others were never found. The acts of the desperate perennial losers set off a wave of terror which permeated the whole society.

So the government, made up of winners, had to contain the desperate losers. A decree was passed setting up special tribunals to try summarily people accused of robbery with arms. Convicts were to be summarily executed before a firing squad.

The beach show as the public execution came to be called was very popular. It felt good once again to be able to identify the enemies of the state and to know that something was

being done about them. For excitement, the beach show topped war communiques. It was one thing to read or hear of thousands being wiped out; it was another to watch, first hand, just one of those lives being snuffed out before one's eyes. It gave one a queer thrill.

The beach was seething now with overcrowding, noise, heat, and dust, and it was only a matter of time before the crowd, exasperated by the long wait, would break out into fights. Still more people were hurrying in. The tree-lined avenue leading into the beach had a two-mile nose-to-bumper car pile-up. Some drivers had baked in the sun for hours and were really in an ugly mood when two highway patrol officers in spruce white and khaki spurted in on motor-cycles, sirens blaring. The message of the sirens was well taken: clear the road, an important official was on his way. It looked an impossible task but after only a few minutes it was accomplished, simply by forcing the cars into the median strip, where they lay in massed, smoky confusion.

A couple more police motor bike riders dashed up and sounded the all clear. They were followed almost immediately by a dozen uniformed out-riders in perfect four-deep formation. Then came a big Rolls Royce, more out-riders, and a long official motor-cade.

Word spread quickly that the head of state himself had come to conduct the public execution personally . . . that a visiting head of state was with him. Or was it the Red Cross? . . . International Observer Team to bear witness that the execution was humane? . . . As it turned out, it was not the head of state but the provincial governor who was known to enjoy doing things in style. As he stepped out of the Rolls Royce amid the clattering of salutes by armed soldiers and police, there were shouts of "His Excellency!" "showman!" "psychedelic colonel." The provincial governor gratefully waved a spruce fly whisk which he had taken to carrying as a means of reinforcing his flamboyant image. Usually he was dressed in expensive robes of generous folds but this time, because he was expecting to perform a military function, he was dressed in his bemedalled military uniform. He was very proud of this, for he was constantly touching it, pushing down his cap, pulling up his tie and affectionately patting down his military tunic.

The provincial governor, as is his wont, traveled with a

large retinue, who all came in the long official motor-cade behind the Rolls Royce. A news report in the city's major newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle* the next day described this retinue as: *Service Heads, Commissioners, Chiefs and Elders, Religious and Community Leaders, Ambassadors and other Members of the Diplomatic Community, Distinguished Dignitaries. . . .*

The governor and the distinguished dignitaries moved on along a route created with difficulty by containing the crowds behind army barricades, unto a special grandstand prepared for them. The crowd became hushed for the first time that morning. As if to break the silence, the governor then rose, flipped his tie, rubbed down his tunic, smiled reassuringly and read a prepared statement. He thanked the people for the moral and other support which enabled the government not only to crush the rebels but to put the country once again on the path of its true greatness. The government, for its part, would ever hold the well-being of the people clear, hence the public execution which was meant to serve as a deterrent to acts of terrorism. The government had carefully reviewed the case of the felons and decided that the law should take its course.

At this point there was unexpected applause. The governor was nonplused wondering if he had said anything funny. When he resumed, after patting down his tunic most affectionately, he recounted the major achievement of the military regime since it was reluctantly forced to seize power. It had preserved unity, contained rebellion, built roads, and set up the armed robbery tribunal. He appealed to all law abiding men to keep the peace and attack corruption in public life.

The governor read dutifully the essay of one of his speech writers but when at the end he waved his whisk to shouts of "showman!" "psychedelic colonel!" all but the most sceptical would have thought he wrote it himself.

The governor's whisk, as it happened, reached a wider audience than the speech, for the beach had not been wired with loudspeakers so only a few people within earshot of the governor heard what he said. But most saw the whisk.

The final stamp of legality had now been placed on the execution. The head of the firing squad started his men on a solemn march. Another military detail hurried on to a Black Maria parked under a palm tree nearby and cordoned off with

soldiers. They emerged later escorting the three robbers. There were several howls of derision from the crowd and a big surge towards the prisoners almost as if some of the crowd wanted to have their scalp first. But the military barricades, between which the prisoners walked, held.

As it often happens, the three men did not quite come up to the expectations of the crowd. After the publicity given them in the press, radio, and television, they had in the public imagination taken on some star quality and were expected to manifest it. But they appeared quite ordinary. The old man, squat and baldheaded, dressed only in dirty shorts, staggered on in an absent-minded way. He appeared half-dead already. He certainly was not the stuff of which vicious robbers are made.

Only the second man had what one might call style. He was of a nondescript build with a pock-marked face but made up for this by dressing himself in robes made of imported expensive lace material and in golden charms and rings. He walked with exaggerated bravado and in response to cat-calls and whistles responded with a V-Sign. There were even perverse elements in the crowd who had the temerity to cheer.

It was really the third prisoner that most of the crowd had come to see because of his background which was academic, cosmopolitan and elitist. It was still a mystery how he came down from such a height to the rat holes haunted by human vermin whose lives were generally thought expendable.

If the crowd sought an explanation in his demeanour, they found none; all they saw was a young, well-fed, clean-cut, man who might have been handsome except that his face was distorted by the most inhuman rage. Spots of foam dribbled down the corners of his mouth and he was shouting what appeared to be a challenge to some forces well beyond the immediate crowd.

The prisoners were led to the stakes and trussed up. The old man submitted wearily. The well-dressed robber danced a jig, taunted his tormentors and finally yielded after a mocking victory sign. As for the third man, the 'doctor' as he was generally known, it required half a dozen men to subdue him, and even then he was still kicking and hurling unprintable epithets at the world. And when it came to the last religious rites he glared so maniacally at the gaunt military priest that the divine moved hastily to the two other prisoners. The 'doctor'

got no last rites.

At last all was subdued except for the sea which, though placidly indifferent at midstream, reared up an angry spume near the shore. The rage, however, blew up before it reached the sands.

The execution, the concerted fire of the firing squad, when it came was an anti-climax after the governor's solemn address. Certainly the impact could not be compared with the drama of similar executions in Hollywood crime or cowboy shows. The guns sounded anemic and one couldn't think of them doing much harm. But the prisoners were clearly dead as the surgeons confirmed.

The television cameras caught the death throes beautifully and the open mouth of the 'doctor,' shouting defiance, when blown up and spread across the whole front page of the *Daily Chronicle,* helped the paper to double its normal circulation.

The story of the man, reconstructed from apocryphal sources, was splashed in the inside pages. Most people came to one conclusion after reading the story.

"Na too much book kill'am."

B. Bayo

I LIVE ON THE TAIL-END OF THE WORLD

i live, i live
i live
i know i live
who says he is not sure i live?
who says he doubts i live?
who says he is not certain?
who says he cannot be sure?

i live . . .
i know i live
i live like a piece of rag
i live like the remnant of hope
i live like an amputated tail, on the tail-end of life
eating away at the orange-peels of life
and its sapless coats of thorny bananas
pecking away at its stray crumbs of bread
gobbling away at the vomited mess, of the fortunate friends of fate—

on the tail-end of the world—
who says i do not live?
on the tail-end of life?

Andrew Salkey

HOME PARABLES AND TWO POEMS

1. FRINGE BENEFITS

Through the rip in her gingham dress,
a slash of thigh streaked
high across the retina.

Lonely as a mouse, she'd come to town
to work as a servant girl,
in that house, in Stony Hill.

At the back, her shrunken room,
a convenient, early morning lay-by
for the drunken paymaster!

She'd said nothing about her three children
who stayed, at home, in Saint Elizabeth,
because she wasn't paid to talk.

Late that Saturday night, the paymaster
brought his five non-paying friends to her room,
but she refused without saying a word.

Later that drunken Sunday morning,
the paymaster sent her back to the country,
without his wife suspecting a thing.

But the fated girl from Saint Elizabeth
had the last laugh, as she pensively pressed
the bulging pockets of her gingham dress,

thought about her three children
and deliberated on the crisp reparations,
snug in the six wallets she'd just liberated.

2. STOCK-TAKING

She was a barmaid and a half,
caring profoundly for bottle and drinker
with a fierce Kingston pride.

Loss was today's gain of tourists;
profit, tomorrow's small change regulars,
their unbankable dreams and all.

Naturally, the bar wasn't hers,
but she managed like a burr
on a snapped shoe-string.

And then came that sudden strike
and the mouths to ply with credit
and the dreams she had to support.

In the end, the stock ran dry;
the owner refused to believe;
some of the regulars lost heart.

But she found a way round it,
by believing in the strike
and subsidizing it on the sly.

Bottles appeared on the shelves
from cool and unrevealed sources;
the owner turned a blind eye.

But what the louse hadn't seen was just
how far the ownership of the bar had changed;
it was now a repossessed *public* house.

3. FUTURISTIC HISTORY TEACHER

She'll say historically piquant,
conspiratorial things like, "Columbus,
that Genoese, was really a Jew, you know!

"He kept on fooling Ferdinand and Isabella
with promises of gold, but was actually looking
for a new home for the Jews, this side of the world."

Then, she'll sigh an under-celebrated Clio sigh,
and go on to add, "Why, of course, I must tell you
that the Caribbean was never intended for us!

"In fact, we wouldn't have been brought over, here,
at all, had Columbus's clandestine,
clannish plan worked out, all right.

"But, he believed his own story of gold, so much,
that it popped up to the surface
of everything he touched, coldly taking him over.

"There's absolutely no doubt whatsoever that both
Spain and the Jews were tricked; but, so were we
by that Euro-Arab commercial get-together."

Then, she'll hold the approved history text,
pretty far away from her formidable breasts,
and ask, "What's this, anyway?"

We'll know her own reply, so well,
that we'll raise the tops of our desks,
and yell, "Yet another slick conspiracy!"

DANGEROUS SINGER

(In memory of Vuyisile Mini)

(Note: Vuyisile Mini, popular singer and songwriter, was executed by the South African government, in 1964)

The uncertain, collapsing family house
was never the same, again,
after those songs blew over the stunted grass;

the walls pinched the cracks shut;
the doors swung free, wide open
to the inciting wind curving off the cockpit hill;

and your words were good, always real,
repeated over the years, going deeper down
into the ground where dangerous songs live like roots.

SEEING IT THROUGH

"Above all, it (revolution in Africa) is
made up of ordinary people. We are not
born revolutionaries, just people who
could no longer support a situation. You
get caught up in a revolution and then
you see it through."
—A *Frelimo* cadre talking to Barbara Cornwall, author of *The Bush Rebels*

In our open house
in underdevelopment,
first, saying no to oppression,
then, getting caught up
in the struggle for change,
lasting out
and seeing it through
are really all that matter.

In our broken house
in underdevelopment,
the trampled grass
and the dynamited walls
are the things
that pitch our responses forward
and make forests of our people.

In our new house,
because we've lasted out
and seen the long night through,
because we've humped our pain
and sliced away our self-contempt,
the new land will bind our promises,
sprout tall grass, again,
rebuild our defoliated dreams,
wait for our love, a second time,
and guide our scientific hand.

In our new open house,
all our children will be equal
and their parents will learn from them
those things that will last
and last
and last.

Willy Nnorom

THIS WORLD

Sons of men
frowning
like their mouth is full of quinine
daughters of women
smiling
like they won sweepstakes

P. F. Wilmot

THE PRODIGAL RETURNS

in the garden of the Lesbian Queen
the cat leapt on the toad
which in midflight
thought itself on the way to paradise
we are waiting for Her Majesty
Sir Christopher said
bearing the seals and instruments
of our Independence
isn't this a glorious day
this bright sun of Africa
doesn't this our Africa
have a bright future
like the cooling glitter of fine gold
above the broken land
above the savannah streaked with rust
the herdsman raised his gourd
empty now of tributes to the earth
heroes once walked here
the rich grass flowing
past ankles rough with dew
past memories of their ancestors
and traditions of piety for the earth
but now the plains are empty
of gods
of joy
of grief
and the consciousness of loss
across the tarnished land
the harsh sun brings no life
no saving crops
no witness of the passing
of the guardians of the earth
but is not this bright sun
the Energy of Africa
the sign of Africa's destiny
to which you

prodigal son returning
must give obeisance
raise your chalice
raise your richly-wrought goblet
to the new gods who are arriving
behold Her Majesty cometh
son of Africa returning
isn't it wonderful
she a white woman
coming all the way over here across the big waters
to give us this our Independence
above the empty plain
above this waste of a people
your tired flag is waving
in this chill wind of evening
robbed of substance
by the exhausts of expensive cars
your tired flag is waving
but this is the flag of Her Majesty
Sir Christopher said
our own is the other
of bright gold
streaked with the green of our rich fields
we commissioned the best man
in all Europe
that would do our Africa proud
are you not proud
child of Africa returning
of Africa and her flag of harvest
raise your bright chalice
and your richly-wrought goblet
filled with the sparkling dew
of the White Man
in my village
i did not dream
Champagne
could taste like this
so civilized and so rich and so refined
are these not sockets in your goblet Sir
where are the eyes
plucked from the skull of the hero
is this the skull of Lumumba

of Moumie
of Ben Barka
of Nkrumah
burnished with the gold
of Lonrho and Union Miniere and American Metals Climax and UAC
and can you not taste the
acid* Son of David
in your expensive champagne
today you name cities and weep
for heroes you murdered yesterday
weeping tears into sparkling Mums and Dom Perignon
bubbling in the skull-goblets
you fashioned from their deaths
across the ravaged land
across the plains emptied of people
nothing is moving
not even the cattle dying of trypanosomiasis
the souls of children
dead before the age of five
the dying hulks which huddle in your squares
nothing is moving
except the cranes and bulldozers and steam shovels
making the parking lot
for the Chryslers
the Citroens
the Mercedes Benz
and the air conditioned command Land Rovers
of all the VVIPs
who wait in the garden of the Lesbian
to drink from the skulls of the heroes
she keeps permanently
on her gilded chest of drawers
in a still corner of an empty room
a blind man sings a tale no one can hear
where are your eyes
Son of Lucifer
where are your eyes
where are your eyes

*Scraps of Lumumba's mutilated body were said to have been dissolved in the sulfuric acid vats of Union Miniere.

Tim Lilburn

EASTER, NSUKKA

Christopher Okigbo, your petals lie
here, grey, returned
  from the grave and breathless in the bone-glow
 of phosphorous light—ghosts whose faces
    fill with wings

      Into the sun's ant-
      hill you came, a
      creature of iron
      and teethmark, they
      likened you
        to a god

Christopher Okigbo.
your petals fell
here, mindflakes,
    with worse than the fire
  of burning aircraft
and our dreams, we woke
      too late to
          realize were just moths, seconds
    before the stone candle's black mutilation

Jenudo U. Oke

DEAR BROTHERS & SISTERS

Democracy favors majority rule
tyranny enjoys minority rule.

Poverty befriends the majority
and wealth clings to the minority.

Democracy and poverty are twin sisters
and tyranny and wealth twin brothers.

Taiwo Okusanya

FOR MY DAUGHTER

I

The kernels speak
In fingered silence,
Fate unravelled in sixteen *odu*:
"You are the gift of joy
You are the one who brought
Joy on the edge of a cloud."
White cockerel and white cloth,
Accept my thanksgiving, *Ifa*.

II

The *egungun* who leaves home
Without asking your protection
Does so in peril.
I bring jars of palmoil,
The spattered entrails
Are on the face of the shrine;
Esu, god on the crossroads,
Don't fight my success.

III

Hear my cry
Ela, prime of the gods,
Hear my prayer;
Bless Ibijoke.

Kalu Okpi

THE ROAD OF LIFE

Just a little up the road—
God is waiting . . .
It is a peaceful road,
Lined with flowers,
And trees.
A hopeful road.
And I am walking along—
With bright cheery steps.
Smiling—
Singing.
And happy.
It is a wide road . . .
Full of Saints.
And the angels are playing their harps.
'Peace on Earth—
And goodwill in heaven . . .'
And meantime, I am walking along—
Up the road.
The roses are my kith . . .
And the stars, my kin.
I am on cloud ten.
—Oh—
What a beautiful world!
Fate is my love.
And Artemis—
My darling.
And just a little up the road—
God is waiting.
—Soon—
We will meet,
Embrace—
And smile.
And then I will Know.
I will know . . .
All about all.
Just a little more.

Any minute now.
—Then—
—Suddenly—
In front of me—
Across my path . . .
There is an abyss.
A horrible dark abyss.
I stop dead.
The smile goes from my face.
And the song dies on my lips.
I stop . . .
And stare,
At the abyss.
I rub my eyes—
And pinch myself.
It hurts.
No doubt about it—
I am awake!
It is an abyss in reality.
So . . .
I can't go on.
I can't cross.
I have to stop.
But God is waiting . . .
On the other side.
I stop and think—
Reason with myself.
I can't go on because of the abyss.
Again, I can't stand here for ever.
So—
I have to go back.
Back the way I came . . .
Away from God.
Towards the other side.
I turn back.
I start going back . . .
With drooping shoulders.
In a daze.
Sorely wounded.
My soul starts dying—
Slowly . . .
But dying all the same.
I start crawling back.

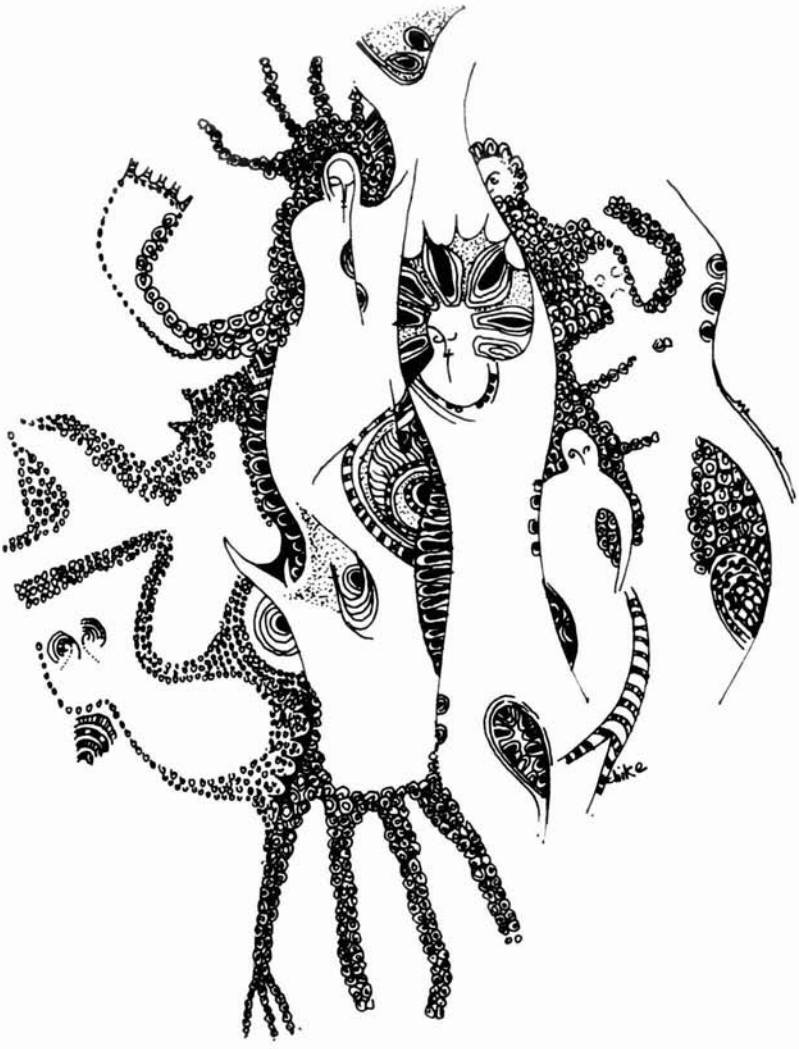
The flowers—
And the trees I saw—
Coming up . . .
Are no longer there . . .
Going down.
No wait!
They are still there.
But they have changed
Overturned.
Now their roots are up.
Their blossoms and leaves are down . . .
In the ground.
Everything has changed.
Even the road.
It is no longer wide . . .
And beautiful.
The saints have gone.
And the angels—
Have tails now—
And horns.
In place of harps, they tote tridents.
I realize—
I am still going down the road . . .
Only—
It's not the same road . . .
Anymore.
I am going down—
Down—
Into, I don't know what.
I don't know it but—
Belzeeb is waiting—
With his three headed bitch.
I don't know it though.
I'm still moving.
Walking along—
Slowly—
I realize very slowly that I am dead.
Dead inside.
I start knowing all—
And all.
Not the all and all—
God would have revealed . . .

But another one.
The big dark truth.
I start knowing the dark truth . . .
Not slowly but in a rush.
And pretty soon,
I know all of it.
Then, I pause.
I stop walking—
I turn—
And look back,
Up the road . . .
At God.
He is far away now—
But I can still see him.
I want to go to him.
I turn and start going back,
Then I remember—
There is an Abyss Down the Road.
In between us.
—So—
I stop again.
And a bitter sigh escapes from my soul.
The tears start pouring.
I turn again.
And the tears stop.
And freeze.
I start—
Walking down the road again.
My footsteps quicken.
—Suddenly—
I realize I am running.
I am racing—
—Towards—
—I don't know it—
But towards Belzeeb.
There is a dark horrible beauty . . .
About the road now.
At first I confuse it with the beauty—
Up the road.
But it is not.
Granted, there is a beauty about the road.
—But—

The beauty is ugly.
Meanwhile . . .
I am still running down the road.
Racing.
—Suddenly—
I stop abruptly.
It is the end of the road.
The dead end.
I stop and look.
Then.
Slowly.
I begin to see.
I begin to see through the fog.
I see . . .
What is at the end of the road.
WHO is at the end of the road.
My mouth falls open.
I see Belzeeb . . .
—Because—
It is none other than Belzeeb—
Who has been waiting for me—
Down the road . . .
All along
Before I can think—
Belzeeb steps forward—
And embraces me,
Just like I would have embraced God.
Only this time . . .
It is Belzeeb.
He embraces me . . .
And suddenly again . . .
I know all and all—
And all!
How many truths are there really?
I know all about the darkness.
And all about the dark.
So by contrast—
I can see . . .
All about the light.
But—
The light is so far away now . . .
That . . .

Even though I know it is there,
The million miles in between us,
Is just too far.
I start forgetting.
I start forgetting about the light.
Quickly.
Too quickly.
I put in my nationalism papers for Belzeeb's . . .
For Belzeeb's dark and ugly realm.
But then—
I think again.
I have to decide now.
At long last . . .
There are only two things I can do.
I can stay with Belzeeb . . .
In his beaugly abode—
Amongst sweet dark revelry.
OR
I can turn back.
Turn back—
Towards God.
I know though—
That the abyss is still there.
And that . . . God is a million miles away,
And that . . .
Chances are I'll never get there
All the same—
The main point is—
It is possible to go back.
I look around . . .
Around Belzeeb's domain.
Then I turn and strain my eyes—
And faintly discern God far up the road.
Far across the horrible abyss.
Which is it to be?
The choice is mine.
Mine only.
At long last, it is time to decide.
The moment for which I was born . . .
The reason for my existence . . .
Stares me in the face.
What is it to be?

Up or down? . . .
Up—
Or
Down? . . .
Instinctively, I realize that,
I have had to decide on this very question . . .
In other worlds.
And that—
I will have to decide on this very question
In worlds to come.
I know though—
It won't be ad infinitum.
It will only have the chance . . .
For only about . . .
Two or three eternities.
But each decision counts.
I look at Belzeeb—
And I look at God.
The choice is mine—
Once again.
I ask myself . . .
What is it to be old buddy? . . . . .


Mike

Mamman J. Vatsa

POEMS

HEAD NA KING

Head na king
And king no dey
Carry load.
Look man wan
Look me disgrace.
Yi don carry meat
Enter my house for sale
Ebin if na my shokoto,
I go sale buy am all
I go sale buy am all.
Head na king

SATURDAY AT IKOK

Today na big day
Man must drink
From dis funda*
To dat funda
Woman must drink
Man from funda
To funda

*funda—hotel

YAMANKORO*

Big like Cameroon coco yam.
If you wan dry am,
Make you buy alum
Look man wey dey hungry
Dey throw way better meal.

*Yamankoro—Snail

ASEWO

Butu, butu, Cameroon insect.
Man wey no wan scratch him body
make e no look you for face
Like Cameroon man dey say,
butu, butu na our country ting.

Nadine Gordimer

THE CHILDREN

The farm children play together when they are small; but once the white children go away to school they soon don't play together anymore, even in the holidays. Although most of the black children get some sort of schooling, they drop every year farther behind the grades passed by the white children; the childish vocabulary, the child's exploration of the adventurous possibilities of dam, koppies, mealie lands and veld—there comes a time when the white children have surpassed these with the vocabulary of boarding-school and the possibilities of inter-school sports matches and the kind of adventures seen at the cinema. This usefully coincides with the age of twelve or thirteen; so that by the time early adolescence is reached, the black children are making, along with the bodily changes common to all, an easy transition to adult forms of address, beginning to call their old playmates "miss" and "*baasie*," little master.

The trouble was Paulus Eysendyck did not seem to realise that Thebedi was now simply one of the crowd of farm children down at the kraal, recognisable in his sisters' old clothes. The first Christmas holidays after he had gone to boarding-school he brought home for Thebedi a painted box he had made in his woodwork class. He had to give it to her secretly because he had nothing for the other children at the kraal. And she gave him, before he went back to school, a bracelet she had made of thin brass wire and the grey-and-white beans of the castor oil crop his father cultivated. (When they used to play together, she was the one who had taught Paulus how to make clay oxen for their toy spans.) There was a craze, even in the *platteland* towns like the one where he was at school, for boys to wear elephant hair and other bracelets beside their watchstraps; his was admired, friends asked him to get similar ones for them. He said the natives made them on his father's farm and he would try.

When he was fifteen, six feet tall, and tramping round at school dances with the girls from the "sister" school in the

same town; when he had learnt how to tease and flirt and fondle quite intimately these girls who were the daughters of prosperous farmers like his father; when he had even met one who, at a wedding he had attended with his parents on a nearby farm, had let him do with her in a locked storeroom what people did when they made love—when he was as far from his childhood as all this, he still brought home from a shop in town a red plastic belt and gilt hoop earrings for the black girl, Thebedi. She told her father the missus had given these to her as a reward for some work she had done—it was true she sometimes was called to help out in the farmhouse. She told the girls in the kraal that she had a sweetheart nobody knew about, far away, away on another farm, and they giggled, and teased, and admired her. There was a boy in the kraal called Njabulo who said he wished he could have bought her a belt and earrings.

When the farmer's son was home for the holidays she wandered far from the kraal and her companions. He went for walks alone. They had not arranged this; it was an urge each followed independently. He knew it was she, from a long way off. She knew that his dog would not bark at her. Down at the dried-up river-bed where five or six years ago the children had caught a leguaan one great day, a creature that combined ideally the size and ferocious aspect of the crocodile with the harmlessness of the lizard, they squatted side by side on the earth bank. He told her traveller's tales: about school, about the punishments at school, particularly, exaggerating both their nature and his indifference to them. He told her about the town of Middleburg, which she had never seen. She had nothing to tell but she prompted with many questions, like any good listener. While he talked he twisted and tugged at the roots of white stinkwood and Cape willow trees that looped out of the eroded earth around them. It had always been a good spot for children's games, down there hidden by the mesh of old, ant-eaten trees held in place by vigorous ones, wild asparagus bushing up between the trunks, and here and there prickly pear cactus sunken-skinned and bristly, like an old man's face, keeping alive sapless until the next rainy season. She punctured the dry hide of a prickly pear again and again with a sharp stick while she listened. She laughed a lot at what he told her, sometimes dropping her face on her knees, sharing amusement with the cool shady

earth beneath her bare feet. She put on her pair of shoes—white sandals, thickly Blanco-ed against the farm dust—when he was on the farm, but these were taken off and laid aside, at the river-bed. One summer afternoon when there was water flowing there and it was very hot she waded in as they used to do when they were children, her dress bunched modestly and tucked into the legs of her pants. The schoolgirls he went swimming with at dams or pools on neighbouring farms wore bikinis but the sight of their dazzling bellies and thighs in the sunlight had never made him feel what he felt now, when the girl came up the bank and sat beside him, the drops of water beading off her dark legs the only points of light in the earth-smelling, deep shade. They were not afraid of one another, they had known one another always; he did with her what he had done that time in the storeroom at the wedding, and this time it was so lovely, so lovely, he was surprised . . . and she was surprised by it, too—he could see in her dark face that was part of the shade, with her big dark eyes, shiny as soft water, watching him attentively: as she had when they used to huddle over their teams of mud oxen, as she had when he told her about detention weekends at school.

They went to the river-bed often through those summer holidays. They met just before the light went, as it does quite quickly, and each returned home with the dark—she to her mother's hut, he to the farmhouse—in time for the evening meal. He did not tell her about school or town anymore. She did not ask questions any longer. He told her, each time, when they would meet again. Once or twice it was very early in the morning; the lowing of the cows being driven to graze came to them where they lay, dividing them with unspoken recognition of the sound read in their two pairs of eyes, opening so close to each other.

He was a popular boy at school. He was in the second, then the first soccer team. The head girl of the "sister" school was said to have a crush on him; he didn't particularly like her, but there was a pretty blonde who put up her long hair into a kind of doughnut with a black ribbon round it, whom he took to see films when the schoolboys and girls had a free Saturday afternoon. He had been driving tractors and other farm vehicles since he was nine years old, and as soon as he was eighteen he got a driver's licence and in the holidays, this last year of his school life, he took neighbours' daughters to dances

and to the drive-in cinema that had just opened 20 kilometres from the farm. His sisters were married, by then; his parents often left him in charge of the farm over the weekend while they visited the young wives and grandchildren. When Thebedi saw the farmer and his wife drive away on a Saturday afternoon, the boot of their Mercedes filled with fresh-killed poultry and vegetables from the garden that it was part of her father's work to tend, she knew that she must come not to the riverbed but up to the house. The house was an old one, thick-walled, dark against the heat. The kitchen was its lively thoroughfare, with servants, food supplies, begging cats and dogs, pots boiling over, washing being damped for ironing, and the big deep-freeze the missus had ordered from town, bearing a crocheted mat and a vase of plastic irises. But the diningroom with the bulging-legged heavy table was shut up in its rich, old smell of soup and tomato sauce. The sittingroom curtains were drawn and the polished cabinet of the combination radio-record player silent. The door of the parents' bedroom was locked and the empty rooms where the girls had slept had sheets of plastic spread over the beds. It was in one of these that she and the farmer's son stayed together whole nights—almost: she had to get away before the house servants, who knew her, came in at dawn. There was a risk that someone would discover her or traces of her presence if he took her to his own bedroom, although she had looked into it many times when she was helping out in the house and knew well, there, the row of silver cups he had won at school.

When she was eighteen and the farmer's son nineteen and working with his father on the farm before entering a veterinary college, the boy Njabulo asked her father for her. The boy's parents met with hers and the money he was to pay in place of the cows it is customary to give a prospective bride's parents was settled upon. He had no cows to offer; he was a labourer on the Eysendyck farm, like her father. A bright youngster; old Eysendyck had taught him brick-laying and was using him for odd jobs in construction, around the place. She did not tell the farmer's son that her parents had arranged for her to marry. She did not tell him, either, before he left for his first term at the veterinary college, that she thought she was going to have a baby. Two months after her marriage to Njabulo, she gave birth to a daughter. There was no disgrace in that; among her people it is customary for a young

man to make sure, before marriage, that the chosen girl is not barren, and Njabulo had made love to her then. But the infant was very light and did not quickly grow darker as most African babies do. Already at birth there was on its head a quantity of straight, fine floss, like that which carries the seeds of certain weeds in the veld. The unfocussed eyes it opened were grey flecked with yellow. Njabulo was the matt, opaque coffee-grounds colour that has always been called black; the colour of Thebedi's legs on which beaded water looked oyster-shell blue, the same colour as Thebedi's face, where the black eyes, with their interested gaze and clear whites, were so dominant.

Njabulo made no complaint. Out of his farm labourer's earnings he bought from the Indian store a cellophane-windowed pack containing a pink plastic bath, six napkins, a card of safety pins, a knitted jacket, cap and bootees, a dress, and a tin of Johnson's Baby Powder, for Thebedi's baby.

When it was two weeks old Paulus Eysendyck arrived home from the veterinary college for the holidays. For the first time since he was a small boy he came right into the kraal. It was eleven o'clock in the morning. The men were at work in the lands. He looked about him, urgently; the women turned away, each not wanting to be the one approached to point out where Thebedi lived. Thebedi appeared, coming slowly from the hut that Njabulo had built in white man's style, with a tin chimney and a proper window with glass panes, set in as straight as walls made of unfired bricks would allow. She greeted him with hands brought together and a token movement representing the respectful bob with which she was accustomed to acknowledging she was in the presence of his father or mother. He lowered his head under the doorway of her home and went in. He said, "I want to see. Show me."

She had taken the bundle off her back before she came out into the light to face him. She moved between the iron bedstead made up with Njabulo's checked blankets and the small wooden table where the pink plastic bath stood among food and kitchen pots, and picked up the bundle from the snugly-blanketed grocer's box where it lay. The infant was asleep; she revealed the closed, pale, plump tiny face, with a bubble of spit at the corner of the mouth, the spidery pink hands stirring. She took off the woollen cap and the straight

fine hair flew up after it in static electricity, showing gilded strands here and there. He said nothing. She was watching him as she had done when they were little, and the gang of children had trodden down a crop in their games or transgressed in some other way for which he, as the farmer's son, the white one among them, must intercede with the farmer. She disturbed the sleeping face by scratching or tickling gently at a cheek with one finger, and slowly the eyes opened, saw nothing, were still asleep, and then, awake, no longer narrowed, looked out at them, grey with yellowish flecks, his own hazel eyes.

He struggled for a moment with a grimace of tears, anger and self-pity. She could not put out her hand to him. He said, "You haven't been near the house with it?"

She shook her head.

"Never?"

Again she shook her head.

"Don't take it out. Stay inside. Can't you take it away somewhere. You must give it to someone—"

She moved to the door with him.

He said, "I'll see what I will do. I don't know." And then he said: "I feel like killing myself."

Her eyes began to glow, to thicken with tears. For a moment there was the feeling between them that used to come when they were alone down at the river-bed.

He walked out.

Two days later, when his mother and father had left the farm for the day, he appeared again. The women were away on the lands, weeding, as they were employed to do as casual labour in summer; only the very old remained, propped up on the ground outside the huts in the flies and the sun. He said to her, "It won't feel anything. It's better for you, too." He asked her for the feeding bottle, with milk. She said, "The milk comes from me." He said never mind, then, water would do, and went into Njabulo's house. She gave him a bottle filled with sugar-water. She understood she must not stay. She went outside the door and watched without seeing an old crone who had lost her mind, talking to herself, talking to the fowls who ignored her.

She thought she heard small grunts from the hut, the kind of infant grunt that indicates a full stomach, a deep sleep. After a time, long or short she did not know, he came out and

walked away with plodding stride (his father's gait) out of sight, towards his father's house.

The baby was not fed during the night and although she kept telling Njabulo it was sleeping, he saw for himself in the morning that it was dead. He comforted her with words and caresses. She did not cry but simply sat, staring at the door. Her hands were cold as dead chickens' feet to his touch.

Njabulo buried the little baby where farm workers were buried, in the place in the veld the farmer had given them. Some of the mounds had been left to weather away unmarked, others were covered with stones and a few had fallen wooden crosses. He was going to make a cross but before it was finished the police came and dug up the grave and took away the dead baby: someone—one of the other labourers? their women?—had reported that the baby was almost white, that, strong and healthy, it had died suddenly after a visit by the farmer's son. Pathological tests on the infant corpse showed liver damage caused by a poison commonly an ingredient of insecticides available to farmers.

Thebedi went for the first time to the country town where Paulus had been to school, to give evidence at the preparatory examination into the charge of murder brought against him. She cried hysterically in the witness box, saying yes, yes (the gilt hoop earrings swung in her ears), she saw the accused pouring liquid into the baby's mouth. She said he had threatened to shoot her if she told anyone.

More than a year went by before, in that same town, the case was brought to trial. She came to Court with a new-born baby on her back. She wore gilt hoop earrings; she was calm; she said she had not seen what the white man did in the house, but she had seen him put a small bottle back in his pocket.

Paulus Eysendyck said he had visited the hut but had not poisoned the child.

The Defence did not contest that there had been a love relationship between the accused and the girl, or that intercourse had taken place, but submitted there was no proof that the child was the accused's.

The judge told the accused there was strong suspicion against him but not enough proof that he had committed the crime. The Court could not accept the girl's evidence because it was clear she had committed perjury either at this trial or at the preparatory examination. There was the suggestion in

the mind of the Court that she might be an accomplice in the crime; but, again, insufficient proof.

The judge commended the honourable behaviour of the husband (sitting in court in a brown-and-yellow-quartered golf cap bought for Sundays) who had not rejected his wife and had "even provided clothes for the unfortunate infant out of his slender means."

The verdict on the accused was "not guilty."

The young white man refused to accept the congratulations of press and public and left the Court with his mother's raincoat shielding his face from photographers. His father said to the press, "I will try and carry on as best I can to hold up my head in the district."

Interviewed by the Sunday papers, who spelled her name in a variety of ways, the black girl, with photograph, was quoted: "It was a thing of our childhood, we don't see each other anymore."

John Pauker

from THE MESSENGER POEMS

COOKING POEM

We cooked him, finally
And ate him hot

Parboiled him
In the
Solemn
Tribal
Pot

Tough on the tooth

Good he was not

He passed on
Gasping:
Yes! Yes! Yes!

Went under for the third time,
Rasping:
Yes!
  Yes!
    Yes!

There was a lot
Of that,
A lot
Of
Yessage

What was it all about?

Forsooth:

A
Pot
Of
Message

GOING POEM

I have Real News
But would they know

Still I'm the Messenger
And I must Go,
  go, go

Bernth Lindfors

POSTWAR POPULAR LITERATURE IN NIGERIA

It is already clear that the Nigerian civil war has profoundly altered the course of Nigerian literary history. Many established authors who used to be preoccupied with themes of colonial culture conflict or post-independence corruption have recently published novels, autobiographies, plays and poems based on real or imagined wartime experiences. The majority of the new writers who have emerged in the four and a half years since hostilities ended in January, 1970, have also been concerned with documenting the social and psychological consequences of military conflict. Even children's books have dealt frankly with civil war themes.[1]

The writers who appear to have been affected most by the war are Igbos who lived in Biafra while the fighting was going on. Among these, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, John Munonye and the late Christopher Okigbo (who was killed while serving as a Major in the Biafran army) are probably the best known outside Nigeria, but there are many others with hard-earned local reputations who have contributed their creative energies to the postwar literary reorientation, too. They have done this by writing pamphlets which have been printed, published and sold in cities and towns throughout what is now called the East Central State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They are lowbrow authors using a popular medium to communicate with the common man.[2]

Before the war the hub of the Nigerian popular publishing industry was Onitsha, a large commercial center on the Niger River. The famous market at Onitsha, purportedly "the largest market in the world,"[3] was flattened by repeated shelling in 1967, but after the Biafran capitulation Onitsha quickly reestablished itself as a major trading center and a new market was soon under construction. Although several of the major pamphlet publishers suffered great losses during the war and went into other lines of business afterwards, at least seven returned to Onitsha and started their presses rolling again.[4]

By 1973 an Igbo scholar could report that Onitsha market literature was alive and well once more; those who had prematurely bemoaned its death, he said,

> were unaware of one vital fact: that the vast majority of the publishers of Onitsha market hail from those areas of southeastern Nigeria often referred to as the "Igbo Heartland." Their homes were thus never directly affected by the fighting, and they were able to preserve a good percentage of their book stocks. The moaners probably also lost sight of the quality of resilience which the Igbo-speaking people are believed to possess in abundance.
>
> A visit to Onitsha today will convince the moaners that far from being "dead," Onitsha market literature not only is very much alive, but is likely to grow as a result of recent events in Nigeria. By October, 1970, five of the established publishers had opened impressive bookshops in which they sold remaining stocks and textbooks. But with only two presses functioning in Onitsha at the time, some of the publishers may have had secret fears about the future.
>
> More than thirty-six months after the end of the war, the situation is entirely different. There are over one hundred presses in Onitsha, and these are sometimes so busy that Onitsha pamphlets have to be printed at presses located in Nnewi and Orlu, 15 and 35 miles respectively south of Onitsha.[5]

The initial tendency of these publishers was to issue reprints of titles which had sold well before the war, titles which had come to be known in the Onitsha book trade as "evergreens." One soon found new editions of a whole forest of these evergreens: courtesy books such as *How to Make Friends with Girls, How to Speak in Public and Make Good Introductions, How to Become Rich and Avoid Poverty, How to Write Love Letters and Make Good Friendship with Girls, How to Know When a Girl Loves or Hates You, The Right Way to Approach Ladies and Get Them in Love;* moralistic manuals full of practical advice and warnings for the unwary, such as *Beware of Harlots and Many Friends, Never Trust All that Love You, What Women are Thinking About Men: No. 1 Bomb to Women, Life Turns Man Up and Down: Money and Girls Turn Man Up and Down;* political "histories" such as *Awolowo and Akintola in Political Crisis, Dr. Nkrumah in the Struggle for Freedom, The Struggles and Trials of Jomo Kenyatta, The Life Story and Death of John Kennedy;* novellas and plays such as *Rosemary and the Taxi Driver, Alice in the Romance of Love, Veronica My Daughter, The Game of Love: A Classical Drama from West Africa,* and *Mabel the Sweet Honey that Poured Away.* These were books that appealed to both head and

heart. Like commercialized pulp classics in other cultures, they promised to instruct as well as entertain, giving the reader full value for his money, whatever his motives for buying. Indigenous publishers returning to the book trade in postwar Onitsha hoped to capitalize on what had proven popular and profitable previously.

Even the new pamphlets they produced after the war followed the old formulas. Writers returned to the same themes, same techniques, same stereotyped characters, and told basically the same hoary story in a new postwar setting; though the everyday world of these authors had changed radically, their art had not. The civil war was merely more grist for their mill, and they ground it pretty much the way they had pulverized previous material, reducing everything to crude pulp.

For example, shortly after the war numerous booklets tracing the course of events from the first military coup in 1966 to the Biafran surrender in 1970 began to appear in Onitsha bookstalls. Nearly every one of them had a picture of Major General Yakubu Gowon, Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, on the cover and an author's disclaimer of authorship in the preface. J. Abiakam, who described himself as a "Poet, Historian, Actor, Novelist, Dramatist and Educationist," said in the introduction to *Important Records on Nigerian Civil War from 1966-1970* (Onitsha, n.d.) that "The statements in this book were actual statements made by those quoted, and dates mentioned were as a matter of truth the real days when the events took places." [sic] (p. 4) S. A. Rajih, in *The Complete Story of Nigeria Civil War for Unity (1966-1970) and Current Affairs* (Onitsha, 1971), wanted readers to know that his book "contains only verbal reports from Newspapers and Magazines. The Author did not add any word of his." (p. 3) A. N. Mba, in *The Story & Records of Nigerian Civil War for Unity 1966-1970 Including Current Affairs of the Twelve States Cabinet* (Onitsha, 1971), was even more emphatic: "May I inform readers that the contents of this book are mainly reports and publications from Magazines and Daily news papers. The author had not added any word of his own whatsoever." (p. 2) Such cautious prefatory remarks may be construed as attempts by the author/compiler to protect himself from charges of taking liberties with recent history—a potentially serious offence in a society that has just passed

through a civil war—but prewar fact books on Lumumba, Kennedy, Nigerian independence, and other newsworthy personalities and events had contained similar prefaces. The postwar authors appear to have merely followed a tradition established by their predecessors who had compiled countless anthologies of this sort. Such booklets were usually devoid of overt political commentary.

It is tempting, of course, to hunt for covert political commentary in the postwar chapbooks and to interpret any deviations from the nonpartisan norm as residual Biafranisms. When one finds Wilfred Onwuka, a self-proclaimed "Historian, Poet, Actor, Author, Novelist and Dramatist," entitling his booklet *Selected Speeches of Odumegwu Ojukwu, General Gowon, Ukpabi Asika and Current Affairs* (Onitsha, n.d.), putting Ojukwu (the former secessionist leader) before Gowon (the Federalist leader) and then topping it off by placing a picture of Ojukwu on the cover, one suspects he has deliberately chosen to be very daring, perhaps even subversive, in his emphasis. However, the back cover of the same booklet carries a picture of Gowon and the title *Great Speeches of General Gowon, Odumegwu Ojukwu, Asika and Current Affairs of Nigeria*, and a quick glance at the contents shows that Ojukwu and Gowon are given almost exactly equal space, with Ukpabi Asika's brief speech throwing the balance of print to the Federalists. Author Onwuka—or perhaps his publisher—may have been carefully hedging his bets. One idly wonders if there is any significance in the fact that the booklet was published by the Survival Bookshop. In any case, the anthologist's art of making a diary of events out of scraps and snippets of news stories is a survival from earlier pamphleteering practice. There is nothing new about the organization of such booklets. The content may change from era to era but the form remains essentially the same.

More interesting are the works of fiction and drama written and published after the war, even though these too adhere to most of the old, established conventions. One extreme example of chapbook conservatism is Ikechukwu Okechukwu's *Veronica, the Girl: A True Account of a Thrilling Encounter between Love and Wealth* (Onitsha, n.d.), which was actually published in the "Republic of Biafra" during the war. It tells the hackneyed story of an educated girl who falls in love with a handsome young man and rejects a rich old chief who

has won the support of her parents by promising to pay them an enormous bride price. The confrontation between the younger generation, represented by the girl and her boyfriend who insist on their right to marry for love, and the older generation, represented by the parents and the chief who still believe that parents have not only the right but the duty to arrange suitable matches for their children, is a stock situation in Onitsha market literature, having been popularized in such prewar best sellers as *Veronica My Daughter, Elizabeth My Lover, True Love: Fineboy Joe and Beautiful Cathe, Agnes the Faithful Lover, Beautiful Maria in the Act of True Love, Alice in the Romance of Love, Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny,* and *About Husband and Wife Who Hate Themselves,* to name just a few. One could say the situation dramatizes the conflict between competing social codes in contemporary urban Africa: the Western-educated young people tend to opt for Western ways while their elders prefer to stick to indigenous customs and traditions. Okechukwu's handling of this theme does not differ much from that of his precursors. The girl eventually breaks with her family, runs off with the young man, and seems to be assured of a blissful life thereafter; unlike several other rebellious chapbook heroines,[6] she will suffer no hardships because her husband has a secure job as a bank clerk in Onitsha. She has married for love but has not lost any money in the bargain. In Nigerian popular literature, there could be no happier ending.

What is most remarkable about this romantic melodrama is that the Nigerian civil war never enters into it. Indeed, the booklet appears to be the product of an earlier period of pamphlet writing, albeit published some time after the Biafran secession. Perhaps it was printed before shortages of paper, scarcity of presses and other ravages of war made chapbook publishing difficult. Or perhaps it was the kind of story that remained popular even during wartime. The entrapped Biafrans may have needed an escape literature.

The chapbooks produced after the war follow many of the earlier conventions but do not omit reference to the war. Indeed, some writers have used the war as a new backdrop or setting for a routine love story; others have focused on postwar problems, concentrating on the impact the war has had on the lives of some of its survivors. An example of the former is Grace Nnenna Nzeribe's *Love in the Battle Storm:*

A Story of War and Romance (Enugu, n.d.), the back cover blurb of which reads:

> Love in the Battle Storm is the story of an attractive nurse, Ifeoma Udozor who falls in love with a dashing young Orthopaedic Surgeon, Dr. Emeka Awa.
>
> A civil war breaks out in the country and Dr. Awa is posted to Santa Isabel to work with the Red Cross. During his absence Nurse Udozor meets Captain Afam Uzoma, an Officer of the rebel army. They get married, but their marriage is short-lived for Captain Uzoma is killed in the battle front when Ifeoma was six months pregnant. [sic]
>
> Ifeoma is left to battle through the war and face the uncertainty of the future alone.

Actually, the book tells two separate love stories, the first of which—the relationship between nurse and doctor—proceeds without the slightest premonition of a civil war in the offing. It is not until the wedding invitations of the happy couple are being printed up that we hear for the first time of the Biafran secession. The subject is introduced abruptly and somewhat obliquely:

> Meantime there was mounting unrest in the country which eventually culminated into an open rebellion by some section of the population. The Government had to declare a State of emergency to stop the rebellion. (p. 50)

No political stand is taken on the war, and the author carefully avoids mentioning the names of any Nigerian or Biafran military leaders. The effect of the fighting on the nurse-heroine is immediate—she suddenly has much more work to do, gets separated from her fiance, and has to help her mother move to a new location—but she accepts these and other troubles stoically, regarding them as "unfortunate circumstances that confront one at one time or the other in one's life." She never once blames her misfortunes on the Federalists or rebels. The only finger-pointing in the novel is done by some villagers suffering from dysentery who complain that "the white man and his civilization have brought this curse on us." (p. 56) Even the conclusion of the war is reported in neutral tones:

> The war came to a sudden and dramatic end. The rebels had surrendered.
>
> People received this dramatic end with mixed feelings. Many had lost their relations and belongings; many were homeless; while others had lost their jobs. (p. 75)

The message seems to be that war is hell for everybody, especially nurses, but no one is really responsible for it. The author of *Love in the Battle Storm* is more interested in examining the storm of love than the love of battle.

Typical of another variety of postwar popular literature—the kind that explores postwar problems—is Shakespeare C. N. Nwachukwu's *The Tragedy of Civilian Major* (Onitsha, 1972), which is summed up on its back cover as the story of a desperado:

> His real name was Uchenna Nweze . . . but people popularly knew him as "Civilian Major." He was an "attack" trader during the Biafra days. When the civil war ended, he abetted some soldiers who performed unfriendly acts against his town's people, and through this he made some money.
>
> When justice and order were established in his town, his ways of making money was sealed. [sic] He left for Kano, his prewar station and joined a gang of robbers. Later he seceeded [sic] from them in the hope of establishing his own gang in the East Central State. He planned to rest for some months at his town Ndiazi to enjoy his illgotten fortune, before proceeding to Onitsha where he chose as his would-be Headquarter.
>
> At home he ran in trouble with his people. The cup was full when he impregnated his kindred girl, Caroline, a class II student. The elders ordered him to cleanse the desecrated land. He refused and took them to court. It's an action-packed story, each page seems more exciting!

Armed robbery was a serious social problem in postwar Nigeria, and the story of "Civilian Major" was undoubtedly intended to show what happened to young men who chose to live by the gun. Civilian Major makes lots of money working for a gang in northern Nigeria but when he returns home to the East to show off his wealth, which he claims to have earned as a trader in cloth, he immediately gets into serious trouble by seducing and impregnating a schoolgirl who turns out to be a distant relative. The elders in the community try him in a native court, find him guilty and fine him heavily. He retaliates by suing the elders in the High Court, but he loses his case. He plans to appeal the ruling, but before he has the opportunity, he is arrested at a roadblock and hauled off to prison for being in possession of a stolen car. After three days in prison, he writes his will, takes poison and dies. As the preface to the book points out, "The end of any avaricious criminal has never failed to be death, either by suicide or execution by the authorities. Thus the end of 'Civilian Major'

spells out a distinct morale [sic] to the reader" (p. 3). In the popular imagination, the guilty are inevitably punished.

This narrative has many of the standard ingredients of Onitsha fiction—crime, sex, trials, imprisonment, suicide, a heavyhanded message at the end—all of which place it squarely in the mainstream of Nigerian popular writing. It merely extends the tradition of crime-does-not-pay literature to the postwar period. However, its attention to postwar problems makes it a new and timely contribution to the genre, one which to some extent reflects current realities in the East Central State.

It is especially interesting to observe the author's depiction of the Federal troops who occupied the Igbo heartland after the war. The leaders of these troops are usually shown to be models of military discipline, decorum and decency, men who are genuinely committed to creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. They try to win the confidence of the villagers and instill in the community a spirit of reconciliation, peace and harmony. When "Civilian Major" attempts to persuade his old friend Corporal Musa to order some armed soldiers to arrest and torture the elders who have taken him to court, the Corporal adamantly refuses, saying:

> "How do you expect us to harrass innocent men, men who had not broken the decrees of the Federal Military Government? We have a code of Conduct, I cannot go contrary to it, this is not the early stage of the end of the Civil war when anybody could act carelessly." (p. 47)

This corporal and his subordinates had not been so meticulous about army regulations earlier: "In some cases, they seezed [sic] bicycles, goats and commandeered beautiful women, common characteristics of soldies [sic] all over the world when they are let loose." (p. 8) After one such seizure—the abduction of the daughter of "Civilian Major's" greatest enemy—the soldiers had to be taught their lesson: "When these careless actions became rampant people reported the offending troops to the Military policemen who took steps and punished them. And so order and peace reigned later." (p. 11) The message underscored here is that even for an occupying army, crime does not pay. Justice ultimately triumphs and the wicked are always punished. The postwar occupation of defeated Biafra has been reduced to the rigid logic of a chapbook formula.

These fictional narratives set in Igboland during and after the war and the factual anthologies mentioned earlier are not the only kinds of Onitsha market literature engendered by the war. There is yet another type which stands somewhere between fact and fiction. This is the pseudo-historical play based on real happenings but not pretending to be an accurate account of what actually occurred. One might call the genre legendary drama or theater of the historically absurd. Before the war many of these chapbook plays had been written about prominent African and non-African leaders; *The Last Days of Lumumba, Dr. Zik in the Battle for Freedom, Tshombe of Katanga, The Sorrows, Complete Treason and Last Appeal of Chief Awolowo and Others,* and *Sylvanus Olympio (The Assassinated President of Togo Republic): A Dramatic Story of the Man who Laughed at Death* are but a few representative examples. Such plays spun legends out of the lives and deaths of famous men, often reinforcing and perpetuating myths about their attitudes and actions. It was perhaps inevitable that at least one should appear after the war called *The Last Days of Biafra* (Onitsha, 1972).

The author of this booklet, Orlando Thomas Iguh, explains in an introductory note that

> This drama "the last days of Biafra" represents the author's personal ideas of a few aspects of the numerous events which led to the emergence and collpase [sic] of the secessionist regime.
>
> The contents and names used therein are rather fictitious and have no bearing what so ever with any person living or dead. (p. ii)

The last statement is rather hard to accept, especially since at least one character, Major Nzeogwu, bears the same name as the Major whose role he enacts, and another, Military Governor Emeka, functions transparently in the role of Odumegwu-Emeka Ojukwu. Moreover, pictures of the real Nzeogwu and the real Ojukwu as well as of "His Excellency, Major General Gowon" adorn the cover and frontispiece of the booklet. There is no mistaking the leading men in this drama.

The play is really a piece of postwar anti-secessionist propaganda. Nearly every scene is set up as a debate, with the most admirable characters—particularly Major Nzeogwu—arguing the case against secession. Ojukwu is shown as being reluctant to bring war upon his people but feeling compelled by Federal actions to declare Biafra independent. He is encour-

aged to take a strong line by his advisers, his Consultative Assembly, and by Rivers chiefs who pledge their money and support to his cause. Ojukwu is portrayed not as a black-hearted villain but as a conscientious leader poorly advised—and perhaps the noblest Biafran of them all. It is clear the author thinks Ojukwu should have listened more attentively to Nzeogwu, who courageously continues to speak out against secession even after Biafra has been created. Later, four Biafran military officers are tried and executed for treason, just as four were in the real Biafra. By the end of the war, even the common people are shown to be opposed to continuing the struggle for independence. One juju priest, praying to the gods of the land for peace, says:

> We now implore you once more to save us, our children and our women from the doom which a few young ones in our midst have unleashed upon our people . . . Initially we all supported Biafra. But after several months of fruitless and frightful fighting we no longer see any sense in fighting a senseless war.
>
> It is said that if the penis does not die young, it will surely eat bearded meat. It is in the hope that your young ones might live old enough to have an abundance of this meat of life, to reproduce and perpetuate the efforts of our forebearers that we invoke you to put sense into the heads of our soldiers and their officers and halt this war immediately. (p. 43)

The play ends with Biafra's total surrender.

It is easy to dismiss such theatrics as inaccurate, far-fetched and wholly unreliable history, but the opinions expressed in the play may reflect authentic popular attitudes in contemporary Igboland toward the war and its leaders. What a given leader actually said and did during the war may be far less important to the common man than what that leader is believed to have said and done. The reputations of the best and worst men in history rest as much on hearsay as they do on hard evidence. The interpretation of Biafra's rise and fall offered in *The Last Days of Biafra* may therefore be a much closer reading of the mind of the average Federalist Igbo of this era—and in that sense, better history—than any textbook account could be.

However, it would be misleading to overemphasize the veracity of popular chapbook chronicles, fictional or otherwise. Some of them are sheer fabrications lacking the remotest resemblance to reality. As a horrible example, one can cite another postwar pamphlet entitled *The Complete Story and*

Trial of Adolf Hitler (Onitsha, n.d.), which tells of the conflict between Hitler and "British War Prime Minister Mr. Wilson Churchill" who were "the brains behind the first and second World wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945." (p. 3) At one point Church-Hill (the spelling of his name varies throughout the booklet) outlines his country's grievances against Hitler on BBC Radio:

> Six weeks ago, the German soldiers, navy and air force attacked Great Britain and damaged the government building in Liberia. Hitla's [sic] air force also bombed the civilian population of South Africa killing 9000 civilians, 40 innocent children and 60 pregnant women. At the same time, the German navy with its sub-marine, opened fire at the British war ships and sunk 300 of them killing about 8,000 British soldiers on board. Yesterday, Hitla's land force landed at Argentina—a British colony and committed rape, arson and genocide by wiping out all her inhabitants.
>
> In Central Europe, the German air force bombed the British Cement Industry, killing the General Manager of the Industry and blastering the production machines into pieces and finally in America, it was reported that the German navy has blockaded the Northern Atlantic out of communication between America and India.
>
> My government already has ordered the British soldiers out through his Majesty, King Judge the VI to arrest General Hitla and charge him before the Nation's National Court of Law. (pp. 12-13)

Hitler responds on the German radio with counter-charges, including the assertion that

> In the German Cameroons, Churchill's rebels attacked the town of Yaunde from British Military base in the Northern part of South Africa, killing 2,000 men, 400 old men, 5,000 innocent children and His Royal Highness Chief Rago the III, the Kolonji of Yaunde. The aggressive soldiers destroyed the Roman Catholic Hospital, killing the medical officer in charge, 10 nursing sisters, 50 attendant nurses, 300 patients, 5 women in labour room, 21 newly born babies, 75 male staff of the hospital. (p. 14)

Hitler is finally captured and brought to trial in New York City, where he is defended by Jomo Kenyatta's famous barrister, Mr. Dingle Foot. He is acquitted on two charges but found guilty on the third—committing genocide against the Jews. Before a sentence can be handed down,

> General Hitler broke the chains on his hands, jumped out of the dock and snatched a gun from one interpol. He shot the gun up and down in the court. The court members, including the Judges took to their heels and ran for their lives. Then General Hitler disappeared. Nobody could tell Hitler's whereabout up till today.
>
> The End (p. 28)

Such creative historiography cautions us not to take Nigerian chapbook chronicles too literally.

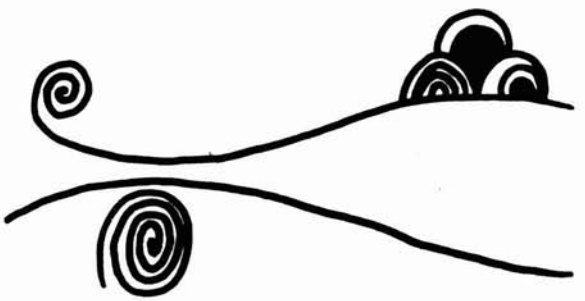
Of course, one could argue that this bogus biography of Hitler, with its references to news broadcasts by heads of state, indiscriminate bombings of hospitals and other nonmilitary targets, vociferous denunciations of rebels and frequent accusations of genocide, actually reflects far more about the conduct of the Nigerian civil war than it does about the progress of any other wars. But this would make it no different from other "biographical" dramas produced in prewar Onitsha which also bent foreign history to conform to local expectations, knowledge and experience. Chapbook authors tend to be long on fancy when they are short of facts.

But we must also remember that these authors work according to the conventions of an established literary tradition, that they are hired craftsmen in a commercial industry, that they must write to sell. They cannot afford to waste their time with art for art's sake or history for history's sake. Their publishers are likely to be highly conservative, printing only what seems guaranteed of turning a quick profit. The market, with its inexorable laws of supply and demand, remains the final arbiter of literary tastes.

In postwar Nigeria a number of Onitsha publishers were willing to take risks on factual and fictional chapbooks dealing with the war, provided these were written according to tested and familiar formulas. The new blood-red wine had to be poured into the same old bottles and purified of any lingering residues of Biafran spirits. Today the Onitsha literary marketplace appears to have returned to "business as usual." Apparently it takes more than a civil war to change the habits of a veteran popular literature.

FOOTNOTES

1. For accounts of some of these writings, see Ernest Emenyonu, "Post-war Writing in Nigeria," *Studies in Black Literature*, 4, 1 (1973), 17-24; *Issue*, 3, 2 (1973), 49-54; *Ufahamu*, 4, 1 (1973), 77-92; and Anerobi Ngwube, "Nigerian war literature," *Indigo* (Lagos), 2 (1974), 3-4, 6-7.
2. Nigerian popular literature has been extensively studied. The best single source of information is Emmanuel Obiechina's *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (Cambridge, 1973), the introduction to which lists earlier scholarship.
3. Ulli Beier, "Public Opinion on Lovers: Popular Nigerian Literature Sold in Onitsha Market," *Black Orpheus*, 14 (1974), 4.
4. Don Dodson, "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature," *Research in African Literatures*, 4 (1973), 175.
5. Joseph C. Anafulu, "Onitsha Market Literature: Dead or Alive?" *Research in African Literatures*, 4 (1973), 166.
6. See, e.g., my "Nigerian Chapbook Heroines," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 2 (1968), 441-50.



Chinweizu

ENERGY CRISIS

(A SONG)

(For All Those Who Almost Did, But Never Quite Did.)

She sat down with her man
At the table next to mine.
She took from me my pen,
My fat, four-color Bic.
She wrote my name and number
And led her man away.
She called up the next day:
"You bootleg hightest?
Supergood? Best in town?"
"I don't advertise," I said,
"If your vibes pull you in here,
If I got some you can try it."
She said she'd be right over.
One midnight, ten days later,
Her thirsty engine snorting,
Windshield wipers fluttering,
The big, bad, hungry mama
Rolled up to my pumps.
She hollered me to fill her up,
Oil, water and superhightest.
But Chevys, pickups, VWs,
Banged-up Volvos, sleek Cadillacs,
In long impatient all-day lines
Had guzzled my week's supply.

And so I said, sorry mama!
I'd like to help you, woman,
But I've got this energy crisis on my hands.

And brother, was she mad!
"Don't lie to me!" she cried.
"With a station like you've got,
Part of the biggest chain there is,
How could you be out of gas?"

"Well, where have you been, woman?
Never heard of the energy crisis?
This is rationing time!
Can't make a dry hole gush;
Can't squeeze water from marble balls;
So, woman, keep on rolling;
There's a gas pump down the road
Full and idle." But she said:
"Couldn't be paid to take that junk!
To drive on heating oil
And burn my engines out?
Young man, don't treat me mean.
Young blood, please treat me good.
I'll bring you custom every day."
"I'd like to please you woman,
But how could I take on more?
For love or money, how could I,
When my ration's all used up
And the energy lord won't give me more?"

And so tonight, sorry mama!
I'd like to help you, woman,
But I've got this energy crisis on my hands.

Right then she started hollering,
But the night, thank God, was deaf.
At last she quieted down:
"Lord, why are you so mean to me?
When he got it I didn't come,
Now I want it he's got none!
Got a long, long way to drive.
Lord, why are you so mean to me?"
"Now, don't you blame me, woman;
And don't you blame the Lord.
What in hell took you so long
To get your engine over here?
How could anyone ever miss
My multi-colored neon signs
Over that highway exit ramp?
Or did your vibes break down?"
"I know," she sighed, "I know.
Please, please, don't rub it in;

Please, when could you schedule me?"
"All right woman, easy now.
Get here Monday, bright and early,
And you'll get all you can carry;
And if your tank can hold it good,
I'll even give you all I've got.

But for tonight, sorry mama!
I'd like to help you, woman,
But I've got this energy crisis on my hands.

"And by the way, listen woman:
If you wanna get this gas
Don't fool around,
Don't drag your foot;
Come running like a starving dog
After the only bone in town."
"And who do you think you are," she yelled,
"King of the road or what?
I'll drive through hell on regular,
Even on low-grade heating oil,
Than hustle hightest like that."
"To tell you the truth," I said,
"I ain't king of nothing at all,
Just a tired, overworked man,
Minding my empty pumps."
But I bet she didn't hear.
Forgetting her oil and water,
She revved off, burning tires,
Blistering the cool of the night.
Next morning they found her
Out in the fields
Down by a frozen ditch,
A siezed-up, burnt-up engine
Smoking in the wind.

And still I say, sorry mama!
I would have helped you woman,
But I had this energy crisis on my hands.


ebike.

Olayinka Daini

A CONCUSSION OF MORES

In the days when long men sat
When long men sat on short stools
In the days of the loud fart
The loud political fart
You had to support the local hero
You had to cover your nostrils too
In the good old days
When long men sat on short stools
They didn't overreach themselves
They were too short
They were too shortsighted for that
They simply oversat
They simply oversat their stools
In the somersault of arrogance
A few broken ribs
A few coffins
A little gnashing of teeth
When the stools crumbled
When the support gave way
A little violence in the dawn
A little tumble in the dark
And some helter skelter in the day
In the day when fate vex
Were they complacent?
Was there insouciance?
In the days when death was common
It was proposed
It was toasted
It was dramatized
In the reality of the blood of sons
In the pool of the blood of daughters
In the days when death was cheap
You got it for standing out
You got it for lying low
You got it for running round
You got it for nothing

When brotherhood bursted arteries
And pain reached out to pain
In the obstinacy of wrong solutions
When guts called out for more blood
And bravery found more agonizing tasks
In the heat which patriotism made
In the rumpus which togetherness caused
The infidelities of death
The treacheries of sorrow
We mourn for the loss of the reincarnated
We mourn for the sins of the living
We justify the agony in cliches
And parade the injuries in metaphors
Our errors remain
Our errors remain on the rostrum
In the perpetual face saving of the tribe
In the usual pride of the clan
We must retain the sorrow
And give out the blames
And divide the blames among the strangers
The dignity of the sons must stand
Must stand on the foolishness of their fathers
The ego of the men must thrive
Must thrive in the foolishness of custom
And the foolishness is handy
You have to carry it
And the foolishness is comfortable
You have to wear it
In the points which you make
The moves which you propose
And thoughts by you generated
Disaster!
Disasters germinate
Disasters germinate bearing your imprint
Citizen X, you are respectable
Citizen Y, you are law abiding
Citizen Z, you are a public figure
A blooming patriot at that
A blooming fat patriot in any case
We never knew
We never knew patriotism can be so comfortable
Make a room

Make a room for me
I am a patriot too
Make a room
Make a room for us
We are natives of this nest
We shall take it without a pinch of salt
So that the bitterness can settle
We shall regard it without tainted specs
So that the truth can dawn
A packet of robbers
A packet of robbers can't thrive for ever
In the concourse of lust
A packet of robbers can't thrive for ever
There will still be crumbs
After the great feast
There will still be crumbs for the sparrows
After the sharing of the spoils
The beggars will remain
The beggars will survive
The beggars will survive the charities
Nobody asked the cockroach
Nobody asked the cockroach to dance before the hen
Nobody urged the rat
Nobody urged the rat to stand before the cat
A lion can't even reign for ever
In the jungle of events
A lion can't even reign all the time
So it was
So it had been
In the days of the loud fart
The loud political fart
You had to support the local hero
You had to cover your nostrils too.

> *Interpreters*, not only because as some might say it is faulty in its form, but because it is not really there—it does not belong to the society.[4]

On the other hand, Ikiddeh is satisfied with Chinua Achebe's novels which, according to him, are "directed to a certain simple but literate audience, such as school girls."[5] This is a wrong conclusion, since it implies that Achebe's novels are not for a sophisticated audience. Any novel that cannot be understood by the so-called simple audience will not endure in the hearts and minds of any people. Achebe writes like all writers who aim to communicate, rather than mystify. It is absurd to associate simplicity of expression with lack of intellectual sophistication.

Nobody would deny that the first use of language is to make understanding possible. The English, especially those who want to purify the language of their tribe, have been considering this issue for many centuries. For instance, John Locke identifies three ends of language: "to make known one man's thought or ideas to another; to do it with as much ease and quickness as possible, and thereby to convey the knowledge of things."[6] Ezra Pound puts it succinctly: "Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear."[7] Soyinka fails in this regard, but his obscurity has neither to do with the complexity of his ideas, nor with "culturally restricted materials." John Povey compares *The Interpreters* to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:*

> He takes the conventional situation of people living in present-day Lagos, seeking their own standards in a world of disintegrating values. But Soyinka raises this subject from the old stock presentation by creating a truer world of witty human beings. Men in fact, who are like Wole Soyinka himself perhaps though this is as far removed from the older kind of autobiography as is James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*. It is this major work that is most often brought to mind as one reads the Soyinka novel. In this book we have the characters not existing to demonstrate the common place response to culture conflict . . .[8]

Soyinka's "sophistication" is usually related to the modernist tradition. Bernth Lindfors argues that *The Interpreters* "owes far more to James Joyce and William Faulkner than it does to Yoruba folktales."[9] This paper seeks to find out whether this claim is verifiable; if so, whether it is positive or negative, and of course, whether or not Soyinka has used impressionistic techniques effectively. Soyinka seems to lack

Joyce's linguistic sophistication and discernment. Whereas Joyce usually prefers simple words, Soyinka is consistently obscure and muddled. When Joyce is obscure in diction it is deliberate or inevitable. Soyinka, on the other hand, often seems incapable of achieving clarity. Let us take a quick look at two passages, one from *The Interpreters*, the other from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I choose to exhibit the first paragraph of each book, beginning with Soyinka's:

> 'Metal on concrete jars my drink lobes.' This was Sagoe, grumbling as he stuck his fingers in his ears against the mad screech of iron tables. Then his neck was nearly snapped as Dehinwa leapt up and Sagoe's head dangled in the void where her lap had been. Bandele's arms never ceased to surprise. At half-span they embraced table chairs, pushed them deep into the main wall as dancers dodged long chameleon tongues of the cloudburst and the wind leapt at them, visibly malevolent. In a moment only the band was left.[10]

Compare the preceding with the following in terms of clarity and choice of words:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo . . .
>
> His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.[11]

If we should ask a fourth-grade pupil to read both passages, he/she would read Joyce's without any difficulty. From both books we pick another set of examples. From the beginning of part two of *The Interpreters* I choose the following:

> The Rains of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull, a million bleeding punctures of the sky-bull hidden in convulsive cloud humps, black, overfed for this one event, nourished on horizon tops of endless choice grazing, distant beyond giraffe reach. Some competition there is below, as bridges yield right of way to lorries packed to the running-board, and the wet tar spins mirages of un-speed-limits to heroic cars and their cargoes find a haven below the precipice. The blood of earth-dwellers mingles with blanched streams of the mocking bull, and flows into currents eternally below the earth. The Dome cracked above Sekoni's short-sighted head one messy night. Too late he saw the insanity of a lorry parked right in his path, a swerve turned into a skid and cruel arabesques of tyres. A futile heap of metal, and Sekoni's body lay surprised across the open door, showers of laminated glass around him, his beard one fastness of blood and wet earth.[12]

An average African reader would not know what "blanched" and "laminated," for instance, mean. Let us now consider the beginning of chapter three of *A Portrait of the Artist*:

> The swift December dusk had come tumbling clownishly after its dull day and, as he stared through the dull square of the window of the schoolroom, he felt his belly crave for its food. He hoped there would be stew for dinner, turnips and carrots and bruised potatoes and fat mutton pieces to be ladled out in thick peppered flourfattened sauce. Stuff it into you, his belly counselled him.
>
> It would be a gloomy secret night. After early nightfall the yellow lamps would light up, here and there, the squalid quarter of the brothels. He would follow a devious course up and down the streets, circling always nearer and nearer in a tremor of fear and joy, until his feet led him suddenly round a dark corner. The whores would be just coming out of their houses making ready for the night, yawning lazily after their sleep and settling the hairpins in their clusters of hair. He would pass by them calmly waiting for a sudden movement of his own will or a sudden call to his sinloving soul from their soft perfumed flesh. Yet as he prowled in quest of that call, his senses, stultified only by his desire, would note keenly all that wounded or shamed them; his eyes, a ring of porter froth on a clothless table or a photograph of two soldiers standing to attention or a gaudy playbill; his ears, the drawling jargon of greeting:
>
> —Hello, Bertie, any good in your mind?
>
> —Is that you, pigeon?
>
> —Number ten. Fresh Nelly is waiting on you.
>
> —Goodnight, husband! Coming in to have a short time?[13]

In the preceding passage, obviously not written for Africans, there is no word which an average Irish reader would not understand. Again, as complement, let us compare the first paragraph of *Season of Anomy* with that of Joyce's *Ulysses*. We are still considering their choice of words.

> A quaint anomaly, had long governed and policed itself, was so singly-knit that it obtained a tax assessment for the whole populace and paid it before the departure of the pith-helmeted assessor, in cash, held all property in common, literally, to the last scrap of thread on the clothing of each citizen—such an anachronism gave much patronising amusement to the cosmopolitan sentiment of a profit-hungry society. A definitive guffaw from the radical centres of debate headed by Ilosa, dismissed Aiyero as the prime example of unscientific communalism, primitive and embarrassingly sentimental. To the governments that came and went it posed neither threat nor liability. Thus it was that Aiyero, unique beneficiary of a three-quarter century of accidental isolation was permitted to be itself. Until its rediscovery at the time of the census . . . the tourists swamped Aiyero, then the sociologists armed with erudite irrelevances. Even the Corporation, intent on its ever-expanding cocoa drive took note of a new market for cocoa-bix and cocoa-wix. Ofeyi, the promotions man took his team down to Aiyero.[14]

The preceding is replete with abstract and vague expressions, as well as cliches. But Joyce's *Ulysses* which has the reputation

of being a most sophisticated and troublesome novel remains clear and fresh in diction:

> Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:
>
> —Introibo ad altare Dei.
>
> Halted, he peered down the dark winding stairs and called up coarsely:
>
> —Come up, Kinch. Come up, you fearful jesuit.
>
> Solemnly he came forward and mounted the round gunrest. He faced about and blessed gravely thrice the tower, the surrounding country and the awaking mountains. Then catching sight of Stephen Dedalus, he bent towards him and made rapid crosses in the air, gurgling in his throat and shaking his head. Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on top of the staircase and looked coldly at the shaking gurgling face that blessed him, equine in its length, and at the light untonsured hair, grained and hued like pale oak.
>
> Buck Mulligan peeped an instant under the mirror and then covered the bowl smartly.
>
> —Back to the barracks, he said sternly.[15]

I hope that it is now clear that Joyce aims to achieve clarity in diction, while Soyinka prefers abstract words which fog up his thoughts. Any work of fiction or poetry whose words are too obscure for the so-called simple, but literate, audience is not suitable for human consumption, except, perhaps, as a riddle. I am obliged to bring to notice an American writer who is one of the best modern experimentalists in fiction, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., the author of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a best seller which is now read in classrooms all over the world. He uses flashbacks, and is very much interested in other impressionistic techniques, but this is how he begins his book:

> All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all the names.[16]

This is a very serious anti-war novel, but it is read all over the world by adults and teenagers alike. Well, I suppose we have spent ample time showing that simplicity of diction is a virtue found in all good writers, and that it is neither synonymous with puerility, nor characteristic of Impressionism.

The preceding should afford us a clue to the obstacles in Soyinka's novels. Because they are written in obscure and tired

language, their meanings are obscured. We cannot over-emphasize the need for clarity in literature—all forms of literature, oral or otherwise. As Elias Schwartz argues:

> I think we may also rule out the notion that literature is distinguished by a special diction and syntax, different in some degree from the diction and syntax of standard speech. We may rule this out though it is obvious that some literary works do in fact depart from standard diction and syntax. The point is that other literary works do not contain such departures. Thus Hemingway's novels and short stories are markedly paratactic and virtually without highly abstract words; Dreiser's novels, on the other hand, are written in a prose virtually indistinguishable from ordinary speech. Yet both Hemingway and Dreiser write novels.[17]

If writers for whom English is the first language prefer diction of everyday speech, why should writers for whom English language is a second tongue prefer to wallow in abstractions? It is unfortunate that this question has to be asked in 1975, especially in connection with one of the most talented writers of current times.

Soyinka's wayward diction is even more obvious in dialogue, although "it is in dialogue above all, that the novelist has more opportunity, if he so wishes, to suggest continuity between his fictional world and the real world, and to allow his own activity as verbal maker to recede from sight."[18] Every line of dialogue from a novel could easily be imagined to proceed from the mouth of an actual person. We do not have to pick an example of an effective dialogue from outside of Africa. Chinua Achebe is a genius in this regard. The following is taken from his *Arrow of God:*

> The little children in Ezeulu's compound joined the rest in welcoming the moon. Obiageli's shrill voice stood out like a small ogene amoung drums and flutes. The Chief Priest could also make out the voice of his youngest son, Nwafo. The women too were in the open talking.
>
> 'Moon,' said the senior wife, Matefi, 'may your face meeting mine bring good fortune.'
>
> 'Where is it?' asked Ugoye, the younger wife. 'I don't see it. Or am I blind?'
>
> 'Don't you see beyond the top of the ukwa tree? Not there. Follow my finger.'
>
> 'Oho, I see it. Moon, may your face meeting mine bring good fortune. But how is it sitting? I don't like its posture.'
>
> 'Why?' asked Matefi.
>
> 'I think it sits awkwardly—like an evil moon.'
>
> 'No,' said Matefi. 'A bad moon does not leave anyone in doubt.

Like the one under which Okuata died. Its legs were up in the air.'

'Does the moon kill people?' asked Obiageli, tugging at her mother's cloth.

'What have I done to this child? Do you want to strip me naked?'

'I said does the moon kill people?'

'It kills little girls,' said Nwafo.

'I did not ask you, ant-hill nose.'

'You will soon cry, Usa bulu Okpili.'

'The moon kills little boys

The moon kills ant'hill nose

The moon kills little boys . . .' Obiageli turned everything into a song.[19]

In his novels, Chinua Achebe is able to convey all the nuances of meaning and emotion and character traits, as well as the tension between doing and reflecting, with little authorial comment. This is one of the hallmarks of his fiction. But when we study the conversation between Pa Ahime and Ofeyi in *Season of Anomy*, we perceive a carelessness which should not be associated with a writer of Soyinka's stature:

Ofeyi smiled. 'What do you call this then?' The sounds of drums were not far and from time to time they could see distant groups of dancers across the field, hear the thud of feet and the flash of bangles in the sun.

'We have observances' Ahime conceded. 'We have our rituals. We are a farming and fishing community so we acknowledge our debts to earth and to the sea. And when a great man dies, a founder, we pay him homage. If we wish to take one full year burying him it is still less than his dues. For a people who own everything in common what we spend merely returns to us.'

'As with earth?'

The old man stood still, stared thoughtfully at him. The look in his eyes could be pleasure or surprise. 'Say that again,' he said.

Ofeyi frowned, repeated the phrase.

'And where did you learn that?' the old man demanded.

'Is it something to be learnt?' Ofeyi demanded in turn. 'You forget our first meeting. I came here with a message remember?'

'Ah yes of course. The land to those who till it . . .'

'The sea to those who fish it . . .'

The old man stroked his chin, smiling, 'Yes . . . and I told our departed Founder. I said to him, here comes a man who brings us our own view of life. And he said simply, give him the run of the meetinghouse . . . how strange . . .'

'What is strange Pa?'

'When Aiyetomo, our parent community turned its back on the world, founding Elder always said someone like you would turn up from the outer cesspit of the land, a stranger who would take our message to the world. But you came here instead, to us the offshoot.'[20]

The preceding is more like a conversation between robots. It

is inconceivable that Soyinka writes in this manner. It is artificial, and uneven. The same Pa Ahime who says: "We have observances . . ." remarks: "When Aiyetomo, our parent community turned its back on the world . . ." Of course both Ofeyi and Pa Ahime have similar speech habits. Wole Soyinka is often unable to give his characters distinguishable speech. Besides there is hardly any difference between Soyinka's diction and the utterances of his characters. We have already read a narrative passage from *Season of Anomy*. Let us compare it with the following which combines narrative and dialogue:

> To Ahime he had explained this, saying 'No, I have no wish to die yet.'
>
> The old man shook his head at what he deemed delirious talk.
>
> 'To go into that place is to court death. Wait for frenzy to die down. You can help no one. If it is given for the men of Aiyero to be the sacrifice . . . it was a good cause.'
>
> No sacrifice, he had thought bitterly, only more scapegoats to lay a false trail of blood away from the altar of the unholy god, Mammon. No, not sacrifice. Ahime, priest of the sacrificial knife, he of all people should know better than to desecrate that word.
>
> So Ahime led him to the pool. 'Whatever bones lie beneath the water, the spirits that left from them must be beneficent ones, of that I am certain. Just sitting on the shore I drift off sometimes for an entire day. At the end I feel restored, rejuvenated. No matter what trials drove me there to seek its peace, they are resolved, as if an oracle had whispered in my ear.'
>
> The only voice that came was the call of Iriyise. And trapped voices of the men of Aiyero who had gone out at his call, vanguard of the new idea. . . .
>
> The channel opened abruptly into a wide expanse of water. He took his bearings from landmarks in the receding town, stood up in the craft and secured the engine over the stern. Seizing the cord firmly between fingers of his clenched fist he pulled. The engine roared into life.[21]

John Povey, rather euphemistically, hints at Soyinka's inability to write dialogue when he claims that the characters in *The Interpreters* are like Soyinka himself.[22]

Soyinka's obscurity is often mistakenly compared to Joyce's. Undoubtedly, both use rhetorical devices in order to go beyond the mere lexical level. The difference, however, is that Soyinka's word-play tends to fog up his thoughts and bog down his fiction. It is obvious that Soyinka lacks the verbal sophistication which sustains Joyce. By the use of puns, antitheses, onomatopoeia, synesthesia, and complex words, Joyce often achieves enormous intellectual and emotional impact.

On the other hand, Soyinka seems to be incapable of going beyond the lexical meaning of words. This is however, understandable; after all, he is not as close to the English literary tradition as Joyce. How can we presume to acquire the magical resources of a language which is foreign to us? But Soyinka is frequently trying to capture the inner magic of the English language. Unfortunately, he often degenerates into verbiage and abstraction. Joyce, on the other hand, achieves emotional and intellectual intensity without abandoning the simple idiom which is vivid and strong—as in the following passage where Stephen remembers his dead mother:

> . . . Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown grave-clothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the well-fed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting.[23]

Joyce tries to convey every aspect of this experience as vividly as possible. Note the use of "odour of wax and rosewood," "a faint odour of wetted ashes," "a dull green mass of liquid," and "green sluggish bile," which apart from their vividness, intensify the experience by appealing to the senses of smell and sight. Soyinka lacks this multi-layered intensity in his fiction.

Soyinka's description is usually woolly, partly because of his frequent use of abstract, vague and tired expressions. He tells you of the situation, instead of showing it to you. Soyinka's inability to communicate his thoughts cannot be justified in any way. Critics like Charles Larson seem to suggest that Soyinka's obscurity is caused by his impressionistic technique as well as his intellectual sophistication. The present writer feels that Soyinka's obscurity has to do with his fondness for abstract diction. There is a mistaken assumption that impressionism is mere abstraction, and in their quest for subconscious meanings, some writers tend to avoid concrete forms of experience. Although the modernist novel is concerned with human condition, the universal, "rather than particular events,"[24] achievement of meaning is impossible without metaphor. Impressionism does not preclude specificity. For instance, dream messages are communicated, not through

abstract words, but through symbols. It seems that Soyinka's impressionism excludes the fact that dreams are made of symbols, not mere predicative thoughts. Even Plato who argues that the most important truths and beauties are too lofty to be caught in images, often uses concrete forms as a stepping-stone to the transcendent truth. The impressionistic writers also believe that transcendent truth can be achieved only by systematic thought, but they differ from Plato, in their aim to capture meaning by paying attention to detail which can also carry the mind "inevitably to the bright center."[25] Also, the symbolist poets who are noted for leaving much to the imagination, "describe the details, which although not central, are so vivid to haunt the mind." Although Christopher Okigbo is often criticized for pursuing fleeting shades, he is most specific, and able to communicate a lot of meaning. Keats is often considered the most unrestrained Romantic poet, but he does communicate his thoughts through images which the mind can perceive. In *The Man Died* where Soyinka is intent on communicating his experience, he achieves vividness as in the following scene where he confronts himself in the mirror:

> I sat in the chair, felt the white cloth passed under my chin, tied at the back of my neck. I reached for the mirror, slowly turned it over and looked at my face.
>
> The hair was unbelievable. I had been prepared for it but still it took me by surprise. It was long and dense and I wondered how my comb had managed to penetrate it for so long. I took the comb from the barber and said, 'You'd better let me do that for you.'[26]

Although this is rather weak, it is a genuine attempt to convey emotion through description (in clear simple diction).

Vagueness is one of the limitations of African Literature published in English. Only a few of our writers have the capacity to create mood and situation through description. Elegance of expression has nothing to do with this: a writer can use the most atrocious English (grammar) to create a situation of great intensity. Why are some critics so bewildered by Tutuola's popularity? Because they think it is inconceivable for one who writes in pidgin to be acclaimed over hundreds of other writers with more than average proficiency in the use of English! He uses the tools at his command with maximum effectiveness. His descriptions are frequently effective. In this short passage, Death shows the hero of *The Palmwine Drinkard* some aspects of his work:

> He took me around his house and his yam garden too, he showed me the skeleton bones of human-beings which he had killed since a century ago and showed me many other things also, but there I saw that he was using skeleton bones of human beings as fuel woods and skull heads of human beings as his basins, plates and tumblers etc.[27]

Soyinka could learn a lot from Achebe, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Elechi Amadi and others who have been successful in presenting vivid experiences in their fiction:

> The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point.[28]

> I was compelled to put on rags for a stretch of many weeks until they became a nest of lice. I'd sit out in the veld scrapping off the eggs and crushing lice between the nails of my fingers. I gave up trying to wash the rags in river water. Yet I don't remember ever falling ill except for occasional stomach upsets caused by eating prickly pears excessively. The only remedy for a constipated stomach after a feast of pears was a sharpened stick pushed in through the anus and turned round and round. Castor oil and other laxatives were practically unknown for loosening the bowels.[29]

> A hair-raising cry rent the air as Agwoturumbe pulled out the arrow. There were pieces of flesh clinging to its barbed points. The hole in Ekwueme's belly dripped dark red blood which stained the upper part of his wrapper and the mat on which he was lying. Large beads of perspiration hung on his face and as he turned his head slowly this way and that the larger drops fell on the mat.[30]

I have laid so much emphasis on description because as I have pointed out, it is a way of creating verisimilitude. Besides it complements other aspects of fiction—plot, characterization, dialogue, and others.

How does Soyinka's diction affect his work as a whole? We have taken note of its effect on dialogue, as well as description. In both, Soyinka fails; so his failure in character delineation is understandable. His description of action suffers from the same lack of specificity. There is a characteristic vagueness in Soyinka's description of action, an example of which is evident in the burial scene in *Season of Anomy*. Although Soyinka takes much space in description of activity, he hardly presents images perceivable by the imagination. Throughout he seems to be stage-directing:

> When all appeared set to his satisfaction he brought down the arm and, one after the other, in no particular order but with earth-

> shaking thuds that brought a tremor to the feet of the furthest in the congregation the bulls were felled. It was a deft, near-invisible manoeuvre, a multiple exposure of swift complementary motions of one rope.[31]

How can one see any of the action when it is all in Soyinka's head? We are told "the bulls were felled," but we do not see the felling, or the "fellers." In any case, for Soyinka "it was a deft, near invisible manoeuvre . . ." which perhaps, the reader is not meant to perceive.

Inasmuch as he fails to particularize the action, as well as the dialogue and place, he fails in characterization. After all, they are all integral to the experience which he is trying to convey. And here we may relate all this to Charles Larson's division of fiction into situation and character, and his placing Soyinka among the novelists of the future who would emphasize "character individuality" over situation.[32] But we may ask: Is it possible to achieve character individuality without specificity in action, dialogue and situation?

Larson's misconception of the novel genre is evident in the following passage where he tries to clarify his point of view:

> From these statements it should be clear that the situational novel is not limited to African fiction alone but is a form which has long existed in the West. I tend to think of Henry James' works as belonging in this pattern—*The American*, for instance.[33]

Division of fiction into situation and character is as absurd as the statement that there are men who are made of bones and those who are made of flesh. In 1884, Henry James, to whom Larson refers, found it necessary to comment on the distinction:

> I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art—that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts.[34]

And as if he were anticipating Charles Larson, Henry James continued:

> There is an old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident which must have cost many a smile to the intending fabulist who was keen about his work. . . . What is charac-

> ter but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture of a novel that is *not* of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it? It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character.[35]

Joyce and other modernist writers differ from the novelists of the past in their almost total refusal to entertain the reader. Because they are hypercritical, they are said to be more intellectual than the former. But, the form of *Ulysses* is suited to its essence which is ". . . that the world is coming apart, that a terrible and mysterious fate is running away with it, that technology is overwhelming it, that the center does not hold, and that the sensitive man can only record this thing and protest against it as he goes down—Joseph K. dying like a dog . . ."[36] But notwithstanding that these works are intellectual in spirit, they possess verisimilitude. This can only happen if the content and form are one. This demands "artistic subtlety, for contrivance must never be obvious. Once the reader is distracted from the story by the author's cleverness, he is more likely to read as though he were playing a game with him than enjoying a literary experience."[37]

The response of modern European writers to Impressionism is usually conditioned by their attitudes to life. Herman Wouk is optimistic, hence he writes: "The narrative gift was born in me, and I use it to speak this word as well as I can, as widely as I can. Whether it is a voice that should be heard or not, it is my voice, and I speak it from my soul."[38] Another modernist writer puts it this way:

> But perhaps a modest and fair statement of the case is that human beings have always told stories to one another. By what right have they done this, and on what authority? Well, on none, really. They have simply obeyed the impulse to tell and the desire to hear. Science and technology are not likely to remove this narrating and spell-binding oddity from the soul.[39]

Charles Larson therefore errs in assuming that African novels will become "more typically Western"—that is, more like *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Ulysses*. It is neither inevitable nor necessary for African writers to imitate their European and American counterparts. He also errs in implying that all modern European novelists write like Joyce. Although Joyce's impressionistic form has inspired many writers, it is not as

pervading as it appears. Many modern writers, as we have just noticed, continue to write conventional novels which Larson erroneously describes as situational.

Nevertheless, *A Portrait of the Artist, Ulysses* and *Slaughter-House-Five* possess verisimilitude, since their authors took their art seriously. By striving to portray experience and emotion with as close attention to narrative detail as possible, they succeeded in convincing the reader. Although events are "unstuck in time," digressions "are for the purpose of emphasizing states of mind and emotions, not for that of denying actual continuity," which is often the case with Soyinka's novels.[40] That is why there is order in these novels.

One is frustrated, stymied, by the chaos in Soyinka's novels, a chaos that has no ethical or aesthetic basis. One gets the impression that Soyinka is imitating the impressionistic form for its own sake, and with little integrity or originality. To begin with, complication of narration, as we have noted, is suited to the theme of despair resulting from materialism. Although Africa is part of the world, her metaphysical view of the world is still cohesive. Africans are not overwhelmed by facts or spiritual doubts. Although we have suffered oppression, and will perhaps continue to suffer, we are still hopeful, albeit our optimism thrives on misery. Nihilism of the kind expressed in *Ulysses* is foreign to Africans. This may seem a moral issue, but it is equally aesthetic. Content and form need to cohere, so also emotion and reason. It is because of this that Chinua Achebe takes Ayi Kwei Armah to task for dealing "not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the Human condition."[41] But this is not to say that Armah writes like Soyinka. Armah is much more articulate and vivid. That is why *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* will continue to be read and enjoyed, despite its obsession with the *human condition.*

There is no doubt but that Soyinka is capable of writing great fiction; but, unless he hacks away his obscure and abstract diction and aims to achieve vividness, he has little chance of doing so.

(This paper was presented to the First African Literature Association Conference in Austin, Texas in March 1975)

FOOTNOTES

1. Charles Larson, *Emergence of African Literature* (Indiana University, 1971), p. 246.
2. John Povey, "Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka," *Conch Review of Books*, Vol. 2, No. 1 March, June 1974, p. 167.
3. Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature* (Africana, 1975), p. 161.
4. Ime Ikiddeh, In a discussion on "The Novel and Reality in Africa and America" held at the University of Lagos, January 26, 1973. The transcript of the same title is edited by Theophilus Vincent, p. 28.
5. Ime Ikiddeh, p. 28.
6. John Locke, "The Right Use of Words," *The Handbook of Oratory*, ed. William Byars (Kaiser, 1901), p. 150.
7. Ezra Pound, "Interludes," *The Modern Stylists*, ed. Donald Hall (Collier-Macmillan, 1968), p. 60.
8. John Povey, "Changing Themes in the Nigerian Novel," *New African Literature and the Arts I*, ed. Joseph Okpaku (Thomas Crowell, 1970), pp. 38-39.
9. Lindfors, p. 161.
10. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (Collier, 1965), p. 3.
11. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist* (Viking, 1972), p. 7.
12. Soyinka, p. 167.
13. Joyce, p. 102.
14. Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (The Third Press, 1973), p. 2.
15. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Vintage, 1961), p. 3.
16. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Slaughterhouse-Five* (Delta, 1969), p. 1.
17. Elias Schwartz, *The Forms of Feeling* (Kennikat, 1972), p. 24.
18. David Lodge, *Language and Fiction* (Columbia, 1966), p. 47.
19. Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (Anchor, 1969), pp. 2-3.
20. *Season of Anomy*, p. 11.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
22. Povey, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
23. *Ulysses*, p. 5.
24. M. A. Goldberg, "Chronology, Character, and the Human Condition," *Critical Approaches to Fiction*, ed. Shiv. K. Kumar *et al.* (McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 22.
25. Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1949), p. 502.
26. *Season of Anomy*, p. 218.
27. Amos Tutuola, *The Palmwine Drinkard* (New York, Grove, 1953), p. 28.
28. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London, Heinemann, 1958), p. 3.
29. Ezekiel Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue* (New York: Anchor, 1971), p. 11.
30. Elechi Amadi, *The Concubine* (Heinemann, 1966), p. 280.
31. *Season of Anomy*, p. 15.
32. Larson, p. 279.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
34. Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Nineteenth Century British Novelists on the Novel*, ed. George Barnett (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971), pp. 247-48.
35. James, p. 248.
36. Herman Wouk, "Reflections on the Modern Novel," *Saturday Review World*, p. 10.
37. Edward Bloom, *Order of Fiction* (Odyssey, 1964), p. 126.
38. Wouk, p. 13.
39. Saul Bellow, "Minstrels v. Machines: Literature in the Age of Technology," *Harpers*, Aug., 1974, p. 50.
40. Bloom, p. 75.
41. Chinua Achebe, "Africa and Her Writers," *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. XIV, No. 3, p. 625.

Melvin Dixon

TOUR GUIDE: *La Maison des Esclaves*

He speaks of voyages
and men travelling spoon fashion,
women dying in afterbirth,
babies clinging
to salt-dried nipples.
But what his old eyes still see here
his lips have few words. And where
his flat thick feet still walk
his hands crack
into a hundred life lines.

Here waves rush to shore
breaking the news that we return
to empty rooms
where the sea is nothing calm,
and the sun tasting the skin
of black men
leaves teeth marks.

The rooms are empty until he speaks.
His guttural French is a hawking trader;
his quick Woloff, a restless warrior;
his slow impeccable syllables,
a gentleman trader. he tells them
in their own language
what they have done.

Our touring maps and cameras ready
we stand in the weighing room
where chained men once paraded firm backs;
their women, open full breasts;
and children
rows of shiny teeth.

They watched from the balcony
and set the price in guilders, francs,

pesetas and English pounds. Later,
when he has finished showing us
we too can leave our coins
where stiff legs
dragged in endless bargain.

He shows us how some sat knee-bent
in the first room.
Young virgins waited in the second.
In the third, already red,
the sick and dying
gathered near the exit to the sea.

In the weighing room again
he takes a chain to show us
how it's done—this measure of men.
We take photographs to remember,
others leave coins to forget
but no one speaks
except iron on stone
and the sea
where nothing's safe.

He smiles at the three of us today
for he has spoken of the ancestors:
his, ours.
We leave quietly, each alone,
knowing that they who come after us
and breaking
in these tides will find
red empty rooms
to measure long journeys.

with Sandra and Peggy
Ile de Gorée, West Africa

REVIEWS

AFRICAN LITERARY CRITICISM TODAY

African Literature Today #7: Focus On Criticism, edited by Eldred D. Jones (London: Heinemann/New York: Africana, 1975).

The Benin Review #1, edited by Abiola Irele and Pius Oleghe (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1974).

If the 1975 issue of *African Literature Today* is at all representative of current African criticism—and I believe it is—then the impression is sustained that the scene is dominated by three preoccupations, namely

1) quarrels over who is most competent to criticise what;
2) expressions of genealogical anxieties of the sort quite characteristic of colonial literatures groping their ways out of mongrelism;
3) debates over two rival approaches to the criticism of African literature—that grounded on timeless, universal values, so-called, and that grounded on African historical values.

It is especially in connection with this third preoccupation that a joint review of these two magazines is most appropriate.

The above preoccupations are, of course, some of the features to be expected in a discipline as yet unsure of its purposes, and undecided about its methods. But some of the amazing features in this case are worthy of special mention. On the matter, for instance, of who is most competent to criticise what, I am amazed to find that the origins of a critic seem sometimes far more important to the discussion than his actual performance. In a scene rife with veiled ethnic wars, the Igbo critic feels duty bound to defend and uphold Igbo writers; the Yoruba critic feels duty bound to attack, or at the least to slight, the works of any Igbo writer; furthermore, an Oshogbo man, it is felt, is congenitally barred from competence to, and should not dare to criticise the works of a Shagamu woman; and, effrontery of effronteries!, why should a non-African, especially a European, dare criticise an African

writer? In a recent, and rather silly version of this sort of thinking, Wole Soyinka, in his recent symposium piece, "The Aesthetic Illusion," takes a position that implies that even an Afro-American or Afro-Caribbean critic, who spends a lifetime acquiring the necessary knowledge of relevant African matters, should be regarded as, somehow, still not quite competent or credentialed to pronounce authoritatively on the African writing he has exhaustively studied. One would have thought that a sufficient criterion would be whether the critic, whoever he may be, showed that he knew what he was talking about, and whether he talked sense. But no! Somehow the myth continues, and is encouraged by some who ought to know better, that if you come from the same village as the writer of a given work, your cultural background gives you "some kind of inherited insight" that will *necessarily* make you a better critic than others; and that "because we are Africans our explanations will necessarily be better than those of a scholar-critic who is not." Solomon Iyasere rightly flails this silly but rather widespread attitude and points out, quite rightly, that

> The information about cultural backgrounds is simply information, descriptive and not evaluative. Of itself, it does not elucidate the work. As information, it can be ascertained by any careful study. But when we apply this information as an aid in explicating a text, we move from the descriptive to the analytical and evaluative and it is here that the literary critic's task begins.
> —Solomon Iyasere, "African Critics on African Literature: A Study in Misplaced Hostility," *African Literature Today*, #7, p. 25

Perhaps, not until the nature, scope, assumptions and purposes of the discipline have been openly debated, researched and established, so nobody is left in doubt what to do; not until we adopt a scientific attitude to literary criticism, will the above sorts of nonsense be properly buried.

The African variety of the anxieties of colonial literatures can take some very interesting forms. For instance, there is a rather large proportion of critical writing that devotes itself almost entirely to tracing the European pedigree of African works. These literary genealogists seem totally absorbed in tracing European literary influences, exhaustively documenting imaginative debts to Eliot, Conrad, Forster, Dostoevski etc., etc. Which may at times be good and necessary work. But there can, and often is, too much of even a good thing. And I cannot help wondering at times if the real purpose of

the exercise is not merely to dazzle or impress us with the critic's knowledge of and intimacy with the foreign work in question. For these critics often end up saying little if anything valuable about the African work itself, and entirely nothing of its debts to the African tradition. All I wish to register here is my sense that there is more, far more, to African literary criticism than such preoccupations which tend to rivet our consciousness upon Europe. And it is my hope that a fuller investigation of the tasks that African criticism ought to concentrate upon should have a corrective influence on these matters.

With that I now come to the central issue of this review, one which I sense is bound to occupy us all for quite a while longer,—namely the contest between two rival approaches to African criticism. In *African Literature Today #7* the sniping between both sides emerges in Eldred Jones' editorial dicta that "the central document is the work itself," and that "a work of art cannot be rescued from its own deficiencies by appeals to its background." It emerges also in Ernest Emenyonu's advocacy that "an essential keynote in the appraisal of works of literature by Africans today" is an imperative, expressed by Emmanuel Obiechina in the following words:

> In a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria, it is imperative that the culture and life-ways of the component units should be given full airing so that national sentiments are built upon the firm foundation of understanding.
> —quoted in "Who Does Flora Nwapa Write For?," by Ernest Emenyonu, *African Literature Today #7*, p. 29

This sort of imperative is denounced by Iyasere for being "blind to the distinction between art and reality." (*op. cit.*, p. 23) In his preoccupation with the "intrinsically literary" and the "artistic aspects" of a work, a preoccupation that at times veers dangerously close to textolatry, Iyasere takes Emenyonu, Oladele Taiwo, and Abiola Irele to task for insisting upon such an imperative, because, he thinks, it leads critics "to emphasize non-literary elements in African creative writings," (*op. cit.*, p. 20); to place emphasis on socio-anthropological matters "of little or no literary importance," (*op. cit.*, p. 22); and to eliminate, as "un-African," any "formal aspect of the novel at which a writer may not be successful," such as "coherence."

This debate reaches a sort of peak of intensity, on a different but allied track, in the heated exchange between Eustace

Palmer and Adeola James. In her review of Eustace Palmer's *An Introduction To The African Novel*, Mrs. James charges the work with being preoccupied with questions of style and technical competence, and with having a Eurocentric point of reference. She demands that African critics eschew a derivative approach to African literature; and that African literature be looked at "not from any vague or glib universal criteria (if any such thing exists) but from the definite historical reality which gives birth to our literature." (*ALT #7*, p. 150). She blames Palmer's approach and views on his western education, and on his not "being conversant with the needs of the majority of the African public." (*ibid.*, p. 150) In his reply to this review, Palmer says:

> This kind of woolly talk about the needs of the majority of the African public always suggests to me that ideological considerations are coming to the fore, with possibly disastrous consequences (p. 125)

He goes on to air his suspicion that all that Mrs. James

> requires from these novels is that they should concern themselves with the dehumanisation and oppression of the African peoples; the quality of the novelist's execution should not matter to the subjective, committed critic. (p. 127)

I find this debate important and fascinating in all its ramifications, especially for what it tells us about the commitments of our critics, and for what needs to be done to state it in terms that might permit some useful resolution. For in this, as in a lot of other disputes, it would appear to be a characteristic of critics that their most vehement quarrels are held over assumptions about their business which everyone takes good care to keep latent and inexplicit. Perhaps if these assumptions were fully aired, the debate would collapse, leaving them with nothing better to do than twiddle their thumbs and bite their pencils. And who wants to do that?

Among the important issues raised for examination by these debates are the so-called sociological or anthropological bias in African novels and criticism; the consequences of employing Eurocentric canons in criticising African literature; the charge of "ideology" and what it means, if anything; the issue of textolatry and formalism among our critics; and the allied question of the relationship between literary forms and social values. To start with the first on the above list, Eustace Palmer raises the issue of sociological bias in the following way:

> Some of the earliest (African novelists)—Tutuola, Camara Laye, and Chinua Achebe—derived their inspiration from traditional lore, indigenous customs, and the oral tradition, in a bid to demonstrate to their readers, African and non-African alike, that Africa has a culture she could be proud of. The earliest novels therefore had a distinctly sociological bias. Partly because of this sociological preoccupation and partly because African literature was a new, and therefore interesting, phenomenon these novels attracted a lot of attention from the Western world. Metropolitan critics and reviewers hailed the new literature with delight as quaint, charming, dignified and different. Social anthropologists and specialists in African studies were equally enthusiastic.
> —Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction To The African Novel* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1972), p. ix.

Now, if this is the sort of thing the issue is really based upon, it is a spurious one. Such a sociological bias belongs, not to the novels, but to the beholding eyes and sensibilities of the 'metropolitan critics and reviewers." That Europe responds with condescending wonder to a work, and raves about elements which are unfamiliar and quaint to its experience, is not a fault of the work, but rather an index of the ethnocentrism, cultural snobbery, and imperialist arrogance Europeans routinely exude. It seems to me quite unfair to charge a work with sociological bias because Europeans approach it with a sociological bias, and tear it apart for every last anthropological tidbit they can exhume. The question for us is: are we, and ought we to be, fixated upon the same things? Why should we too regard as sociological things that are familiar to us, that are simply elements of the African setting of African novels? In showing up the mind games involved in this question, it is perhaps necessary to raise a few other questions.

Why is a novel about African life by an African to be considered sociological or anthropological when a novel about African life by Joyce Cary is not so considered? Why are novels about English society by Englishmen not considered sociological or anthropological? Is *The Forsyte Saga* or *Decline and Fall* considered to have a sociological bias? Is Joyce's *Ulysses* considered a sociological work on Dublin? Yet I, an African and a critic, do find much that is quaint and different in them from what I am familiar with within my own cultural background. And any specialist in English upperclass studies would be delighted to read *Decline and Fall* for its wealth of socio-anthropological information. Going further back and afield, I am yet to hear these fellows dismiss Homer or Hesiod

as socio-anthropological documents, and hence not quite ART. Yet *The Iliad* and *The Works And Days* are packed full of socio-anthropological information, and without disguise. When Homer finds it necessary to give you the background of a spear, he stops, even in the middle of his description of a battle, and tells you who made it, from what wood felled on what mountain, from what iron, in what forge, by what technique, under the auspices of what god or goddess or sprite, and how it came to be carried into that battle, in the hand of the warrior about to drive it into the breastbone of his victim. Hesiod is full of Greek proverbs, outright moralizings, and advice on sowing, reaping, taking a wife and so on. Yet we don't hear these works looked askance on, or inveighed against as having socio-anthropological biases of the sort African writers are daily castigated for. What's really going on? What is the real motive of a criticism that harps on this matter?

Some of what these critics might dismiss as socio-anthropological may be indispensable for the African novel which is read by Africans from different cultural backgrounds. There are things the Yoruba or Ewe writer needs to introduce into his narrative to make a scene or action intelligible to his Acoli or Hausa reader. To urge the exclusion of such materials under some supposed ban on socio-anthropological materials is to do a disservice to African literature and its African readership. It betrays an inactive awareness of the relationship between literary forms and the structure and composition of specific societies; it betrays adherence to the mistaken and mischievous notion that there are universal forms to which every work within a genre has to conform. More on this later. If these critics of ours should argue instead that the manner of introducing such indispensable information is often unsatisfactory, that would be another matter altogether, calling for technical innovation. But their clamor for the exclusion of vital material just because they find its manner of presentation inappropriate is, at best, wrongheaded.

But there is, I believe, far more going on in this than any maladroit presentation of socio-cultural information would warrant. I submit that these hectorings of so-called sociological biases and materials are just part of a larger effort to impose Eurocentric, and pro-imperialist canons upon African literature. This larger campaign can be glimpsed in some of its other manifestations. At times the need for a non-Euro-

centric criticism is denied outright. According to Eustace Palmer:

> Even if the form of African novels were different (from European ones), this would not mean that a different set of criteria should be evolved for their criticism. . . . Since we are still concerned with the same genre, the same criteria should still apply. To allow different critical criteria is to provide loopholes for mediocrities.
> —Palmer, ibid., p. x.

None of Palmer's three propositions is true, and each is demonstrably false. All I have space to say now in support of my dissent is that (i) the proposition about providing loopholes for mediocrities is simply serving to intimidate disagreement with the other two propositions; that (ii) different criteria do often have to be applied to different branches of the same genre; and that (iii) because literary forms are socio-historical cultural products, they, as well as the terms for evaluating performances guided by them, do tend to vary from society to society, and even from period to period within a given society. So I see no logical grounds, no non-political grounds, for not evolving for the African novel a different sort of criticism than the prevailing Eurocentric one. And I submit that there are indeed strong cultural and pressing political grounds for evolving genuinely Afrocentric, and therefore anti-imperialist, criteria for the criticism of the African novel.

Another manifestation of this Eurocentric, pro-imperialist campaign is when critics of that persuasion hurl their supposedly devastating thunder of "ideology!" at those, like Irele, James and Obiechina, who chide them for paying "insufficient attention to the objective forces that make the living tissue of history" (Irele), and hence of cultural activities like literature and criticism. The intended victims of their thunder are those who say that modern African literature is a vehicle through which African writers are imaginatively documenting Africa's historical development, and groping towards the creation of a new order in their societies; and who therefore demand that a criticism be devised that would clearly relate this literature to the African situation, and to the total experience of the African peoples. In other words, our Eurocentric, pro-imperialist critics employ their cry of "ideology!" in an effort to silence those who want to see developed an autonomous, Afrocentric criticism of African literature; in other words at those who wish to effect the liberation of African literature from Western cultural hegemony.

Let me simply note here that crying "ideology!" is neither an answer to this demand, nor a rebuttal of its validity or urgency. For the Eurocentric, pro-imperialist position is itself ideological through and through, even though its adherents take all pains to imply that it is not. When the matter is properly approached, the point of the dispute will turn out to be, not who is being ideological and who not, but rather which of two conflicting ideological positions is desirable in the African literature and criticism of this era—the Eurocentric, pro-imperialist, or the Afrocentric liberationist.

In the light of the Western campaign to keep African culture, and African literature Eurocentric, we might now better appreciate their point in trying to discourage so-called sociological matter and socio-anthropological criticism. To eschew what they label socio-cultural would mean divorcing the life lived in Africa by Africans from the contents and criticism of African literature. It would mean denying literary validity to the portrayal and examination of African experiences from an Afrocentric viewpoint. And since an Afrocentric viewpoint, given the world imperialist situation within which Africa is trapped, would result in anti-imperialist and anti-European explorations of reality, explorations that are quite likely to undermine Western cultural and economic hegemony over Africa, we can appreciate why they want to ban altogether any material or criteria that would lead to such consequences. From the Western position of cultural imperialism, African literature and criticism that remain pro-imperialist, pro-European or at the least neutral; the literature and criticism that do not cast the light of a dissenting consciousness upon European and imperialist values, are acceptable. Critical criteria are therefore manufactured to encourage them; condescending encouragement and inflated praise are deployed to help them along. But African literature that is pro-African, Afrocentric, and therefore not neutral towards imperialism or Eurocentrism—is regarded as dangerous. Supposedly critical canons and injunctions are promulgated to discourage and scotch it; the scorn of donnish authority is deployed to keep others from following its example.

Not surprisingly, we hear in the works of many critics of African literature, critics sent out to keep it under control, subtle hints and even direct commands against such supposedly purely literary sins as using polemical rhetoric, even

when it is as masterly as David Diop's. And we hear them say—no intellectual meditations, only descriptions please!; stick to universal issues, avoid the local African ones, they have become oh so boring!; if you are didactic your level of performance will necessarily be lower; the writer as educator is somewhat oldfashioned in the modern world; and so on and so forth. Of course, the intent and import of all this is simply this: don't you dare expose or indict imperialism! don't you ever treat matters in such ways as would give validity to African life and experience and so condemn, implicitly, the imperialist legacy in Africa. And when African critics succumb to such trickery and swallow as part of "pure" literary values such political injunctions, they are perfectly conditioned to sally forth and exclude from their canon of exquisite African novels works like Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* which employ splendid artistry in presenting a picture of African struggles against colonialism. If these Eurocentric critics have their way, African political novels may have to be counted artistic failures, no matter what excellent artistry they do indeed display.

Another and perhaps far more subtle and insidious way in which the ban on Afrocentric literature and criticism is advertised is through encouragement of formalism and textolatry. One of the aims of our formalists and textolators seems to be to carve out and keep inviolate a literary turf, with no cross currents, breezes or dust and pebbles allowed in from other areas of concern. In support of this type of thing some tell us that literature is not reality but a simulacrum of reality, and so autonomous. On such a fenced-off ground they would like to be left severely alone with their symbolisms, ironies, archetypes, mythopoea, and with their explorations of European influences and models on works of "pure" literature produced by Africans. I am not against myth or symbolism or irony. But I see no reason for trying to make them the exclusive reference frames or analytic instruments for our literature, especially when some others might be even more pertinent to our situation. While the futile efforts of our textolators to throw up spurious barriers between life and art need not be countenanced, some of their contentions are quite in order, and some of their concerns must be heeded. Clearly, the quality of execution in a work should matter. Critics of Mrs. James' persuasion might unwittingly do unwarranted dis-

service to their position if they should omit to stress that at the point of debate, thereby giving their opponents the unearned right to imply that they care nothing for craft, and that they would rate highly any piece of trash which exhibited themes and sentiments they approved of. For it is quite clear that in their other writings,—e.g., James' review of *Idu* in *ALT #5*—they do indeed value craft and artistic execution quite as highly as they value the germane treatment of important African themes.

Yes: the text is the central document as far as criticism is concerned. Yes: the techniques, artistry and craft with which a text is executed are of cardinal importance. But these considerations do not make the text autonomous in the least. The facts are against such claims. At some risk of harping on the obvious, one must, against textolatry, emphasize that literary texts, or other works of art, also are socio-cultural artifacts. They are produced and marketed just like cars, beds, chairs, akara, garri or paper. They invite our use, enjoyment and admiration. We hear them on the air, study them in schools; they convey ideas, disseminate and entrench prejudices, and they help to shape our consciousness of ourselves and our societies, and their places in the world. Why then, one must ask, are our textolators so anxious to exempt them from the scrutiny of sociological inquiry and criticism?

Let us begin at the point of publication and dissemination, and briefly trace some of the implications of these observations. For most publishers, the so-called literary value of a text is not divorced from their assessment of its socio-cultural, or even its immediate political impact. Books have, as we all know, been banned, writers jailed, publishers prosecuted, in Europe and America in particular, for putting out materials some important persons or institutions deemed dangerous to their notion of the public good. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would be dragged through trials motivated by fear for its impact on public morality; but *Animal Farm* would be given royal welcome because of a political message considered useful and timely for the purposes of an Establishment. Now, if what texts you are allowed to have, and when and in what forms, are all matters of socio-cultural and even of overt political decisions, then the critic who pretends that the text is, and has to be isolated from socio-cultural inquiry can hardly be on more absurd ground. Hiding one's head from seeing the world

does not mean that the world is not there.

Against formalist textolatry another consideration from the practical world can be brought. Into the making of a literary text there goes, not just pure verbal skills, but also the memories, moral values, social perceptions and the temperament of the writer, and quite often of his editor. His sociological knowledge helps the producer of the text to choose and shape the characters and settings he portrays. His values mould the consciousness through which aspects of the real world are refracted into his artistic simulacrum; his experiences sharpen the sensitivity with which he draws or etches his picture. And usually, the less a writer knows about the foundations, working structures and experiences of his society, the less persuasive his presentation of parts of it will tend to be. His simulacrum is likely to appear full of holes left there by his ignorance of the real world. Artistic failure is quite often brought about or worsened by a writer's failure to explore fully and understand thoroughly the circumstances and possibilities of his material. And this is quite often so because he has a shallow understanding of the reality he mirrors in his work. Given these considerations, should not the writer or critic know as well as he can the social forces reflected in literature? In that case, for critics to try to barricade such considerations from their criticism is, at best, wrongheaded. And it sometimes is a political manoeuvre.

Another consideration against textolatry arises out of the formalist attempt to reject socio-cultural considerations on the ground that a work of fiction is not a treatise. True, it is not. But are they not forgetting that the special force of literature, the force that makes its impact quite often superior to that of theoretical essays, is its power to present matters through concrete examples, as they work themselves out in action? Rather than being served a mash of abstractions plodding across a page, we are shown how they could be embodied in beings very much like us, in circumstances that are plausible, and might have even happened. For example, p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, as a dramatized debate between two sets of values, has far more impact than a thousand treatises on the same theme. Now, isn't that all the more reason for taking seriously the socio-cultural materials embodied or reflected in literary texts, and for seriously considering, within criticism, their potential impact upon the real world? Surely,

in correctly and fully appraising a simulacrum, what it is a simulacrum of cannot but figure importantly.

One other consideration must be urged here against formalist textolatry. It is this. In every society we find a continuum of values, stretching from the aesthetic, through the moral and political, to the economic. These values tend to be intertwined; they reflect the basic choices and compromises a society has made during its history. Any boundaries drawn among them tend to be neither very sharp nor distinct, and certainly not sufficiently compartmentalizing as to warrant glib talk about sticking to "intrinsically literary" values. For instance, should one be surprised if a society given to adoration of deviousness, often in the name of complexity and sophistication, turns out to also admire convoluted narrative techniques? In such a case, would love of literary complexity be an intrinsically literary value? In the final analysis, values about literary craft and literary criticism are an integral part of social values. Even what constitutes art, let alone good or bad art, is for each society to decide, on its own grounds, to suit its condition and purposes. Relevance, competence, perfection—these are matters upon which larger social considerations have to bear. We are therefore not to be surprised to find that different forms, styles, techniques and themes have been preferred and concentrated upon by different societies at different times. The novel, a western bourgeois development, did not exist in ancient Greece or Rome. Their preferences led them to drama and poetry. The Chinese preferences ran to poetry.

The interconnectedness of all values in a given society would, I'm afraid, make fruitless any attempts to isolate some purportedly "intrinsic literary" values and materials; it will also make a wreck of efforts to exclude certain issues from literature on such grounds as their being considered sociological, anthropological, ideological or what not. We might be better off by far if we admitted the whole spectrum of values and concerns, and routinely let them bear upon literature and literary criticism. In that case, as occasion demands, we may have to examine a work for its technical achievements, its aesthetic impact, its moral or its sociological or political import, without having to make apologies for doing so, and without being hectored, on supposedly purely literary grounds, by our Eurocentric, pro-imperialist critics.

It is in light of these issues, and of the dominance of Eurocentric, pro-imperialist criticism in Africa's academia, that I feel a special urge to sound a fanfare for *The Benin Review*. I am delighted at the positions put forth in the editorial published in its maiden issue. These positions raise hopes for the speedy and thorough development of an African literary criticism that shall, in the words of Hamidou Kane, be "in the line of a genuinely African cultural development" and that shall repudiate and combat the sort of prevalent criticism that seeks "to insert an opaque screen between the work and the public." (Hamidou Kane, "The African Writer And His Public," in *African Writers on African Writing*, G. D. Killam (ed.), Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 63.)

Here are some highlights from that landmark editorial.

1. This magazine is being brought out in the faith that literature in particular and the arts in general, have a special significance and value for our community, and that this value, this significance, have a direct bearing on and an immediate connection to the social conditions of our contemporary existence, to the intellectual climate and moral dispositions that, arising from these social conditions, can be thought to affect our consciousness as Africans. In other words, that "culture" is not a narrow thing, but is related to our total life and to our awareness of its historical determinations. And as an inherent part of that general awareness of ourselves—of our situation and possible role in the modern world—must be counted our special position within that broader community of experience and of interests that makes up the black world.

2. Development, if it is to have true meaning, cannot be limited to the phenomena that economic statistics inform us about, but must be understood as an implication of the total life. . . . In its fundamental import, it implies a relentless effort directed towards a perfection of consciousness, and presenting as its proper finality the establishment and maintenance of human values as the very foundation of our collective will and effort.

3. It is well to remember that it is to an audience that the artist addresses himself, to give or to refuse attention to what he offers, to accord to or withhold recognition from his creation: recognition being used in the primary sense of a reflective acceptance and identification with the offering. And it is indeed the interest of the artist to force attention and to compel recognition by the nature and quality of his work.

4. While we can make no pretensions to dictate to the artist, it is clear that our preference will go to a literature that expresses a serious concern for the communal experience as defined by those continuities that have gone into the making of our original collective self, combining with the determinations from our recent history, to shape our present destiny.

5. It is indeed relevance that we are concerned with, . . . relevance of a

kind that carries with it the strength of an essential integrity, of a seriousness that entails significance: seriousness, in the sense of a wholehearted and high-minded engagement upon the fundamental issues involved in our experience; significance in the demonstration of a mature creative intelligence informing and sustaining such an engagement. The very meaning of relevance here becomes indissociable from that of *truth*.

6. The aesthetic factor is, as can be inferred, not a negligible one, but it can only be considered as auxiliary; for expression, literary and artistic, assumes a special dimension, an intense interest, by reference not to vague canons of beauty but to the concrete realities of life by which the imaginative consciousness itself is conditioned; and through that reference, maintains a vital connection with the practical consciousness that presumably governs our efforts to give a meaning to our present insertion in history.

7. We believe that criticism has a part in the promotion of consciousness that is parallel to that of literature. We conceive as the most appropriate to our particular situation that criticism which presents itself as a response to the perceptions and intimations of our artists, to the human import of their work—as a taking up of their expressed concern with our lives with a view to their larger discussion.

In clear, unequivocal terms that contrast sharply with the insidious Eurocentric criticism and universalist consciousness rampant in Africa's schools, universities, journals and magazines, *The Benin Review* rightly intends to concern itself with the development and promotion of an African consciousness, rooted in the context of African history, African development, and in the imperialised condition of the black world; and to focus upon a concretely African audience, and not upon some vague, insubstantial republic of letters; and to challenge our literature to deal fruitfully with our communal experience and interests, our collective self, and with our destiny. Anyone truly concerned with Africa's cultural freedom from alien hegemony—note: I say Africa's cultural freedom, not some vague, unspecified Cultural Freedom, usually promoted by imperialist organisations for the benefit of the imperialist's freedom to exploit and dominate us—ought to be gladdened by the intentions expressed by the editors of *The Benin Review*. And those with contributions to make to the endeavor ought to feel powerfully motivated to come forward with them.

Perhaps the central task to be tackled in this effort will be the discovery and formulation of those values, critical assumptions and methodological tools which an Afrocentric alternative to the Eurocentric one can be presumed to require.

For it is with tools cleaned of Eurocentric, pro-imperialist biases and tendencies that a genuinely Afrocentric exploration of new directions for African literature and criticism can confidently proceed. In this regard, let me offer a few suggestions for general consideration.

a) Given that the vitality of our literature is being crushed under boulders of Eurocentric values, and that avenues to its emancipation and autonomous development are being blocked by imperialist cultural propaganda, is it not high time we disengaged contemporary African literature from the European embrace in which it was born and nurtured, and within which it has so far been shaped? If so, the preoccupation with Eurocentric genealogies, a preoccupation which tends to fix our gaze on European literature, ought perhaps to be discouraged. Somehow, we cannot forever keep acknowledging debts to a West that owes us altogether far more than we owe it.

b) While disengaging from the smothering embrace of European values, and while trying to ground ourselves in our own history, we cannot but study the implications for our literature and criticism of the fact that, for more than 500 years now, our history has been lived within the framework, and under the dominating shadow, of Western imperialist aggression. We therefore have quite a bit of mental cleaning job to do, to scrub out the crud of centuries, to apply antidotes to the accumulated mental poisons of half a millennium, and to prevent a basic pro-European, pro-imperialist inertia from quietly pulling our cultural train to the demolition yard. For this cleaning job to be done, we need an active consciousness of the fact that, and why, our criticism and literature need to adopt an uncompromising anti-imperialist tenor; why it must consciously scrape away at the bourgeois values and beliefs that visited imperialism upon us.

c) Needless to say, African cultural nationalism does require that we appropriate for our use, and not leave them to disappear in neglect, Africa's indigenous literary traditions, together with their indigenous aesthetics. They should indeed be the bedrock upon which we stand as we explore new directions.

d) Finally, since we are not the sole victims of Western imperialism, or of its cultural hegemony, we might stand to benefit from study of the experiences of other peoples and cultures of the world which have been victimized, or have had severe brushes against Western culture. We ought to learn from their experiences without losing sight of the peculiarities of our particular history and conditions. For it sometimes happens that our exploration of an issue can be illuminated and speeded up by seeing how others have tackled its counterpart in other times and places.

I should perhaps address my closing remarks to Africa's crop of Eurocentric, pro-imperialist critics and publishers. We have heard and read too much, for too long, almost to the point of disorienting exclusiveness, from Eliot, Forster, Richards, Leavis and company, and from their followers in the Anglosaxon brigade of imperialist literary criticism. In my

view, our conceptions of publishable literature, and of how its criticism should be conducted, are suffering from an advanced case of claustrophobia. The tacit and ruling notion that English dons, pundits, literary stars and publishers know best what is good for us in Africa I find utterly ridiculous. We ought to shake our heads quite vigorously and loosen the gag of British academic preoccupation and examples. We should run out of their dungeon and get some literary fresh air into our lungs. I, for one, do not see why our literature and criticism should be governed by British rules, and constipated with British inanities. I do not see why our critics should be peddling British cultural propaganda as "pure" criticism. Why should they go about trying to keep our writers from doing things that the British might, quite deservedly, find unsettling? I don't see one good reason why we, who are traditional victims of British imperialist machinations, should allow our minds, and the minds of our children to be weaned exclusively on imperialist literature and criticism, without at the very least a contrasting antidote to open our eyes to the death-dealing distortions being planted in us by such literature.

In this regard, the example of Eustace Palmer,—as reported by Mrs. James—whose respected book of introductions to the African novel is so written that a British reviewer does not, in all those pages, stumble across even one sentiment or opinion or angle of presentation to suggest to him that Eustace Palmer is not another Britisher, is quite amazing. Perhaps this is the landmark example of the successful assimilation of an African critic into Eurocentric consciousness. I might recommend to the British to call the gentleman to London, induct him into the Parnassus of Universal Literary Values, and honor him, eventually, with a burial place at Westminster Abbey. He would seem to deserve it. It looks like John Bull has done it again. Britannia still rules the cultural waves of important sections of Africa, if not all of it. The British cultural evangelists must feel quite proud. One must wonder whether the notion of universalism is not one of the gambits with which they have lassoed into their service another African scholar. If it is, then we all should be wary of anything being sold to us on universalist grounds.

Let me conclude by noting that much of the best contemporary writing is not taking place in the English language at

all. The centres of vigorous literature in this century—the Eliots and Pounds and Lawrences, and Forsters, and Joyces, and Jameses and Yeatses and other stars of the Anglosaxon firmament notwithstanding—seems to have clearly moved to Latin America. Witness the abundance of powerful and lively works produced by Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Julio Cortazar, Jorge Luis Borges, Nicolás Guillén, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and many many others. Their works are vibrant, alive, deal powerfully with experiences under imperialized histories and conditions that are, in many significant ways, quite similar to ours in Africa. Our publishers ought to make these writers more available in Africa. Our critics should help introduce them to us, and point out their technical achievements so we can inherit what we can from their labors. I clearly do not believe in reinventing the wheel. I consider it far more original to put it to fresh uses. So let us use for the purposes of describing our own reality whatever we find useful among their technical achievements.

But first, our critics ought to stop, under the guise of universal literary principles, issuing us with haughty political injunctions in aesthetic disguises. We can do without these orders they transmit from their British mentors to hobble the development of our consciousness. We ought to make it quite clear that we are not about to stay clear of themes, questions, techniques or materials which the British find uncomfortable, and have well-earned cause to dread. So, legislations against so-called socio-cultural, or anthropological literature and criticism ought not to be binding upon us. We should make that clear, especially to our Eurocentric critics. We should demand that they start consciously serving African literature; and that they stop playing roles that oblige them, whether consciously or unconsciously, to serve as British customs officials keeping from African consciousness such things as their British mentors regard as literary contraband unfit for the African mind to consume.

Chinweizu

Nadine Gordimer, **The Conservationist** (Jonathan Cape: London), Viking: N.Y., 1975

Like her last novel, *Guest of Honour*, Nadine Gordimer's new novel, *The Conservationist*, explores the consciousness of a male protagonist. But whereas the protagonist of *Guest of Honour* was a liberal, invited by the president of a newly independent African country to help organize its educational system, Mehring, the principal character in *The Conservationist*, is a wealthy industrialist who refuses to question his right to the privileges, the power, the money and the land which he and other white settlers have appropriated in South Africa.

The Conservationist is a brilliantly convincing but subtle representation and indictment of the conservative point of view. Nadine Gordimer's skill and intelligence as a writer is perhaps most clearly apparent in her ability to portray the totality of Mehring's world—his social and family relationships, his memories of his mistress, his attachment to his son and to the farm which he hopes his son will inherit, his political stance—without ever lapsing into that easy sentimentality (encouraged by the Godfather films, for example,) which establishes a clear moral dichotomy between the man who takes care of business and the man who takes care of his family. And it is through Gordimer's presentation of the totality that we begin to grasp the key to her critique of Mehring and of those who represent capitalism. For Mehring refuses to accept the totality of others. He will not or cannot deal with his son's or his mistress' rejection of the South African regime, and there is for him a dichotomy between his son as inheritor and the boy with the long blond hair who wants to avoid serving in the South African army, just as there is a dichotomy between the sexuality of his mistress and her intelligence. Or rather, her other qualities, such as her "bright little female brain," are subordinated to the attribute which is important to *him*—her sexuality. Similarly, he simply refuses to deal with his son's rebellion—he is aware of it, but it is unimportant to him. Nor is Mehring able to comprehend his son's lack of sexual interest in anyone who seems intellectually barren.

Thus the title of the novel is particularly ironic. Mehring is a conservative and a conservationist; he is intensely aware of the land, of the ways in which varieties of animal life are

dependent upon one another; he is preoccupied with the ecology of his farm. The novel opens with his dismay at the discovery of children selling eggs which they have robbed from a guinea fowl nest. Yet he ignores the interdependence of human beings, the wholeness of the social fabric, and, indeed, the novel traces his increasing self-removal from all meaningful human contact—an alienation which one sees as the logical outcome of his exploitation of other human beings, his insistence on seeing in them only what is useful or necessary to him. While he can grieve over the destruction by fire of bird and vegetable life on his farm, he is indifferent to the uprooting and relocation of whole groups of peoples. Only where it suits him does he assume a dependency—the people who run his farm, for instance, he terms "his own blacks," and he will not see their flattery of his self-esteem for what it is. For the reader, however, the potential self-sufficiency of the African community is made quite clear; the farm, and indeed the farm house, which Mehring visits only on weekends, is theirs rather than his. They need neither his presence nor his instructions in order to keep the farm going.

One of the most powerful images that informs the novel is that of the corpse of an anonymous African from the location which borders Mehring's property. The body is buried in a shallow grave on the farm and, following an almost apocalyptic sequence of fire and flood, reappears as a rotten mass upon the surface of the land. Its presence constantly haunts Mehring's and the reader's consciousness, asserting a claim over the land and disturbing the calm which Mehring seeks in his farm. The half-buried corpse is analogous to the memories which rise unbidden to the surface of Mehring's mind, memories of his liberal mistress and her indictment of his ideology and his role. Indeed, these memories make up a large part of the novel, and, together with Mehring's responses, past and present, form the debate between the conservative and liberal positions, or frames of mind, central to Nadine Gordimer's latest work.

But while his mistress' constant questioning of Mehring's world ("What's the final and ultimate price of pig iron?") focuses the author's critique of conservatism, Mehring's indifference to her accusations also suggests Gordimer's critique of the liberal position. For his mistress does after all have intercourse with him; she too is guilty of creating a dichotomy

between her personal and her political worlds; she, like his son, shares in the privileges of the white-run system, and both son and mistress avoid a real confrontation with the system by calling upon Mehring's money to escape the country and avoid prosecution. It is their willingness to benefit from the fruits of a corrupt system, together with their ability to escape from that system, which ultimately subverts the white liberals' effectiveness in attacking it.

Nevertheless, *The Conservationist*'s final pages seem to predict that the South African brand of capitalism will bring about its own death, as Mehring's paranoia about the corpse and about a bleak sexual encounter with a young girl who is perhaps colored leads him to flee South Africa and abandon the farm. With Mehring gone, the unknown corpse is given a decent burial by the Africans whose labour and skill have made the farm productive. The final paragraph of the novel is both elegaic and prophetic:

> The one whom the farm received had no name. He had no family but their women wept a little for him. There was no child of his present but their children were there to live after him. They had put him away to rest, at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them.

C. L. Innes

Edmund Ilogu, **Christianity and Ibo Culture,** Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974.

Canon Ilogu (Anglican Church), Reader in Religion, University of Nigeria at Nsukka, is a gifted Christian theologian. His study of *Christianity and Ibo Culture* is an important historical analysis and programmatic essay that should be read by anyone interested in the problem of the relationship of religion and culture in West Africa, as well as by theologians concerned with doing theology in the context of an African type of traditional religion in the midst of rapid social change. For some readers (and not just theological ones) the analysis and argument will be disturbing, if not controversial. But there can be no doubt that the book will provide a useful focus for serious discussion of the issues concerned with "the expression of Christianity in an African way of life" (xv).

Following a brief introductory chapter which delineates the scope of the inquiry and sketches the theoretical approach of the study, Canon Ilogu provides in two chapters a detailed analysis of Ibo traditional society and traditional Ibo beliefs. He not only speaks out of his own experience as an Ibo, but relies upon the rich resources of ethnographic literature for understanding the cultural patterns and religious well-springs of traditional Ibo morality.

In chapters IV and V patterns of change in Ibo society occasioned by the arrival and spread of Christianity and subsequently by the impact of technological and scientific modernization are described and evaluated. The author's knowledge of the relevant literature is impressive. His assessment of the inner-tribal conflicts of Iboland and the destructive effects on Ibo society of the slave trade among Ibos before the arrival of Christian and colonialist, his careful analysis of the history of the complex relationship of Christianity and colonialism, and his insistence on understanding the Western influences of technology and scientific modernization as essentially a separable issue from the influence of Christianity are intended to raise serious questions for those who, out of a legitimate concern for a renewed sense of being Ibo in a post-colonial West Africa, link the Christian Church too closely with colonialism and disparage the place and significance of Christianity for Ibo society today. Canon Ilogu is convinced that the Christian Church not only has a historically estab-

lished place in Ibo society; in a time of rapid social change and cultural dislocation the Christian Church can also provide a "new synthesis of adaptation of the old and the new" and 'pioneer a new value orientation, a new ethos or social norm or ethics, by which this can be achieved" (115-6). It is a bold evangelical claim, which our author attempts to meet in the concluding chapters.

Three premises undergird the evangelical program. The first is a sociological one. The author finds Emile Durkheim's analysis of the "integrative force" of religion in society not only helpful for understanding the relationship of traditional religious institutions to Ibo morality and society, but applicable also to an analysis of the modern religious and social situation in Iboland (234). He puts the matter quite clearly at the beginning of the concluding chapter.

> Because the Ibos are used to having religious background for their ethical norms, and the traditional religion in its teaching and world view is now inadequate to explain most of the experiences of today, the Christian religion becomes the only satisfactory existing religion (there is little or no Islam) from which an ethos could be developed to take in present Ibo experience (201).

Thus, religion is understood, in part, in its functional role as synthesizing a people's ethos with a world view and legitimating social institutions.

The second premise, and one more fully developed by the author, is the claim that theological analysis must proceed from man to Christ, from anthropology to Christology. Canon Ilogu shares the theological position of Professor John Macquarrie in observing that "the appropriate starting point for the exposition of Christian ethics is an investigation into the nature of man" (144), or as Macquarrie put it: an investigation into a " 'grace' common to all mankind" (145). Thus, it is a theological-anthropology that is meant, not the studies of sociologists and anthropologists.

The third premise is that it is in terms of the "Christ-event" that man, hence the Ibo man, discerns his true being in all its dignity and iniquity, and discovers new possibilities for his life (165f, 170-1, 198, 233). This is the distinctive affirmation that marks the work as Christian and gives the analysis its theological cutting edge.

Since the study is essentially a theological inquiry, it must be judged accordingly, and our assessment must begin with the second and third premises noted above.

The problem of methodology in theological inquiry is perennial and vexing; and it is to Canon Ilogu's credit that he does not avoid it. John Calvin summed up the matter when he noted at the beginning of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that it was not clear whether one should begin with the Word of God in Christ and proceed to the human condition or begin with an inquiry into human nature and discern the Word of God in terms of the study of man. After finding little but sin in man, the sixteenth century divine decided that, if one were ever to know human nature in all its righteousness, he had best first look to the man Christ Jesus. In spite of the numerous references to studies in the sociology of religion, Canon Ilogu has not departed as far from the Protestant Reformer as some will probably think. There is no doubt that he rejects the biblicist and moralist theology of yesterday's missionaries to the Ibo, a theology which places Christ against traditional Ibo culture, alienates the Christian Ibo from his past, and offers an essentially legalistic and pietistic approach to life in modern Iboland. In contrast, Canon Ilogu argues that theology must take the human situation more seriously, recognizing that man cannot be uprooted from the particularities of his culture without serious personal and social consequences. Furthermore, Canon Ilogu does not want to commit the theological offense of not permitting God the possibility of being known in some measure apart from His manifestations in Christ. Thus the author sees the necessity for, as well as the possibility of, a theological prolegomena in an analysis of human nature as expressed in traditional Ibo religion, and, more importantly, for a theological ethic for modern Iboland that will relate traditional Ibo morality to a normative Christian ethic.

It is the author's conviction that Christian theology must begin to take seriously the Ibo valuing of "the integral union of personality and community" in its emphasis on institutions of family and commune (151). Life is a shared experience with those who have died, as well as with the living. In addition, there is an acute sense of the inter-relation of man, nature, and the realm of the spirits. There can be harmony when the "customs" *(omenani)* are observed, or pollution *(aru)* when they are forsaken. Along with this communalistic and cosmic patterning of life there is the Ibo notion of personality *(chi)*, in virtue of which individual achievement is

possible amidst the limitations of ascribed status. *Chi* connotes a radical sense of personal identity and responsibility for the self as a self, as well as a participant in the communalistic scheme. Finally throughout all Ibo experience there is an ultimate valuing of "life" expressed in the word *ndu*. All are ideas essential to Ibo self-understanding and hence important for the shaping of a Christian ethic for Ibo man.

What does the "Christ-event" do to these Ibo values? As the reconciling work of God in the world (165), the "Christ-event" informs man's moral awareness, enabling the individual to live within the particularities of his cultural situation freely, that is, with a larger view of human needs and possibilities. Thus, while affirming the importance of kinship ties and the communalistic pattern of life, the group identity is not permitted to deny individual worth. "Duty as 'imposition' from the routine of lineage links of relationships" is replaced by "duty as service of 'love' by which one confers divinity upon the neighbour" (152). Sacrificial love "correct(s) the rigidity of the Ibo concept of duty" (152).

The love of God is not only sacrificial in the giving of self. It is also reconciling. It enlarges the context of duty and of other interpersonal relationships. For example, lineage, as important as it may be for modern as well as traditional Iboland, must be seen anew in relationship to those social institutions and values which now shape the life of the individual in Iboland, the new economic and political relationships of labor union, corporation, city and nation. And, as a further example, in the experience of sexuality, one should no longer have his or her role in society defined primarily by gender, or one's marital life by child-bearing and the terror of barrenness, but rather perceive sexuality as a part of individual personality (113).

The Church, in this situation, is not just another institution. It is representative of that transcendent divine love that enables the individual to see the value and the limitation of every social structure. The Church's Gospel thus provides what might be called a "critical realism" in and for the individual's life in virtue of which one is freed to live in service to the community through the received social structures but no longer bound by them; indeed, one is even free to change or discard them, if necessary (202). To realize one's *chi*, therefore, is to know the "life of personal decisions" in Christ (165), to know a

"Christian calling" (202).

Ideas and values are always embodied, enacted, and institutionalized. Canon Ilogu calls attention to three social institutions that in spite of the Christian Church's objections have persisted and need to be taken more seriously by the Church: extended family and lineage duties, polygamy, and the Ozo title.

Extended family and lineage duties include the customary giving of seniority tributes, second burial, widow inheritance, libation and ancestor reverence. Although once referred to as "heathen practices," Canon Ilogu recommends that such observances—

> should be universally done as the Ibos did it in the past by all, Christian as well as non-Christian. It is a means of recognizing the lineage tree when the line of seniority is clarified once a year by the exchange of these tribute gifts on the appointed day. Furthermore Christians should see in it an occasion for reestablishing their membership in the community of blood relationships, just as through the Church they share in the Community of the Spirit relationships. In these days of the growth of cities where children are born, who do not easily recognise their membership in the community, this yearly exchange of tribute no matter where people actually live will strengthen their sense of belonging to counteract the evil effects of the anomie of city life (218).

Canon Ilogu's argument is not just sociological. It is theological as well, for he adds:

> We cannot fully believe in the communion of saints and in the resurrection of the body without seriously thinking of our common humanity with those who had begotten us and yet knew not the Lord Jesus (219).

On the problem of polygamy Canon Ilogu is less certain. It is the traditional marriage system, and judged in terms of the security that it has provided and the happiness that has been known for so many, it commends itself as a viable familial arrangement, at least in the traditional village scene. And yet the author is convinced that monogamy is one of the "original divine intentions," according to Scripture, and that polygamy is a deviation from God's will (223). For those who converted to Christianity after having lived in a polygamous marriage he would counsel acceptance by other Christians of the situation. To ask, as the Church now does, for all but one wife to be renounced is, according to Canon Ilogu, to be legalistic and fail to accept in love the individuals whose lives have

been shaped by the polygamous relationship. In his opinion the present position of the Church does nothing—

> to solve the problem posed by polygamy to an Ibo convert whose social structure, links of association on the father's side as well as on the mother's side, and the relationships of cousins, uncles and nephews or nieces have been built around the many wives of the family, nuclear and extended (74).

The Church, therefore, should accept all persons as one in Christ and not impose a double standard on those converts who remain in a polygamous marriage. But those Christians who chose a polygamous relationship where they had not done so before should suffer the judgment of the Church (223).

The third institutional conveyor of Ibo social values, which the Church has rejected but which now must be viewed afresh, is the Ọzọ title. So important is this institution that, according to Canon Ilogu, it should be "'captured' into the Christian value orientation as part of the strategy for the Christianization of Ibo life" (225). The importance of the tradition of the Ọzọ title is that it has been a major institution in Ibo life for providing moral continuity. The Ọzọ title holders were the God-fearing men who shared in "the spirit of the land through their relationship with the earth goddess *(Ala)*" and who knew how "to placate the spirit of the dead ancestors and uphold the ordinances of the land" (31). Thus the Ọzọ title holder was one who lived "a holy life," upheld "publicly and privately the morality of the land" and observed "all the taboos, religious ceremonies and rituals of all the gods and goddesses of his community" (31). In the Christian context the Ọzọ title would ask of its holder that he be the model of the Christian citizen, one dedicated to community service, whose life expresses sanctification in its communion with "the ancestral saints of the community" (228).

There has been a subtle shift in the argument from a concern with the indigenization of Christianity in Iboland to the Christianization of traditional Ibo morality. These are two very different ways of responding to the theological problem of the continuity and discontinuity of Christ and culture, although Canon Ilogu uses the terms as if they were synonyms. That he does so reflects the methodological problems that pervade the study.

As we have already noted, the author's understanding of the relationship of religion and society follows essentially a

structuralist-functionalistic approach. Religion is identified with institutions and their importance for society's stability. Thus, the Christian Church is more useful to modern Iboland because historically related and adaptable to urban modernization and scientific thought. Traditional Ibo religious institutions are to be used by the Church to provide a sense of continuity with the past and an awareness of Ibo selfhood. It is implied that social change will probably destroy these religious institutions and thus, if they are to be preserved, it will be through the auspices of their adoption by the Christian Church.

It is, I think, interesting that Canon Ilogu has so little to say about religious symbol and how sacred institutions and practices are part of a religious symbol system. He refers to Ibo life as "symbolic life" (168) and to the fact that "the whole of Ibo life is full of symbolic usages and exchanges" (213). But what symbolic life means is never discussed.

The failure to treat adequately the nature of religious symbolization is clearly seen in the discussion of the Ibo concern with *aru* (pollution). The author acknowledges that the concern with purity and pollution is at the heart of traditional Ibo life and thought (22, 127, 198) and that "Ala, the earth goddess, is the most important deity in Ibo social life" (35). But then the discussion proceeds to translate pollution into the Christian notion of sin as rebellion, since both refer to an essential disharmony in human experience (166, 209). Indeed they do, but in very different ways which are expressive of significantly different conceptions of the relationship of the self, world, and what is conceived as ultimately real.

The issue of Canon Ilogu's discussion of *aru* is important, since it also reveals the inadequacy of his understanding of religious symbol as expressive of a people's understanding of "reality" and, hence, the difficulty of translating, adopting, or Christianizing rites and institutions because of their symbol status. The traditional practices that persist in Ibo life are not simply institutions to be "captured" (225) or used by the Church. Their persistence suggests their sacredness, their informative value about what the Ibo perceives as fundamentally real and how he is to live realistically. As such, they may not be amenable to Christianization without compromising their significance as bearers of Ibo identity.

There is an additional problem. The Christian theologian

begins with "the fact," as Canon Ilogu puts it, of the "Christ-event" as God's unique revelation (233), which is not to be confused with "interpretations" (fictions?). As a revealed religion, the theological core of the Christian witness is therefore presumed to be culturally transcendent. All other religions, including the Ibo, by comparison must be viewed as human creations, and, hence, culturally bound. The desire and the claim of the Christian theologian is to see Ibo life from above, from a holistic Christian perspective. When, therefore, revealed religion and traditional religion meet, the former accommodates the religious artifacts of men to its own divine purposes. Such an approach seems precluded from taking Ibo religious insights into the nature of man and the world very seriously.

Furthermore, can one distinguish between fact and fiction, kernel and husk, in Christian or any other religious symbol system? These are metaphors (Platonic in origin?) that can be misleading in one's understanding of symbolic modes of expression. Victor Turner's studies of African religious symbolization and Clifford Geertz's analysis of religion as a cultural system have made it clear that meaning and form of expression are intimately, perhaps inextricably, related in the sacred symbols of a people. At its most serious level, therefore, the contact of Christianity with Ibo religion and morality is an engagement of two sacred symbol systems. Circumstances may appear to give one the edge, if not the victory, over the other. But in the evolution of the cultural situation both will change and the emergent symbol system will reflect the distinctive experience of the Ibo in their suffering and their quest for meaning more than the designs of theologians. Canon Ilogu is not unaware of this. His Christian evangelical concern and hope is chastened by a recognition that the real issue for the Ibo man today, as it is for every person aware of being in a condition of cultural change, is that of becoming responsible for the symbols by which one lives. It is to that end also that he has written about Christianity and Ibo culture.

John Pemberton 3rd

South African Voices, Ed. Bernth Lindfors (Occasional publication by African and Afro-American Studies and Research Center with the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1975).

Strains by Dennis Brutus (Austin, Troubadour Press, 1975).

The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live by Keorapetse Kgositsile (Chicago, Third World Press, 1974).

On the 21-22 March, 1975, South African poet Dennis Brutus got together a group of his countrymen at the University of Texas, Austin, for a symposium on South African writing. The audience was largely American whites who are teaching African literature, and after the symposium, formed themselves into the African Literature Association. Among those present were South African poets, scholars, a playwright and a novelist, most of them exiles living and teaching in the United States. The following had contributed verse for the small volume *South African Voices* in commemoration of Sharpeville, which synchronized with the symposium: Oswald Mtshali, Mongane W. Serote (both of whom have recently come out to study), Keorapetse Kgositsile, Mazisi Kunene, Dennis Brutus, Cosmo Pieterse, and this reviewer (all four exiles).

This is a very uneven volume. There is some talkative verse which feels like the coarse grains of sand or bran left out of the fine dust in the sifting process, the fine dust that went into a published book. There is some energy in the excerpt from Serote's "No Baby Must Weep," a poem he is still developing. Mtshali certainly sounds like a man still waiting, like Serote, for something to happen, which is normally slow in coming when you have just come home and have been flung into a new milieu.

There are the poets who stand on much surer ground because they are more practiced—Kunene, Brutus, Kgositsile, and Pieterse. Almost as if Kunene were responding to what this reviewer had said elsewhere—that he hadn't written poetry on the subject of exile—in comes his "Dreams in Exile"! The exiles are people "haunted by nightmares of sealed walls." That of course is a recurrent theme in the four poets just referred to. Much as this poetry speaks to the plight of those

back home and of the poet who stands outside the barricaded door because he is banned from his native audience, it does not rant and rave. There is a strange kind of decorum, subdued philosophical though apocalyptic tone running through the verse. But the focus is never lost, decorum is not used as a shield against the pain. Kunene says of Eichmann and his kind, for instance:

> Your feet like splayed fingers of the crocodile
> They walk behind the child like a fierce night
> They climb the forehead of the woman's skull.
> This is the way paved by your ancestry of blood
> Who roamed the world filled with songs of death . . .

And Kgositsile in "Open Letter":

> Once we were brothers
> But that, as Cabral says,
> Is no commitment. Relatives
> Are not weapons: you cannot choose
> Not to be born with one who has
> Eyes but practices no habit of sight. . . .

Altogether it is a neat little book and it was worth putting together.

The poems in *Strains* date back to September 1962 and come as far as 1973. "Jagged streets in Vrededorp/under the papery pre-dawn moon," "hoarse tubercular rooms," "thunderheads . . . in the night," "fractured metals," "shattering releasing tide,"—these are all images that are anchored in a familiar, specific place and time. Vrededorp is a slum suburb in Johannesburg. The "fractured metals" echo sabotage when power plants and trains were being blown up following upon the Sharpeville massacre. It is also the phase of loaded rows of epithets in Brutus's career, some of which epithets are mere thick plaster. The epithets become sparser as we move to the 1970's. He broods over his own stagnation, when he is "pooled in desperation," standing like a heron on one leg. When the verbs do more work when the epithetical plaster is knocked off, there is energy in the poem. "It is the human form/ that you see mutilated" (1970) is an example of this energy. He warns the spectator that "the instrument of terror" will yet reach him where he stands. "Because the ship sinks while you dance/ I must command your choice for you:/ It is prison you must choose." And so much for freedom of the will!

The single idea visualized, the single emotion or set of emotions felt about it and the ripples of feeling and thought pushing out from the center—these provide muscle in Brutus's poems structured on this premise: instruments of terror, prison, the spiritual feud with himself, etc.—the specific experiences that give so much of his previous *A Simple Lust* (1973) a sustained focus. There are several trivia in *Strains*, which don't tell us much and sound like snatches of a tune or a dream begun and abandoned because the rest of it could not take shape. They also give one the uneasy feeling that they are a running commentary on the changing moods in a man traversing oceans and continents, filing through airport gates. The single object or mental experience, the single emotion or set of emotions as the starting point lend force also in "No matter for history"—about the late Latin American poet Pablo Neruda, and in "Returning to the continent."

Brutus's language maintains the lucidity of *A Simple Lust* and rings as clear as a bell, except when his epithets rush on you as if jostling for prominence. Brutus the champion of justice and beauty is still here with us. But there is lacking in the book the strong link between the various items that makes *A Simple Lust* readable and much more meaningful. If *Strains*, as the blurb tells us, has all the major strains in Brutus's poetry, it has, unfortunately, spread itself too thin.

Keorapetse Kgositsile's volume is largely a brooding pessimistic book. Disturbingly so. Brooding about self and its condition and that of black fellowmen. The poet is in despair, no matter how widely he tries to range in his poetic landscape. "What did you do between despair and desire" he hears the young people denounce their seniors for cowardice. Accusations of self all the way: "I may even moan my deadness;" "my soul is inside and thin and knows yours death too;" "I have here now, without a shadow;" "without life, an artifact with as much use as a fart;" then:

> If I am a receptacle
> you will see your life
> and the particles of your death
> collected in me.

Children could ask their parents: "knowing your impotence why did you bring me here?" His soul is soiled, the poet goes on in his melancholy mood; his memory is but "a bloodstain teetering on legs thinner than (his) shadow." "If you are

soldier they shout you are," a sister could insist, "shoot! Shoot then . . . shoot buckshot in their hearts . . ."

Accusations all the way, intended to arouse a collective response:

> In this sterile moment asking:
> where is the life we came to live?

The collective illusion led to the present, "which is a dangerous place to live;" "we bleed. We bleed." We dream, and our dreams grow old and go six feet under, meanwhile we try to sing "our magic song/ to assemble the shattered pieces." In reality, we no longer sing, "except perhaps some hideous gibberish like james brown making believe/ he is american or beautiful or proud."

Yes, this is a depressing little book. Kgositsile takes us in and out of the corridors of his bleak house. We come back in and recognize a number of turnings because we've been there several times before. His "silences" keep turning up. So does his slave simile; white shit, "the thick of all those whitenesses in our eye," "white footprints" everywhere; "whiteness of their desire" (i.e. of the "cole black hustlers"), "blackandwhitetogether kosher shit." We are back here to the now-common theme—distinctively Afro-American—of what the white man did to blacks or what blacks let the white man do to them. The uneasy question arises: from what vantage point has Kgositsile been observing black life in the U.S.? Is this all he saw—the man whose "soul is soiled;" the fake revolutionary or hustler; impotence; vampire-bitten folk; shattered pieces; the walking dead, and so on? Grim images that fill a 34-page book and represent the poet as some kind of misanthrope. Where is the fortitude, the fuller, multi-levelled life of black folk? Where are the human dramas that go on all the time, where people are too busy living to pause and contemplate the failures, the impotence, the temporary but necessary acceptance of some of the white shit? What happened to the Kgositsile of *My Name is Afrika* and the poems in *South African Voices*, who, in spite of an uncompromising stand against white racism and the blacks who promote it, who, in spite of occasions when he dissipates feeling by trying to speak to Africa and Afro-America at the same time, has some warmth and compassion for human beings? The opening poem, "For Ipeleng" (his daughter) is an example of such

warmth. The tenderness with which he speaks of her enhances the image of "heads cracked open for fun or lawandorder." Her question is beautifully phrased and yet cuts like a pang:

> . . . . if mother or father
> is more than parent, is this my land
> or merely soil to cover my bones?

And there is love here, instead of contempt.

Kgositsile ends the volume with six poems, tributes to Billie Holiday, Art Blakey, B. B. King and Lucille, John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Hugh Masekela. He is surfacing here and sounds alive again, glorying in the sun and warm rain and shadows projected by black music. A brief but useful relief!

At the time of writing, Kgositsile is about to go to Tanzania to teach. This volume of poetry addresses itself mainly to the Afro-American. I can safely predict that his stay in Africa will help him restore what, for lack of a better expression, I could refer to as the philosophical distance that characterizes African poetry, even in South Africa. I distinguish this from the gunshot distance between stimulus and response, often programmed, between the crunch of the boot and the strike from a snake if its head is free to strike. Between the two poles humanism, the love for people, will create a philosophical distance. Not that this distance is lacking in all Afro-American poetry. It is there in Larry Neal, Lance Jeffers, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker, Dudley Randall, and so on. But one needs to have been born into it, no matter where. Only the Afro-American can give us the resonances that come from deep down the levels of ethnic consciousness, dreams, lore, belief, history, etc. among his own people. Kgositsile does not, and I don't think can ever, acquire these deeper resonances that defy or modify stereotypes like Uncle Tom, the black man's whiteness, white footprints, etc. He can only serve up the external trappings, the visual and therefore accessible dramatization of Afro-American life, the visible heroes, cowards, buffoons, uncletoms, slaves, musicians, the behavior of a people from decade to decade and so on.

We can see from this the kind and size of the chances he has taken. That is one way in which an exile may choose: the movement from native territory to near-integration into

the new landscape. Another is Dennis Brutus: the movement from native territory to internationalism. The latter is the less hazardous. It does not matter which is the more heroic. Indeed exile does not make heroes: it neutralizes them.

Ezekiel Mphahlele

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

A Critical Anthology of African Literature

I am compiling a critical anthology of African literature from its oral beginnings to the present. What I am planning is a book of about 1,000 pages consisting of poetry, short stories and expository prose, which Indiana University (USA) has undertaken to publish.

This is a request for manuscripts of poetry and short stories (the latter should be 2,500-4,000 words long), preferably those that have been published before. In this case, please state how you wish credit to be acknowledged in the finished anthology. If a short story has never been published before please indicate accordingly.

Regarding poetry in African languages: I should be grateful to have any *new* English translations of *oral and written* poetry from any African languages. This includes songs whose lyrics have poetic depth. Please state whether it is oral or written poetry. Indicate also what language you are translating from, and where your language group is geographically located.

Also welcome will be those brief African tales that have a poetic center and short stories that are an adaptation of traditional themes and modes to modern situations and idioms. All the items I mention in this paragraph can be submitted regardless of whether they have been published before or not.

If there are other and unknown writers you feel deserve public attention, please let me know about them.

I shall appreciate a biographical note about yourself, including other publications. The fee will be worked out later when I have made final selections.

Please note the following deadlines for MSS to be in: Modern poetry in English/French/Portuguese: 31 Dec. 1975; Oral and written poetry translated from an African language, short stories, narrative sketches, expository prose: 30 June, 1976.

Your prompt response and co-operation will be greatly appreciated.

Ezekiel Mphahlele
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The Mofolo-Plomer Prize

The Mofolo-Plomer Prize is awarded annually for a literary work by a South African writer. It is named in honour of two South African writers, Thomas Mofolo and William Plomer, whose work was significant to the beginning of contemporary fiction in South Africa.

Conditions of Entry:

1. The prize of R500 for 1975-76 will be awarded for a novel or collection of short stories, in English.

2. The work must be unpublished as an entity, although sections of a novel or individual stories from a collection may have been published previously.

3. A novel is understood to be a work of not less than 35,000 words. A short story collection is understood to consist of not less than 30,000 words or not less than 15 stories.

4. The prize is open to any writers resident in the Republic of South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland or Namibia, and to writers from these South African countries living abroad.

5. Only writers who will be under the age of 36 on the closing day for receipt of entries are eligible for the prize.

6. Entries must be typewritten in double spacing, and two copies of each entry must be submitted.

7. Manuscripts cannot be returned by the organizers, although entrants may make their own arrangements to fetch them.

8. The judges for the founding year of the prize will be:
   Chinua Achebe, Nigerian novelist and short story writer
   Alan Paton, novelist and short story writer
   Adam Small, poet and playwright
The judges will have the right to divide the prize among more than one entry if they see fit to do so. The decision of the judges will be final.

9. Entries must be accompanied by a brief biographical sketch of the author indicating age, nationality, place of residence, published work, etc.

10. The closing date for receipt of entries is Monday, 31 May, 1976.

11. Entries must be sent or delivered to:
   The Mofolo-Plomer Prize Committee
   c/o Ravan Press
   508 Diakonia House
   80 Jorissen Street
   Braamfontein, Johannesburg 2001, South Africa
   (P.O. Box 31134, Braamfontein, Transvaal, 2017 South Africa)

Meeting of African Writers, Accra, June 1975

We have resolved at this June 1975 Accra meeting, to form a Union which shall be called UNION OF WRITERS OF THE AFRICAN PEOPLES (UNION DES ECRIVAINS NEGRO-AFRICAINS). The following is a list of decisions, resolutions, and projects undertaken by the Union:

A. 1. That the Union will be, as far as possible, self-sustaining. We shall be free to seek and accept aid wherever possible but first the Union will establish itself and its independence by the contributions of its own members. To this end it has been decided:

i. That all members shall pay a membership fee of the equivalent of U.S. $20.00

ii. That all members shall pay to the Union a minimum of 5% of all royalties accruing from their writing and publishing, in whatever media.

iii. That Associate member unions shall pay 10% of their group membership fee.

2. It is the decision of this Union to establish its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, in close collaboration with the hosts of the present meeting, the National Association of Writers, Ghana, who are, in this connection, hereby assigned the responsibility of interim Treasurers until the full Congress of the Union in Dakar, February, 1976.

3. Membership shall be by application, invitation or recommendation. The Co-ordinating Committee* of this Union has been assigned the responsibility of future membership until the full Congress of the Union.

4. The Co-ordinating Committee has also been assigned the task of presenting a draft Constitution to the full Congress along the lines already established at the Accra meeting, the said Constitution to be circulated in advance to all members, and modified as needed from positive suggestions, in order to minimize a waste of words at the full Congress.

B. 5. We find that the establishing of an African Cooperative Publishing House is indispensable to the healthy development of African Literature and educational texts; to the development of indigenous publishing Houses; the protection of African writers from further exploitation and, the general promotion of an authentic literary culture. We consider also that the most favorable location for such an enterprise is Senegal. To this end, the Senegalese members of the Union have been delegated to approach President Leopold Sedar Senghor with this proposal, bearing in mind the various aspects which have been emphasized as essential to this project; a strong continent-wide distribution system; a low-priced sale policy to remove the stigma of privilege in literacy and culture; a translation bureau, bearing in mind the existence of and possible collaboration with the Ghana Institute of Languages and its School of Translators; insistence on an All-African copyright; collaboration with smaller indigenous publishers; full control over an integrated, modern printing press; assurance of royalties at all stages to its authors; reprint of African classics in translation, etc., etc. It is our collective responsibility to persuade African governments, cultural and technical organizations, international organizations such as UNESCO, etc. to give vital assistance to this

*Ayi Kwei Armah, Eduard Maunick, Cheik N'Dao, Jean-Baptiste Tati-Loutard, Dennis Brutus, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka.

project which is essential to the cultural progress of the continent and to the world Humanities in general.

6. To undertake the publication of a regular journal of literature, and criticism, and the Humanities.

C. 7. This Union finds it regrettable that twenty years have been wasted since the Second Congress of African Writers in Rome recommended the adoption of one language for the African peoples. Resolved to end this state of inertia, hesitancy and defeatism, we have, after much serious consideration, and in the conviction that all technical problems can and will be overcome, *unanimously* adopted Swahili as the logical language for this purpose. We exhort all writers to apply every strategy, individually and collectively on both national and continental levels to promote the use and the enrichment of Swahili for the present and future needs of the continent. In this connection, we have resolved that the proposed African Cooperative Publishing House shall adopt the policy of translating every work it publishes into Swahili. We exhort all schools to accelerate this process by substituting the study of Swahili for the least viable subject on their curriculum such as European ballet, la Civilisation Francaise, English Social History, etc.

D. 8. The Union of Negro-African Writers, aware of nameless atrocities perpetrated on Africans in Africa by external forces as well as by African authorities, hereby expresses its vigorous condemnation of such atrocities wherever they do occur. This Union wishes to stress its profound indignation against all attempts at the denial of human dignity, freedom and security as is currently the situation in Uganda and South Africa, not to mention the other concentration camps on the continent.

This Union therefore strongly urges all member states of the OAU to abandon the present plan of making Uganda the venue for the next meeting of the Organization. We ask this in the name of common humanity and from a sense of being inseverably bound to the fate of African peoples everywhere.

Accra
June 8, 1975

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHIKE C. ANIAKOR, formerly a lecturer in Fine Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, is presently doing advanced study in Art History at Indiana University. His work has also appeared in AFRICAN ARTS.

B. BAYO teaches at the Mayflower School in Ikenne, Nigeria. He describes himself as a "poet by vocation and a teacher by avocation".

CHINWEIZU, Associate Editor of OKIKE, has recently finished a new book, *The West and the Rest of Us*, published by Random House; it will soon be brought out in Africa by Nok.

OLAYINKA DAINI is a minister of religion as well as a writer. He is also a student in architecture at the University of Nigeria.

MELVIN DIXON has travelled in West Africa and France and is now teaching African and Afro-American literature at Fordham University in New York. He has studied at Wesleyan and Brown Universities. Poems of his have appeared in BLACK WORLD, FREEDOMWAYS, PHYLON and several other magazines.

OSSIE ONUORA ENEKWE is a graduate of the University of Nigeria and of Columbia University Writing Division. He is a poet, short story writer and critic. He is Associate Editor of the GREENFIELD REVIEW (African issue), and has published in numerous journals including AFRICAN IMPACT, BLACK FORUM, OBSIDIAN, MARGINS and several others. His *Broken Pots*, a collection of poems, is being published by Nok Publishers in New York.

NADINE GORDIMER has written five short story collections and six novels, two of which were banned in South Africa. She was co-winner of the Booker Prize in Britain for her latest novel, *The Conservationist* and was awarded the French International Literary Prize, Le Grand Aigle d'Or, in 1975. She has lectured at American Universities on African literature, and has published a short critical work, *The Black Interpreters*. Two books of selected stories from her collections will be published shortly, *Selected Stories*, by Jonathan Cape & Viking Press, and *Some Monday For Sure*, Heinemann African Writers Series.

C. L. INNES, an Assistant Editor of OKIKE, has just recently completed a book on Irish and Black Nationalist Literature. She is presently a visiting lecturer at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England.

TIM LILBURN, born and educated in Canada, now teaches English at Government Secondary School, Yola. He hopes to continue his education in literature with an emphasis on African writing.

BERNTH LINDFORS is an Associate Professor of English and African Literature at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the editor of RESEARCH IN AFRICAN LITERATURE, and author of *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*.

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE was born in South Africa and has lived in exile since 1957. His publications include *The Wanderers*, a novel; *Down Second Avenue*, an autobiography; and most recently, *Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays*. He is currently in the English Department, University of Pennsylvania.

WILLY NNOROM is a zoology student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corp., and has written both poetry and drama.

NKEM NWANKWO, a Nigerian novelist, was educated at the University of Ibadan and at the University of Indiana in Bloomington where he now resides. He has published four books including *Danda*, and *My Mercedez is Bigger Than Yours*. "The Scapegoat" is the first chapter of a forthcoming novel.

JENUDO U. OKE is a poet whose work also appeared in OKIKE 4.

KALU OKPI, a native of Enugu, Nigeria, began writing during the Nigerian civil war. He is presently studying filmmaking at New York University.

T. O. OKUSANYA is with the Military Governor's Office in Agodi, Ibadan.

JOHN PAUKER is a firm friend of Africa whose work has appeared often in OKIKE. He has also published work in TRANSITION. He edited a "mini-anthology" of African poetry for the NEW REPUBLIC in 1973, and he is currently assembling a "midi-anthology" of African poetry for the LUGANO REVIEW and a selection of world poetry for PEMBROKE MAGAZINE. His fourth book of verse, *Angry Candy*, is to be published in 1976 by Pigiron Press, Ohio.

JOHN PEMBERTON, a professor of religion in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Amherst College in Massachusetts, for the past five years has been pursuing research in cult organization and ritual symbolism of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. He is a Fellow of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan.

ANDREW SALKEY is a Jamaican poet, novelist, children's writer and radio-journalist. He lives in England, where he has written and edited twenty-five books in the last sixteen years. Even though he has lived and worked in London for twenty-three years, he considers himself "a Jamaican who is merely living in voluntary exile in England". His most recently published books are: *Jamaica*, a long historical poem; *Come Home Malcolm Heartland*, a novel; and *Writing in Cuba Since the Revolution*, an anthology.

MAMMAN J. VATSA is an infantry officer in the Nigerian Army. He has published two collections of poems and a collection of children's verses. His

next book, "Children's Rhymes", will be out in February 1976. He has also published in poetry journals in America, the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

P. F. WILMOT has been teaching at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria since 1970 as a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology. His publications include a play and short stories in SPECTRUM and articles in SOCIOLOGY IN AFRICA, as well as research reports in various textbooks. He is a frequent contributor to newspapers, radio and television. He is now working on three books in Sociology, political theory and poetry.

LETTERS

Congratulations on OKIKE which continues to keep up an excellent standard in both criticism and creativity.

Gerald Moore
University of Sussex

Dear Sir,

May I attempt, by my poor English which does not allow much commentary in arts, to thank you for your review on Mr. Kofi Awoonor's "This Earth My Brother" (OKIKE 6).

While I had not the opportunity to read this book, I happened to read your review on it after I read Mr. Awoonor's "Comes the Voyager at Last" (OKIKE 7).

The end of this novel had a very sickening effect on me. Indeed, I was in a kind of alarm after it, but now your review balanced my mind because I must no longer ask myself confusedly where I am.

After all the great artistry in depicting the wrongs against which both heroes, the narrator and Brother Lumumba, manifest their stand what does the author offer as the way out of wicked societies? That uncle's pathetic "Welcome, my son; I have been waiting for you"?

I really got furious over this hollow phrase. Does Mr. Awoonor really want to make us believe that all the problems both in Africa and the United States which he had just described, will be solved in the village?

The past as embodied in the village, always seems a lost paradise but we know quite well that the past never was paradise. All we can take from it is that our elders one way or the other mastered their problems, overcame them and survived. So, it is to be hoped that both heroes after some time, are sent away, vested with some good proverbs, to face the problems where they arise for them. But that is not what Mr. Awoonor wants to imply. His heroes return as if into a womb, and we can bet that they will suffocate there.

After this impression, it was a relief to read your review where you explained why Mr. Awoonor's skills in writing leave us unsatisfied. Indeed, the reader is not satisfied with an author's knowledge of rot and decay from where he knows no other salvation than a headlong spurt into the past.

Every narration conveys an idea, and this one worried me. Thank you very much for your help.

Elfriede Reinke
Hamburg, Germany

My dearest brother Chinua,

Man, what a great joy it has been for me reading through the copies of OKIKE . . . . Wow! Do you know that OKIKE has a clear winner in Chinweizu? Oh, yes! That's a brother I admire and respect a great deal. He is a diamond asset to OKIKE. And I also admire his two colleagues: Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike. That's a formidable trio of truth and beauty. What a powerhouse of critical energy and foresight, eh? What a source of new enlightenment for our Third World? I haven't come across any other critical voice like Chinweizu's, except for our Caribbean Gordon Rohlehr who is our best new critic.

I am very, very impressed by Chinweizu. We must treasure him, along with his two other brothers. They are our new truth-sayers, and with them we'll all find our way back home, I believe. The things Chinweizu says badly need saying. I am very happy about his clear alternative voice. A new broom, at last!

Andrew Salkey
London, England

Dear OKIKE,

Please begin my subscription with the first issue in which the notorious neo-Tarzanists Chinweizu and Company appear. Thank you.

Charles Keil
Buffalo, New York

Congratulations for your article, "Towards the Decolonization of African Literature." You are saying exactly what I have been thinking all these days only that I haven't had the power to express it vividly on paper. As I told Dubem Okafor, current editor of the "Omabe" recently, I belong to the "Chinweizu School."

Mamman J. Vatsa
Ogoja, Nigeria

The Editorial Staff of OKIKE would like to apologize to Mr. Kofi Anyidoho for the error in his contributor's Notes in #8. His work has not appeared in any of the magazines mentioned therein, but has appeared in *AFRICAN ARTS* and *UFAHAMU*.

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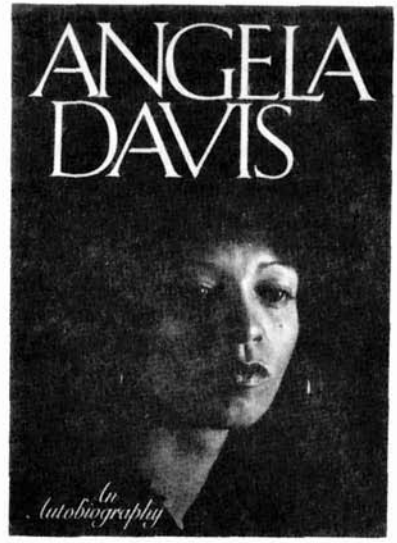

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III. *Civilisation noire et pédagogie (Black Civilization and Education).* Articles de S.J. CARLON, M.A. KWAMENA-POH, D.N. SIFUNA, B.O. UKEJE, J.A. MAJASAN.

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