



# OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



# **OKIKE**

*An African Journal of New Writing*

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### Note from the Editor

This issue was scheduled for publication in 1991. Although our resolve was strong, harsh and uncertain economic realities prevailed against us, in spite of a successful 20th Anniversary Celebration launching of the journal sponsored in Lagos by Aka Ikenga. (The names of donors during that occasion appear on the back cover of this issue). We regret the delay, and apologise to our numerous readers and friends.

Fortunately, the Heinrich Böll Foundation of Cologne, Germany, has made it possible for us to resume publishing. We are ever so thankful to them for this much needed assistance. We are grateful to Victor Nwankwo of the Fourth Dimension Publishers, for introducing us to the Foundation.

This number is the first sign of rebirth. It is hoped that all of us - and this includes contributors and readers also - would work hard to ensure that this is for real.

*Okike* remains dedicated to its mission as a springboard for new writers. We hope that this mission will be fully realised as usual. In fact, one of the highlights of this number is the publication of several poets and short story writers who are appearing in print for the first time.

*Okike* remains a source material for teachers, students and scholars in higher institutions of learning. We are working hard to ensure that it is accessible to those who need it.

Onuora Ossie Enekwe

CHINWE NZEGWU

**Lovely Roses**

Lovely roses so pink  
Fresh as dew-drops  
Dainty and so soft  
Elegant and so colourful  
Fragrant and so attractive.

Lovely roses so pink  
Light of the eyes  
Breath of the soul  
Food of the spirit  
Slowness of the heart

Lovely roses so pink  
Bright as early dawn  
Fair and so fragile  
Vivid yet wither away.

**Fibre of Women**

That summer at Wuppertal, West Germany,  
The old couple, Lilo's parents were no more.  
We had met them on previous holiday.  
So we took flowers to their resting place.

Karl and Lilo, our wonderful host and hostess  
Took us to that serene graveyard.  
By the gravestone of the retired couple,  
I was inspired to think on life.

When I looked around the peaceful graveyard  
Save Karl, only women with flowers stood around,  
Like Mary Magdalene once stood by Christ's tomb.  
Here again, only women came to remember.

Many many questions came to mind.  
What constitutes the fibre of Women?  
Is it just dreamy sentimental stuff  
Or mere cobwebs of sweet fantasies.

Women are endowed with tender caring nature.  
They are made of soft sympathetic stuff.  
Women worship with more devotion.  
The fibre of women is their burden here.



**Title:** Surulere (Patience has its rewards)  
**Medium:** Ink  
**Artist:** C. Krydz Ikwemesi  
**Year:** 1994

*VIRGY ANOHU*

**A Gentle Voice**

There's a little stream behind our house.  
It flows down my left  
It's neither blue nor black.  
Call it red or brown,  
A stream all the same.

A close friendship  
There is between us  
In turbulent moods  
A constant feature of a heart  
Scared with frustration  
Stunted with dreams unheld,  
My stream meanders into fellowship with me,  
Gently, quietly, flowing my pains away.

There's a hilly forest  
To cushion my stream to me  
As if it flows into my kitchen below  
Only occasional traffic to Three-Three  
Interrupts the union  
Between my stream and me,  
As she flows  
Carrying the lesson of peace and calm.

You do not know my stream I believe,  
She has the patience,  
Sufficient for two,  
And I the temper,  
For additional four,  
When glued to my stream of Love  
And the questions surge  
With the rage of equations unsolved,  
My stream tenders  
A verbless response,  
Quietly urging me  
To ignore the OMATA around.

From a window  
Her width is but a few feet;  
Her breadth hardly more.

A patch she is to many  
To some a dirty wash-hand basin  
For clapping Sabbath fanatics.  
They do not see my stream aright:  
The gentle voice of balm  
The little stream behind our house.



Title: Ogu Ajoka  
Medium: Ink  
Artist: C. Krydz Ikwemesi  
Year: 1994

*ENOH ETUK*

Chief Kodo

Chief Kodo!

That terrible chief I had heard so much about but never hoped to see.

Chief Kodo!

That inhuman chief who uses nails instead of syringes to "inject" his unfortunate guests.

Chief Kodo!

I shuddered at the thought of what I had been told about this popular chief of the twenty-second state of the Federation. Yet here I am in his domain, the heavy steel bars locked behind me, waiting to be ushered into his dreadful presence. It can't be a dream! I rubbed my open eyes to assure myself that I was wide awake. I pinched my thigh and felt the pain. I was wide awake. I was not dreaming. I was not even sleeping.

Chief Kodo!

What will he do to me? What will he say to me? I trembled from head to toe at the thought of looking into those dreadful eyes I'd heard so much about. What abominable crime have I committed that has led me to this horrible place? I looked at myself and tears welled up my eyes.

"Be a man, my friend!" I scowled at myself. "Why not accept things as they are and play along with them".

My mind flashed back to the happenings of the evening and I marvelled at the speed with which time passed. I looked at my wrist where my watch should be but it wasn't. The guards had removed everything I had on me: wrist watch, necklace, money, even my sandals. I had only my trousers on and nothing more. I guessed the time should be about three o'clock in the morning. About eight earlier, I was relaxing in my cousin's room oblivious of the impending journey to the twenty-second state.

It was one of those mildly warm Saturday evenings in April. I had just come back from the stadium where my favorite football team, the Coal City Rocks, had walloped the visiting Enyimba Highlanders with three goals to one. The time was getting on to nine, and before settling in for the Nigerian Television Authority "thirty million Nigerians" news at nine, I thought I should go for some fresh air outside.

Suddenly, dark shadows appeared from all corners of the compound. Johnny, my cousin's neighbor jumped out from his room, darted across our door where I stood and disappeared through the back entrance. I did not

understand what was happening. All around me doors were being forcefully closed, boots smashing into the doors. Some old ones flew into pieces. People's heads were not left out in the violent drama. You could hear curses and yellings.

I stood where I was, confused and open-mouthed. I could have escaped, if I had followed Johnny's example. I did not run. Why should I run? I had committed no crime. But, before I could take a decision anyway, three of the policemen noticed me and rushed towards me, one pointing a blunt-nosed automatic pistol at me. I stood my ground, preparing to be friendly. After all, I had done nothing.

Good evening, officer. May I know what...."

Sharrup! " the leading sergeant shouted and made good his words with a slap that reeled my head. My first reaction was surprise. Then anger swelled my chest. I wanted to fight back, but before I could throw the first punch, the other two policemen fell on me and beat the fight out of me.

"What have I done?" I cried. "Why are you beating me like a criminal?" I shouted at them, anger and hatred nearly choking the words out of my mouth. I was dragged towards our main gate where seven other tenants already arrested sat and were surrounded by other policemen with guns and batons " at the ready" . The sergeant and one other constable were asked to go and look for a vehicle to transport us to the enclave of the condemned.

All this while I had no idea why we were being arrested or to where we were being taken, I decided to hazard an explanation from one red-eyed constable standing beside me, fuming with alcohol and cigarette smoke.

" Please, officer, " I said calmly, " won't you tell me what we have done?"

"You will soon know, idiot. You will soon know what it means to beat a policeman. All of you will go to prison," he bragged, and followed it up with a solid kick at my back.

Anger surged into my mouth again. I glared at him but decided to play it cool. Obviously, this louse of a policeman did not know the difference between a cell and a prison. So, that was it, I thought . A drunken policeman got himself beaten up by somebody or some tenants. So that was why we were being treated like armed criminals. I could not believe it . The more I thought about it, the angrier I became . I decided I was going to take it up with higher and more responsible police officers. After all, I am a full citizen of the land and I have my inalienable rights.

Meanwhile, a pick-up van arrived and we were all herded inside the back, closely guarded by the policemen. The journey to the police station took about ten minutes. We received more slaps and gun butts before we

were asked to sit down "behind the counter". We sat for long hours waiting for the Inspector who ordered our arrest and who was in charge of the case. At about midnight, he arrived and our interrogation began. It wasn't much of an interrogation. It was rather a kind of jungle justice.

CASE: A policeman was beaten up. It was an offence, a "serious assault". He did not know who beat him up because he was drunk. Therefore, all those who live in or around the scene of the incident "conspired, aided and abetted" the offence.

DEFENCE: We were not around during the alleged beating. We do not even know the said policeman who was beaten. We did not take part in the beating.

JUDGEMENT: But you all live near the scene of the incident. You are all guilty. You are all sentenced to one night and one day detention without sleep. Sentence to run concurrently.

That was how I found myself in the territory of the indomitable and famous Chief Kodo of Kodoland. Our sentences were carried out with utmost despatch. And here I am, O my God, waiting for dawn when I will confront the honourable chief.

We were shared two to each cell. There were four cells numbered accordingly. An old man with only a wrapper tied around his neck was put in the same cell with me. When we came in, the room was in total darkness. We had to find a corner to squat so as not to disturb the unknown occupants of the room. I could only see the silhouette of their sleeping bodies. The whole place sounded like a zoo with so many lions trying to out-score each other. The stench of urine coming in from the inner part of the steel bar was overwhelming.

As dawn came rapidly, my apprehension about meeting Chief Kodo grew. I wondered what kind of reception awaited us when our fellow inmates awoke. One of them seemed to be restless in his sleep. After a while, he sat up from the floor. He looked up and noticed us.

"Wetin una de do here?", he queried sleepily. I kept quiet

I did not know what to say. I looked at my companion. The old man had slumped into sleep where he squatted beside me. I looked back at the man who had spoken. He was slowly getting up. At the sound of his voice other inmates began to wake up and soon eight pairs of eyes were staring at us.

"I say, wetin una de do here?" the first inmate queried again, this time harshly. I decided that silence was not going to help me. I must offer an explanation before it was too late.

"Oga, policemen brought us in here and locked us up".

"Wetin una do?" he continued.

I remembered some of the stories told about hardened criminals in the cells. If I told them that we did not do anything, they would be hostile throughout our stay there. But if I told them that we had committed the gravest of crimes, they would respect us and possibly make friends with us. I needed their friendship. I wanted to learn so much about criminals, especially about Chief Kodo

"Oga, one stupid policeman came to our house to make trouble. We beat him up well well. He called other policemen with guns and we were arrested. That is why we are here," I explained, trying to look defiant and bold. "Very good," he smiled broadly. "Now una don come prison, make una prepare for initiation. Una go meet Chief Kodo very soon.

I looked from one of the inmates to another, wondering which one was Chief Kodo. But none of them looked as powerful as my imagination told me Chief Kodo would be. My fears suddenly turned into curiosity.

"Stand up!" one red-eyed inmate barked at me. I quickly jumped up.

"Attention!" I stood at attention, guessing that the initiation had begun.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Peter Okeke," I said nervously.

"Peter Okeke, right turn".

I turned right, facing the wall opposite the door. On the wall there was a huge hali-drawing of a man with the biggest face I had ever seen. It was drawn with ordinary chalk. On his head lay one of the most ridiculous contrivances of a chieftaincy crown. His fat face and glazed eyes gave him the air of an important chieftain. His wide mouth, half covered with long cat-like whiskers, was serious and unsmiling. He sat on his throne with all the dignity of an African traditional chief, with rows of ivory round his fat neck. In his right hand he held his over-decorated fan, the sign of his authority. As he stared directly at me, I marvelled at the ingenuity of the artist who conceived of such a work in a police cell of all places. I momentarily forgot my predicament and attempted to smile. While I was lost in my admiration of Chief Kodo, my interrogators were conversing in low tones.

"Attention!" the growling voice brought me back to reality, and I jerked at attention once again. The red-eyed bully walked up to the drawing and stood beside it to the left, with his hand folded behind him like an aide-de-camp. The other inmates formed themselves into a single file, facing the wall to my left, with me in-between.

"Salute Kodo!" the aide-de-camp commanded. I lifted my hand to my ears and dropped it again, military style.

"Okay, turn left!" I turned to my left, backing the other inmates. On the wall was another half-drawing of a man. This time it was of a young man with a berret-like fez cap on his conical head, horn-rimmed glasses and goatee beard, smiling sheepishly at the chief. The artist took great pains to make it look like a policeman.

"What is that on the wall?" the aide-de-camp growled.

"A man", I replied, not knowing what else to say.

"What is he doing?"

"He is laughing."

"Why is he laughing?"

"I don't know."

"Now, I don't want him to laugh. I want him to cry."

"Can you make him to cry?"

"I don't know," I said, feeling nervous.

"I will teach you how to make him cry. Marshal, teach him how to make our friend cry."

Before I knew what was happening, I received a star-invoking slap on my face that made me stagger forward, nearly dazed out of my wits. Anger welled up in my stomach, but I knew I had no chance in the midst of these bullies. They would kill me even before the policemen on duty could open the steel bars that served for a door. That was supposing that the policemen would want to help at all. I decided that it was better to obey their orders without question.

"Very well," pronounced the aide-de-camp when he noticed my resignation. "Now, I want you to make that man cry. You will give him seven heavy slaps on his face. If they are not heavy enough, the marshal will show you another example. "Now, go on".

I hesitated a bit. Then I went to work on the wall with my right palm. As each slap landed on the wall, the sound re-echoed throughout the building. Before each echo died down, another followed. The aide-de-camp of Chief Kodo was busy counting the number of slaps I delivered on the half-drawing. As I delivered each slap with all my strength, the drawing kept its steady smile at Chief Kodo who was still scowling at all of us. When I delivered the last slap on the wall, my hand felt as heavy and warm as a newly sawed Iroko plank. Sweat poured down my face and body. The other inmates were laughing at my face, contorted with pain and anger.

The initiation over, the parade formation dissolved. I sat down at one corner of the room, thinking that I was free. Suddenly, one of the inmates jumped up, seized me by the neck, hoisted me to my feet and stared at me

with his black, twinkling eyes, his long unshaven beard making him look fierce, cruel and ugly.

"How much money you have?"

"I don't have any money. The police took everything," I quickly replied.

"How much they take from you?"

"Twenty naira," I lied. Actually, I had had five naira fifty kobo in my pocket. I gave the police five naira and left a fifty kobo note in my back pocket. Wanting to buy their friendship, I decided to offer them the fifty kobo I had with me.

"I have only fifty kobo here ..."

"And what are you waiting before you bring it?" the aide-de-camp interrupted, looking angrily at me. I quickly brought it out and handed it over to him. He called the policeman on duty and sent him to buy cigarettes for them.

"If you don't give us fifty naira you are not going out of here". It was the man with the twinkling, black eyes. Others nodded their assent.

"Don't worry," I said, trying to be cheerful, "when my people come, I will give you fifty naira".

"We are not worry," said twinkling eyes. "Na you wey go worry."

I wanted to find out a lot of things about these people. I had never been to a police station before, let alone to a police cell. I was filled with curiosity about armed robbers. I looked at all of them curiously, and I wanted to ask them questions. I reasoned that now that I had been initiated, they would be willing to answer my questions. I looked at the aide-de-camp and decided to confide in him.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"We have been here for five years," came the defiant reply. I could not believe my ears. Five whole donkey years in a police cell!

"Five years," I repeated incredulously. "Why haven't your cases been tried all this while?"

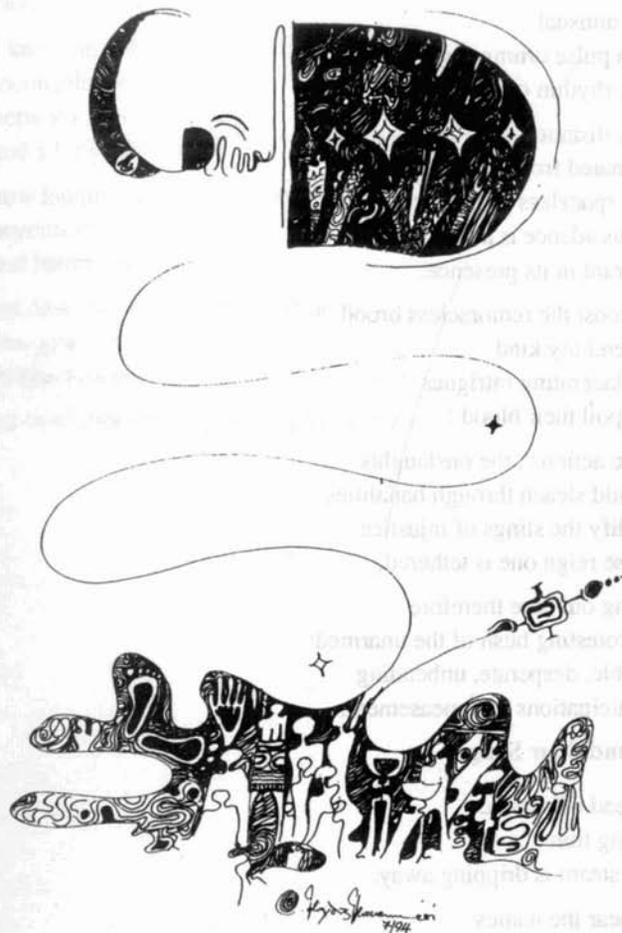
"We went to steal at the Bank. We shot and killed so many people before we were arrested by the Police. Our case is not easy", he explained.

"Five years in this God-forsaken place," I thought. Before I could ask further questions, the constable on duty appeared with a piece of paper, calling "Peter Okeke! Peter Okeke! Peter Okeke?"

"I am here!" I shouted as the constable opened the steel bars. "Come out," he said and I walked towards the door.

"Come back here!" shouted twinkling eyes, making as if to hold me back.

"I will be back," I told him persuasively. "I am only going to make a statement ." As I walked out , I took a last look at the grinning face of Chief Kodo of Kodoland.



Title: Obinigwe (Sky Dweller)  
 Medium: Ink  
 Year: 1994  
 Artist: C. Krydz Ikwuemesi

**UCHE NDUKA****After A Coup**

In the cadence of disorder  
it is not unusual  
to find a pulse drumming  
with the rhythm of rage.

I am not distant  
nor alienated from rebellion  
in these spaceless acres of concrete  
where dissidence is a daily fare- -  
protuberant in its presence.

So to accost the remorseless brood  
and defend my kind  
against lacerating intrigues  
that despoil their blood :

these are actions , the onslaughts  
that would sleach through banalities  
and nullify the stings of injustice  
on whose reign one is tethered.

Thrusting out here therefore  
is the protesting hush of the unarmed:  
immutable, desperate, unbending  
with anticipations of **appeasement.**

**Sweet and Sour Song**

The thread of patience  
is running thin  
and the steam is dripping away.

I can't hear the names  
we love so well to call:  
a knot of worry chokes my breath.

Bitterness claws through the senses  
as lifebuoys are hacked  
and stabbed to lifelessness.

---

These are the ordeals to hold off  
from easeful minds;  
these are the hostilities to expunge  
from human heels.

I know how the season wails  
inconsolably  
between a wretched day  
and a long grim night;  
how laughter labours to assert itself  
beyond shuttered doors  
and battered fortunes;  
but new longings await fulfillment,  
new graces to learn,  
worlds to woo  
far from this sadness dogging my song.

## DEREK WRIGHT

**Man and his Teacher: A Note on Double-Narrative**

The narrative vision of Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*<sup>1</sup> is oppressively monolithic, the viewpoints of author, indeterminate narrator and protagonal consciousness being, for most purposes, one and the same for large tracts of the book. Some critics, however, have taken this singleness of vision a stage further by over-emphasizing the overlappings and interchanges of the man's narrative with the Teacher's monologue in the long retrospective sixth chapter at the fulcrum of the novel, even to the extent of confusing one with other. It will be the aim of this brief note to dispel some of this confusion and to demonstrate that the twin narratives are quite distinct, expressing a separateness in community (albeit of an indeterminate kind) rather than a blurring or erosion of personalities.

Eldred Jones complained in an early review of the novel that "sometimes it is difficult to tell whose mind we are being shown<sup>2</sup>". Following Jones, Richard Priebe claimed that "all sense of time, place and point of view become inextricably confused<sup>3</sup>" and Gareth Griffiths has written:

The confusion of the two is deliberate since later, in the final chapter, we note that the hero inherits memories (the figure of Manaan) which belong to portions of chapter six narrated by Teacher ... The figures and events are not merely aspects of an auto-biography but aspects of an historical process and a general cultural experience<sup>4</sup>.

What happens in Chapter Six is certainly deliberate and functional but it is not confusion. There is, in fact, never any serious doubt about the identity of the "speaker". The later word needs to be used warily because the Teacher's first-person monologues are interspersed with the continuing third-person narrative of the man's reflections and memories and, whilst the

1 Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969), reset edition 1975. All page references are to the 1975 reset edition and are given in parentheses in the text of the article.

2 Eldred Jones, review of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *African Literature Today* 3 (1969), 56.

3 Richard Priebe, "Demonic Imagery and the Apocalyptic Vision in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah," *Yale French Studies* 53 (1976), 120.

4 Gareth Griffiths, "Structure and Image in Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*," *Studies in Black Literature* 2,2 (1971), 5.

Teacher is talking directly into the camera, the man's thoughts are still being reported by a narrator: "The man remembers times when his friend has been drawn to speak of something outside himself". "The man has long known of the pain of disappointment inside his friend" (pp. 79,85). The uses of the present tense (not peculiar to Chapter Six) and the third person for the man's thoughts are demarcation devices which keep them distinct from the Teacher's monologue, delivered in the first person and the past tense. The only doubtful moment in the chapter is during what turns out to be the man's first interruption, recalling the African child's common colonial experience of raiding the white man's orchards. But this is clarified retrospectively once the network of alternating narratives has moved into focus and the alert reader will pick up in the first words of the man's passive vision—"The listening mind is disturbed by memories from the past" (p.67)—a link with the last words of the previous chapter, immediately prior to the bursting of the Teacher's monologue into the new chapter: "Opposite him, the man went very quietly back to the desk and sat on it, just thinking, looking, and listening" (p.61). Far from being "inextricably confused", the chapter has a crystal symmetry, consisting of seven alternating narratives, one for each year of the symbolic mantilla's accelerated seven-year life cycle which loosely approximates to the life of the first Independence government, with the Teacher having the first and the last word (additionally, the temporal disorientation referred to by Priebe is peculiar to the Teacher's memory and does not include the man, who is always perfectly clear about where he is in time).

It is of course true, as Griffiths goes on to argue, that the frequent interconnections of the two narratives are meant to give the impression of a collective vision, presenting what is really an autobiography of the childhood and youth of a new nation and its failed hopes, and a number of features give the shared experience priority over the single one: the monotony of speech-style, the interacting ideas, the psychological continuity which allows one "listening mind" to pick up vibrations left hanging by the other rememberer and admits the man to a group memory that enables him to recognize Maanan in the last chapter of the novel. This Teacher's lament over "the rot of the promise" and remembrance of "something so good about the destroyed people waking up and wanting to make themselves whole again" (p.90), are almost verbatim echoes of the man's thoughts: "The promise was so beautiful ... at least something good was being born ... The beauty was in the waking of the powerless" (p.85). Conversely, the man's brief flicker of faith in new flowerings from dung (p.85), and his remote hope in the later episode of the coup that a "future goodness" and "a new

life would maybe flower in the country"(pp. 159-60), recall the brief flowerings of hopeful friendships, community and political idealism that, in the Teacher's vision, were born out of the anomy and decay of the postwar years and scatological disgust at the new leaders(p.82). Furthermore, the man's habit of dispersing his own memories and experiences, which elsewhere in the novel produces a paranoia of vicarious suffering that threatens the independent existence of the other characters, is used in the sixth chapter to "communalize" typical experiences like orchard-raiding: the man automatically picks up the Teacher's reference to the white man's huge dogs and the vision of one unidentified boy is made to cover the experience of three and, ultimately, the whole of African boyhood. Even so, the very sharp, lyrical rendering of the sensations of fear, wonder and pain in this passage tend to individuate rather than collectivize the trauma and make the notation of group identity a rather artificial one: it is the intense experience of one boy - now the man generalized and abstracted into three, not that of three compressed into one. Meanwhile, in the more important matter of the Teacher-man friendship, it is not long before the man's comments and reminiscences begin to qualify and correct the Teacher's pessimism and the narratives that appeared to be dissolving into one another start to diverge.

The relationship between the two men in this pivotal chapter is a complex one, beyond the scope of this note, and it has been dealt with at length elsewhere both by other critics and by the present writer. What I wish to notice here are the ways in which the chapter's structural and stylistic devices- which are not merely matters of technique, perfecting and preserving point-of-view--serve to dramatize the passage from community to fragmented individualism, from earlier idealistic hopes of awakened political unity to the contemporary Ghana of morse-tapping solitaries sending out messages across the void of the modern state; and how the progress of this passage is furthered by the growing rift between the man and his former intellectual mentor. From the fourth section of the chapter onwards there is a splintering of the wee-smoking group into individual destinies- the suicide Kofi Billy, the rejected Maanan, the murdered Edgy Akon, the recluse Teacher- and this is reflected by the fracturing of the narrative into two more sharply distinct voices. The narrative's emotional currents carry the man circularly back into past time and into a vague affinity with the wee group, but, pulling against these, the sharp segmentation of the chapter into seven phases, one for each year of the "progeriac" Nkrumah regime, imposes a pressure of linearity. This impels the diverging voices inexorably forward into the dichotomized order of the novel's present: on the one hand, the goal-getting elites which the man is

invited to join, and on the other the atomized negated community, the void of lost connections represented by the Teacher. The man begins, at this point, to dissociate himself from and deny feelings he has held in common with the Teacher, rejecting the latter's too calm embracing of so much despair and self-imposed isolation - "a human being hiding from other human beings" - and insisting that "something could still be done by a good man" (pp.78,79). Armah's two voices, to be repeated in the next two books in *Ocran* and *Baako*, *Solo* and *Modin* - the expatriated, alienated despair and the defeated but resilient vision of communal service - are held in tension and then divide into their separate selves. In the course of this process, which is effectively a microcosm of the general atomization of communal feeling, the concepts of "community" and "communality" are themselves redefined, and what emerges from the reappraisal is that the Teacher's idea of community, unlike the man's, is essentially false.

The Teacher's proprietorial personal pronoun - "We also knew that we were the people to whom these oily men were looking for their support" - makes "the people" the object of his ecstatic, but essentially unearned, identification, laying claim to a common wisdom that saw through the nationalist leaders at an early stage and to a common sympathy with an imagined "popular will" or "voice of the people," as expressed in the common man's pidgin (p.82). Some critics, such as Frederick Case, have taken these projections on the Teacher's own terms: "The novelist shows that whereas the leaders feared but loved the white man, the people in their despair feared and hated the colonizer. On the one hand, there was gratitude and faith that led to imitation, on the other hand mistrust that leads to rejection."<sup>6</sup> But these polarized distinctions are not the author's, and certainly not the man's, but the Teacher's. The mass subscription to imitation-white values in Armah's contemporary despot in fact offers little support to the idea of a separate "will of the people" which is distinguishable from the will of the leaders, and the Teacher's nostalgic picture of a popular community of feeling needs to be weighed carefully against the man's expressed or implied reservations. All that the Teacher's monologue actually does is provide sketches of a few alienated individuals, most of them centred around himself, against a featureless, undifferentiated canvas of the awakening "people" which is too vague to amount to a living human community. When the awaited Utopia fails to arrive he swings from a gratuitous idealization of "the people" as the source of revolutionary energy

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6 *Frederick J. Case*, "La bourgeoisie africaine dans la littérature de l'Afrique occidentale," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 7,2 (1973), 264.

and hope to a cynical dissociation of himself from "the whole society" that is behind the man's wife and "loved ones" (p.93), and the people who provoke this about-face are envisaged as see-sawing from a dismissive cynicism towards the old leaders to a collaborative cynicism towards the new ones. In the past, the Teacher is seen looking forward to the rising of the powerless and in the future, which is the novel's present, he looks back at the ideal that failed, but between these extreme positions there is little evidence of any concrete engagement with the people's ambitions and fates or, indeed, of anything other than a solipsist withdrawal posing as commitment.

One year before the novel's publication, a Western anthropologist, Robin Horton, argued in a discussion of changing time-modes in modern Africa that the new faith in progress

leads all too often to an excessive an excessive fixation of hopes and desires on an imagined Utopian future. People cling to such a future in the same way that men in pre-scientific cultures cling to the past. And in doing so, they inevitably lose much of the traditionalist's ability to enjoy and glorify the moment he lives in.<sup>7</sup>

The Teacher's idealism, having a foot in both worlds, couples Utopianism with nostalgia and prevents him from engaging with the insecurity of the passing moment. His fantasy of fraternity with the masses in ideal communities, projected into past and future from a position of total seclusion, appears to be compensation for his failure to relate to the real, living people and the genuine flux of community around him, and to live intensely in the present. All of this exists in stark contrast with the man's immediate, present-tense reality and his involvement in the practical difficulties of living in the day-to-day, here-and-now social world, and the contrasts are especially evident in the flashbacks of the sixth chapter, where a comparison of the Teacher's romanticism with the man's childhood remembrances is instructive. The orchard-raiding episode is shot through with the poignancy's of bright sunlight and gentle rain but the childhood idyll is brutally interrupted by that violent new order of speed overturning the runner which the Teacher's mind has such difficulty coping with and which is represented here by the dog-chase (paradigmatic for postcolonial Africa in its vision of savage black oppression under distant white control). The paradise images in Chapter Six, like this one, exist only at the level of nostalgic reverie and it is to this level that the Teacher's drugged or alcoholic "dreams of beauty and happiness", of the waking nation divesting itself of

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<sup>7</sup> Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," *Africa* 37 (1967), 179.

whiteness and returning to its true self, are reduced by the man's more pragmatic vision.

These are not the only ways in which the two men are seen more in antithesis than in alliance. The Teacher's spurious personal assumption of the collective burden of hope and despair on behalf of the whole society is a conscious projection of the will which is quite different from the man's quiet interiorization of common sufferings, something which Armah makes the special preserve of the passive consciousness and involuntary memory. More importantly, the man, who is never a long questing hero after the Teacher's model but is always "in the middle", caught in the crossfire between family and gleam, does provide, under sufferance, a workable recipe for living in a totally corrupt world and a more viable experience of human community. It is true, of course, that he deludedly looks to the Teacher for guidance and, following his example, succumbs momentarily to despair, is himself beguiled by political unrealities such as "moving a whole people forward", and is drawn into a similarly paranoid polarization of humanity into loved ones who pursue the gleam and those who are victimized for not doing so. But the man, unlike the Teacher, has to live in the world, and his actions speak of a more positive and realistic, if compromised, approach to co-existence with corruption as a way of living which weighs against his natural idealism: witness his patient endurance of the Koomson connection and a crooked boat-deal that he cannot prevent, his honest confession that he is not even sure that he wholly detests the new materialism, and his more discriminating, strangely happy response to the book's last bribe (a communal gesture insofar as it is performed by the bus driver on his passengers', not his own behalf). It is therefore not surprising that the man's gradual growth away from the Teacher is given increasing emphasis towards the end of Chapter Six and it is significant that when he takes leave of his friend's immobilized solitude, he returns to his own more purposive element of slow walking and feels an intense desire for real human contact, evidently generated in the wake of the Teacher's claustrophobic seclusion from the world.

The twin narratives of Chapter Six oscillate between defeatist pessimism and guarded hope; they expand to embrace an imagined community which is the projection of the Teacher's political fantasies and contract to the dimensions of the real one experienced by the man in his daily trials; and they shrink back to the vision of two isolated - and, finally, divided and estranged - men. The vision is, strictly, neither single nor plural, being about as close to a "communal view" as Armah could get at this problematic stage of his writing career. There is no confusion of viewpoints,



Title: Head of a Princess  
Medium: Ink  
Artist: G. Krydzikwojny  
Year: 1994

JACK D. FORBES

**The Third World After Thirty Years**

A lot of the easy money  
has come and gone  
and the easy years  
the years of credit  
have been cashed in  
the years given  
drafts of hope  
by independence and revolution.

Dreams of the Third World  
sour now, for some,  
and bitter in many mouths

The wages of freedom  
stand at the bottom  
for those who work  
and death's face  
is the wage  
for those who cannot.

And the armies of those able to leave  
grow  
seeking entry  
through the metropolitan gate  
to sweat-shop work  
in the North

The Third World  
wrenched by wars  
external wars  
internal wars:

Lebanese and Ugandans  
Iranians and Afghans  
Iraqis and Ethiopians  
Somalis and Palestinians  
Shonas and Kurds  
Tigreans and Oromos  
Amharas and Sudanese  
and the list goes on and on  
as tears keep flowing

salting ever new the wounds.

And, of course, there are  
the Yankees, the Soviets  
the Boers, the Israelis  
and others who, rich  
and powerful,  
kill more efficiently  
putting more money  
behind every murder.

The hopes of the Fifties -  
new flags of independence  
the dreams of the Sixties -  
programs of emancipation -  
lie like ancient  
unrepaired roads  
pot-holed and dusty  
broken and  
in places invisible  
beneath the tracks  
of tanks  
and refugees.

The Third World  
broken by debt  
shattered by falling prices  
impoverished by devaluations  
cheated by inflation  
at the mercy  
of cartels  
of multinationals  
of the storehouse of  
colonial wealth  
which never left the North  
(except as down-payments  
on more wealth).

Independence seems now  
like desert mirages  
a thin wispy  
insubstantial  
vapor

salting ever new the wounds

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the Boers, the Israelis  
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on more wealth).

Independence seems now  
like desert mirages  
a thin wispy  
insubstantial  
vapor

always eluding  
the grasp.

Independence

becomes a slogan of deceit  
when it is a gift -  
or an acquisition -  
spider-web wrapped  
like a fly dropped  
after its juices have  
been drained.

Sticky-strands of colonial boundaries

irrational carvings and  
butchering made  
by mad conquerors  
cutting apart nations,  
tribes, languages  
breaking up ancient states  
and putting them back together  
like a puzzle  
but a puzzle whose key is locked away  
in London  
and Paris, and  
now New York.

And the strange thing is

such makeshift territories  
work well  
the colonialist's find  
precisely because  
they are in  
perpetual turmoil  
and the Big Powers  
make sure that they stay  
just so.

The new elites of Africa  
and Asia

the old elites of Latin America  
the new radicals  
the old exploiters  
marxists

capitalists  
opportunists  
examine the boundaries created  
by Imperialism  
and by and large - pronounce them good.

And hand in hand  
the Yankees and the Latino elites  
the Europeans and the African rulers  
all together  
dancing around a bonfire  
of madness  
because it makes it easier  
to steal  
to control  
to keep off balance  
the people blindfolded  
pockets picked  
the Native American masses  
the African masses  
the Asian masses  
pockets picked.

While their own rulers  
pin their arms  
the capitalists  
pick their pockets  
and the party leaders  
pluck up the change  
which drops  
in the dirt.

Imperialism and colonialism  
it is seen  
are not over in a day;  
one night of revelry  
does not bring freedom,  
a change of flag  
changes colors only -  
not the system.

So long as the pupils of the system  
the ones who eagerly

sat at the teacher's feet  
the ones who carefully  
noted their lessons  
slip right in  
behind the colonialist's departing boots  
to appear again  
as their heirs.

Imperialism does not  
seem to die, for  
like a Noble House  
it finds legatees  
inheritors who step in  
to occupy  
the mansions  
the perquisites  
the positions  
the power

Government  
have we forgotten?  
is  
in essence -  
money -  
the power to tax

Marxist governments  
get money

Capitalist governments  
get money

Socialist governments  
get money

Islamic governments  
get money

For a government  
without money  
is *no* government,  
in these times.

The State -  
the government  
must have a territory  
must have a zone

of exclusive power  
 a zone  
 as large as possible  
 in which  
 the people are counted  
 and money is collected.

The bigger the land  
 the more bureaucrats  
 the more soldiers  
 the more police  
 the more officials  
 the more contracts  
 graft, taxes,  
 concessions, gifts,  
 bribes.

The struggle to control a state -  
 we must keep that in mind -  
 the stumble  
 not for freedom  
 not for justice  
 not for equality  
 the struggle  
 for a state  
 for a defined territory  
 for a controlled people  
 to pluck -  
 isn't that  
 so often  
 the real -  
 the functional-  
 goal?

"The objective of the proletariat" -  
 the "vanguard" that is -  
 "is the seizure of state power" -  
 and the goal  
 of virtually every party  
 is the same  
 to get control of a government  
 (and we know who  
 government's control!).

Now that has been  
the great error  
the terrible mistake  
of the last thirty-odd years  
To believe  
that "Liberation"  
means  
the acquisition of state power  
Brothers and Sisters  
liberation  
means setting people free!  
Liberation means  
destroying the boundaries  
erasing the borders  
in order  
for genuine, real, authentic  
communities  
self-determining  
communities  
to choose  
for themselves  
to organize  
themselves  
in their own way!  
Why should Amharas  
be killing Oromos  
Tigreans, Eritreans  
Somalis  
to preserve the boundaries  
of an Ethiopia  
drawn on the map by the  
British, the French, and  
the Italians?  
Who can show  
that a "big Ethiopia"  
forced upon  
uphappy  
unwilling  
subjects

is better than smaller,  
democratically  
created  
republics?

Mounds and mounds  
and still more mounds  
of dead people -  
is that what a Third World state  
shall be erected upon?

No, we have wasted  
three precious decades  
imitating Europe  
imitating Communism  
imitating Islamic empires of old -

We have envied the mass graves  
we have hungered  
for the bloodshed  
we have desired  
to wear the boots  
which have crushed  
so many  
peoples  
beneath their bloody heels.

And in the course of  
fateful imitation  
we have fostered  
the conditions  
which have led to  
corruption and  
self-serving  
governments

And we have opened the doors to  
neocolonialism  
multinational corporations  
raw exploitation  
because the doors  
we have given away  
to thieves  
responsible

to no one  
but state power -

The dreams of the Third World  
nightmares now  
will not be sweet  
until we understand  
this:

We cannot crush each other  
We cannot coerce each other  
We cannot remake each other  
We cannot control each other

We must respect  
the weakest of our neighbors  
for truly, they are us!

As Turks we must let  
Kurds be Kurds

As Pakistanis we must let  
Baluchis be Baluchis

As Guatemaltecos we must let  
Quiches be Quiches

As Nicaraguenses we must let  
Miskitus be Miskitus

The ideal of the Third World  
must be  
*respect!*

The goal of the Third World  
must be  
*freedom!*

And as free people we  
indeed  
can come together  
uncoerced  
to build  
bonds of human-ness  
across...

any and all boundaries.  
If we cannot do that  
we

historically  
have no claim  
upon the future

We will recede  
like an ill-formed wave  
into the vast sea  
of ancient miseries,  
of ancient failures  
without having  
eroded even an inch  
from the cliffs of tyranny!



Title: What the Eater Ate  
Medium: Ink  
Artist: C Krydz Ikwuemesi  
Year: 1995

SAM ONUIGBO

### **Language As An Instrument of Change in Reid's "New Day"**

*New Day* is an artistic account of Jamaican history which spans a period of eighty years—an account told by Johny Campbell, an ageing member of the well-to-do Campbell family. When the story opens, Jamaica is ruled by the Crown Governor with an advisory assembly elected by the wealthy land-owners. But many of the large estates are crippled as a result of the emancipation of the slaves who prefer subsistence living to working on big plantations.

To worsen the already bad situation, there is the three-year drought which apparently stimulates immediate resentment against the crown administration. The resentment gives rise to calls for universal adult suffrage and it is also this resentment that leads to the Morant Bay Rebellion in which many people are killed. In reaction to the rebellion, the Crown Governor hangs the leader and a member of the assembly who favours it but this action is judged excessive. The Crown Governor is therefore recalled and a new governor is sent. But the agitation for self-government continues until 1944 when the constitution reform that inaugurates the "new day" is established. Thus, the "new day" is born.

#### *Language in Literature*

The novelist's medium is language:  
whatever he does, qua novelist, he  
does in and through language.

David Lodge, *Language of Fiction*, p.18.

It may be stating the obvious to say that the ability to use language differs with individuals and according to the nature of the ideas, concepts and thoughts to be presented. It is no wonder then that even when two people use the same language to present the same ideas and concepts, one makes a better impression on the listener than the other. A number of factors are responsible for this but effective use of language is an important one.

Granted that the novel is a piece of artistic creation, the artist weaves his plots and characters through the medium of language. And as that medium through which these elements of the novel are presented, language is a potent instrument for effective presentation. To be an effective artist

however the novelist must realize that his work is a "mirror" through which the society sees itself. If he, as an artist, must be "a mature-participant in the community,"<sup>1</sup> he requires some flexibility in the language; flexibility to perform linguistically according to the situation, according to the role he is playing and according to the requirement of the audience for whom the work is designed. To the artist, therefore, language is the way through which the fictional elements of experience are created and presented. If language is as central to the business of artistic creation as we may have seen, the writer's language must not place a barrier between the readers and the events and objects presented but should instead enact them directly."<sup>2</sup>

This paper therefore examines the language of *New Day* to show how far the writer fashions a special medium which serves, not only to enact the events and objects presented but also to represent the communal spirit and collective experience of a people in their march towards a day of hope.

#### *Linguistic Features of New Day*

To M.A.K. Halliday, 'language is a rich and adaptable instrument'<sup>3</sup> and to Reid in *New Day*, "what I have attempted, is to transfer to paper some of the beauty, kindness and humor of my people ..."<sup>4</sup>. In doing this, Reid, perhaps, exploits the fact that language is a rich and adaptable instrument and as a competent manipulator who is aware of the dynamics of the language, he creates elements out of the continuum of the human speech to which he is exposed. As must be expected, the elements created in this situation are those relevant to the characterization of the facts the artist wants to establish. Because of the sustained emphasis on purpose, the language is examined more according to popular appeal to subject matter than its conformity to conventional grammatical rules and where the non-conformity is highlighted, it should be seen as the author's device for a motivated prominence. Because of this popular appeal to subject matter, the primary linguistic concern of the novelist is apparently to capture the traditional speech pattern of his people in order to give force to the action,

1 See R. Fowlers *The Languages of Literature* (Routledge & Kegan Paul London and Henley, 1971.) P. 92.

2 Ernest Fenollosa in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. San Francisco (N>d.) The work was discovered by Ezra. Pound among Fenollosa's papers after his death in 1908 and and hailed by him as a study of the fundamentals of all esthetics.

3 M.A.K. Halliday: Extracts from "Relevant Models of Language", *Education Review*, Vol.22, No.7. (1969) pp. 26-34.

4 See "Author's Notes" in V.S. Reid, *New Day*. Heinemann, London, 1949.

aware, of course, of the evocative power of language to a people who are fighting for survival.

A look at any page of the novel shows a deliberately sustained form of elision which leaves *no*, *O*' and *ha*' for 'not', 'of' and 'have' respectively. This kind of elision extends to other words like 'handkerchief', 'Ezekiel', 'between' and 'except' with the corresponding words as '*kerchief*', '*Zekiel*', '*tween*' and '*cept*'. There is also an abbreviational device which gives rise to special contractions like *y'know* (p.312), *s'matter of fact* (p. 303) and *ol'timer* (p.274). Although these elisions and contractions may have been phonologically devised to maintain the tempo and rhythm of a language that is subtly revolutionary, it is more likely that what Reid does is to move from unthinking acceptance of a British heritage to "a more critical awareness of our origins." It is this awareness that imposes on the language, peculiar features especially at the phonological level. In fact, phonology in relation to the written code is important to the Jamaicans as they "create silently in their mental ears, the writer's voice or some other voices for that matter from the signs on the printed page."<sup>5</sup>

Besides, when at the beginning of the novel Reid states that "thirst and hunger walk through our land" and that thousands of people "have no *osnaburgs* to their back" (p. 6), he uses the culture-based linguistic pattern to express the realities of the famine period in order to add indigenous flavour and local colour to the language and, by so doing, heighten the sensitivity of the reader. A more euphemistic form of expression would not have been adequate for an artist who is part of the general labour force and whose only weapon, important though, is the language. This weapon reinforces the fighting spirit as the "fighters" notice a deviation from "the master's language" to the people's form of the language.

Equally significant and of course worthy of special mention is the musical cadence of the language. This cadence results from the poetic forms sometimes employed by writers who are conscious of the place of poetry in black arts as a means of capturing and expressing the feeling of the time. It is not surprising therefore, that even when the "county Inspector says we voices must no' be loud, sing we will sing the hymn o' our faith, and what follows is

<sup>5</sup> R.B. Le Page in "Dialect in West Indian Literature," in Edward Baugh, (ed) *Critics on Caribbean Literature*, London: (George Allen and Unwin Publishers, 1978), pp. 123-129.

BREAK DOWN THE WALLS O JERICHO  
 HEAR STONEY GUT MEN: YEA, LORD O!  
 YEA LORD O!  
 SEVEN DAY WALK, SEVEN TIMES ROUND  
 SEVEN DAY COME-O, SEVEN TIMES GO-  
 BREAK DOWN THE WALLS O'  
 JERICHO-  
 YEA, LORD O! (P.104).

Apart from the Biblical implication of the wall of Jericho as a barrier to freedom, folk songs in form of ballads, spirituals, work songs, and secular songs are natural vehicle for poetic expression for people who want "to voice their emotions rhythmically, melodiously and imaginatively."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, these are songs of experience through which composers and singers share communal sense of happiness and sadness. Poetic expression is therefore used in the novel as a mode of symbolizing experience and as a means of expressing the secret of the inner mind. Johnny the narrator seems to appreciate this fact when he echoes that "one's thoughts fly out on the wings o' his songs." (p.106). We must however, note, as Nwoga (1967:123) points out that it is not the subject matter that makes poetry. Rather, "the expression is what raises the subject matter to a poetic level." In expressing the feeling of the people, Reid adopts a special linguistic pattern that exploits to advantage the value of sounds and words specially patterned to raise the subject matter to a poetic level.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the poetic form, the language has a striking syntactic peculiarity. And the syntactic pattern which the artist selects in specific situations is not only an index of the social class of the speaker but is more closely linked with the role the speaker is playing at the time. For instance, Pa John, just back from the Gut, reports that "Davie heartly" (p. 98) and describing a woman later, Johnny says, "All red and white, she". In standard English usage, the linking verb may have been employed to link the subject and the complement but, here, it appears the copula exists at the underlying level but is deliberately deleted at the surface level to dislocate the expectations of the reader or listener and therefore foreground this linguistic feature which gives prominence to the complement.

Since there is always a correlation between the use to which the language is put and the form it takes, it is not surprising that Garth's language in the Wednesday court case of riotous demonstration is strictly legal and technical. As he pleads with the magistrate to represent himself and other

<sup>6</sup> See the Introduction to the collection of poems in Darwin Turner ed., *Black American Literature*, (Columbus Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishers 1970), p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> I.N. Nwoga, ed., *West African Verse*, (Longman, 1967), p.123.

defendants, he points out that he is not just "a defendant in this case but also a member of the Bar and a solicitor of the supreme Court of Jamaica." (pp. 283-4). And his ultimate aim is to prove that the defendants are "Ipsa facto not guilty of riotous assembling" (p. 289). The prolixity of the language which is further studded with technical words is not an indication of a superior social status. Rather, it is the usual form of the language of the legal practitioner who fights in his own way to free his people from the firm grip of the Crown authority. With Pastor Humphrey and his usual Sunday sermon, the religious overtone is clearly marked in "servants, be obedient to them ... as unto Christ" (p. 39). A good christian, the sermon suggests, should obey constituted authorities but it is equally implicit that his message projects the christian creed which emphasizes equality of men before God. The Jamaican struggle for the "new day" is a collective struggle which knows no age, creed or status. Therefore, when the spiritual head speaks, he translates the moral code into language. when the uneducated common man speaks, his concern is not very much to portray the niceties of the language as it is to exploit the nuances of meaning which his gutter language predicts. And when the educated and the socially advantaged few speak, they use language, not to consolidate their social superiority but to fight for the freedom and upliftment of all.

Extensively employed in the novel also is a kind of word game, a play on words to serve special adjectival functions. For instance, Johnny plays with "mouse-mouse Naomi" who is also a "hungry-belly Naomi" (p.135). As Munael goes out with the canoe to see "if any fool-fool mullet" will mistake "cane-bait" for pear (p.70), Johnny's mother describes Zaccy as "a hurry come-up man" (p.126). This kind of word-game gives credence to Obiechina's (1975) observation that each speech community has her own traditional conventions of language use. This group-determined relevance to pattern receives group response because of its immediate relevance to the needs of the people. As the language presents excitement on the surface, it is important to note that underlying this excitement is a grim message arising from a life of reflection. And it is the grim message which the language carries that makes it function as an instrument of change. When Johnny, to describe the hopelessness of life in Jamaica during the three-year famine period, says that "thirst and hunger walk through our land", one feels excited at the utter violation of the selection restriction rule which predicts an animate subject for the verb, "walk" but it is more interesting to note that the author uses this syntactic foregrounding to paint a vivid picture of sordid living condition of the people of the time. Whatever the syntactic and phonological peculiarities of the language, they serve, not only a unique communicative purpose but act also to liberate the community from those repressive vagaries from which it seeks freedom.

Apparently in line with this observation, Reid creates some syntactic patterns that deviate from conventional word order of English syntax. Of

interest are some declarative and interrogative sentences. The English declarative sentence has an order in which the subject usually precedes the verb. The interrogative on the other hand is marked by placing the operation before the subject, initial positioning of a wh- word or by a rising question intonation. But in the following sentences:

"Hard day it has been for him today ..." (p.3)

"Sixty five, it was" (p.3)

"Drunk she was" (p.229) and

"Sargeant Gambell they called him then ..." (p.231),

there is the initial positioning of the complement even though the subject/predicator order is maintained. In other instances, however, the predicator precedes the subject as in the following:

"Smooth is the wall on the side ..." (p.57)

"Terrible was that day ..." (p. 229).

"Well matched her' been my two sisters ..." (p.232)

Much in the same way, many interrogative structures attract the attention of the reader because of the apparent disorder of the usual interrogative pattern. In examples like

"Is war it, or peace they want?" (p.8)

"Is what kind o' wickedness this?" (p.13)

"Is where Davie? (p.47)

"Is what it you gentlemen want me to do" (p.78),

the initial operator is immediately followed by the wh-word, quite unlike what obtains in conventional interrogative sentence pattern. But when one remembers that the author hinted earlier that what he tries to do is to transfer to paper some of the beauty and humour of the people, one feels that the structural patterns are part of the linguistic humour that helps to sustain the action.

Equally curious as a feature of the language of the novel is prefixing of "a-" to the verbs to form the continuous verb tense which would otherwise be represented by the "-ing" form. This form survives in present day English, however, but it is not limited to the verbs as is the case in the novel. English nouns like foot, flame, bed and a few others have "a" prefixed to them, but when that happens, the resultant word is usually adjectival or adverbial in function. But in cases where, for instance,

"Davie commenced a-sing too" (p.10)

"October sun is a-shine on me" (p. 36)

and "Noami is a-tellmethrough..." (p. 256),

the verbs to which the "a-" is prefixed represent the "-ing forms.

It appears therefore, that Reid is aware that a writer's style is often expressed as much by the grammatical structures he prefers as by his choice of words.<sup>8</sup> It is this awareness that probably guides his choice of words and the arrangement of these words in linear progression to achieve a special effect. And it is this awareness that allows him the freedom to exploit the open but controlled linear progression of sounds and words to fashion a variety of language that projects some linguistic features. The writer who does this, recognizes the validity of sentences "that are both new and unexpected, for this is the basis of his communication."<sup>9</sup> In fact, the validity of such sentences allows for the kind of syntactic pattern and inversion noticed in this novel. When such unexpected inversions occur in language, some linguistic items are usually brought into artistic focus. To a large extent, Reid employs this art of "motivated prominence"<sup>10</sup> in *New Day* to make the language function within the thematic framework as a potent instrument of change; this language being a variety that deviates in many ways, from the acknowledged pattern of standard English. But this variety must not be dismissed as sub-standard since it is a direct result of the writer's response to a unique situation.

One thing remains to be said about the language of the novel: that the language is reinforced with proverbs based on communal sayings and beliefs. And the use of these proverbs probably stems from the need to create a medium that is as heuristic as it is instrumental.<sup>11</sup> But it is equally relevant to remember, as Obiechina (1975:115) intimates, that "proverbs constitute a natural part of the speech of traditional societies."<sup>12</sup> While the use of proverbs is not unique to Reid, it is pertinent to note that wherever proverbs are used, they are designed "to make the simple-minded wise" and to make those already wise to become wiser "by exploring the depths of

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<sup>8</sup> R. Chapman, *Linguistics and Literature*, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers 1973), p.44.

<sup>9</sup> Chapman, p. 47

<sup>10</sup> Chapman, p. 48

<sup>11</sup> M.A.K. Halliday, "Relevant models of Language," pp.26-34

<sup>12</sup> E. Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in West African Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 115.

meaning in these nuggets of truth.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Johnny must have acquainted Garth with the history of his people in order to make him "run his race without forgetting his turnings" (p.259) and to make him understand also that "the higher monkey climbs, the more he exposes his underpart" (p.235). What can be more effective than the merger of theme and style (style used only as the linguistic idiosyncrasy of a writer) to carry the Jamaican folk-way as Reid does.

### Conclusion

The paper has, so far, tried to show how Reid has actually put on paper the beauty and humour of his people. As to whether "the language of *New Day* is one of the novel's important achievements or a brave failure, Mervyn Morris, in the "Introduction" leaves us to decide. But if you agree, like I do, with Ralph Ellison that

Behind each artist there stands a traditional sense of style, a sense of felt tension indicative of expressive completeness; a mode of humanizing reality and of evolving a feeling of being at home-in the world (and that) it is something which the artist shares with the group ...<sup>14</sup>

we may then conclude that Reid feels at home and is therefore able to manipulate the language with all the nuances of expression. The dialect is sustained as an instrument of the desired change and one which helps the reader to feel the texture of daily living in Jamaica.

On a final note, the paper believes that since language is part of the social organization of a people and since, according to Firth, the systematics of phonetics and phonology and of grammatical categories are ordered schematic constructs or frame of reference for the handling of events,<sup>15</sup> the success or failure of presentation of such events depends on effective use of language. Reid the artist is not only a mature participant in the community but one who has the flexibility to perform linguistically according to the situation in which he finds himself.

13 Proverbs 1<sup>4-6</sup> in *The Children's Living Bible*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tynodal House Publishers, 1972), p. 709.

14 Ralph Ellison, "On Becoming a Writer" in Darwin Turner ed *Black American Literature*, Charles Merrill Publishing Company, Ohio, 1970, p.107.

15 J.R. Firth, "Personality and Language in Society," in J.P.B. Allen and S.Pit Corder, ed., *The Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Vol 1, 1972, p.15.

## WALE OKEDIRAN

### After The Flood

The storm reached Ibadan at eight in the evening. Starting with howls of wind and claps of thunder, the thunderstorm soon erupted. It was a sudden electric moment in the otherwise placid night.

"Oh my God. What kind of thing is this?" Sade Lala hissed as she parted the curtains of her bedroom window to gaze outside. "I thought the weather reports said the possibility of rain was remote," she muttered to herself. Suddenly, jagged lightning streaks raced across the sky, briefly illuminating the blanket of darkness outside. The thunder rared and the baby on the bed started crying.

"Sorry, Tomi boy. It was the thunder eh," Sade said as she picked her three month old baby. Then she called out. "Beauty, Beauty!" When she didn't get any reply, she called again. A young girl of about fifteen years, dressed in a faded cotton dress, came hurrying to the bedroom, her hands dripping with water. "Where were you when I called?" Sade asked.

"I--I-- was in the kitchen and ---".

"See your hands. Come on go and wipe them, then come and take the baby from me while I finish dressing!" Sade said angrily.

Beauty soon took Tomi away and Sade went back to the dressing table. She turned both ways admiring herself in the mirror. The off-the-shoulder purple dress with slim figure especially just three months after putting to bed. As the twenty-four year old bank worker adjusted the trendy looking earrings and choker, the doorbell rang.

"It's aunty Nana", Beauty came to report.

"Let her come in", Sade replied.

"Sade! are you not ready?" Nana Okolie remarked as she entered the bedroom.

"Hello Nana" Sade said. "Nana--are -are you sure I should still go to this party? You know Bayo has travelled and I don't remember telling him about the party?"

"What are you saying, Sade? How can you miss my birthday party after all our preparations?"

"I know Nana-and this rain. You know how unpredictable these housemaids can sometimes be".

"Don't worry Sade. The rain will soon stop and Bayo knows me well. He won't object to your coming to my party", Nana replied.

Reassured by her friend, Sade quickly completed her dressing, dished out instructions to Beauty and left the house with her friend.

Outside, it was raining heavily as Nana's boyfriend James Boro swung the car into the main road.

"The rain is getting heavier. I just hope the Ogunpa river would not overflow its bank again this year", Sade frightfully remarked.

"Ha, come on Sade. Relax. How can this small rain cause a flood?"

"I hope so Nana. You remember how much last year's flood disturbed us. That's why I'm always afraid every rainy season".

"Don't worry Sade. Everything will be all right", Nana replied.

By the time the trio reached James' house at the other end of the city close to the university, the party was already in full swing. On the dance floor, Sade was able to recognise some of her friends from the bank. While some were in snug jeans and cute blouses, others wore exotic dresses with jewelry that shimmered and glittered. It was the time of the oil boom in Nigeria and people were rich. Everybody seemed happy and the air was drowsy with the aroma of fragrant perfume, cigarette smoke and brandy. It had been a long time since Sade attended a party, and with the warm company of her friends, she soon forgot her worries about the storm and started dancing.

Three hours later, it was still raining. Contrary to what Nana said, the Ogunpa river could not contain the torrential rainfall.

As the rain continued, the trickles and puddles on the roads flowed into the gutters before cascading into the muddy waters of the river which coursed through the length of the city. To compound things, thick heaps of refuse dumped into the river obstructed its smooth flow, and before long, the river broke its banks. The flood now swept across the land masses adjacent to the river's bank, washing away bridges, vehicles, houses and their occupants.

Because the river took its origin from the northern part of the city where its flow was not powerful, houses in this neighbourhood, including James' house, were not affected by the flood. Thus, guests at Nana's party were oblivious of the disaster going on in the city.

However, by the time the river reached the centre of the city where the inhabitants in defiance of Town Planning Authority regulations had built houses close to both sides of the river, the damage was extensive. Hundreds of people were made homeless, while many others whose number could not be immediately ascertained were killed by falling walls, lightning electrocution and drowning.

By the time the river got to the southern limits of the city where Sade Lala's house was situated, the velocity of the flood had become terrific and the water smashed into Sade's house. A sudden clap of thunder woke Beauty up where she slept with Tomi in the bedroom. Due to power failure, everywhere was dark. It was after she had got used to the darkness that Beauty realised that water was pouring into the room through the windows at an alarming rate. Frightened and confused, the fifteen year old girl started screaming and shouting for help. By then, Tomi was also awake and he too was crying.

Another streak of lightning exploded, bathing the girl in an eerie blue light. As she looked up, Beauty discovered that one of the walls in the room had collapsed outwards and water was now filling the room at an alarming rate.

Within minutes, the water had reached Beauty's waist. As she continued crying, a sudden bump at her waist made her look down. Floating beside her was the green plastic laundry bucket which she used for Tomi's clothes. The bucket which had a spring mechanism that allowed the lid to shut tightly was about two feet in length and two feet in circumference. Because of the rising level of the water, Beauty's immediate concern was the safety of the baby whom she was now carrying in her arms. Suddenly, an idea occurred to her. Drawing the plastic bucket nearer, she used her elbow to steady it while she opened the lid and gently dropped the baby inside as the lid snapped shut.

At that moment, another clap of thunder rang out and the walls of the room caved in. Beauty was knocked unconscious by a falling brick, while the bucket was swept through the opening to join the river which had completely overrun the house.

Meanwhile, Sade had lost interest in Nana's party after some of the guests who had tried to go home had brought back the news of the flood. "All the roads are flooded, so we had to turn back," they had said. Sade was now terribly apprehensive about her baby, but it was not until the following morning that James and Nana tried to take her home.

"Just relax and everything will be all right", Nana said as she tried to calm her friend. Apart from the slightly flooded roads, nothing unusual was noticed as James drove along the Ring Road until he made an exit to connect Sade's neighbourhood of Molete. Suddenly, a long line of stationary cars on the road came to view. A policeman came up to James. "No cars beyond here. Drive down to the roundabout and turn back", the officer said.

"Why?" Sade asked.

"The whole area down there is flooded", the policeman replied.

"What! - but I live there", Sade shouted.

The policeman started to say something but he caught Sade's countenance and quickly changed his mind.

"Okay. You can get down here and join the others crossing the foot bridge", the man added. Quickly, Sade and Nana got down while James tried to find somewhere to park the car.

It was when they got to the head of the footbridge that Sade looked down and had a glimpse of the devastation done by the flood. Through the drizzle that was still falling, she could see tons of debris of household utensils, bricks, wood carcasses of dead animals littering everywhere. Several house and streets were all washed up by the flood. And as she took in the scene, Sade's heart sank. "Oh God, please keep my baby safe for me", she silently prayed as she and Nana crossed the bridge. The little bit of conversation that floated to her hearing from the other pedestrians further compounded Sade's fears.

"They said a whole street was carried away by the flood", one fat woman in front of her said. "You should have seen human corpses as swollen as elephants", was her reply when Sade said she hoped nobody was killed.

By the time they got to the other side of the bridge, Sade was almost crazy with apprehension. After looking round and finding the landscape strange, she frightfully approached a group of tense and sullen faced men standing nearby. "Crimson Street---please where is Crimson Street?" She asked in a trembling voice. All she got as a form of reply was a shout "Behind you woman", from one large hairy man who was still trying to salvage what seemed to be the remnants of his household furniture.

As she again glanced round, Sade thought the man was joking. "It's Crimson Street I'm looking for", she repeated. Then she looked again and saw the familiar red tiles of the roof and the front balcony of her house with its green railings still hanging precariously in the flood. Then it hit her fully! - her house was under the water!

Sade put her trembling hands on her head and gave a wild ringing scream. "No! No!. It can't be true - where is my baby!" And before Nana who was already crying could do anything, Sade had leapt over the debris and jumped into the muddy water with a celerity remarkable for her sex. Half blinded from the drizzle and her own sweat, she kept plodding on in the direction of the collapsed house. Initially no one tried to stop her for their own minds and imaginations were momentarily arrested by the emotion of the moment. They also thought that she would soon realise the stupidity of

her action and stop. However, when she got to the deep end of the river and slipped, Nana ran to call the fire men who were nearby.

"The woman is drowning", somebody now shouted as Sade's head suddenly disappeared into the water. However, seconds later, her head bobbed up again and she could still be seen advancing towards the collapsed house, her body carried forward by the current of the flood. She soon reached the ruins of her former house and as the firemen closed in, Sade could be seen rummaging in the frothy brown water searching for her son.

Half an hour later with Sade safely in a hospital bed, a crowd gathered a few metres to where she had almost drowned. The object of their interest was a green plastic bucket which had been found among the debris at the bank of the river.

"I heard the baby's cries so I opened the lid,"one elderly man holding a shovel in his right hand said.

"It's a miracle", the woman who was holding the baby said.

"Yes indeed. It's God's work", another woman added as Tomi Lala, wet and hungry, continued crying.

## VIRGY ANOHU

### Syntactic Deviation: An Inquiry Into The Language Of Ossie Enekwe's "Broken Pots"

This paper calls attention to the various deviations employed by Ossie Enekwe in his poem - "Broken Pots". While the device of deviations constitutes the main thrust of our essay, other significant linguistic strategies therein are also examined with a view to showing up how this sensitive writer, at the various levels of linguistic association, has ensured that his readers are let/led into the consciousness of his creative art/vision.

In her article, "Syntactic deviation and cohesion", Irene R. Fairley notes that "deviation creates tension and may reduce the redundancy of a statement, but when repeated intrasententially it can reinforce understanding."<sup>1</sup>

The syntactic dislocations in "Broken Pots" are profuse, highly effective, and prominent as they foreground the imagery of the poet's vision right at the forecourt of his readers. The deviations are concentrated initially at the skilfully chosen modifiers that not only act as intensifiers, attributively crafted, but smithily selected for their semantic probabilities.

Thus / the/ + bosomed hill  
 + naughty (little) birds  
 + crawling touch

exhibit a common feature of collocational dislocation as (a) the verbalised adjective "bosomed" which should select as its N (noun) or HW (head-word) + human + female, is boldly deviated syntactically by measuring it with the lifeless structure (hill) to generate - "bosomed hill";

- (b) "naughty", a determiner that naturally surjourns with + human - children, collocates with the noun *birds* of indeterminate temperament to generate "naughty (little) birds";
- (c) "crawling" - a verb in its progressive hue functioning as an attributive modifier which should delimit a noun + mammal + creature - limbs/legs is allowed to have abstractive noun as its headword, giving rise to "crawling touch". By these conscious selections: "bosomed," structured with hill forces the reader to finalize the concept of hill and infuse

1. Irene R. Fairley, "Syntactic Deviation and Cohesion" in *Essays in Modern Stylistics*, ed., Donald C. Freeman, (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p., 123.

the physical attributes of a mature, fully blossomed woman into this lifeless object. The poet here leads us on to see the heavy bosomed feature as having the possibility of bursting. In a sense, we are reminded of ripened mango fruit or pawpaw, ready for plucking and equally standing the danger of falling to the ground and damaging. In the end, these possibilities are fully actualized as the virgins finally got "ripped" open when they lose their virginity.

The deviation in the nominal sequence "naughty (little) birds" helps to reinforce understanding of the theme as the semantic implication of "naughty" quite suggests the fear and the tension generated in the reader for the maidens as they are likely to "stumble", "prance", "crumble", "wreck" and "break" their pots. Again "crawling touch" as a group quickly suggests a process that would ultimately yield to a flow. When then later in the poem, a virgin finally breaks her pot, earlier image generated by the sequence - crawling touch - is reinforced and thus foregrounded. At this stage, one is reminded of Fairley's apt statement that "organisation and meaning depend upon syntactic deviation to the extent that correction of deviant sequences would irreparably alter formal relations, causing a collapse of both unity and rhythm."<sup>2</sup>

We further notice conservative and unusual sequencies in the verbal structures as "winding narrow path *stumbles*", "squirrels *prance*" "wind *runs*" (in addition to possessing fingers), "fountain *lingers*" - a conscious paradigmatic and syntagmatic configurations that make syntactic deviation a linguistic motif in itself.

Apart from these unusual collocational syntactic patterns, we find Enekwe fully experimenting with parallelisms at both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels. Thus "hill" and "path" are syntagmatically and paradigmatically related as they share the identical structure:

art + adj + N

the + heavy + bosomed + hill

and

art + adj + adj + N

the + winding + narrow + path.

Here, the poet encourages us to infuse sameness of meaning into the two lexicons, "path" and "hill". Any presence of antonymity is immediately neutralized.

Again the adverbial clauses "where the squirrels prance" and "(where) the naughty little birds + twitter" are so effectively paralleled that we are

<sup>2</sup> Irene Fairley, "Syntactic Deviation and Cohesion", p. 127.

RICHARD ELMAN

## Tiberias

Epicene St Peter's fish  
lie in baskets underneath  
a lakeside Turkish minaret,  
blunt and silent twenty years.

The Emperor of all the Jews  
came to take the waters here  
where pretty boys from Tel Aviv  
now cruise the tourists on the pier.

The Sea of Galilee is cold;  
this balmy sulfurous air  
has left me feeling very old:  
Jordan phosphors across the lake.

*Elianu Hanovim Elianu Hatishpi*  
echoes on the darkened water.  
Won't you spend the night with me?  
Eros with an Uzi slung...

Smudged with light, the new hotels  
spill dark shadows on those hills.  
Strung with bulbs, excursion boats  
sound their mournful foggy niguns.

*Elianu Hatishpi.*

You like head? Or to fuck me?

*Elianu Hanovim*

Please sir spend the night with me.  
The ancient chant will not abate:  
Sheckels, dollars, British pounds.  
Love for sale with Yiddishkeit,  
Hebrew queers, a Jewish State.

## Jerusalem

Just below Mount Scopus,  
in sight of Al Akhbar Mosque,  
the tour bus skittered  
when a rock blew out

the window in the door.  
There were other incidents:  
a pretty young Palestinian  
in black leather  
got roughed up by Border Guards  
at the Western Wall checkpoint  
because she lacked any ID;  
and a bomb was found  
in a trash barrel on Jabotinsky,  
cattycorners from our hotel.

Christmas was unseasonably sunny.  
The golden dome of the mosque  
glowed and shimmered under warm sun,  
and Jerusalem was unseasonably warm  
and golden from early morning into evening.  
The women in black demonstrated  
every Friday afternoon on Ben Yehuda Street,  
and Christian, Moslem and Jew  
shared their rancorous glances.  
Everybody prayed for rain,  
but no rain fell. The pre-recorded  
muzzein called five times a day,  
his cries punctuated by sonic booms  
above the Jaffa Road. F-16s soared  
like hassids along the hills of Moab.

### **Homage to Isaac Babel**

I read and reread the stories of Isaac Babel,  
and the stories about Babel in Konstantin Paustovsky's  
"Years of Hope -- of his care with language,  
of making draft after draft. ""A comparison  
must be as accurate as a slide rule and as  
natural as the smell of fennel".

Not only because we are both from Jewish families I find  
affinities with this long dead Soviet writer. He  
inspires me to try to be less slothful,  
and feckless. Here is a story I've made up about the great Babel.

The year before his arrest and death, Isaac  
Babel journeyed to New York. He knew  
nobody in America, but was befriended by

my Aunt Esther when he went into her Cotton Shop in Orange New Jersey to buy a dress for his wife in Brussels. Esther invited my family to her house that Sunday to meet Babel.

The man we saw was bald and goggle-eyed, and he laughed a lot, but nervously, and though he was a bit tubby, he ate very little of Esther's flanken for lunch. Afterwards my Uncle Max took him along to meet their neighbor, the prize fighter Tony (Two Ton) Galento.

"What Joe Louis did to me," Galento said, "shouldn't happen to Mussolini".

"Mussolini," Babel replied, "is D'Anunzio with the syph"

We all sat under the grape arbor in my Aunt Esther's garden. Babel asked if we knew Buster Keaton or Joe Penna, and Esther said she personally didn't move in such circles.

It was a gay time, I think, for all except my father who seemed a little sour, and grumpy.

Babel and my Aunt Esther were clearly lovers and he had done for her what no man until that moment ever could. My mother, Esther's younger sister, was anxious to flirt with this man Esther called with affection "Benyaleh."

"Benyaleh," she said, "you sure you wouldn't like a glass of cream soda?"

"Trouble makers. The lot of you," said my father. Babel chatted with Uncle Max about how to pickle Baltic herrings. "The important thing," Max pointed out, "is there should be no vinegar. Just salt and dill, and a little mustard seed."

"Maybe so, maybe not," Babel said. "But mustard seed doesn't always do the trick. It's like depending on Jesus Christ to produce an angel. One has to be audacious with spices and select only olive wood for the barrels."

Then Babel took an interest in me. He missed his daughter in Brussels, he said, and though I was hardly a substitute I'd

have to do.

He said I really don't know how to talk with little boys anymore since the Cossacks.

"Did you really fight and kill people?" I asked.

"Mostly I just looked, and made notes to myself. I also had saddle sores."

Its hard being in the saddle night and day," he said, "but worth it. Some can even make the gentile women happy that way."

"Is that so hard?" I asked.

"Its real work," Babel said. "Slave labour but also pleasure. Don't ever be a shirker, and you'll get rewards."

He said I looked like I would chase women someday. "How do you know?" I asked.

"In Odessa," he said, "a little boy like you is a rarity nowadays. We Soviets can't afford pampered brats. Too bad ...I was such a lad myself, but I grew up fast with the pogroms, and then came the Revolution. You remind me of myself when I was little. I had my first girlfriend only after I got married. I advise you not to follow that route. Be a good stout lad and serve womankind, he said, and always come last."

My mother and aunt were blushing and my father very angry to have this said in front of the children. Just then Aunt Esther served tea and fruit, and shortly thereafter Babel made his excuses. He would have to catch the Tube train back to New York.

He stood up and shook my hand, a little balding tub, and short of breath from asthma.

My father said "Just what the child needs, a role model."

"He'll be dead within a year anyway," said Uncle Max. "A mouth like that in the Soviet Union puts you against a wall

with a blindfold on your eyes."

Babel disregarded such kibbitzers and spoke only to me: "Don't be self-centered. You can't grow groats in a desert. Love life. A good Communist always waits his turn," he said. "Only Stalin is the exception and if that doesn't prove the rule what will?"

When I woke up Babel was dead in the Gulag, and my parents long dead, and Aunt Esther, and Uncle Max, and "Two Ton" Tony Galento. A world that is no more except in nostalgic TV documentaries on the Cable channels, and Babel's words in a book, consequently, still more vivid than my own.

"A man should think twenty times before he decides to be a writer."

All gone gone again and gone while  
I struggle even now to heed Babel's advice.

C.A. Pever-Ge

### Signifying Systems In Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*

The paper explores the language in the text as a semiotic system and seeks to look at the signifying function of the various utterances in *Kongi's Harvest*. We will explore the interplay of a dialectics of performance text and dramatic text, and decipher the multiplicity of signs these contain and their relationships. According to Annemarie Heywood:

*Kongi's Harvest* is total theatre, brilliantly structured to articulate a dialectical confrontation of old and new, not so much through dramatic action, as by theatrical means. The 'Meaning' is communicated by design, music, style of gesture, and delivery over and above the dialogue within the plot (p. 46).

The systems referred to above form the basic signifying elements in the dramatic text/performance of this play.

### SIGNIFYING SYSTEMS

At the same time, the autonomy and dependence on each other of both the dramatic and performance texts will be elucidated. Joseph Melancon asserts that language becomes semiotic practice at the level of speech when language becomes discourse (p. 17). Semiotics can therefore be viewed here from the angle of 'a setting into signs, a construction, a process of signification, a "to be" (p. 17). In the performance script of *Kongi's Harvest*, therefore, can be seen the elements of music, costuming, dancing and of course, the linguistic signs brought out in a language that is highly poetic. The first signification is aural-the music- 'a roll of drums such as accompanies a national anthem'. The roll of drums signifies and becomes a signification of the phenomena of a certain way of rolling drums in order for the signified to register fully in the consciousness of the spectator as representing a type. Oba Danlola and his retinue are revealed, as the lights come up on stage. The placement of the actors (in the three performances I have watched) reveal a clear interplay of proxemic relations that signify the relationships in operation on stage. The dance that accompanies the anthem in Mr. Bayo Oduneye's production in 1965) is apparently choreographed

because clear indications could be seen of unanimous downward and upward rhythmic movements, in a clearly synchronized and harmonious manner.

The anthem sung clearly signifies the contrast between the expectation of the audience presently rising to honour their country (on occasion when the signification provokes this response) and the fare they are served. The reader of the text, seeing 'national anthem' written in the stage direction, expects to read the real life national anthem, while the spectator hearing the signal-roll of drums as accompanying a national anthem' expects to listen to the actual anthem. But Soyinka uses this device to signify the disparity, within the state and the conflicts he sets out to expose. From the beginning, evidence of these disparities and conflicts have the desecration of the national anthem as their signifiers through the use of the aural and visual signs.

The language used in the 'national anthem' signifies; it is poetic and establishes the cultural codes, especially in its use of proverbs, wise sayings and other motifs derived from the Yoruba tradition.

The pot that will eat fat its bottom must be scorched ...  
(*Kongi's Harvest*, p. 61).

Metaphors, similes and other tropes intermingle to signify within the dramatic world, the obvious rift, conflict and contempt of a particular party (Danlola's) for another in the state.

The basic idea of conflict between the old order and new order is pursued throughout the text and certain classes form the basic backbone against which this conflict is played. Linguistic signs such as 'spurned', 'snorted out', 'broken', etc. form some of these basic classes that are reflected in a constant interplay signs.

Signification by use of the set (which throughout the play remains a fixed feature except for semi-fixed movable items such as Oba Danlola's throne and Segi's' night club etc) helps in establishing the idea of play as evidenced by the different levels on which the set is built. Oba Danlola and his retinue, Segi, Daodu (and the crowd in the night club), and Reformed Aweri, all play on the ground level while Kongi's 'retreat' is on a higher level, as steps lead to this setting.

The various systems - costume, movement, word, tone, facial mime, decor, accessories, etc. - all intermingle, correspond, and ostend themselves and are foregrounded within the different scenes. The clash between the two

"orders" (old and new) is evident in the signifying factors of royal dance/military steps; royal and traditional regalia/military attire; poetic language/everyday speech usage; and dignified carriage/short stride military movements.

According to Annemarie Heywood:

On Kongi's side movement is regimented, angular, machine like. Drill and marches; leaping up and sitting down (p. 48).

The linguistic sign points to the roles of these parties with reference to the old Aweri as "A big name for little heads." Images signified at the ostension of the flag (turned costume) emit powerful connotations of "disregard for state", "the pride of the state is in shambles"; but the signification that proposes itself at the whipping off of the costume-flag, heightens the signified conflict. The action builds on the signification of the downgrading of the 'old order'.

Discourse forms the basic unit of the semiotic thrust of the interplay signs - as language is used significantly both as signifier and signified. The significance of language is evidenced in the use of choice words to reveal the weakness of the new institution: (Child/rodent) as compared to the strength and resilience of the old institution; (awesome/thunder) especially in terms of spiritual strength. The connotation is therefore obvious; the physical strength is possessed by the new order but it is not by right, while the spiritual strength can only be received or got by inheritance.

Signification is then basically in the use of words endowed with significance and these classemes are reflected as earlier stated, in different contexts within the play. Words such as driven/took/ate/first/royal canopy/silk/silk worm are key words used to state the allegation made against the old order and their defence has as its signifiers words such as/witness/we never ate/we drew the poison/ etc. The linguistic sign, though foregrounding itself in the communication of the issues postulated in the text, is complemented by the interplay of the different visual signs, especially the gestural and also aural signs in the music.

Reference to the 'last dance' in the first scene capitalises on the linguistic sign of 'last' to signify finality. This signification serves to set the tone and eventual exposition of the play. This 'last dance', with its slow royal movements, helps to establish the linguistic signification. The picture presented is that of the coming to an end of an issue, or as the total picture is presented -- of a reign. The word and dance (a visual form) operate at the same time and complement each other to present a signified - solemnity,

which, though an abstract term, is an emotion supposedly evoked by these systems.

Music as used in the scene in which Kongi appears is referred to as a "chant" in complete disharmony with the royal music that accompanies Oba Danlola. All are connected to the signifier/signified - Image. The signifier-image is a seme that runs the length of the play; its other forms are: /loves to act roles/ /a flair for gestures/ /our dignity/, etc. The linguistic signification of image connotes all that Kongi is seeking, and to a lesser extent, his Reformed Aweri Fraternity. This signifying element (linguistic) emits a lot of signals that are summed up in the following signifiers. /magi/strategist/paraphernalia/patriach/positive scientificism/.

The night club scenes signify through the use of many stage systems, the bodies of the actors as these form configurations in space, including their dance movements. For the most part, lighting ostends this setting by use of coloured bulbs and other elements which it highlights: make-up, costume, movements, gesture and the linguistic sign. The lighting system serves both as a sui-generis sign and points to the context of the action.

Signification in this play is also realised through music and song. The linguistic sign attaches itself to the music and lyrics sung in honour of Segi. Auditive, linguistic and visual signs intermingle to lend significance to this character Segi. The key signifying linguistic signs that reveal Segi's character are /elegant/lady/fathomless//fame/. Song, dance and gesture flow into each other and harmonise with the linguistic signification. All the signs emitted - the recently closed club having twice its former number; strange facets of Segi's character contained within the song (whereby signifying through lyrical language), all help to build up the connotation of the 'ominous.

Scene switchings within the text are signified through different systems of signification with the change in the lighting system and the wailing, 'Kongi Oh,' being placed intermittently at the peak of the hierarchy.

Kongi's dictatorial tendencies are signified (among other various significations) through his capitalising on the signifier/dead/(when the secretary says of the Aweri/They are practically dead/). He seemingly absorbs it literally (another signification of his single mindedness) and wonders alouds how any Aweri could be dead when he has not condemned any of them to death; and a more forceful signification of these dictatorial tendencies is presented by the immediate follow up of his wondering if he should (condemn them to death).

The connotation that arises from the interplay of the systems in the above scene - the actor's position, movement - the deliberate upstaging of

Kongi (in performance) by use of the various systems connotes that pandering to Kongi's ego is essential. This is in order to signify his dictatorial attitude, meanness and egoism. Soyinka gives the pandering attitude full realisation in the character of the Organising Secretary and other characters. The Organising Secretary therefore serves as a sign for the character Kongi. He is portrayed as fully aware of his leader's love for underserved self esteem (an understatement) and fully exploits this to his advantage (that is, getting what he wants).

The sign at the top of the hierarchy is obviously linguistic, and the other systems merely help underscore the meaning of the utterances. The character Kongi possesses characteristics that give him away as modelled along the lines of living persons in the actual world.

The chant is foregrounded in the exchange between the Secretary and Kongi and provides the thrust to expose Kongi's vulnerability and mortality - which is fear. This is signified by Kongi's assertion of lack of trust which connotes insecurity through the signifier - his refusal to acknowledge that the Carpenter's Brigade which is his 'own creation' (and serves as a sign that points to Kongi) could be loyal to him. The exchange between Kongi and Secretary brings into play mainly the rules of prosody as the tone varies, starting as an assertion and ending on a hysterical note:

KONGI: I am the spirit of Harvest.

SECRETARY: Of course my Leader, the matter is not in dispute.

KONGI: I am the *SPIRIT* of Harvest

SECRETARY: Of course, my Leader

KONGI: I am the spirit of *HAAR-VEST* (p. 91)

(The underlined words point to the emphasis as reflected in the text). Within a textual analysis, it is clear that Soyinka lays out the interplay of the linguistic sign in a paradigmatic arrangement that has the 'am' in Kongi's first utterance foregrounded (the writing of the word differs from the rest of the utterance); in the second utterance the significance points to 'spirit' which is capitalised; and in the third, Harvest is foregrounded -- it is capitalised and stressed.

The paralinguistic feature 'sh' becomes the tool for visibly foregrounding the fear and cowardice of the man (Kongi) who has hitherto declared himself 'Spirit of the Harvest'.

Kongi's hypocrisy (reflected in earlier scenes) blossoms fully into a harmonious blending of this earlier signification of hypocrisy when Kongi insists that the reprieve he will grant to the condemned men must be a last-minute reprieve.

Undercoding, as a deliberate ploy, can be seen as a characteristic feature of the earlier actions within the text. So many things are left unsaid, thereby demanding a greater decoding activity, involving supply of missing links from the spectator/reader. There is an ominousness that surrounds some scenes such as those that involve Daodu and Segi. Many activities are presented as taking place the same night. One of Kongi's prisoners has hanged himself, and another, Segi's father, has escaped. All these form some of the surprise revelations of the text. His escape signifies that the plot of the play is yet to be resolved; in fact, it has become much more entangled. The sub-plot (that of the five men awaiting execution and Daodu and Segi's involvement) gradually gains in importance and becomes more interwoven within the basic plot of the play as emphasis is gradually removed from the conflict that hitherto has been denied a direct confrontation.

Segi's assertion that Daodu is the spirit of the Harvest is a signifier that clearly postulates Kongi's real opponent as Daodu, thereby lessening Oba Danlola's opposition.

Signification in the second part of the play (Oba Danlola and Daodu's encounter) embodies a lot of the actions occurring on stage at the given moment and the idea embodied is complete when he refers to his act as 'play-act'. This is therefore a play within a play situation but the mechanics Soyinka uses are too fine and subtle. The play-acting is therefore embodied within the character and the action and both are inexplicably intertwined.

There is an interplay of cultural codes as evidenced in the breaking of the drum by Daodu. These are presented as forming the basis for the decodification of the action. The action carried out by Daodu is explained as a taboo - the breaking of cultural codes. This signification explains the terrible silence, and it connotes that by Daodu's act, he has 'split the gut of our make-believe.' According to Danlola the drums were already silenced a long time ago and this brings to mind the utterance: *This is the last our feet shall dance together.* Bogatyrev asserts that in a state of high emotion in a performance, the different elements either complement or supersede one another. This can be seen in the various scenes as the praise-singing gives way to dancing, though it still complements the dance; the verbal is suspended and the non-verbal elements highlighted, etc.

The humour that Dende provides in this play shows clearly Soyinka's interspersing of humour with the more grim and serious. But this lighthearted atmosphere that Dende contributes in evoking, and the gradual lessening of tension before introducing a higher tension, all reveal the techniques of the playwright. Dramatic conventions (reminiscent, to some extent, of the Fool in a Shakespearean play) can therefore be seen to be at

play in the creation of character, the ordering of events, and the overall structure of the play.

The basic signification evidenced within the Harvest scene is both visual and linguistic. But the linguistic signs brought into play here utilise tropes that are visual in nature and connote the differences that exist between the life-giving forces and death-giving forces.

The gun-fire shots - an aural signifier acts as a sign that catalyses another sign - that of the resurgence of the signified isotopy - Kongi's fear. Coding of Kongi's fear is expressed through the stage directions: 'looks wildly around for some means of protection'. The connotation is, those who dish out terror and commit atrocious acts are highly cowardly. There is an interplay of visual signs and from looking 'around wildly', there is a shift to (as Kongi gets information that makes him start to laugh) a laughter that becomes, a powerful signifier of 'malice', venom', 'revenge', etc. And this signification is underscored by the 'maniacal laughter'. The explanatory acting that follows this signification is that Segi's father has been shot dead - and the spectator's doxastic world is constructed - Kongi has 'triumphed' after all, a painful resolution on which to end the play.

But the play does not end, Rather the festival begins in earnest with dancing and all the actors, and spectators become celebrants. The spectator's construction of the dramatic world does not give thought to the possibility that the end result will be different, with the festivity being signified through dancing, singing, eating and drinking. Kongi's actions during this signified festivity are basically gestural and the verbal element reflected in his reviling, declaiming, cursing, etc. connotes that he is a maniac.

Segi's return, which in many productions acts as the last scene (the 1965 production and 1987 production - at Ibadan Arts Theatre, and the film version), raises some curiosity, especially at the closed copper salver, which is passed from hand to hand until it reaches Kongi's table. The object ostends itself and the signification here is visual but there cannot be any attempt at decodifying this iconic sign until the cover of the salver is thrown open by Segi at Kongi's table. In the salver is the head of an old man and this connotes (from already given information) Segi's father. Signification here is basically visual and has many connotations attached to it - Kongi as a death-giving force; Kongi as deserving a fate no worse than the one he has inflicted on others, etc. Further connotations arise from these earlier implications.

The ensuring scramble signifies movement away (and this implies) not so much from the "head" as from the death-giving force which stares at his atrocities in 'speechless terror'. There is then a sudden blackout. The

signification employs mainly visual signs in terms of kinesics, proxemic relations and other relationships between the set, objects and actors. Various interpretations and connotations arise from this sudden blackout. The most obvious is that Kongi cannot rule anymore because all the citizens have either fled or are fleeing (as we see in the Hangover).

As Oba Danlola and the Secretary part ways, the play ends on a mixture of the royal music and the anthem. This signifies the theme of the play (and the uncertain resolution of the fight between the two forces). The abrupt ending of the aural signification (music) and the iron grating that hits the ground with a loud, final clang signify the events that have been passed through. The connotation that we glimpse is that dictatorship is not completely over yet.

If we agree with Gossman (1976) that the performance is more than a mere translation, then in *Kongi's Harvest* can be seen the putting of a 'message into a context', and it is only through this context that the meaning is acquired. The text of *Kongi's Harvest* is, therefore, as clearly elucidated, one among the many signifying systems of the performance, since it provides the basis for the verbal message.

Signs in *Kongi's Harvest* can be seen to play both conventional and non-representational functions. Conventional signs are evident in the clear depiction of certain characters as types, in the costuming, language and stage design. The non-representational (*sui generis*) signs can be seen also in the costuming and manner of speech, the decor and stage gestures (all these intermingle to signify to the audience at particular instances that the performance is a play) - as is evident for example, in Dende's scene with the Secretary and Captain.

#### **Conclusion:**

The several semiotic systems identified as signifying in *Kongi's Harvest* have been divided into the broadly general-verbal signs and non-verbal signs. The verbal signs are referred to as linguistic systems, and the non-verbal, visual systems. The aural systems fall into either of the above. The linguistic systems are concerned with the language; the visual with the iconic renditions (these include the set design, costuming, the gestural, movement and other objects that signify visually); and the aural with sounds (for example, thundering, etc).

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Title: The "Convultural" Conference  
Medium: Ink  
Artist: C. Krydz Ikwuemesi  
Year: 1994

**TOYIN ADEWALE****A Poster**

Within you  
Verdant hills tease a thunderous waterfall beneath the canopy  
of a potent sky.  
A sun, the shade of mischief  
Pours a warm morning on steep mountain paths -  
Dare I climb?  
To the heady songs  
Of a different thousand birds, a thousand different leaves to  
hug peace words  
whose lips root soul-deep  
at the querulous waters  
where there's full fruit.

**After Song**

Today, I roar like a loose lion  
hungry to prowl the morning kilometres of sundawn  
but steel clangs in;  
bars me, binds me, unbinds me.  
You are the restraint  
The crucial divorce from leaden chains  
The narrow path that urgently commands my presence.  
You are the challenge that won't let me grieve  
Today, you are a cage, my great freedom.

PETER NAZARETH

## Papa's Got a Brand New Bag

Running away. Wanderlust. Having come to this theme yet once again, memory plays a trick on me. From her corner Shehru throws a wink at me ... and do I imagine that the gaping mouth with its sisal moustache has a silent laugh on its thin old lips.. ?

The question that comes to mind is: in coming here, have I followed a destiny? Satisfied a wanderlust that runs in the blood? Or do I seek in genes merely an excuse for weakness, an inability to resolve situations? Perhaps it is this weakness that's in the blood: can you distinguish such weakness from wanderlust? When does a situation become impossible enough to justify escape?

I too have run away, absconded. And reaching this grim basement, I stopped to examine the collective memory - this spongy, disconnected, often incoherent accretion of stories over generations, like the karma a soul acquires, over many incarnations, the sins and merits, until in its final stages it lumbers along top-heavy with its accumulations, desperately seeking absolution.

I, like my forefathers before me, have run away. But what a price they paid. Dhanji Govindji, his self-respect and his sanity. His son, the joys of family life, the security of community life. My father Juma, I don't know what price he paid for running away - it was Hassam Pirbai who paid the cash price - but he did pay a price for coming back. He joined his tormentors. And in joining them he lost his compassion for those of whom he was also a part - if only a quarter. Perhaps I judge too harshly. (M.G. Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack*, Hinemann, 1989, pp. 65/66)

The concerns of *The Gunny Sack* stand revealed here: the running away syndrome or imperative, the question of memory, the need to accept one's inheritance, the existence of syncretism, and the possibility of moral choice. What gives the extract force is that we know that the narrator is a Tanzanian, East African Asian who has an unrecognized African ancestor through his father. The problem of memory then is not only a personal one but also one of the two ancestries, the Asian and the less clear African. And everything is contained in the gunny sack which he names Shehrbanoo, Shehru for short, like Sheherezade, the storyteller of the classic Arab Muslim work of fiction. The gunny sack has been left to Salim by the old woman Ji Bai, after whom the first part of the novel is named. The above extract suggests syncretism because Salim is a Muslim yet he is talking of reincarnation, a Hindu concept. His people, a fictional group of Shiite Muslims called Shamshis, very much like the Ismailis, were Hindus who became Muslim in India. Is it fate or history that the East African Asian must run away from?

The narrator of Vassanji's novel is in exile in a Western country, like the narrator of my *In a Brown Mantle*. My novel was published 17 years before Vassanji's; it is inevitable that his novel be linked to an earlier East African Asian novel: in both novels, the protagonist says he is going to begin at the beginning, and that beginning is way in the past in India. But there is also a connection with another East African Asian novel, published nine months before mine: Bahadur Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow*. Early in Tejani's novel, reference is made to a baby with an Asian father and an African mother. Another connection with Tejani is that Vassanji calls his community "Shamshis" while Tejani calls his protagonist "Shamsher." (Both novelists are Ismaili.)

A novelistic response to other novels is legitimate. Salim is the name of Rushdie's protagonist in *Midnight's Children* and of Naipaul's in his *Bend in the River*. Vassanji takes his novel in a different direction from all four novels, however. His protagonist's family has come so early to East Africa, via Zanzibar, that many generations are born in Africa. There is a shadowy African great-grandmother, Bibi Taratibu in the background. My protagonist's father's background is that of the civil service while Vassanji's, like Tejani's, is the one most dumped on by East Africans, the dukawallah.

Focusing on the Asian experience in East Africa from early times, *The Gunny Sack* covers Zanzibar, Tanganyika/Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. The protagonist, Salim, is an Asian, actually a Gujarati but he has some African ancestry, and thus the novel shows the interaction between Asians and Africans in ways that have not been sufficiently recognized in the past. Salim is self-critical, critical of his Asian group, and (sometimes) critical of Africans, with a warm sense of humor that makes the criticism acceptable. The first word in *Things Fall Apart* shows its focus: "Okonkwo". The same is true of Vassanji's novel: the word is "Memory." Salim wants to find out more about his father who died when he was four. He feels responsible for the death of his father so he tries to communicate with his father by going with his gang, the Famous Five, named after a popular English series, to a man who could communicate with the dead. This fails but it leads to Ji Bai's talking to Salim and telling him stories of the past. And this is why Ji Bai leaves the gunny sack to Salim at her death. His desire to know about his father means he must find out as well about his grandfather, great-grandfather and great-grandmother. The gunny sack contains everything Salim needs to find out about the past, to trigger off his creative imagination, Memory has to do with family and with history and different countries. But Salim belongs to a generation which wants to forget the past. Add to this the fact that it is considered embarrassing for an Asian family to recognize African ancestry. When Aziz, Ji Bai's grandnephew, brings the gunny sack to Salim, he tells Salim that his family wants him to burn it, "to bury the past." But Ji Bai had known from the way Salim had tried to contact the spirit of his father that he wanted to know about the past, that he knew the past had

something of value. The gunny sack becomes a womb giving birth to everything, to a story, so it has a woman's name.

"Memory" is the word, and the whole story told by Salim is a struggle with memory. The first part of the novel is clogged and difficult, just as memory struggles to recall things from the distant past, from childhood, from scraps of stories. The story gets clearer when we get to the present time because memory itself is clearing up. Part of the difficulty is that Salim's ancestors were always on the move, from India to Zanzibar to a small town in Tanganyika to Kenya when the Germans were losing and back to Tanzania. Juma, the father, had run away and gone to India but was not permitted to land: he only saw Bombay through a porthole (the scene being comparable to Dr. Aziz examining a woman through a hole in a cloth in *Midnight's Children*). The purpose of the struggle with memory is both to remember and to find a way of breaking from the cycle.

Salim lacks a father. His mother, Kulsum, after whom the second section is named, brings up her children herself. She does not get married again because she would have to give up the children. Two father-figures turn up, both, we discover later, in love with Kulsum but never admitting it to her or others: one a Goan, called "Uncle Goa" by Salim, and the other an African, Edward Bin Hadith, "Edward son of Story." Edward introduces Salim to Africa, African dancing, African storytelling and the rabbit trickster figure.

Uncle Goa too is responsible for taking Salim to the heart of Africa. He takes Salim to school and puts down on the form the name "Juma" as the name of the father. When Salim is selected for national service, he is not sent to areas where Asians are sent but into the interior, where Africans go, because "Salim Juma Huseni" must be an African.

Failing to get out of being sent to the interior, Salim takes his trunk:

You were told (by those, and there were many, who claimed to be in the know) before embarking on your journey to camp to take with you a large, iron trunk. In it to put away some of life's exigencies that could come in handy: a suit and some decent clothes for the times when you would go to town, canned food, such as corned beef and beans, not to forget chevdo and gathia and ladoos...and, oh yes, toilet paper: a must - what they gave you was more like sandpaper. You were told to lock the contents inside this trunk with a heavy-duty steel padlock. And it should be so heavy, this trunk, it should not be easy to walk away with.

I took the big, back trunk that lay under Kulsum's bed all these years, my father Juma's trunk constructed by some long-forgotten Bohra tinsmith in Mombasa at the turn of the century, that had travelled with him from Kibwzi to Nairobi and later carried his bride Kulsum's belongings from Mombasa...then loaned to Ali Chacha for his home-leave to India on the SS Amra, for which service my father received the

three Kashmiri daggers. Under Kulsum's bed it contained all sorts of knickknacks; a corset we would sometimes open without saying a word, a brassiere pad, soft and spongy we would put our cheeks and nose to, a compact, a motheaten velvet clutch purse, a Taj Mahal with its columns broken, the sword, a piece of tarpaulin, a khaki cap probably a police officer's, not unlike the one Inspector Kumar had worn. All these were hastily poured into a suitcase and room made for my safari inland (pp.199/200).

The trunk is all kinds of thing: family history, storage bin, the city in the country, but most of all, it is a way of keeping locked away from the openness of Africa. Once Salim gets into the interior, the sentry, "a thin bony-faced Mangati youth", makes him run with the trunk: and he runs "like an unstable donkey, a pregnant camel". Salim says, we Indians have barged into Africa with out big black trunk, and every time it comes in our way. Do we need it? I should have come with a small bag, a rucksack." Or one could say a gunny sack, which is flexible enough to contain everything and yet it is light.

Salim's story takes place in a real world, and thus the story is full of historical events: the Maji Maji revolution, ruthless German rule in Tanganyika, the defeat of the Germans in the First world war, the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, the Zanzibar revolution, the army uprising in Tanzania, the Arusha Declaration and the expulsion of Asians by Amin... One notes that the attitude of Salim to Mau Mau seems to be the diametric opposite of that of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his novels: here, the people, chiefly Asians and Europeans, see the Mau Mau as murderers and thugs. But this is presented as a subjective view: the language reveals that Vassanji's attitude is different. when the British soldiers arrived, "the Europeans waved, Asians heaved sigh of relief." (p. 75) After the family of the Bucks is killed by Mau Mau, "Civilised Nairobi was sickened." (p. 76). And "In all cases suspicious-looking Kikuyus were taken away in caged trucks like wild animals to a zoo." (p. 77) The phrases, "heaved sighs of relief", "civilised" and "like wild animals in a zoo" are loaded, Salim's father betrays Mary, the Kikuyu woman who had become his adoptive mother taking the role of the mysterious Taratibu: she comes to him for help to hide her son from the British, but the father tells the British where he is hiding and he is taken away. "We never saw Mary again," says Salim. "Perhaps she too was taken away, to be screened, detained even. Was she a Mau Mau sympathiser? What did we know of her - a Friend from another world who came periodically and then once at night in an hour of need - whose memory we now carry branded forever in our conscience..." (p. 78). This betrayal is like one in *A Grain of Wheat*.

The novel gives us very precise dates for historical events, but points out that internal memory operates differently: "November 23, 1963. Dates become important: you realise now why they invented the calendar - to turn

events into dates, the artefacts, the knickknacks of yesterday that you store away in your gunny somewhere..." (p. 173) So what does the gunny sack do? It brings out things which trigger off memory. It frequently does this by bringing up memories of people who at various points in Salim's life, asked questions or did things that affected both his life and his later understanding of it. For example, quite early, we have the white teacher little Salim was in love with, Miss Penny who later became Mrs Gaunt so Salim remembers her as "Miss Penny Mrs Gaunt", asking, "Where are you from? Begin at the beginning." Later, there is Edward bin Hadith telling stories such as how Dar es Salaam got its name, thus affecting the story that Salim is telling because he learns that everything is important. Unlike most Third World radicals of the sixties, and Salman Rushdie, Vassanji believes that everything is relevant if it has impinged on one's life and consciousness: Salim talks of political events and of Charlie Chaplin, Elvis, Cliff and Pat Boone. "History", that is, "his story", "must include everything, not only the formal stuff Sona is researching.

Salim tells a multicultural story, a story that was only made possible by his living in Dar es Salaam, where the different races intermingle, instead of Nairobi, where the family once was, where people are separate.

The thousand faces of Kariakoo...From the quiet and cool, shady and dark inside of the shop you could see them through the rectangular doorframe as on a wide, silent cinema screen: vendors, hawkers, peddlers, askaris, thieves, beggars and other more ordinary pedestrians making their way in the dust and the blinding glare and the heat, in kanzus, msuris, cutoffs, shorts, khaki or white uniforms, khangas, frocks, buibuis, frock-pachedis...African, Asian, Arab; Hindu, Khoja, Memon, Shamshi; Masai, Makonde, Swahili...men and women of different shades and hues and beliefs. The image of quiet, leafy suburbia impressed on the mind, of Nairobi's Desai road, cracked in the heat of Dar into a myriad refracting fragments, each a world unto its own. (pp. 85/6)

Each item the gunny sack gives up, each place Salim has been to, produces a different memory, a different piece of the jigsaw puzzle. This is why the story goes backwards and forwards, covering the same ground but differently. Salim feels he killed his father because of something he did and he must re-establish his relationship with his father: he must be about his father's business. Hence the two father-figures and the various mother- and lover- figures (including the real mother). Can a critical essay do justice to this novel without itself going backwards and forwards, going over the same material differently? A challenge is being thrown out to modes of writing: conventional ways of writing will distort the story. The complexity is revealed in the fight among the family women in Parklands:

A war of words followed.

The high culture these ladies had picked up in this most European of east African cities, their new snobbishness, was cast aside, and they were back in their elemental form. Here was not Parklands and Ngara anymore but the alleys of Mombasa and Zanzibar, the villages of Cutch and Kathiawad. (p. 72)

The result is a radical consciousness. The story of Tanganyika is so much better than the one of Zanzibar, Kenya or Uganda. Yet there are implied questions. When it came, "Independence was painless", and Salim repeats this phrase (p. 156). But we know from Fanon that true independence is painful. When candidates run for elections, people of different races run on the TANU platform, which is good: but Fateh the coalseller runs for the election with the rabbit as his symbol. He loses; given the rabbit symbol, knowing the rabbit is a trickster, we know that the workers are being left out of the independence process. Salim knows that he is compromised by the colonial rulers: his family had believed the German rulers of Tanzania and had lost all their money, and he cannot help rooting for Britain, the erstwhile ruler. But what is the story if one does not tell the truth? National service opens him up to a consciousness of the world, thanks to Amina and to his meeting up with a tough officer, his former fellow-student, Shivji Shame, who had found himself though the service; but for Alu Poni, the service has had the opposite effect, making him pro-west, Pro-America, Pro-C.I.A. Salim pursues truth. He has a serious discussion with Amina:

"Why do you call me 'Indian'? I too am an African.

I was born here. My father was born here- even my grandfather!"

"And then? Beyond that? What did they come to do, these ancestors of yours? Can you tell me? Perhaps you don't know. Perhaps you conveniently forgot - They financed the slave trade!"

"Not all of them -"

"Enough of them!"

...And what of your Swahili ancestors, Amina? If mine financed the slave trade, yours ran it. It was your people who took guns and whips and burnt villages in the interior, who brought back boys and girls in chains to Bagamoyo. Not all, you too will say... (p. 211)

The last response to Amina comes as he tells his story, not as he is speaking to her. Here is a turnaround: he becomes the accuser because his great-grandmother was a (freed) slave. The possibility of exploiter/exploited exists in the same person, and to claim innocence as a victim of history is a lie. Amina has stressed the complicity of greedy members of the ruling elite in the slave trade. Salim's accusation is credible because he recognizes his own guilt.

As with the end of *In a Brown Mantle*, the last sentence is incomplete, leaving open the prospect of the return of the protagonist to Africa, which is home. Vassanji's Salim is very different from Naipaul's. In Naipaul's novel, Salim is also the son of an Asian businessman from East Africa. He too

moves into the interior and eventually runs to the West. But in his case, he remains isolated, cut off from any profound interaction with Africa except an exploitative one. Vassanji's Salim sees everything as part of interactive culture, even movies and pop music. What we have heard, seen and experienced is part of our culture, no matter where it came from: and out of the mix, we can choose. As Soyinka has argued (and *The Road* proves), everything that is absorbed, even under colonialism, is so because one's culture has a matrix, like a spider's web. This means that we see a whole range of characters in the gunny sack we have not met in East African fiction before. Being a "half-caste" is positive. Salim recognizes this as he tells his story in the West, pondering over letters he has received from the freed Amina and the daughter Amina. Salim transforms his father's inheritance. The gunny sack has given birth to a new self, and he now is a father himself, leaving a different inheritance to his child a daughter, who is waiting for him in Africa. Her name, like that of his lover, is a reworking of "Amina". In embracing his Anima, he is seeking wholeness. "The running must stop now, Amina," he says. "The cycle of escape and rebirth, uprooting and regeneration, must cease in me. Let this be the last runaway, returned, with one last, quixotic dream."

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## TOYIN ADEWALE

## Sister

Those legs just had to be hers. The billowing skirt too. Standing where the staircase turns sharply into the outer arena and waiting for the poet, I sight her legs. Striding, she comes into complete view, the familiar sash, the always present head-band, eyes ever so ready to dare. Slowly, I melt into her hug.

"Folu", she gets my name wrong and I don't make to correct her, "when did you come?"

"Just a few minutes ago", I tell her, "say, you're looking good. Bright smile and all". I tell her I've come to chase the poet for an interview, "You know, how he manages to pick up poetry from grass at his feet and all that. I mightn't stay the night though, unless there's a blue moon spectacular enough to grip me". We soon separate, appointing to meet again in three hours time.

Meanwhile I see the poet. We talk and again, I'm struck by his gift for speech, his capacity to exude the freshness of the word so much so that new things happen to his listeners. Trying to net him into a controversial corner, I ask, "What by your own judgement should be the thematic core of the serious word?" He laughs and I feel small.

"The word cannot be bound like a cluster of broom sticks. It heaves like the sea. A man writes a word, the word looms larger than him. I say, let all be written. Love stories, thrillers, all poetry, all drama. Let the word flow".

Smart guy! Real slippery smart. I probe further, "Let all be written, will you write all?"

"By writing all, I don't say throw life or craft to the trash can, I mean let's aesthetically speak for the truth of our world". He smiles and his smile makes him look mischievous in a vulnerable baby sense.

I search his eyes hoping to find revealed in them some major angles. I find no new treasure and I get ready to leave. Why not rehearse my minimum French? "Au Revoir, Mr. Poet. Merci, thanks for the time we've spent talking.

"You're welcome young lady" As if he were much older than I...

I step into the shadeless sun and laugh as the days cruise into the past in my memory. The incident? An Irish acquaintance of mine scratching his arm

and peeling from the heat of a nonchalant Lagos noon. It was a sight at once piteous and funny. As I walk towards her hall, the university's sight loom before and around me. I spot a students' carnival, their queen, naive, fearfully rides a horse. Joy-drunk boys shout their chant, "Up Lagos, down with the forces of oppression," and I sense a sincere faith in their own personal truth. I soon get to her hall and trace those steps I remember her once taking me through. I step into the corridor leading to her room, what her room number is, I don't remember. I walk slowly, peeping into room after room. Perhaps, I'll see her face through one of the open windows. I reach the end of the corridor, only failure. I turn back. At the middle of the corridor, I make bold to enter the room on my left to ask after her. As I knock, it is her voice I hear beckoning me in. I walk in and do not say I missed my way. I brightly smile.

"Hi, back from your lecture?"

"Yes, sit down. How did the interview go?"

"Fine, I got some material to delight my editor and earn  
"me my overdue leave"

"You look wearied out, let me get you a cold coke.

"You can't beat the feeling, you know"

"My dear, a glass of ice-cold water beats coke hands  
down any day. Just get me some cold water".

She has no refrigerator and she goes out to get the water. From where, I do not ask.

I look around her walls. Nothing's new. I see she's still keeping her old birthday cards. Books, a bible, perfume and those other ingredients that help make a woman lie around in compact disorder. Her room looks like home, lived in. Pots tucked under the bed, slippers peeping from under her armchair. I move to the table and meet an unfinished poem, and I skim through the opening lines.

"Hug me  
in the dazzling sunlight  
to the chorus of morning birds..."

I smile. Sola! She comes in with the water. Gratefully, I gulp it, then mischievously ask, "writing a poem for a new flame?"

She responds shyly, "Sorting out myself you might say and Fola, (this time she gets my name right), you can't leave today. There are some new

poems of mine I'd like you to see and I know it's no use letting you take them back to Lagos. You'd be too busy there to look at them. "So now you're here, I ain't gonna let you go."

"All right", I give in quite readily, "travelling back to Lagos in this hot sun isn't an attractive prospect, besides, I'm not needed in the office till tomorrow afternoon". She smiles happily and I continue, "I might as well use the opportunity to search for a nail file in the University shopping complex. Would you like to come along?" she nods and slips on her sneakers.

...We get to the shopping complex and I find the nail file in the first shop we enter. It's selling for N7.50 but I'm hungry for window shopping. I turn to her "why not let's look in some other stores?, We might find it cheaper". She agrees. We leave and enter the next shop, where it's selling for N6. "Nigeria", I exclaim, "just the next shop and there's already a N1.50 difference". I pick the nail file and almost move to pay for it but I feel in my bones that somewhere, among the shops still ahead, I'll get it cheaper. I drop it and we look around the shop instead. I caress designer perfumes, Chloe' Anais Anais, alas, I'm too poor to buy any. With a regretful sigh, I pull her by the hand and we leave for the next shop. By the right side of the next shop door and looking in through the glass are three little boys gazing desirously at the displayed toys. One of them is carrying a bottle that draws my attention, I look closer. It's a mini aquarium!

"It is," he replies, "for ten naira"

I take the bottle from his hands and look close. Inside five little fishes are having a fishy ball over little rocks. My office desk would appreciate their presence. I tell the boy, "Son, take eight naira"

"All right", he says

"How about six naira?"

"No auntie!, remember I'm selling it with the bottle and bottles are expensive, you know".

I insist, "Six naira, son".

"All right", he accepts and I give him the money.

Sola and I gaze admiringly at the little fish, lost in their natural charm. A man passes by us and mutters under his breath, "Silly women!" We laugh with each other and enter the shop. We find the nail file and it's selling N4.50. This time, I buy it and we retrace our steps towards the university gate. It was getting to night. Early moon was already up, stars too. On the

other side of the road, a night market was gathering. Clutching the aquarium, I look in Sola's eyes. They've turned wistful. She soon speaks, "I'm longing for roasted corn and a stroll through the night market. Let's go, I'll help carry the aquarium..." The plea in her eyes is too intense. Moreover the idea of strolling through a night market, chewing roasted corn and lugging an aquarium sounds like fun. Besides, I need some crayfish for fish food. I turn with her and cross the road into the night market. We stroll on, till we meet a little girl roasting corn over an open charcoal fire. We stop and ask the price. It's fifty kobo each.

"Are you sure it's fresh?", Sola presses.

"Aa, auntie", she quickly replies, "my corn is very fresh. My elder brother just harvested them from our farm this morning. Taste this small one, you'll see I'm right". We taste it, it seems fresh but we aren't quite sure. We choose two corn cobs and ask her to roast them for us. Sola sights a log, lying a few yards away. We go to sit on it and the sights and sounds of night close upon us. The moon, full like a fulfilled vow shimmers in silence. Oil lamps lighting the market are like fireflies in the forest of night. People haggle. Two dogs howl at each other. A baby cries. The little girl brings our prickly hot corns. Sola reaches for hers with an eagerness so ready to conquer. She laughs, a musical laughter as she puts the corn to her lips like a flute, her teeth clinging to it like a trumpeter to his trumpet and I look her full in the eyes. As I look her full in the eyes, it dawns upon me quite simply that I love her.

## ONUORA OSSIE ENEKWE

## Interview With Kalu Uka \*

Enekwe: What is the genesis of your work as a poet?

Uka: It is difficult to say, because as you know, some people feel that certain poets are born with poetry in their veins and the poetry sits there just as a time bomb waiting its time to explode. To some extent, I can say that that has been true with me. I have lived among, and I was born into a family of artistic people. But you know it is quite different in all circumstances for you to feel and express your poetry in Igbo, and then to translate it into English. So I suppose your question is talking about the formal setting down on paper of my poetry in English. In that case, the thing began way back in my undergraduate days at the former University College of Ibadan (now called the University of Ibadan). We as a group of students of English Language and Literature, in spite of being educated more or less along British lines, started trying out a few ideas of our own in magazines such as the *Horizon*: in University students-sponsored magazines and departmental-sponsored magazines. We settled into an exchange of good poetry, bad poetry, indifferent poetry, just so we could experiment and find out, as you would say, where our interesting and good poems began. What I am talking about is way back 1959/60 session in the University College of Ibadan. So you can say that was about the beginning of the formal expression, formal genesis of my writing poetry.

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\* This interview took place in Kalu Uka's Office in the Paul Robeson Drama Building, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1983.

Enekwe: Thank you very much. I was going to ask you about your Ibadan experience. Do you recollect some peculiar experiences at Ibadan?

Uka: At the time I went to Ibadan, we were talking about the one university and the second one was coming, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and everybody was again very excited that a second university had come. So one kind of excitement then in Ibadan was that you were kind of special:- the common phrase was 'gay adder'. But, if you let that go into your head, of course, you'd end at achieving nothing. So when I say "special", I recall that in the English Honours class, there were only ten of us that did the English Honours with Professor Molly Manhood.

As I recall it, that class was about one of the largest. Another peculiar thing with that class was that there was absolutely no girl, not one. While we regretted what one of our lecturers, Professor Brosnahan, called the 'absence of the feminine influence', and thought that we were therefore not very "complete", it enabled us to let our imagination run riot, let our sense of humor know no bounds, because we could then crack all kinds of jokes without inhibition.

But talking more seriously about what a university meant and what impact it had on one, you'll remember that the time I am talking about was just about the beginning of Nigeria as a country attaining self-hood and independence. I went to University in September 1959, and a year later when I was going into the second session, the country became independent and we, therefore, felt ourselves challenged to grow with our new and young nation. And such was our idealism, in fact, we were, in the light of most recent events, including the civil war, all dreamers. We were all so much part of Nigeria that we wanted to grow with it, to help build it; and, in that experience, we got into contact with all kinds of people. For instance, the Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka himself was just about beginning, and we used to take some of our work, some of our poetry to him to listen

back to his comment. We also used to write in the Students' Magazine, *The Horn*. As I said earlier, some good poetry, some indifferent poetry, some bad poetry. We had columns to award marks to bad poets as well as to reward very good poets.

But the relationship was such that you couldn't tell the tribe of any Nigerian, you just couldn't tell. We all said we were Nigerians and we had this job to do. We were special people in University and we took the expression which was then popular about students being 'leaders of tomorrow' quite literally to be true. But like I said, things began to happen. Experiences started to fall apart; ideals fouled up before long, and disillusionment set in.

The consciousness about tribe, the consciousness about sections in the country, began well before the 1966 coup, and began ironically enough also right on the campus of the university. So, it was both an excitement at the time and a disappointment certainly with time as other factors started intruding into our very cozy life in the university. So I would summarize by saying that I consider those years very 'formative', very influential period of our life. We had excitement, almost as if I was back in a good game of cricket.

At university, you had, on the one hand, those taking themselves as Nigerians, and on the other, those thinking of themselves as belonging to separate Nigerian tribes and peoples. Ultimately, I think, these realizations just showed us that to build one nation is not an easy process, since it is a reconciliation of levels of interests and aspirations, an issue I tackle in my novel, *The Courtmartial*.

Eneke:

Well, you talked about the optimism in Ibadan, and I am beginning to wonder whether there is any difference between your recent work and your pre-war poetry.

Uka: O yes. As a matter of fact, what I have tried in subsequent volumes is to so mix some of my early poetry with the recent in such a manner that you may not quite tell which was later and which was earlier. Just as you can see, when you hear a famous composer of music, and you yourself as a composer and a guitarist with some experience, you can always tell the tunes of any particular composer, whether it is him playing his own tunes or somebody else playing them, because you know there is a particular characteristic that he has. You will see that kind of characteristic between my earlier poetry and the later. But I believe that by the later poetry, something had begun to happen to me. I would say, for instance: I had gotten a lot better acquainted with this borrowed language that we are using. We are no longer just trying to "translate" ideas from Igbo, so to speak, into English. And I will show you what I mean. You can easily distinguish three stages: the very early poems; the poems written during the war; and the poems written after the war. Now, I will give you an example of one. I don't want to go too far back. And I don't want to use the very familiar example. I am thinking of a poem like the one I call "Music Maker". Sorry. Wait a moment. Just a moment. Well, I cannot quite find a poem on the early Ibadan time, but I remember one I called "Parenthesis", a poem originally inspired by my listening to some Nina and Frederick records you know, in fact, "Counting Colours in the Rainbow", that kind of thing. Anyway, but I will give you what I consider to be the intermediate stage. This stage that I am talking about is when one had gotten better grip of the language, how it behaves, blending it into, if you like, our own natural rhythm, as well as blending it into conversational, freeflow English. It is a poem I call "The Silver Lining." This was written at the peak of the Nigerian civil war at the time when Owerri was recaptured. You don't mind if I read some of it.

Enekwe:

Go ahead

Uka:

Right. "The Silver Lining":

We who walked through moon-blanchéd corridors of night  
(p. 16 -p.176).

All right, I will leave it there. Thank you. There is something you yourself said sometime ago about the 'tough musical quality' of my poetry. I would say it began at this time and, as I look back on it now, I didn't think it was anything more than the expression of the mood, the general mood of the war. But Nwokobia-Agu took it and set it to music and one lady called Susan Wanger, I think, took it down to Germany. Well that was the last I heard of it. During the war you know how things were. But looking back on it, I think that carried me into what I may call the post-war expression where as I say in one of the early chapters of my first novel, *A Consummation of Fire*, that our attempt has always been to integrate lyricism and intellect, and it is not only integrating lyricism and intellect, but that my own aim as a writer in any one of the various modes - poetry, drama or the novel- should be an attempt to invent, at least trying to invent, a "poetry for suffering." Again when you read the early pages, about page thirty or thirty-one of *A Consummation*, you'll see where I say that I try to "invent a poetry for suffering", by which I mean a poetry that would enable one accommodate, contain, you know, the trauma of suffering, and I hope you don't mind too much this kind of a self-plagiarism that I am doing. But I go on to say that this claim of mine to invent a poetry for suffering is an assertion which, in some people's opinion, will brand every writer as a "romantic agoniser." But, at heart, many writers are romantic in the sense that they are always resenting the "humdrum beat of unperceiving life" around them in the society. They are always looking for improvement. They try to reassert life, you know, as against all the forces that destroy life, all the forces that negate pure existence. It is not that the thing called "pure existence", like a celestial thing, will ever materialize on

earth, but you still look for it as the ideal. I say, although one might call a writer then a romantic agoniser, that it is the "hallmark of the sufferer who has accepted and transmuted and lived into fortune's provenance to produce a poetry out of his experience, just as the most revolutionary being is hammered out of the jungle", you know. And I believe that in spite of all the unsatisfactory conditions around us, whether we are satirising or simply recording, it should be an authentic expression of a vision at a particular time.

Enekwe: You have taken me to a question that I am trying to ask you about "Fear".

Uka: O yes, O yes. O.K. Ask me that question.

Enekwe. The poem seems to me to be leading from suffering to some kind of affirmation, some kind of optimism, and I see in it also something that seems to suggest that there was a childbirth around that time. I don't know, but I am aware that you are a very strong family man, and children are part of our striving for eternity, our striving for optimism and so forth. what would you have to say about this?

Uka: Thank you, Ossie. That's a very interesting observation about "Fear". I myself have sometimes been frightened and quite flattered about the interpretations and the impressions people have had of "Fear." The very first person who said, "Look, Kalu, this is very strong poetry and this reminds me of your 'Earth to Earth', was Michael Echeruo. And then I think you know the recent *Selection of African Poetry* where "Fear" was also selected by Theo Vincent and Senanu and they make something quite interesting out of it. And here you are now suggesting this even more interesting extra line. I will tell you this quite clearly. "Fear" was written in 1967. I was not even married. There was nothing like a child anywhere near me. But it was written after all the sights I had seen at the Enugu Airport when fellow Nigerians, fellow Igbo, were returning from Northern Nigeria in all kinds of stages of mutilation following the pogrom. Particularly painful were

the sight of children you knew had been damaged for life. In fact, it is good to read "Fear" along with all the other poems inspired by the period of agony, because they form an interesting sequence that I called, "No Two Sides", although they are now in fragments, because all that poetry was left at Nsukka and we didn't see a trace of it when we came back.

"Fear" was my attempt to reach beyond that immediate suffering to see that war was coming. We, the Igbo, as one of the component elements in Nigeria, were being overwhelmed, were being threatened, were being driven into oblivion and people didn't think it was true. So that the first stanza of "Fear" where I say, "Only the thunder will revive the drums and flutes we travellers love so much" was only the stanza of the war, you know, as you can see, because things were already coming. But you know like when you have lightning in the sky and the rumbling of thunder follows, usually there is a "breathing down" following all that. And if there is a breathing down, think of the light. In other words, I was trying to say, 'supposing, instead of just thinking of the gun, instead of thinking of just mutual destruction any time, supposing we talk of the future and the future is children and the children are parts of eternity.' I said, rightly so, you know, at a time I didn't even have one child of my own. So it is purely, if you like, an extension by imagination, of what might have happened. And I felt very much encouraged later on during the war when General Gowon himself modulated his attitude to the rest of Nigeria, particularly to the "rebel" area when he married and started having children.

Eneke:

Thank you very much. I think this does extend our understanding of "Fear". I am going back to talk about the critics. Before the war or immediately after the war, you were mentioned as a poet, but nobody seemed to pay much attention to you. Michael Echeruo said something about you being a remarkable poet in *Mother is Gold*, and

recently a reviewer in the magazine, *West Africa*, talked about your poetry and wondered why a poet of your stature, a poet who has such a strong command of language, beautiful expression, whose poetry is tough and pliant at the same time, had not been recognised as one of the leading poets, one of the major African poets. Also, Abiola Irele had this to say, "Kalu Uka's new kind of poetry is in fact a take-off to a certain extent from where Christopher Okigbo left off; a new kind of poetry that is extremely tough in its texture, and extremely difficult because of that and making significant statements about life." Well, talking about the *texture* of your poetry, I remember I had said something about this myself and still I am of the opinion that there is a strong lyrical quality in your poetry, and perhaps one would say that your poetry falls into the image pattern of development more than the narrative pattern of development, and if one wants to understand your poetry, one has to look more at the imagery, and then at the sound of the words, but I think I remember I talked of the "metallic sound quality" of the words you know. The words have sounds peculiar to them. Now, why has it taken the critics so long to discover you?

Uka:

I don't think I myself can say I know why, but let's speculate a little bit or rather let's try to pick between the years and see whether there were any extenuating circumstances or reasons. The first thing is, you remember, immediately after the war in 1970/71, when I started working on my first novel, *A Consummation of Fire*, I had always had this attitude of first of all reading my poetry or my prose to a small circle of friends. I remember well before the war, Professor Anya of Zoology, Professor Echeruo of this Department and profession, and of course, the late Christopher Okigbo, were the few, who listened to my reading of my poetry either in the Catering Rest House in Enugu, or in the sitting room of any one of them or in my own sitting room. And we simply exchanged notes. It was like a

coterie of intellectuals doing their private thing. Then I remember, when I was writing my first novel, *A Consummation of Fire*, I used to read it to some of you as students. I know Sonny Samson-Akpan's group in particular and I remember it was at one of those reading that one of the students suggested that I should put one of Chinua Achebe's novels into play form. So I think one reason for the delayed recognition is that I had always circulated among friends who didn't see their job as carrying it beyond that little circle or I had always tested out my ideas among students or people who were not yet in our own kind of valuation, regarded as big enough critics to be listened to. Because, as I said, many of the good things about my poetry were said by somebody like you much earlier, and they reveal very keen observation and yet nobody took you seriously, because nobody in this country thinks that the so-called small man has any good opinion. You see what I mean. So I was not surprised. Then the one or two remarks made by Echeruo were made also at a good time when they could have been taken up, but remember that my poetry had not been published and he did say so even in *Mother is Gold*, he said in "yet unpublished work by a colleague I respect..." So the delay in publication, because our people like to see something done on paper, the delay in publication, my own not pushing to promote myself, if you like, sell myself immediately, and the fact that we circulated privately, all contributed to the delay. But, again, the delay was affected in a big way, I think, by the war. In late 1966, Chinua Achebe and the late Christopher Okigbo were planning to start a Publishing House, if you remember, by establishing the Citadel Press. I don't know whether you know about that plan.

Eneke:

Yes, I do.

Uka:

And one of the things that Christopher Okigbo said very honestly and very seriously was, "Look, Kalu, I like your poetry. I like the trend, the way you are going and I think

what we will do is to sell you through CITADEL PRESS by putting some of your best poems between mine and Wole Soyinka's".

You see what I mean, in every profession, you need this kind of apprenticeship and you need a master craftsman presenting his apprentice. I don't resent it. I know some impatient younger writers today say: Why should I wait for so and so to approve of me before I can go on the air?" The war came, Citadel Press failed, not for lack of good intention, but just because of the pressures of war and you will see that as soon as the war ended, Achebe started *OKIKE*. Some of my best poetry went into the maiden issue immediately, you know, although not as in the old plans, but it was still a fact that any good thing would get in there.

The third reason I would think is that I, myself, I have been accused by some people of being a bit too proud and haughty, that I always wanted things to be so perfected before they saw daylight. This happens to be true, because I have read some really shoddy stuff put up by people just to show the world that they have been published. Unfortunately, I don't quite believe that way. I'm not a hustler. I believe that before this attempt of communicating with other people should be shown to the world, it should be something which is worth the time of the world, the time of those people you are going to give it. In other words, it should be something perfected as much as possible and you don't begin your carving and when the idea of the thing you want to carve is just about gaining root, you say to people, "Look, I have become a good sculptor; come and watch me." You see what I mean? And when you are not particularly interested in this kind of publicity you are bound to be delayed. You are bound not to be quite recognised, but it has another danger. And this is the danger I have observed in my own. You know that *Consummation of Fire* was published only in 1978, but I wrote it in '72. And I know that, in between, one or two people, (I won't name them) have published novels that I don't consider as good as

*Consummation* but have been praised to the skies and I said, "Well, this is because somebody hasn't heard about me". So the delay too, has hurt me, you know, in many ways, but as I say, now that the things have come to people's notice and they have realised that they are good, they are bound to talk about them as good. So in the end the patient dog has eaten the fattest bone.

Enekwe: You have dealt with some of the questions I was going to ask about your novels. Do you see the novels as an extension of your poetry? Or is it the other way round?

Uka: Yes, and No. Extensions I would be suspicious of, but complementary parts of, yes. I say complementary because as I told you, traditionally, a novel should be written in prose; but in that prose, you can then take an opportunity to express some of your own ideas on your writing, and as I quoted to you earlier on, I did say things in the first novel that define some of my positions in artistic creation, like this idea of integrating lyricism and intellect, you know. So that the novels are a complementary part of the poetry. As you know, the nature of poetry is such that it has to be very very concisely and energetically expressed, economised; there is no room for the extended narrative form of treatment. You compress a lot. Then in the novel, through your characters, especially the more reflective ones, I believe, you can then use the more phrasy narrative form to extend comment. In that sense, I would regard novel and poem as complementary. It is better. But, I also found that in writing dramatic dialogue that the poetry has been of help; the lyricism of the poetry has helped me quite a bit with finding the kind of level of conversation for some characters, you know. So I see all of them, poetry, novel writing and dramatic writing as complementing each other, saying what one has said in brief in a more extended form elsewhere, but perhaps saying them more emphatically and extending the perspective. In a play, for instance, you have many characters, and one perhaps is

just a singer, but you watch the words of the song he sings and you know that they are very poetic. Then consider the novel, particularly my second novel, *Colonel Ben Brim* where I have three friends, three University friends, who have been involved in the war and who are about the same age and, in the "middle" of their lives, as they are all between 30 and 35 years of age, and they are just sitting in the miserable University club reflecting on what has come to be the aftermath of the war when suddenly a respected colleague of theirs who had gone mad because of the way things ended, walks into the club stark naked, and they start to debate: Who is he? Is he the same person? So one person tells the story as he thinks he *knew it*. Another one, challenging it, tells the story as he thinks he *knew it*. Notice the shifts in tenses. And the third person says, "Well, fine, you people are telling stories about this character and your role with him, but I want to analyse to you what I think the war did to all of us - you two, he and me." So you have basically two storytellers and one commentator on all the stories told. What I was trying to do was to re-define prose as poetry, a way of communicating without being so concise and compressed that a reader would have to stumble on and think of every line. I also found that it gave me an opportunity to battle a little more with the English Language and I don't now want to say the things that some people have already said they think about *Colonel Ben* and its language since in a week or two you will have a copy of the novel. I am sending you a complimentary copy of each of my novels. You will see for yourself. But somebody said to me, "You know, I have read this novel. I like it very much especially 'he mastery of the language. You seem to have broken all the laws in English and yet broken none."

Enekwe: Has this command of language anything to do with your scrabble playing?

Uka: That's interesting. I didn't know that anybody else other than my wife knows that I am a scrabble addict. Well you

see, scrabble is not merely word formation, as you find. In fact, you could have the largest vocabulary in life and still not be able to enjoy or beat anybody else in scrabble. Scrabble is technique. Many people don't see it that way. It is cutting and joining and extending.

Enekewe: Isn't this what you do in many of your poems?

Uka: More or less. But again, by comparison, poetry is not just verbalising; it is not just the sound of the word, but the permutations and combinations to produce the maximum result. For instance, connecting it again with scrabble, I never make a move in scrabble unless I am going to form three or four words by the one move. You see what I mean. So you will be scoring sometimes eight times the value of a particular tile and it seems to me that if it is a poem, if you can score eight times the value of the image in a word, you have written very good poetry. So from that point of view you can say that they are connected.

Enekewe: I would like you to say a few things about "Earth to Earth" which I think is a very sad poem. It lacks the optimism of "Fear."

Uka: Okay, thank you. Let me be very honest. I don't know which edition of *Earth-to Earth* you are using, but in the Greenfield Review volume, "Earth to Earth" is on pages six and seven and you will see that it is dedicated to a "G." Earth to Earth (to G)." Right. The "G." was a girl, just as I have an eye for beautiful words that create maximum impacts, I think it can be said that I have an eye for beautiful women, and that girl was not ugly by any consideration. We were just friends, very good friends. And one day I walked into Christopher Okigbo's chalet with the girl by my side, and Okigbo was seeing her for the first time. As soon as we stepped in at the door and rang the bell, he came himself and opened the door and said, "Kalu, you must marry this girl, you must marry this girl". And the poor girl just smiled, you know, smiled because what greater compliment could you pay a girl? So we walked in and I introduced her and he said, "When are you marrying this girl?" you know. Right. So I was going to

marry the girl or I hoped so. It didn't work out and when it didn't work out, I was very sad about it. So, in spite of all the speculation you see about the interpretation, in fact, this is the hard life fact and that is the genesis of "Earth to Earth". But it is also a way of laying a ghost to rest, that one would otherwise have had so much trauma about. Because I will tell you that I don't like those who talk of Freudian reality. But you can see that you have to live down an experience one way or another by proxy or directly, in order to be able to contain and control it, short, of course, of going mad over it. And I don't think that anybody should go mad over a woman or over the experience of losing something. I think he should use that experience and I used that one to produce a poem. There is an internal sustaining medicine in a writer's chest, I think.

Enekwe: What do you think you will be doing in the United States as far as poetry is concerned? Are you going to do a lot of readings or are you going to write a lot more poetry? And what is your attitude to Afro-American poetry?

Uka: Thank you. Three questions in one. First, what I am going to do about any of my other writings. At the earliest possible opportunities I have, I will expose them to the largest possible number of people, public and private. As we say, once beaten, twice shy. You have just talked about the delayed recognition of the work. Now I have the opportunity of selling not just the work in print but also the person who produced them physically there. I think I should maximise the opportunity. I am not going to abandon poetry and I hope poetry won't abandon me. Secondly, I will be doing some readings because the Fulbright Fellowship allows for interaction with other faculties and allows me to make myself available to other universities than the one where I will be based. And if eventually all my books are there and people want to ask questions about any of the various aspects, I am quite prepared to talk about them. Afro-American writing-well-I will tell you what I think. I hold Afro-American writing in

the highest regard and particularly by the way I got acquainted with that writing. While I was studying in Canada, I read a lot of Baldwin, a lot of Richard Wright, a lot of Ralph Ellison. This was 1962, and you may say this was my first real introduction to what the black experience in America had been, and I could immediately respond to some of the issues raised. Later I began seeing some of the people themselves in flesh and blood. From Canada in 1963, I took time off to see the U.S.A. I was in Washington D.C. for the "Great March". I returned to Canada after that, and was there when President Kennedy was assassinated. I cannot forget the shocked silence the news vibrated out all over the world. Then after the Nigerian civil war, our own war, a black American writer, Nikki Giovanni, was here, and I was the guest speaker at the reception accorded to her, a very intensely moving reception, and I remember that before I started talking about anything, we exchanged books. She gave me a book of her poem called, "My House", and I gave her a copy of *Earth to Earth* which she read and told me that she liked a lot. We agreed then that we would keep in touch. Anyway, we haven't. But that is one of those things about life. I remember asking her one pointed question. I said, "Nikki, what do you think of polemics and creativity? By this I mean, Baldwin comes along and feels he has to put down Richard Wright to exist; LeRoi Jones comes along, and he has to put down Baldwin to exist. Eldridge Cleaver comes along, he had to destroy everybody else to be. And yet it seems to me that in all, the works from Ralph Ellison, through Richard Wright and Baldwin to you yourself, Nikki Giovanni here, there has been a consistent fidelity of reporting the experience of the black person which, by complementation, would still enhance your position that polemics among yourselves would be no use?" She said, "Boy, you got it. I don't believe in polemics myself. I believe in creativity. So it is my attitude to them that I

wish that, like us here, they should spare a little less effort quarrelling and allow a lot more room for creating."

Enekwe:

We know that your work, like those of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and several other poets from Ibadan and from the University of Nigeria is considered tough even for scholars who understand some of the unfamiliar words that you use. But now your work has been included in the books for Secondary Schools Certificate Examination. How do you advise teachers to approach your poetry?

Uka:

Thank you very much. A teacher should first of all find out the peculiar characteristics of a poem. Is it a poem that depends on recurring images to reach its meaning? If so, teach the images and then you can relate them to society. Consider the title; you take, "Earth to Earth." I don't see that "Earth to Earth" would pose any difficulty. It is what we say at burial ceremonies everyday, "Earth to Earth, dust to dust". So, that should give one a key, a clue, you know. Then when you work through the imagery you can see whether there are consistencies or inconsistencies, repetition of patterns and no repetition. In other words, the poem should speak for itself more or less. In the words of Brooks and Warren, 'Let the poem be itself.' Let the poem talk about itself. Rather than one looking for the poet, like this year, a mother on this campus, came to me and said, "Look, my daughter is going to sit for the School Certificate Examination. She read this poem and said, "Mummy, mummy, is it the same Kalu Uka who comes to our house?" And she said "yes". And the child said, "Mummy, let's go and see him now; let him tell me about this poem." They came, you know, eventually. And I tried to follow the pattern of imagery comprising the flowers opening up and then these flowers becoming blighted. You know, like you wake up in the morning, the whole thing is dead and at the end of the day it is raining. Consider it like that and this is the loss of one who was dear to somebody. I didn't say that somebody was me, because it should not be *me*. It should be for the

protagonist in the poem. In other words, I think a serious attempt should be made at poetry as communication. Then a meaning will be gotten out of the poetry. In fact, in the *Selection of African Poetry* that we have, Senanu and Vincent, have done a marvellous job of explication with that poem.

Eneke:

You no longer write as much as before. Why?

Uka:

As much what- poetry? I have gone into other forms. Novels. Plays. Then I have to survive as an academic, teacher, and head of family. So, the war is on, on many more fronts. You are listening for the guns in only one front which seems - note seems - quiescent for now.



**Title:** Alu Emee  
**Medium:** Ink  
**Artist:** C. Krydz Ikwemesi  
**Year:** 1994

**A.B.C. DURAKU****Play Review**

Title:	<i>Worl' Do For Fraid</i>
Playwright:	Nabie Yayah Swaray
Publisher:	Three Continents Press, Washington D.C. (1986)
Price:	\$8.10

*Worl' do for fraid*, a play in three acts explores the theme of inordinate ambition dulling the discriminatory senses that reflect ethics. It is a natural check on the quest for power. In the play, the taste to rule is so pervading that murder, rape and incest are not ruled out. These terrible crimes are no real hurdles for some who seek elective office.

The title of the play may puzzle for a while. Simply, it is the bastard Sierra Leonean English for "the world is enough to frighten you". Even then only one of the characters speaks in this refreshingly interesting dialect. It is perhaps significant that this title line is spoken by Pabuya, the village idiot (?) who is the "conscience" of the village.

The play opens at a time when retribution begins to rain on the family of Chief Drissa. Through revelations of forced 'demented soliloquy' and 'sober narration' we learn that Chief Drissa, the ruler of Kissy Mess-Mess village had, in collusion with his twin brother Baimbadi, listened to the voice in a dream that Drissa would become Chief. In the manner of a Macbeth who would not wait for the normal course of prophecy, but would rather be its agent, both brothers rape and kill Drissa's daughter in a ritual sacrifice. They also murder her mother Makalay, who observed the incident. Earlier, they had tried to use a substitute for Drissa's daughter Abbi with no success. The efficacy of ritual depends on its rightness, therefore Fatimah (an adopted child) was not acceptable, even though the twin brothers had already raped her. She is spared after she swore not to reveal their gory secret.

The play dwells on retrospective action so that the events that follow the horror are what we see enacted. Fatimah, the ritual-reject is having terrible nightmares when the play opens. She insinuates witchcraft. But it goes beyond that. Nene, Makalay's twin sister, who is married to Baimbadi, reveals to Fatimah that Drissa's wife Makalay was not her natural mother. This foreshadows the exposé that the ritual killing after rape cannot be efficacious, resulting in the substitution for Abbi. Nene is worried of the mystery surrounding her sister's death. She takes the distraught Fatimah to Makalay's grave to perform ritual sacrifices in a bid to get answers to her questions.

Ominous notes and foreshadowing punctuate the play as Fatmah plays the agent of disaster in the Drissa household. Also, her complicity in the heinous crime cannot but be weakened because she keeps the secret of the rape/murder under duress. After the storm, calm returns presaging a cataclysm.

Baimbadi, architect of the crime now becomes a babbling idiot, hallucinating and re-living the eerie nightmare of the ritual murder even before Nene. The three graves that he mimes digging symbolise three deaths that follow - those of Fatmah, Drissa, and Baimbadi.

Zwary introduces a sub-theme anchored in the personality of Pastor Brown. The hypocrisy and apostasy of the reverend gentleman is criticised as he shows a curious personality dislocation in his application of religious life. He has been to all denominations and accepts pagan beliefs as well as Christian and Muslim dogmas. This stance typifies Baimbadi's lack of religious focus. The Priest's utterance and disposition therefore show a naivety and lack of perception that only begin to parallel A'abas'. It shows how a preacher of the faith is - an incompetent babbling busy body who does not understand the world around him, and has become largely irrelevant to the issues he cannot comprehend, but fails to admit this lack. In this way, Pastor Brown becomes a mirror of the 'foreign A'abas'. Even then, Pastor Brown is the only man who is unaware of the current of evil running through the Drissa family.

Almost halfway through the play, Drissa, Chief of Kissey Mess-Mess is introduced. Already struck insane, he relives in maniacal flashes, the life of a madman and is picking road signs like Professor in Soyinka's *The Road*. But that is the only relationship between the two characters. One of the road signs symbolically reads "No exist." Nemesis does not let go of a criminal. Papyrus philosophically comments on the fall from power of all men; for greedy men, they die like vultures after living like madmen. Through the hallucination scene, the spirit of Makalaya reveals details of the grisly crime further. The most humiliating moment arrives when the returning son of Baimbadi A'abas meets Drissa. He quickly rushes him to hospital against Baimbadi's advice. A doctor of Psychiatry, A'abas feels he can tell a mental case when he sees one. But Drissa's is a spiritual one. Perhaps the coincidence of psychiatry is deliberate and over-stretched but ineffective. We appreciate Zwary's determination to pile on the disaster and show how despicable Drissa had been, at every possible opportunity. Drissa is later to die in the asylum.

Extending the theme relating to naivety, disorientation, and cultural alienation started with Pastor Brown, the playwright takes a swipe at A'abas:

as foreign as they come with an out-sized but-dislodged idea of reality. But Swaray does not spare those who do the nationalist dance without moderation. Abass cannot understand the traditional marriage about to take place between Saidu (Baimbadi's son) and Fatimah. As far as he is concerned, a woman need not remain virgin before marriage since virginity is not a marriage prerequisite in the West. He has lost his identity and has become a stranger to the rhythms of his society - a faceless man who is not completely in tune with either the society to which he culturally belongs or to the one he professes; indeed we see him as a cultural parallel of Reverend Brown.

But the play also lampoons the Brukses in society, extremists who in spite of their education, seek to do the "cultural dance"; who marry several wives with the compensating and convenient excuse that they are traditionalists. Brukus is thirty-five with four wives to show for it. They respect him because, according to him, they were virgins before he married them. The perceptive Pabuya knows of course that virgin girls are rare in these days of materialism.

Nene, now wise to the evil deed, warms up to counter the oath administered to Fatimah so that she would not disclose the secret. Nene is sure that in 'cleansing' Fatimah of the bond, she (Fatimah) would feel protected enough to divulge the secret on her wedding day state-of-the-bride ceremony. According to Nene, the world must hear of the "filth Drissa and Baimbadi did to (her) body:"

In heart-chilling apostrophes, Nene calls on Makalay's spirit to protect Fatimah. But Baimbadi nullifies the protective mystical shield by forcing Fatimah to drink a portion. The consequence is that Fatimah fails to reveal the secret and dies from the boomerang effect of the spell Nene had put over her. It is in fact a situation of "the devils alternative". Either way, Fatimah was billed to die. She had been caught in a mystical web of spiritual encounter between two 'adepts', Baimbadi and Nene.

Still pursuing the "Nemesis" subject, Swaray is determined that evil must be properly punished. So, relentlessly, Nene effects her revenge in a curse that recalls an earlier discussion between Abass, Joshua, and Brukus on the eerie powers of a corpse and makes Fatimah (now dead) the instrument of vengeance. In an incredible and ghostly scenario, the coffin in which the dead Fatimah lies knocks Baimbadi dead in an uncanny exhibition of individual will and kinetic capability.

*Worl' do for afraid* is rich in African lore, beliefs and religious ambivalence. The play is touching in its pathos and the characters loom large. But they are largely types. Except for Abass who goes through the

crucible of horror (by association) in the family before he can become relevant in the "new society" he finds himself, others come strongly as personages who hardly make an impression with their "humanness".

All we are left with are sketches of evil. They are recognizable in the society, especially if the subject of seeking political power by all means is put under scrutiny. In this regard, Swaray's comment is clear and is driven brutally home (perhaps too much so) by the sheer plausibility of the situation, and in grisly details in the treatment of the subject matter.

In the creation of the avenging hand of fate in Nene (with all her relationships to the other characters), Swaray strikes the master stroke that lifts the play beyond a story session, but makes a statement bold enough for us to recognize in him a certain commitment.

## OSY OKAGBUE

**A Play of Giants: On Stage with Soyinka's Oversize Buffoons.**

In *A Play of Giants*, Soyinka gives a full-throated vent to his deep-seated loathing for the key human aberrations that sprout and soil Africa's political arena. His vehement disapproval of dictatorship in any form - a disapproval manifested in his handling of the power-crazed Kongi in his earlier play, *Kongi's Harvest* - is in this later play carried through most effectively by his deft excursus into the realm of satiric grotesquerie. Where he had showed some measure of respect for the maniacal Kongi, he shows an enormous disgust for these later giants. He shows no mercy, not even a basic humanity for his four oversize babies and buffons - Kamini, Kasco, Gunema and Tuboum. They are nothing but mad unfortunate aberrations. Not even the 'stout and florid' Gudrum is spared, not even the scampering delegates of the respective superpowers. They all are in the eyes of the sculptor fit only for the Chamber of Horrors in Madame Tussaud's waxwork museum. And appropriately the four brothers in blood and crime are sitting for a collective bust for the United Nations gallery.

The play is set in the premises of the Bugaran embassy in New York, adjacent to the United Nations assembly building. The occasion is the United Nations general assembly. But the central action is the sculpting of President-for-life, Field-Marshal Kamini and his fellow giants. Soyinka expertly uses this apparently unimportant event to expose the ugly dementia of these power-crazed models of African leadership. The play is more or less a psychic probe into the morbid intellectual landscapes of these unflattering models of African politics. Especially, it is a journey into the sick mind of Kamini who of course is no other than the infamous psychopath, Idi Amin of Uganda. Soyinka makes no attempt to mask the identities of his four monstrosities. The result is that the images which emerge from the play are extremely unflattering, to say the least. They are images that would make any sane and responsible African cover his face in shame before outsiders. But the shame, to Soyinka's credit, extends also to the offsprings of the superpowers, because their own representatives are as obnoxious and loathsome as the huge African puppets who flap grotesquely to the pull of their strings.

The central theme in the play is the notion of power which is the life concern of the four prodigies. As they discuss the concept of power, they each reveal the sickness in their respective minds. The discussion points up to what I feel Soyinka considers the cause of the endemic occurrence of unsavory dictatorships on the continent of Africa. The giants, in spite of their differences, see power as the ultimate elixir of being which has to be acquired and protected at all cost. The four in varying degrees maim, kill and even 'eat' enemies in order to preserve their power. And in their individual theories of power, Soyinka leads them into betraying their debased idiocy and corrupt notion of proper rulership - they all are presidents or emperors for life and so cannot contemplate existence outside the realms of power. In their murderous hold on power, they are aided and abetted by the superpowers who, whenever it is in their interests, sink their ideological and economic differences and come together behind one Third World fool or another - Amin and Mobutu being the perfect examples. It is hardly surprising that Kamini gets abandoned by all sides in the end, because he makes himself an embarrassment and a threat to those who installed him in the first place. Barra Tuboum, on the other hand, with the backing of the superpowers, survives yet another coup. But the one question which Soyinka asks is: For how long will this monster and his ilk hang on to power? And the answer which the play gives is: For as long as he serves the interests of his superpower backers. Or, for as long as his people keep silent in the face of his tyranny.

*A Play of Giants* is a challenge to all Africans to laugh and chase out the child monsters who bestride and cast smudges on the notion of Africanness and democracy. The play's satire is ferocious and its irony bitter, but underneath it all is the playwright's abiding humanism, and a concern and hope for the improvement of the human condition. For Soyinka, the man dies in he who keeps silent in the face of overbearing tyranny. People can laugh in this play at our horrible aberrant giants, but their disgusting brand of rulership calls forth tears, both of shame and righteous indignation.

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### Notes on Contributors

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**Uche NDUKA**, as an undergraduate, was Editor of *The Muse*, published in the Department of English, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is Executive Secretary of the Association of Nigerian Authors, and author of *Flower Child*.

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Title: The Minister's Daughter  
Medium: Ink  
Artist: C. Krydz Ikwemesi  
Year: 1994

*Friends of Okike*

Hon. Justice Phillip Nnaemeka-Agu (rtd)

Agunze Chib Ikoku

Dr Stanley Macebuh

Chief Greg Mbadiwe

Dr Chris Ngige

Chief R. C. Okafor

Chief S. O. N. Okafor

Dr Pat Okeke

*More names will appear in issue number 32*

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