Okike

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Contents

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KOKO BASSEY

La Lumiere

In a world that is fast fading,
where morals have ceded place to inverse values
and priority has espoused herself to injustice,
immorality and corruption...

A light in the darkness shines a message,
a message of hope to a transient world,

Dusk will give way to dawn
and midnight will become noon.
There is still a narrow path
that leads to the break of day.

The light shines in obscurity.
It is not given to obscurity.
That light bears a message,
a message of hope to a dying world.

"Did you say?"
Yes!

CHIMEZIRI OGBEDETO

Were You a Phoenix

Were you a phoenix
I would not carve this dirge
but sing a gleeful measure.
Soon you would return with timeless youth
and death would be nought
and life a coming and a going and coming again.

Were you a phoenix
the wrinkles in our souls would not have grown.
The grave would not be the in-betweener.
Your going would not leave echoes of parting.
You would return to our embrace.

There are ones who stir my heart.
A mother's love they never will know.
Ugochukwu, Chiekezu, Akuoma,
The little ones you loved
Stare in tearless grief.

I wish you were a phoenix
And I would scrape this dirge.
I would soothe their pain -
"Mummy'll come back soon"
I'd reply.

Your going has opened again
The sad reflections on life.
I hear the flute play awhile and strut away
as tears defy the solace of passing moons.

I hear the silences of death
whisper loudly in my ears
and I fear tomorrow.

Tomorrow may not hold your memory,
If in hurry I do not carve these lines.
Endless time stands between us -
The phoenix did not lend us its secret
of coming and going and coming again
to reap the harvest of life.

Shadows of Time

We used to be one
like pods of kolanuts
hung on a branch.

Today we stand isolated.
Time has put its scythe on our brotherhood.
Each now has his *obi*
where he sits lonely
calling out greetings with false smiles.

We live with the silence
of our inner struggles
each in unspoken competition.

Our cherished past
peeps behind the sun
at our battered present.
No hopes bring back what was
though yesterday still holds fresh flowers.

FUNSO AIYEJINA

Memories of Three Months

When April ends, armed with its seasonal overnight kit
Loaded with intense and brief lilies in full bloom
The fragile glow of the cassia tree lining the roads
To proclaim the beauty and brevity of human life,
I recall the nightmare of my brother's death in his youth
On the last day of the month labeled cruel by the poet ...

When April ends, armed with its seasonal overnight kit
I seek solace in the already evident month of May:
The birth month of our hopeful future continuous
When the flamboyant tree rooted in one of our pasts -
Constantly a target of elemental and human decrees -
Blooms forth in all its glory, paying no heed
To the presiding clusters of campus intellectuals
Who, borrowing a leaf from the resident colonies of bats
Ravage our green fruits long before the harvest season,
Blindly out-doing each other like crabs in barrels
Struggling for vantage rungs on the ladder of escape ...

After the brief lilies and the fragile cassias of April
I seek solace in May with its flames of the forest
Which tower defiantly above cretins who have adopted
The belly-to-earth pose of the Ile-Ife campus lizards
Permanently glued to ground dirt in hopeful obeisance
When they should stand up, bloom and be counted as
Contestants for the flaming crown of struggle, as
Members in a procession of satiated priests in worship
As followers of Ogun returning triumphant from battle
With the palm fronds of peace in his left hand

And in his right the steaming sword of conquest
His carpet of glory leading into fields of hope
As a guaranteed link with the month of September:
The month of sunshine: the sunshine of harvest time
When the miracle of May is doubled and re-confirmed.

Aftermath
(For Fatima Vatsa)

Each new life is a descendant of a graying form
Every new season a rebellion against an older norm
But the cactus survives the swing of the pendulum
Not through the collusive allegiance of a chameleon
But through a tenacity of will and a clarity of vision.
Poetry is rebellion, insists Neruda. The poet in rebellion
Is a cactus in bloom, nurtured by miracles in the subsoil.

Was the warrior-poet a desert cactus, a carrier of our anguish?

For you and others who knew them in less dangerous roles
As tenants, friends, husbands and fathers
Yours are grieving tongues and loving hearts
From which cynical questions may not be asked.
Mindful of your intense personal pains and tears
Over lost privileges, we join you in singing dirges
With which to coax them on to their now inevitable posting.

Blessed are they whose coups succeed:
They shall own the yams and wield the knives
And songs shall be erected naming them saviours
Until after the next night of the long knives ...

The Baboon on the Swing

Because the night is dark with no stars in sight
The baboon boasts he's clad in the finest velvet
Forgetful of dawn - the epilogue to nightmare
Our charm to dispel the hold of evil nights
Invocation to affirm that no matter its flare
A lie will always remain a lie, destined
Like a false masquerade, to be unmasked.

Not really; history does not repeat itself.
Men do
And are thus repeated on history's shelf
Like Onitobi of the skimpy loin-cloth
Champion wrestler in the riddle who
Wrestled his challengers to death
And dared harmattan to a final duel.

Now, who amongst us needs to be reminded
That one who throws such affronts at the wind
No matter the magnitude of his past miracles
No matter the number of stars on his epaulets
Such a man must come away from such a contest
Badly bruised, lock-jawed, needing treatment?
No, history does not repeat itself. Men do.

If therefore, the clay-god craves a dance of shame
Persistent in his demand for extended prime time
In the rain; oblige him, turn on the spotlights.
If the baboon insists, in spite of honest protests
Let him swing low and high, secure in his might.
Let him swing sweet chariot amongst the branches
There is a dry one lurking within the green foliage.

Remember the bullock who craved a round-trip aboard?
Didn't he return as corn-beef, cured and packaged?

To Ararimeh at Two

Blessed are they who know how to deploy anger
In the defense of dreams; against nightmares.
They shall inherit futures brimming with life
Forever succulent like the flesh of the cactus ...

Blessed are they who know how to deploy anger
Against sages who boast of knowing the prayer
With which to embrace the baobab tree of wisdom
But who, come mid-night, sneak off to the vulture
With multiple offerings - escorts to secret requests
For instant cures for their hereditary baldness ...
Against those quick to arrest whispering leaves
But never deem it fit to question raging storms
Which alone sow the seed of recurrent restlessness
Among the virgin branches of our forest of a thousand dreams.

You point angry fingers at their stars
Whenever they crash into our laughter
Via their channel 9 at 9, every night.
Does their rank arrogance recall those nights:
Your pre-conscious encounters with their agents
Who embraced darkness, made it their garment
And were guided to us by hooded informants?
Do you wonder why as one of their many victims
I do not join you in pointing my rage at them?
Do you wonder what has become of my gift of anger?

The well is silent: The well is shallow: A child's logic!

I am pointing. I am angry: If only you could see into my head!
But not at those who hold the yams and the knives. No.
They are well out of it. Even as they sign our death warrants.
Look beyond them, beyond their thrones, to aide-de-camps
Stiff with the anticipation of a future to be measured in gold:

First ladies lodged in the sanctuary of State Houses
Concubines recruited from virgins' pools by trusted aides
At home in safe houses and unlisted official annexes
All equipped with state of the art basement chambers
Designed for the ultimate comfort of those parrots
Who are too daft to learn from the three wise monkeys.

Blessed are they who live to celebrate their dreams
They shall not number among the framed and accidentalized.

The Power and Glory of Memory

Death, awesome in its totalitarian amour of conceit
Throws arrogant affronts in the face of humanity
Ignoring the power and the glory of memory
Our immortal antidote against the sting of mortality
Our invincible armour against all doctored history
The gentle fingers of dew drops forming before sunrise
On whose invisible wings the promise of bloom rides
Over generations of sand dunes, along the primal path
Of Ogun, pathfinders and pathmender, to an oasis of hope ...

Today, men of iron have banished past truths and deeds
And decreed their hirelings into new royal legends

To be installed in bunkers inside custom built palaces
Fitted out with regulation pools, overflowing with milk -
Human milk; protected by blind, deaf and mute walls
Designed to shut out the babble of the market place
Insulate their royal highnesses within a magical comfort
From which, unhindered, they continue to mastermind us
Into the holding bays designed into their castles.

For consolation, let us tickle the armpit of memory
Awake, into gentle horses of speech on whose back
We may ride triumphant into the eternal city of hope
Submerged somewhere inside our past ruins and scope
And beyond to when kings kept faith with their subjects
and watched over the teeming masses in the markets
Listening intensely and always to bold human voices
Intuiting unuttered hopes into fulfilled prophecies
Such that the people saw and hailed them as wise
Prostrating themselves, before and after, in gratitude.

Before they Came Calling in the Middle of the Night

Way back when, before chickens became toothless
And turned champion devourers of back-up grains ...
Before drunk agents came crashing into our dreams
Armed and ready to arrest metaphors in our streams
On the orders of a General high on syndicated acclaims
Galloping full-speed ahead of our children's fervent pleas,
I believed with the innocent citizens of our nation
In the open-arm one-on-one embrace of salutation.
But after seeing wily foxes at work in our forests
Spiders spinning deadly webs in and out of contexts,

I now know why, even as they bury comrades freshly killed
Fists of the children of Soweto remain forever clenched.

We have always had their likes: inheritors and usurpers
Who, too cowardly to confront the truths in our songs
Would don the dirty garb of aberrant masquerades
Determined to waylay and strangle singers of tales
Long before the ascension of this General Tortoise.
Today, descendants of those same insolent renegades,
Protected by the anonymity of their choice profession,
Courageously finger the homes of witnesses of truth
Forgetting like their ancestors now condemned to oblivion
That the outstanding relatives of a condemning finger
Are inevitably aimed back at the heart of the pointer.
Whatever darkness conceals, dawn is bound to reveal.

Why argue with men who insist they are really clad
In exotic robes when it is too dark to investigate?
Let them dance. Let them prance. Like the intoxicated.
Daylight, when it arrives on the silent wings of dawn
Will reveal them as wearers of rags before the town.
Men like them are not new; we always had their kind:
Men who conveniently forget that when an order
Fit only for slaves is forced on us we must deliver
Such with the wisdom and courage of the free
Instead of kicking in wide open doors with glee.
To such men our ancestors sent collective ritual curses
Causing them to die abominable deaths, swollen with greed.

ADA UGA

Achukwu, The Night Masquerade

Apa market square was a beehive of activity. This was normal since it was the last Ukwo market day before Ej' Alekwu, the most colourful festival throughout the twenty-two clans of Apa. A sudden hush descended on both vendors and buyers alike. They craned their necks and trained their ears to confirm what they had just heard. The sound that emanated from the direction of the sacred groove was unmistakable. With each passing moment, it became more distinct and louder. The sacred female drum struck thrice. Then her male counterpart burst into life in fourteen rapid rhapsodic beats. A staccato wail of flutes, iron bells and wooden gongs all sounded at once. Drawing this thunderous din, many voices of the night masquerade's advance party rent the midday air.

"Eka - Heji - Mo!"
"Eka - Heji - Mo!!"
"Eka - Heji - Mo!!!"

The sudden out-burst of activity from the usually quiet sacred groove of Achukwu, the dreadful Apa night masquerade signalled an unscheduled appearance at day-time. In a moment, the busy market square was deserted, with children, women and non-initiates scampering into the safety of their homes. Behind tightly shut doors, they monitored the progress of the unfolding drama.

"Something unusual must have happened. Achukwu never appears in the day except on rare occasions." Adehi Ogwuche, Akanaba of Apa whispered confidentially behind closed doors to his family huddled together in his vast Itakpa, the spacious sitting room.

Rolling her large eyes, a smile playing on her sensuous lips, gap-toothed Omeyi, Akanaba's first daughter asked her father:

"Father-that-begat-me, why does Achukwu usually perform at night? Doesn't he like the sun?" Father and daughter exchanged furtive glances. A big lump in Akanaba's throat threatened to betray his emotion for his beloved daughter that has metamorphosed from a mere paternal affection into lust. He quickly got hold of himself when he heard his first wife fondly called 'Omeyi's mother' shout out an order angrily at the girl, "Shut up. You, naughty girl!"

"Don't rebuke her, Omeyi's mother. She's only a child ..."

"A child indeed!" Omeyi's mother mockingly retorted, and continued, "At fifteen she is already a woman now. Very soon suitors will start besieging this house."

"You are always too harsh with her."

"Omeyi's father, I know Omeyi is your favorite child. But she is also a girl. In Apa women have nothing to do with the masquerade cult; let alone know about Achukwu, the night cult ..."

"I share your point there, but no sane man gives a scorpion to his child to play with."

Omeyi's mother, the eldest of Akanaba's wives undid her wrapper, retied it around her waist, rested her camwood-polished chin on her right palm and remained pensive for a while, then blurted out: "It is only a fish from the river that can be coiled. It isn't right for a girl to get used to prying into the affairs of men. One day she may see an abomination and the consequences will be irreparable. By then it will be too late."

"Omeyi's mother has spoken our minds." Akanaba's other four wives chorused in support of their most senior partner.

Not a man to be deterred by this show of feminine solidarity displayed by Acheme's mother, Elakeche's mother, Ogo's mother, and Onyeche's mother, Akanaba ignored his wives' counsel and continued his reminiscences in a deep baritone voice: "... throughout my adult life, I only remember three rare occasions that Achukwu came out in the day-time. The first was when the

wife of Ochepo, Son of Elaigwu from Ai-otache Lineage was delivered of three monster children at a go ..."

"Daddy, what happened?" Omeyi asked not unmindful of her mother's reproachful look. Protected by her father's presence, the young girl could afford to defy her mother's myriad sanctions. Her father promptly replied:

"Achukwu took the three monster children away to his abode in the sacred groove..."

"And what happened to the mother of the children?" Omeyi probed further.

"... em ... em ... em ...em ..., she was sold into slavery."

"But why?"

"Achukwu is a spirit. It leaves its domain in the spirit world to mend the broken bridge that links the living to the world of the dead. Once its job is completed, it returns to its retreat in the groove. No one knows what it does with its seasonal gifts."

Outside, Achukwu with its advance party and escorts stopped at the deserted market place. They performed briefly and headed towards the compound under sanction by the empowered spirits of the land. On their trail the accompanying cacophony of musical symphonies and ritual chants numbed and shell-shocked non-initiates and their wards. The procession drew nearer to its target. At a hand signal from the lead initiate, the troopers raced ahead to take up strategic positions around the target totally encircling it and cutting it off from the rest of Apa. Achukwu and his escorts continued their slow-paced, deliberate advance.

Inside, a certain air of unease permeated Akanaba and his family's hearts. Determined, Akanaba continued his recollections in a voice hardly above a whisper. Even Omeyi was not listening now. Her heart beat faster and faster. She merely heard her father's words without making any sense of them: "... the second outing of Achukwu in day-time was when Adaji, the son of Otukpa from Ai-ono lineage surprised his pregnant wife with her lover Ochoche,

the Son of Idakwo, the blacksmith ... He beheaded both of them. He sought refuge in the evil forest ... Achukwu came out in the day-time and brought him from the forest to face justice. The last one was six moons after the great thunderstorm disaster that wrecked havoc in Apa ... Our neighbours, the rat-eaters-that-farm-for-us, declared war on our brothers at Odugbo. The night cult men came out to lead our warriors to ..."

Ritual chants of "Eka-Heji-Mo!" "Eka-Heji-Mo!!" "Eka-Heji-Mo!!!" broke out in and around Akanaba's encircled compound.

Words froze in his throat. His heart sank. Omeyi let out a piercing, ear-splitting cry that was immediately stifled with a gag of blue-ribbon head-tie stuffed into her mouth by her mother.

Achukwu stormed Akanaba's compound.

Trapped and defenceless, Akanaba looked about him, darted to his inner room, came back panting, sat down on a cylindrical-topped wooden stool, and hid the shame in his face in his open palms from his wives and children. The man wept. The thunderous din continued outside his compound unabated. Sharp, metallic objects clanged and clashed as the night cultmen engaged one another in ritual salute. Achukwu asked in a high-pitched tone: "Is there any man in this compound?"

Trapped, Akanaba remained tongue-tied. Defenceless, Akanaba awaited his fate with bated breath. He knew within him that however gifted a swimmer might be, he could not conquer a raging sea-wave when both his hands and legs were tied. Akanaba knew that he had poisoned the land. What beauty? What lust can push a man to desire his own daughter, his own seed?

The eventful day came to Akanaba's mind. It was an Ede market day, three moons before the last Ej' Alekwu festival. He left to work on his farm alone as the rest of his household observed the market day as work-free. Exhausted and bone tired, he went to

the farm shed to have a rest. He soon dozed off after a meal of roasted yams spiced with red pepper ...

The members of Akanaba's family were enjoying a delicious meal of pounded yam with egusi soup. Akanaba picked one big lump of meat from his earthenware soup bowl and called out:

"Omeyi! come and take." His favourite daughter promptly stood up, darted to her father's side, took the choice cooked piece of antelope flesh from him, regained her seat and munched it voraciously to the envy of the other children. Omeyi left a sweet perfume around Akanaba's sitting place. He gazed at her as she walked away. He noticed that his erstwhile small child was fast becoming a young woman. Soon suitors will come calling. He inhaled the enchanting perfume left behind by the disappearing silhouette. His manhood stirred. He quickly banished the abomination from his mind. He stood up from his seat to fetch his tobacco pipe from his inner room. He tripped on a banana peel, plunged forward headlong and crashed to the ground measuring his full six-foot height. Akanaba got up from the ground. Sleep vanished from his eyes. He saw Omeyi standing. Smiling, she said, "Father you fell off because the camp bed is too small." She drew closer and dusted her father's body.

"When did you come to the farm?" Akanaba asked, sleepily wiping his eyes with the back of his left palm.

"I brought you gruel," Omeyi replied sitting on the wooden camp bed beside her father and smiled. "When I came to the farm shed, I noticed that you were asleep. I then decided to let you rest awhile but hardly had I sat down than you fell off the bed," she planted a peck on her father's cheek and said: "Father you must have been having a nightmare". Akanaba turned another cheek. His daughter planted a second innocent kiss. Akanaba was roused. Then he lost his head. Satan created evil desires in ten equal parts and handed nine to women. Akanaba saw the nine parts of desire in

his young daughter. He kissed her fully on the lips. Omeyi shivered as sweet little thrills ran through her body. The nipples of her young sturdy breasts stood on end as they pressed against her father's hairy chest. The young girl moaned softly. Akanaba tucked a hand inside Omeyi's pant. She struggled feebly. Momentarily, they were locked in a tight, passionate embrace. They collapsed on the wooden bed. She offered no resistance, neither did she shout for help. He undressed rapidly, did same to Omeyi and positioned himself on top of her. She jerked wildly when their bodies made contact. She let out a loud wail when the seed that gave her life entered her. Three sharp pains were followed by rosebuds of pleasure. She moaned softly as Akanaba pounded her. His eyes were closed.

Exhausted, father and daughter lay side by side. It became a regular affair each time that they were alone. They pledged to keep their secret. But now everything has burst open. The trees in the land must have betrayed them. They all have ears. The trees swaying in the wind seemed to say to him "Akanaba! titled elder of the land, remember the laws of the land. A poisoned seed cannot grow in the land. The Chief Marksman of the land has turned its chief despoiler." The voice of the trees tormented him still. His heart sank deeper. He knew he must drown. "Then drown! Poisonous Seed!" Mocked the trees. A drowning sailor, his innermost heart wailed: I don't know why the rains fall so often upon my wet brows unlike the sheltered in the homely embrace of filial love. I don't know why I row with bare hands in this scorching sun chained to earth-bound tides of the maze of life's whirligig. Morn of all creation! Unbound these chains! Quench this thirst! My famished flesh aches! My lonesome soul bleeds! And beyond the crest of the hill all is mute and still.

Three sharp objects thrown at his door in quick succession brought Akanaba back from his reverie. The lead night masquerade then pointedly accused him: "Akanaba of Apa! Son of my

mother's womb. Adehi Ogwuche! When the traveller with insatiable eyes sees a strange creature he remains tongue-tied. But not I Achukwu! Not I! When Akoto, the nocturnal bush rat suddenly emerges in broad daylight, Achukwu speaks ... when our sole fisherman drowns, Achukwu speaks ... when a practised night hunter loses his way, Achukwu speaks ... when a master tapster falls off a palm tree, Achukwu speaks ... when an old man desires his own seed, frightened women and children feign ignorance ... Not I Achukwu! Not I! Proud first-born of Ogwuchekwo, the eldest son of Idu, Father-that-begat-us-all in Apa. Akanaba what is this story behind the news? Apa is thirsty. Quench her thirst with water which only you and your poisoned seed, Omeyi can provide. No suitor crossed your threshold with gifts yet your daughter's womb is nurturing a seed that poisons the land ..."

Akanaba took one last glance at the prostrate, inert body of his daughter Omeyi, darted across to his room, picked one viper poison-tipped arrow from its quiver and struck himself in the chest. The poison acted very swiftly.

Many millet moons afterwards, the story of the poisoned seed, and Akanaba's suicide became a song among the initiates of the land.

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IRO AGHEDO

Eclipse of a Nation

We live on the river's bank
Dirt-scales linger on us
Defying our ebbing spittle

Our oily elixir fertilizes
The spillage of our heated blood
And makes heath of our verdant land

Doves are now hunted causelessly
Norms having been entombed
In this vicinity of death

My country is a giant fly
Trapped in the gluey web
Of a death-dealing soldiery

Daily, daily our unhallowed fasting is enkindled
The macabre dance renewed
Oh! will the sun rise again?

EMEKA AGBAYI

No Symphonies

there are no symphonies in the air
there are no symphonies here

no whispering palms
no whistling pines

no sunshine

rivers of blood
showers of bile
descent of shrapnel
darkness profuse
these only

no symphonies

only discordant, haunted voices of penury
wondering out loud what went wrong
in the equation of their lives

there are no symphonies in the air
there are no symphonies here

no whispering palms
no whistling pines

no sunshine

no jingling of coins portending full stomach
no ruffling of currencies threatening relishes
no splash of running waters carrying men's laughters

only rivers of blood
splashing blood-curdling shrieks of drowning men
on deserted shores

... our life is one long shriek from horrors unnameable

there are no symphonies in the air
there are no symphonies here

which symphony when nights are keyed up with gun-shots
and gun-powder tickles children to a death-sneeze
and caskets wander the streets in search of men

there are no symphonies here

OBAFEMI ILESANMI

Remembering Ted Kayode Adams (1943 - 1969)

He marches in with youthful strides
And with a crooked brush in his hand
He dares to paint the discordant colours
Of our landscape
Into harmonious crimson
But the earth won't let him.

Though trapped in a mixed grill
Of naivety and bravado
Still he poises to plough
The undulating terrain
Putting into shibboleth
Its anthills of tribes and creed
But the ants won't let him.

He glides through littoral
To raise the values
Of the wandering seashells
Beyond the glitter of gold and silver
Still the ocean won't let him.

Then in a grip of perplexity
He swaggers out from the classroom
Away from his teachers' admonition
Not with his pen and paper
But daggers and bayonets
To pierce through the carapace
Of ethnic pretensions
That envelope the psyche

Of adherents and adversaries.

But they abandon him
Like ashes from a bonfire
In a loonybin
To trade not only with his sanity
But his lonely ideals
They leave him with nothing
But to catch up
With his independence and martyrdom
On the surface of the sea.

The Area Boys

The new brats are in town.
The tramps on the walk,
Begging and extorting
Manacling the tranquillity
Of our days.

Denizens of the downtown ghetto
Holders of a blighted today
Combing and searching
For the big bright lights
Of their morrow's wishes,
Propped with drugs and daggers.

But your life is at
The brink of the harmattan's solstice
When the sundown
Robs the sunrise
Of its neon lights

Protection racketeers,
There is no solace
In this brigand suburbia
Botched with wants and wine
It is time to hanker
For respite
At another place and another day.

The Zest in the Horizon

What is the sunflower's misdeeds
That the bees
Should separate it
From its nectar
In the heat of the moment

But every denial we know
Emits its own benediction
Hence we should masticate
This experience in love

It is a rung
One has to negotiate
In order not to be
Judged wrong.

It is a desultory footpath
One has to glide through gingerly
In order not to miss
The zest sprawling in
The horizon.

CHINYERE L. NGONEBU

A Contrastive Analysis of Significant Linguistic Strategies in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah.*

Things Fall Apart, Achebe's first novel, was published in 1958. That was the period when Africa was regarded as a dark continent - a world without culture, history or civilization; a world of savages and barbarians; a world in desperate need for deliverance. It was against these misconceptions that *Things Fall Apart* was written. In 'The Novelist as Teacher,' Achebe summarizes his aim in writing the novel:

> I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past, with all its imperfections, was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.[1]

Consequently, the novel came to fill that gap the West had imposed in the history of Africa. Thus, the novel set about portraying the African in his own world. In this world, we see that Africans are a people with cultural values, and well organised political and legal systems. They equally practised a religion indigenous to them.

Things Fall Apart is a rural novel about life in pre-colonial Igbo community. The main character (Okonkwo) is a strong, hardworking man of substance. It is through him that Achebe explores the communal ethics of this tribal setting and the power of this tribal community to maintain a unified vision of life and values. Okonkwo is a self-made man who begins life in a hard way. His father, Unoka, was a drunken, irresponsible, lazy man, who was a poor model for his son (Okonkwo).

Okonkwo never inherited anything from his father. His first barn was built through share cropping - a slow and tasking way of building up one's barn.

However, Okonkwo struggles against all difficulties, and, through hardwork, and 'solid personal achievement', becomes a successful man. Unfortunately, he gets dogged by tragedy. First, he is exiled for seven years for accidentally killing a clansman, and all his property is burnt to placate the earth goddess. Then, while on exile, his son, Nwoye leaves home and joins the Christians. On his return from exile, Okonkwo becomes disillusioned over his people's complacent attitude towards Christianity. In the end, he commits suicide after killing the white man's messenger and discovering that his clansmen are not eager to join him in destroying the rest of the foreign agents.

Anthills of the Savannah, on the other hand, falls within post-independence era. Now, African writers have turned their attention to pertinent issues facing the new and developing nation. Achebe again supports this change:

> Most of the Africans are now politically free. A new situation has thus arisen. One of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice. Should we keep at the old theme of racial injustice (sore as it is) when new injustices have sprouted around us. I think not. [2]

With this philosophy in mind, Achebe sets out to write *Anthills of the Savannah*. Unlike *Things Fall Apart, Anthills* is a cosmopolitan novel, set in a post-colonial African country, which, in the words of the President, is 'a backward West African State called Kangan ...'[3] And unlike *Things Fall Apart* in which the author describes a traditional community on the verge of change, *Anthills* explores the failures of contemporary African leaders.

Kangan is a society faced with tragedy. On the apex of this ineptitude is His Excellency, the President, Sam, who arrogates to himself absolute power and authority and who spits out fire on his

subjects. In the end, he becomes alienated from the masses and turns a dictator after the likes of Emperor Bokassa of Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants.* Eventually, anarchy erupts and the President and some principal characters in the circle of leadership, Chris and Ikem, are decimated.

Hence, while *Things Fall Apart* extols traditional values, *Anthills* condemns the unfortunate state of contemporary Africa, criticises the normless, selfish, and individualistic society of Kangan, and denounces the corrupt, irrational leadership exhibited in this fictional African state.

This glaring difference in subject matter between the two novels marks the difference in their styles and techniques. There are not only dissimilarities in setting, point of view, and narrative pattern, but also in the choice of linguistic structures. This paper will only discuss the significant linguistic strategies in the two novels and show how they embody the writer's visions and ideological contentions. It is not the intention of this work, however, to examine every bit of language patterning that appear in the novels. The focus is just on those configurations that shov profound thematic significance.

The strength of *Things Fall Apart* lies in its linguistic simplicity. The novel is permeated with concrete, specific and homely every day words. The words are mainly short, crisp, and picturesque; precise but not pedantic; common without vulgarity; neither diffident nor ostentatious. Every word is at home, taking its place to support the others and to portray the world and culture of this simple African community.

A few illustrations from the novel exposes this brief, direct, and lucid choice of linguistic structures:

> As night fell, burning torches were set on wooden tripods and the young men raised a song. The elders sat in a big circle and the singers went round singing each man's praise as they come before him. Some

were great farmers, some were orators who spoke for the clan; Okonkwo was the greatest wrestler and warrior alive.[4]

The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a witty craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the cat (p.3).

The story of Okonkwo, like the excerpts above, is explored in the same vigorous manner. The reader is brought into the world of Umuofia and easily visualizes every scene. Achebe also uses these forms of words to imprint in his readers' minds something of the life and habits of these rural people.

From the first passage above we get the following simple structures:

night fell
burning torches
wooden tripods
young men
elders
farmers
singers
clan
warrior

The second passage provides also numerous Anglo-Saxon terms:

drums
flutes
fish ... water
thighs
cat
arms
breath
witty ... craftsman
back

From this class of words we can deduce that Achebe is writing with an intense desire to explain clearly and effectively and to show with no complexity or obscurity all he envisages in this pre-colonial society. He uses no word that will becloud the reader's perception of Umuofia. Rarely do we see such polysyllabic constructions as occur in the latest novel, *Anthills of the Savannah.* Consequently, the readers have a clear picture of African life and tradition, and so grasp fully and vividly the significance of Igbo civilization. The simplicity of linguistic items in *Things Fall Apart*, therefore, is a major means of improving clarity in communication and forcefulness of appeal.

In *Anthills*, however, the classes of words are different. There are predominantly complex polysyllabic terms, longwinding verbose constructions, political clichés, modern dogma, obstructive prepositions. Ikem's meditation, as he calls it, is essentially a form of verbosity. His ideas are clothed in superfluous wrappings of words and expressions. Like those of the President, they are pompous and inflated; long, elaborate, and far-fetched.
Hear him:

> I see too much parroting, too much regurgitating of half digested radical rhetoric ... When you have rid yourselves of these things then your potentiality for assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled (p.161).

In Ikem's speech above, we can identify many compound/Latinate constructions:

regurgitating
half digested radical rhetoric
potentiality
quadrupled

These linguistic terms are not negative in sense. Neither are they derogatory, nor better or worse than those of the earlier novels. Rather, every writer finds the most appropriate means of exploring his creative vision. I.T.K. Egonu captures this fact thus:

> ... the real habitat for literature is found not in the use of writing but rather in the aesthetic use of words and language. This means that the writer makes a conscious and deliberate choice and arrangement of both words and imagery in order to produce certain effects on the reader not only by *what is said* but also by *how it is said.*[5]

Raymond Chapman further asserts this point when he says that writers "manipulate language to make it contain a unique series of experiences and interpretations."[6]

In *Anthills,* Achebe manipulates the language to achieve distinct effects: to reflect the modern, sophisticated, chirographic society of Kangan, to express the discouraging disillusionment in the land, and to underline the pitiable state of affairs in this hopelessly governed state. *Anthills* deals with the delicate issues of power tussle and intellectual conflict. It is a world of confusion, turbulence, and anxiety - an unhappy world, a world divided against itself, filled with fear, uncertainty, heartache, and frustration. Such complex issues elicit from the writer a complex and intricate style. Hence, the novel is completely drained of the simplicity and naturalness that characterise *Things Fall Apart.*

Just as the choice of linguistic items in the two novels differs so do the sentence patterns. In *Things Fall Apart* the syntactic sequence is mostly lucid and forcible. Achebe presents his story with "ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical florishes", to borrow the imaginative expression of W. Strunk & J. White, (1980). The passages deal in particulars and report the details that matter. What is remarkable is that the language is not only definite and concrete, but that the details are also given with such preciseness and vigour that the reader has almost the sense of inhabiting Umuofia during the pre-colonial days. Through this means, the reader easily reaches the centre of the writer's creative consciousness.

The address of the one handed spirit at Ezeudu's funeral is presented in a beautiful lyrically patterned sequence:

> Ezeudu! he called in his guttural voice. If you had been poor in your last life I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long (p.36).

The structural parallelism of the passage with the emotional intensity it exudes is striking. There are series of similar sentences beginning with "If you had been ..." concluded with "I would have asked you to be ..." while another set provides a wonderful balance of structure, "But you were ..." The result of this rhythmical prose is marvellous. A reading of the passage aloud produces an effect akin to that of poetry. A reading aloud also makes another point: the extraordinarily beautiful way Achebe presents those events that make up the African cosmos.

Achebe employs different linguistic *cum* syntactic patterns in *Anthills*. Because the major characters are literate, the vocabulary is wide and diverse. The stylized writings, convoluted and lengthy speeches, embedded sentences, logical but complicated reasoning patterns are what should be expected from educated Africans - especially from politicians. And each underlines the despair that pervades the society of Kangan.

When Beatrice was coming back from the Presidential Guest House, Abichi lake,

> What passed through her mind and flowed through her senses ... could not be assigned a simple name. It was more complex than the successions of hot and cold flushes of malaria. Indignation, humiliation, outrage, sorrow, pity, anger, vindictiveness, and other less identifiable emotions swept back and forth through her ... hitting shallow bottom of shoreline, exploding in white foam and flowing back (p.107).

Beatrice's mind is in a tumult over the venality and moral turpitude of the so called guardians of the nation. Her silent cry of protest at such moral sterility cannot be summed up in one word. Her feelings are as complex as the problem itself. It is a painful and

shocking experience which cannot be summed up in one word. Hence, she gives vent to profuse syntactic repetition:

Indignation
humiliation
outrage
sorrow
pity
anger
vindictiveness

Achebe, in the words of H.G. Widdowson, is "struggling to devise patterns of language which will bestow upon the linguistic items concerned just those values which will convey 'his' personal vision." [7] This vision is the stark realization of the social and moral decadence of the leaders of Kangan - a realization that heightens Beatrice's bitterness and frustration over the decadent state of her country.

Yet these lexical items do not succeed in capturing Beatrice's state of mind. Her confused emotions

swept back and forth
hitting ... bottom of shoreline
exploding in white foam ...
flowing back ... (p. 107)

The confusion continues as Beatrice jolts between the present and the past. She is lost in the midst of two worlds uncertain of time:

> last night now seemed far away, like some-thing remembered from a long and turbulent dream. Last night? It wasn't last night. It was this same night, this night. It was still Saturday night ... It wasn't light yet (p. 107).

The shock she got at Abichi Lake seems to have blurred her memory. This momentary amnesia is not surprising for a warped society only breeds warped feelings, anxieties and uncertainties.

In further exploring the issue of corrupt leadership in Kangan, the novelist employs syntactic relaxation much of which

embody cryptic meanings. One particular instance of this is the personification of *Power* in Chapter eight: "Power rampaged through our world naked" and "power's rude waist." By ascribing to 'power' the qualities of 'devastation' and 'heartlessness', Achebe exposes the tyrannous exploits of the bad government of Kangan. Power becomes not a means of social development, but a means to personal aggrandizement and monetary gains. Government itself becomes a chessboard of secret deals, graft, immorality, deception and dishonesty. Devoid of any ethic or guiding principles, the Kangan leader gradually degenerates into the Frankenstein monster spreading fear all around and threatening to destroy the entire nation. Such are the features personified in the Kangan leadership.

In *Things Fall Apart* there are no similar violations of language to represent defects either in the social milieu or in the concept of government. In a world where emphasis is placed on just conduct and discipline, injustice and corruption do not triumph. It is an irrational situation that gives rise to aberrent linguistic constructions. Deviation from linguistic conventions seems suitable in the description of a society that is robbed of truth and honesty.

A more striking linguistic strategy in *Things Fall Apart* and one that is more thematically significant is the interpolation of indigenous words and expressions within English constructions. At almost every page of the novel one comes across such direct renderings as *Ogbanje,* (p.58) *Inyanga, Obi, Chi* (p.19) *Ozo, Agbala do-o-o,* Umuofia *Kwenu. Yaa* (p.8). Besides giving the work an African touch, these local terms enable the reader - especially the foreign ones - to have a better grasp of the culture under exposition.

More than this, however, is that some of these local appositions have an aura of mysticism. There is no English word that can adequately translate such words, and using their English

equivalents will merely divest them of the spirituality and traditional connotation they are associated with. *Egwugwu* (p.49), for instance, is more than just a masquerade. It is the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan. It also represents the spirits of the ancestors. Being sacred, it is held in awe and in respect by all; not spoken of in human terms; and not touched by women and by the uninitiated. Replacing the word with 'masquerade' or even with 'ancestral spirit' will obscure these salient attributes and reduce the centre of the people's belief to child's play.

Similar to interpolation is the profuse use of hyphenated compounds which serve as structures of modification. A fews of these appositives are:

> "I am dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth";
> "I am fire-that-burns-without-faggots";
> "I am one-who-kills-a-man when his life is sweetest" (p.60).

Through these impositions, characters, emotions, and situations are more clearly delineated. The speech pattern of the society in the narrative prose is also portrayed. Proudly African and believing that his audience should share his pride, Achebe is concerned with portraying, with all the power at his command, the beauty and rhythm of African language. Also, since this is a rural community, the most successful means of appealling to its imagination and sensibility will be the use of patterns that lie closest to traditional modes and practices. Achebe himself supports this assertion when he says that:

> The English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.[8]

In another context, Achebe comments that

> the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language ... He should aim at

fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience."

Achebe is trying to recreate a world and a culture. And to do this realistically he goes beyond the confines of the normal English language code employing forms that retain the Igbo thought processes. Consequently, these local terms are so powerfully structured that we are forced to see them not only as syntactically and semantically related constituents but also as carriers of the novelist's intentions and conceptions.

A different case arises in *Anthills*. Having moved from themes of cultural nationalism to those of social criticism, the novelist modifies the semantic import of the local renderings in the novel. *Anthills* does not call for idealized impositions on the English language. It is a story of the failure of the leaders and its consequent effect on the land. The language is thus directed towards criticism and the local expressions there merely show that the characters are African and that the setting is in modern Africa.

Another linguistic component that gives weight to *Things Fall Apart* and to Achebe's cultural-nationalistic strain is the proverbs. Proverbs occupy such a central place in the rural novel that they have been the centre of much discussion by Achebe's analysts and critics. All said and done, proverbs remain an indispensable source of thematic confirmation. They not only serve as culture carriers; they also strenghten the presentation and portray the world view of the society under study.

This role appears more clearly in *Things Fall Apart* because of the writer's ardent desire to portray the Igbo culture in its entirety. Moreover, such figurative and stylish forms of speech are characteristic of traditional conversation patterns. Bernth Lindfors states succinctly that the narrative language in the rural novels:

> Is studded with proverbs and similes which help to evoke the cultural milieu in which the action takes place whereas in the urban novels one finds the language of the narrative more cosmopolitan, more westernized, more suited to life in the city. [10]

The two worlds of *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah* can be demarcated by this factor, that is, proverbial usages. *Anthills* contains fifteen (15) proverbs as against the twenty four (24) in *Things Fall Apart*. While the proverbs of *Things Fall Apart* reflect experiences of simple rural living, spiritual and behavioural restraint, those in *Anthills* mostly reflect a stark contrast of values. His Excellency, the President, Sam, proudly tells himself that "it takes a lion to tame a leopard" (p.22). Such is the blatant exhibition of unrestrained political power that fills the pages of the novel. In *Things Fall Apart*, however, the majority of the proverbs depict the communal traditional society of pre-colonial era:

a. As the dog said, "if I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play (p.50)
b. An animal rubs its aching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him (p.118)
c. I have learnt that a man who makes trouble for others is also making trouble for himself, said the Tortoise (p.68).

This paper has tried to explore how the thematic variations between Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah* are reflected in the author's choice of linguistic patternings in each novel. *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills* are two worlds apart. While the former is a traditional novel set in a village where the communal ethic holds sway and where spiritual and behavioural restraints are perfectly enforced, the latter is a novel set in a metropolitan city with no seemingly constraining principles.

These diversities dictate variations not only in theme, style, and point of view, but also in linguistic structuring. It is generally said that one of the things on which Achebe's reputation rests is his ability to create a special idiom for the social setting he depicts. Reading between the lines - in the novels under study - we find enormous evidence to show that each linguistic configuration

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ultimately leads to further elaboration and conceptualization of the whole work. Since language is the medium through which every writer communicates his perception of reality, Achebe chooses just those significant linguistic strategies that will lead the readers into full consciousness of his creative intentions. For as T.S. Eliot says: "Only by the form, the pattern can words and music reach the stillness." [11]

Hence, while the speech patterns, imagery, proverbs, syntactic structures, and diction of *Things Fall Apart* are in perfect harmony with the rural setting of pre-colonial Umuofia, those of *Anthills* are equally in consonance with the sophisticated modern world of Kangan. Against the simplicity, concreteness, and lucidity of *Things Fall Apart* lie the verbosity, complexity, and obscurity, of *Anthills of the Savannah.* And while Okonkwo and Obierika speak with local idioms and rustic simplicity typical of their non-literate nature, Chris and Ikem, for instance, express themselves as educated intellectuals.

By these deft manipulations of linguistic structures, therefore, Achebe is able to reach out more effectively to his readers who, on their part, are encouraged to infuse meanings to constituents which embody the totality of the writer's literary imagination.

Notes

1 Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher", *New Statesman* January 1965, p. 162.

2 Chinua Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New World", *Nigeria Magazine No. 81*, June 1964, p. 159.

3 Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1988), p. 161. All subsequent page references appear within the text.

4 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p.82. All subsequent page references appear within the text.

5 I.T.K. Egeonu, "Literature and Moral Values: The Role of the African Writer" in *Readings in the African Humanities* (Owerri: Vivians and Vivians, 1988), p.143.

6 R. Chapman, *Linguistics and Literature*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), p.5.

7 H.G. Widdowson, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*, (London: Longman, 1975), p.42.

8 Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.61.

9 _____ p.62.

10 Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm Oil with which Achebe's words are Eaten", *African Literature Today* No. 1 (1969), p.49.

11 T.S. Eliot "East Coker" in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 11. 140 - 142.

NNADOZIE INYAMA

Edelus

His name was Edelus Nwaokwa. The Edelus was a name that made people who were hearing it for the first time to look at him with half-hidden amusement, or with suspicion - the way you would look at someone who is trying to put one over you. His polygamous father had named him Amaji when he was born, but his illiterate mother, the first wife, who had taken it into her head to start going to church, and who did not like the name, had taken him to the Mission on his eighth day of life and had him christened. Two "Church names" had been suggested to her by her neighbours: one was Fidelis, and the other Theophilus. But, between her house and the Mission, she had got confused and when they asked her the child's name, she had stammered out "Edelus". The minister who was anxious to get to an anniversary feast he had been invited to, did not bother to check if this was a proper church name or not, and so Edelus it was.

When they returned from the Mission and his father heard the name, he remarked that the name showed the foolishness of women. He had given his son a proper and befitting name (which meant "Source of Yams"), in the hope that he would grow up to be a great yam farmer, but they had gone and given him a name that had *ede* (cocoyam) in it. Well, he would see how a boy would grow up and farm cocoyams, a woman's crop. The other villagers were laughing for weeks afterwards.

Well, Edelus Nwaokwa did not become a farmer of yams nor of cocoyams. As soon as he left the village primary school, he had run off to Akassa, the nearest township. His plan was to become a motor mechanic, eventually a trader in women's fancy goods - earrings, necklaces, pomades and so on. He was working hard to save up money for either of these two enterprises. He had

given himself a target year in which to start one or the other. The amount of money he had saved up by then would determine whether he apprenticed himself to a master mechanic or set up his own fancy goods stall in the city market. He would prefer the latter - if only the stall fees weren't so high - as he thought himself a bit old at twenty-something to become an apprentice. His main job was lifting loads. As early as five o'clock each working day, he would be at the market motor park, along with other young men - waiting for the lorries to arrive from wherever with their sacks of beans, rice, garri, groundnuts or bags of cement. Over time, his back had become used to these heavy things being rolled unto it, to be taken from the lorry to the warehouses. On a particularly busy day, he could lift a hundred or more bags of cement and his body would not need even an aspirin.

After the morning rush, or whenever business was slow, Edelus was in the habit of staying in the stall of a friend of his who sold provisions, listening to his friend's radio and occasionally dozing off. It was on one of these occasions that he heard an interesting announcement. The day was Monday, and the announcer said that those who wanted to be employed by the City Council as bicycle license inspectors and enforcers should come the following day and give their names at City hall. An interview would be held on Wednesday, and successful candidates would know on that same day.

By the end of the day, Edelus and his friend had analysed the value of such an employment from every possible angle and had concluded that it would be a much better job for him than carrying heavy sacks all day. In the first place, there would be a guaranteed monthly salary. Then there would be a percentage commission on how much money he collected as license fees. Besides - and this was the interesting part - if someone who didn't have a current license was caught and he didn't have enough money to buy one on the spot, you didn't just let him off like that.

A little "something" had to be given to secure release. And that of course, went into your own pocket. Moreover, there was the prestige of being a uniformed government worker, the envy of your neighbours, a man of authority.

As soon as the morning rush was over the following day, Edelus went to the city hall. There were about forty other people who had come for the same thing. The man who wrote down their names informed them that only twenty people would be selected. They were to come back the following morning with a sheet of paper, and a pen for writing a test. There would also be an oral interview and a short race to determine their physical fitness for the job. He then pointed in the direction of a mango tree which stood about fifty yards away and asked them to go, one by one, to the man who was sitting under the tree for further information.

When it came to his turn, the man told Edelus, in curious low tones, that the job he was looking for was a very important one and demanded a lot from the lucky person who got it. The rewards were also many. Then he said, "I stay here as late as 6 p.m. each day. I represent them." Edelus couldn't make any meaning out of this, but he was able to find out from the man the venue for the race, which was an open field nearby.

Edelus had been something of a sportsman when he was in primary school. The work he did everyday had made him quite strong. He now surveyed the race area with something of an expert's eye and smiled to himself. From what he had seen of most of the other candidates, there was no way he wouldn't beat at least three-quarters of them in any type of race. He was even tempted to do a lap around the course, but he thought better of it and went back home. Throughout that day, and far into the night, Edelus thought of the happy prospects ahead of him.

On Wednesday morning, Edelus was one of the first candidates at City Hall. He had his paper and ball-point pen and felt quite confident, quite unlike some of the others who had

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On Wednesday morning, Edelus was one of the first candidates at City Hall. He had his paper and ball-point pen and felt quite confident, quite unlike some of the others who had

anxiety written all over their faces. Around nine o'clock, they were led into a large hall for the test. A blackboard had been set up and the questions written out. When Edelus read these questions, which were supposed to take forty-five minutes, he almost laughed out aloud. He read: Question One: Write your name and address. Question Two: Write the names of three streets in Akassa. Question Three: Write one to fifty in figures.

Edelus picked up his pen, and in under fifteen minutes, he was done. He had been a clever pupil in school, and what they asked them in this so-called examination was as easy as drinking cold water on a hot afternoon. To show them how brilliant he was, he had chosen to write the names of the streets with really difficult spellings, such as Wilberforce, Pankhurst, MacDonald, and for good measure, he had added Fitzgibbon. He had done the same with the figures question, giving them a bonus by writing up to 100. He sat out the remaining thirty minutes, looking at the other candidates as they laboured at the answers, a smile on his face. When the time was up, he was the first to hand in his paper.

The next thing was the oral interview. Three important - looking men sat behind a long table, and each candidate went up as his name was called. Before it came to his turn, Edelus noticed that each person who went up bared his chest and stretched out his right arm. This gave him great inner satisfaction. If they were looking for muscles, he would show them what real muscles were like.

"Candidate Mr. Nwaokwa!" Edelus bounced up from where he was sitting, shouting "Sah" at the same time, and trotted up to the panel.

They asked him to bare his chest, which he did with pride, and a smile. They then asked him to stretch out his right hand and make a fist. He did, and felt the muscles bulge on his upper arm. He was then asked to stretch the arm towards the man at the left end of the table and open his hand. He did. The man who was

giving these instructions then asked,

"Does it hold anything?" and the man on the left said, "No," after looking at a short list he was holding.

"Very good!" the first man said, "You may go Mr. Nwaokwa." Nwaokwa left, his face awash with smiles.

After this, they were assembled at the race venue. By now Edelus was certain that fortune was on his side. All the men were jockeying for positions of advantage at the starting point. About eighty or so yards in front of them, two men held a long white ribbon at each end. Nwaokwa leaped up and down a few times to warm his muscles. Finally they were put in some kind of order.

"Get ready," someone shouted. Nwaokwa's heart gave a few quick beats.

"Get set ... Go!"

Edelus took off at once. In a few seconds, he was out of the pack and flying ahead. Before the others knew what was happening, he was more than ten yards ahead of them. He hit the tape with a final burst of speed, and it flew out of the hands of the people holding it and rested on his triumphant chest, as he added a few extra yards, and then stopped. He turned around to see the others stumbling awkwardly past the finish line, all in a pack, so that it would be difficult to say who took what position. Edelus trotted back with the tape, a true victor's smile all over his face.

They waited another thirty minutes while the officials put things in shape. All this while, Edelus joked and laughed. Many of the other candidates sat morosely on the grass under the shade trees, apparently sure that they were out of it.

Finally, the officials appeared, and anxious faces surrounded them. Edelus didn't share any such feeling of anxiety. Then the chief official spoke:

"The following names have been selected and they should come tomorrow for their appointment paper: Amari Eke, Aju Kande, Ebi Joseph, Abati Kaje ..." Edelus listened as the names

came. At first, he was unbothered, but as the names increased in number and he didn't hear his own, he became anxious and then very alarmed. Finally, the official said,

"And the last name, name number twenty, Ederi Marcus."

Edelus was aghast. How could his name not be there? How on earth could that be? He knew he had done all the questions right; no one among the happy people who were called looked any thing as healthy as he did; he had come first in the race ... He walked up to the officials and told them that there certainly was a mistake. The other candidates were already dispersing in different directions.

"How do you know there was a mistake?" The asked him. He recounted his credentials.

"Well... let's see," the chief official said, "What's your name?"

"Nwaokwa... Edelus Nwaokwa"

"Edelus... Hm! What kind of name is that?"

He started going through the sheet of papers he carried.

"Eke... Aju... Gogo... Ebi... Agudo... Aha! Nwaokwa, Edelus... you failed the examination."

"What?" Edelus shouted.

"Yes, you failed. You were told to write three street names; you wrote four instead. You were asked to write up to fifty; you wrote up to hundred. You must follow instructions, that's what government work demands."

"But the race ... I came first in the race," Edelus pleaded.

"You were disqualified. You ran beyond where you were supposed to stop. If you were sent to catch a license defaulter would you run past him?"

"But the others ran past it too," Nwaokwa said in a rather lame voice.

"That was because you took the tape with you. So they didn't know where to stop. You caused the confusion".

After that Edelus said no more. He had wasted his day for nothing. As he turned to go, the official called him, and peering over his spectacles, said,

"When a fist is clenched, it should have something in it. Do you understand? We shall employ more people soon. And when next you go to the man under the tree, listen carefully to what he says."

As Edelus made his way despondently home, he decided to stop at his friend's shop. Perhaps he might know what these government people really meant.

Outing Ceremony

BRINDA J. MEHTA

(De-)Orientalizing the Female Self: Selected Feminine Characterizations in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters, Season of Anomy* and *Madmen and Specialists.*

Female characterizations in Soyinka's works have been the object of much ambivalence on the part of feminist scholars like Carole Boyce-Davies, Sylvia Bryan and others, who remark on the unidimensional and often, stereotypical representations of women in his work. They assert that Soyinka's women are almost always presented as symbols of an idealized, essentialized femininity and are thereby deprived of the possibility of selfhood. Moreover, they consider the female characters to be marginalized within the narrative context serving as tools to promote the hero's (self-)interest. Boyce-Davies states:

> A feminist reading of Soyinka reveals enough female stereotypes to suggest a definite sexist bias against women. Additionally, an examination of the characteristics of these women produces the distinct impression that the author is conjuring up the image of the same, ideal woman over and over again.[1]

The immobilization of the female in male-imposed, traditionally-convened roles is the main thrust of Sylvia Bryan's article as well, in which she states that Soyinka's efforts to posit a balanced view of the feminine are undermined by his preoccupation with certain cultural values that are negative in their application to women, seeking to confine them to the roles of wife, mother, mistress, whore.[2]

While situating itself within the parameters of a psycho-feminist approach, this study will attempt to establish a more global perspective on feminine characterizations in selected Soyinka texts by comparing and contrasting three seemingly opposed stages of female representation that demonstrate the

counterparts. Their double alterity provides an inverted mirror image of a comparatively "wholesome" representation of the Nigerian women. In other words, feminine representations in Soyinka's texts are located in deflective mirror images of each other, in fractured, splintered evocations. However, I assert that Monica and Taiila become juxtaposed antithetical representations that serve as "points of motivation" to facilitate a reconstructed woman-self, as portrayed by the *aje*. The "feminine process" that leads to an alternative re-positioning of the feminine is a rehabilitating agent that mediates between the antithetic, which it seems to cancel out eventually, to create a more valorized synthesis.

As mentioned before, the "feminine process" is an activator that seeks to debunk female non-specificity through a structural reorganization. This process of 'coming to being' is based, however, on a negative stage of initiation whose effective rupture or dismantling provides the necessary foundation for an uncovering of the "revised" female self.

Edward Saïd defines orientalism as an imposition leading to the creation and occupation of space. He states: "The Orient was almost a European invention and had since antiquity been a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories....remarkable landscapes... I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience."[3] In other words, Orientalism is a strategy that confronts and controls otherness through a manipulation of imposed images and sensations in an attempt to introject and re-present the Oriental Other. Consequently, the Orient can be easily manipulated to satisfy the Orientalists' intents and purposes. Orientalism, as Saïd asserts, is based on a power dynamic to maintain the Orient in its position of alterity, thereby affirming the superiority of the Orientalist, the master fabricator

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and manipulator of false images. Western hegemonic control favours the location of the Orient as a passive and easily malleable instance whose secondary status renders it incapable of self-articulation, thereby warranting its definition by the orientalizing other. The myopic vision of the self-interested Orientalist is limited in its capacity to present a more "authentic" or true to life elaboration of the Orient, confining it to an already-constituted essence which is at odds with its own ontological realities. Orientalism is thus the creation of falsehoods or imaginary meanings about the Orient, a political and cultural veiling of the Orient seeking to mystify and mythify it in its abstraction and timelessness. This ensures the immobilization of the Orient in a series of frozen images or tableaux, or as Malek Alloula states in *The Colonial Harem*,[4] as a collection of sensationalized postcard images circulating within the economy of the colonial gaze. Orientalism is thus a unilateral process of identification with the Orient, a non-relationship in which European culture heightens and strengthens its specificity by deflecting its image against the Orient as a "sort of surrogate and even underground self"(Saïd p.3). I would like to propose that apart from being a well-defined political strategy, Orientalism, as articulated by Saïd, is also a pervasive psychological strategy elaborated by the human psyche, as a defensive mechanism, to deal with socio-cultural and sexual alterity in an attempt to "comprehend" and ultimately, confine otherness.

The application of the orientalizing process to Ofeyi's encounter and subsequent relationship, or rather non-relationship, with Taiila in *Season of Anomy* serves as a good example of psychological orientalism on the part of the male psyche anxious to fathom and control the mysteries of the feminine. Taiila poses a dual threat to the male through her femininity and her exotic otherness (she is an Indian woman), rebounding the hero's efforts

to conquer and subjugate the ideal. Ofeyi's initial reaction to Taiila's presence is indicative of his attitude toward her throughout the novel. The narrator describes the Ofeyi - Taiila encounter at an airport in the following manner:

> The unexpectedness of their encounter was matched only by the other departure from the real programme of his study tour, a restorative idyll with the Asian enigma, Taiila. The airports of the world seemed to have turned hunting-grounds for alienated souls.[5]

While the humour here cannot be ignored, it is also important to note that Taiila is already inscribed in a pre-fabricated decor even before she makes her appearance. Characterized as an "idyll" and an Asian enigma, she is dehumanized from the very inception. The reader gets the impression that Taiila, as the object of man's reconstructive, reconstitutive capacities, is of more interest to Ofeyi than Taiila as woman-person who defines and claims her own subjectivity. Ofeyi is seduced by the enigmatic ways in which Taiila can be re-presented by him. The idealized Asian woman is glorified in her abstraction and reduced to a state of symbolic neutering whereby her mythical attributes lead to a loss of personal identity. In other words, Taiila as autonomous presence does not exist in the male psyche, which contents itself with the perpetuation and propagation of its own mythology of the feminine. It is also significant that the two characters should meet in the transit lounge of an airport. This suggests that while Taiila herself may be "in transit", the images associated with her representation remain static, impervious. Associated or conceptual imagery becomes the paradigm of a more generalized, essentialized image of the Asian enigma in which the hero participates in a creation myth of his own making. Pygmalion creates his female-object who is veiled behind a smoke-screen of indistinguishable generalities that detract from subjective particularities. What constitutes an enigma, more specifically an Asian enigma? Is Asian a universalized, monopolized, blanket

characterization of a multiplicity of variegated experiences and realities? The non-recognition of individual and group "constitutive complexities" leads to a process that Chandra Mohanty qualifies as a "discursive homogenization and systematization" of difference.[6] Rather than valuing and authentifying difference, homogenization reduces difference to a series of "visible" signifiers that are easily identifiable. Ofeyi's second evocation of Taiila is that of a "woman also with unmistakable Asian features" (*Season of Anomy,* 468).

The easily-distinguishable, homogenized reality of the Other is conveniently assimilated by the self; the Other is incorporated into the self's own belief systems leading to a fusion between the self's recreated perception of the Other and the Other's own selflessness. In other words, the Other is situated in absence and deflection, denied any possibility of subjectivity and self-representation, leading to its state of alienation in which it is out of touch with itself. This impression of disconnection is accentuated when Ofeyi contrasts Taiila with his lover, the courtesan Iriyise. In a conversation with Pa Ahime in which he evaluates the relative merits of the two women, Ofeyi describes his interactions with both women:

> I would have thought that she was miraculously sent to save me from the path of damnation.... To tell you the truth, Iri was never in serious danger. I don't know how, but that woman has become indissoluble in my mind from the soil of Aiyèro. Taiila on the other hand is ... trying to run a two-way commuter service of requests and counter-requests between the living and the unknown. That is the business of monasteries (*Season of Anomy,* 259).

While Iriyise is grounded in a more terrestrial reality, Taiila is relegated to an outer space or 'altered reality', characterized by the references to an angel and a monastery, two symbols of renunciation of earthly activities.

If Taiila symbolizes non-presence, then Iriyise too is reduced to a fantasized projection of orientalized images which

seem to dominate the male psyche. The image-woman becomes a fetish for the male magician who is more interested in his power to conjure the image-ideal, irrespective of the ontological reality of the women in question. The power of the image fascinates and seduces the male, relegating the female to a marginalized position in which she serves as an easily-replaceable substitute for the preferred idealized image. As a result, the image has a more enduring impact on the male than the woman herself, as is evidenced by Ofeyi's "natural" facility to associate his description of Taiila with that of Iriyise, leading to super-imposed characterizations of the two women:

> He ... turned to linger over the part-bared shoulder of the virgin at the bar. Strange, she could be Iriyise, even her skin was right...
>
> For the first time he remarked her extra-long mannequin legs, the only part of her that appeared to have developed to full maturity. He watched them wade delicately, creating ripples in the pool that lapped his mind, stirring up visions of Iriyise (*Season of Anomy*, 329).

The ideal woman is several women in one, a choice selection of fragmented body parts; hand-picked and welded together by the master surgeon seeking to perfect his creation which becomes an extension of his glorified (self-)image. In evoking the specificity of the image, John Beger comments: "Images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent. Gradually, it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented."[7] Taiila and Iriyise are reproductions of an original master image. A reproduction, as a copy, is an illusion, or rather, it creates the illusion of presence. In other words, the women are objects of man's fiction, inscribed in a fictionalized male plot, transfixed by his voyeuristic and obsessive fixations and desires.

Mary Ann Doane's analysis of the male plot and its ambivalent consequences on female specificity reveals that:

> ... the semiotics of male plot construction ... the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of

> differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.[8]

Doane adds that the male plot leads to a certain dislocation or disengagement between the subject (representer) and the object (represented) and it is precisely within the locus of this disjunction that Taiila's (non-)space is situated. This location is accompanied by a particular dismembering of the female body as is evidenced by Ofeyi's capacity to dissect each body part into an isolated unit, depriving it of a certain 'totality of representation.' In other words, woman is accorded her specificity in division. This fragmentary perception of the body detracts from its unity and serves as an effective ploy to keep the feminine in a state of perpetual dispersal. This unilateral perception of the female body is further evidenced by Ofeyi's inability to contemplate the female body as an integrated whole without confining it to a particular frame of reference. His descriptions of Taiila are reminiscent of an Orientalist painting *a la* Delacroix, of a distant, exoticized/eroticized Scherazade of male dreams and fantasies, a captivating odalisque whose ethereal beauty and sensuality are captured and immortalized/immobilized on the male canvas. Two passages from *Season of Anomy* are particularly revealing:

> Swathed in some animal fur, expensive, she entered on flat sandals. And her eyes were as sleepy, ocean-bedded as ever. He questioned his interest. A need for encounters far different from confrontation that lay four thousand miles away. He transformed the stranger to no less than Iriyise, in spite of the much lighter cocoa skin in the dim tranquillizing light ... He insisted that the texture of flesh was the same; if he touched it, it would radiate the warm thrill of velvet in the dark. He eyed quadrupled reflections of a tone of golden syrup in the cave of mirrors. A shawl slid off one shoulder, a slender arm gathered it, replaced it round her neck (327).

This hallucinatory, dream-like evocation is based on a certain abstract quality whereby the female body ceases to have a physical reality of its own, due to its substitutive value. Iriyise and Taiila

constitute reflecting mirror images of each other. The major difference between the two women, however, lies in Iriyise's political activism that connects her to a larger cause, namely her participation in the liberation movement. She is presented as a multi-facetted figure, a "super mistress of universal insurgence. To abandon such a potential weapon in any struggle is to admit to a lack of foresight. Or imagination" (453), admits the revolutionary Dentist. Taiila's precise function in the text is questionable. In addition, she seems to be locked into a limited space of reference. The reader participates in the evocation of a tableau in which the body becomes a spectacle or an object of contemplation. Jean Baudrillard states that as a result of this objectification, the body is distanced and reduced to a system of signs[9] - the animal fur, ocean-bedded eyes, cocoa skin, etc. In other words, the female body is denied an autonomous, self-contained presence and needs, instead, to be supplemented by a chain of signifiers.

The body is presented as a gaping hole, a void to be camouflaged in order to affirm its specificity. The sign creates the illusion of filling the void. Thus, Baudrillard seems to suggest that it is the sign that is more fascinating than the body itself. The body is only an appendage of the sign. The primacy of the sign explains the importance accorded to accessories like clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, whereby the accessory or the artifice replaces or usurps the primacy of the body.

Another pictorial description of Taiila is even more revealing of the objectification of the female body:

> Ofeyi tried to shake himself awake. The same enormous goblets of eyes, lithe, gazelle limbs impossibly long ... only the hair was different, drastically so. She had cut it close to the skull, black and glossy in a light hug down the nape of her Modigliani neck (470).

The "artistic" inscription of the body reduces it to a purely ornamental function. The ornament desexualizes the body by negating its corporeal individuality, reducing it to a concept. The

body as concept is immobilized and neutralized. In other words, the body remains petrified in the tableau and is rendered inoffensive because it is incapable of movement, relegated to a state of sexual neutering. The body is highly stylized in its representation as is evidenced by the reference to Modigliani, whereby, once again, it can be molded by the master craftsman who alters or de-forms its reality. Male-orchestrated body alterations desexualize or depersonalize the body which is further idealized when it becomes an asexual abstraction.

The asexual ideal is appealing as it completely negates feminine erotic desire by becoming the repository for projected sexual fantasy. Mary Ann Doane, in *The Desire to Desire*, affirms that for women, desire is linked with the imaginary, situating it within the confines of a non-place. Feminine non-desire motivates female desirability which remains insatiable as "it may entail the constantly renewed pursuit for a perpetually lost object, but at least the male has desire" (12). Female sexual desire is displaced through the mediation of male desire, as evidenced by the constant reference to Taiila's "large, impossibly luminous eyes" (328). Devoid of natural self-expression, the woman's eyes, in fact, serve as a lens to reflect masculine sexual fantasy.

The imposition of masculine fantasy on the female body is associated with a certain desire to colonize it. As Carol Duncan states: "The female is positioned as an adversary whose independent existence as a physical or spiritual being must be assimilated to male needs, converted to abstractions, enfeebled or destroyed."[10] The assimilation of the female self is based on a particular fantasy of conquest whereby the sexual neutering or dehumanizing of the body heightens its desirability, reminiscent of the practise of Chinese female feet mutilations as a prerequisite to their further veneration. Ofeyi is incapable of conceptualizing Taiila outside of her mystical, virginal aura: "He was alone with her, the secret word had been spoken and he was led, a lone night

guest into a virgin's lair. Given that he had created her, her face, her own vulnerable shoulders pronounced her virginal ... No matter, the spell remained intact" (327). Taiila's preconceived virginity provides the necessary lure to titilate Ofeyi's fantasies, while, at the same time, assuring her non-access to desire through a tightening of the mystical (noose-)aura around her. In this way, man reassures himself of his own sexual primacy through his (non-)sexualized relationship with the phantom-like mystery woman whom Barbara Warren describes

> as the man's supreme ideal, his ultimate desire, an image with which he compares all living women, this "phantom" lady is a barrier between himself and actual experience. He can only waste away in a fantasy world if he seeks her as a real woman for he will never find her in the flesh.[11]

Ofeyi's obsession with Taiila's virginity is highlighted throughout the novel in which he is completely self-absorbed by Taiila's preoccupation with nunhood, symbolizing, once more, the non-effectuation and eventual renunciation of sexual desire: "'What has become of the nun?'" he asked, trying to read into the depths of her mind. She tapped her breast and said, "'She is still in here. Almost at the centre'" (474). Her answer is reassuring as it ensures the preservation of the ideal, while, at the same time, guaranteeing sexual gratification with the "more earthly" courtesan Iriyise, who, till her ultimate physical consumption, is presented as a highly sexual woman.

The inscription of woman in an extra-terrestrial reality has the further result of dislocating her realm of influence from the political by actively denying her access to language and authority, which remain a male prerogative. In her article, "Women and Language," Rahma Bourquia states that by being placed outside of language, the woman cannot participate directly in the elaboration of a discourse of power. While Ofeyi's language embraces a much-valued social and political cause, Taiila simply wants to stretch her

soul: "I want to stretch my soul to embrace the infinite" (332), she exclaims. Her statements seem incongruous, inconsequential, bordering on the absurd at times, constituting a pastiche of much-touted fragments of orientalized, mystical discourse "striving to obtain a glimpse of the entire network" (334).

The male narcissist falls in love with his own image which he sees mirrored in the eyes of the woman. There is only one instance in which Taiila's eyes express emotion and a certain human quality as a response to the abjection and decrepitude she confronts at the Tabernacle of Hope: "Ofeyi wondered how they looked to all these fugitives, Taiila especially, foreign and beautiful in the midst of such squalor and destitution. Yet her eyes as she rose from the hard death-bed had held such oceans of sadness, reflecting a suffering that he had not thought possible in one so young" (505).

For the first time, Taiila's eyes reflect back to him an inner reality that he characterizes as alien to his understanding. The discrepancy inherent in Taiila's characterization, between an externally imposed, male-ordained reality and an inner psychological, subjective reality, is further evidenced when Ofeyi fails to recognize her the moment she steps out of her gilt-edged frame. I refer to the moment when Ofeyi catches a glimpse of a "young woman, also with unmistakable Asian features" (468). Taiila's attempt to define and project her own reality is revealed in her retort to Ofeyi, who tries to shield her from the despair of the fugitives at the Tabernacle of Hope: "I hope you were not too distressed. Perhaps I should not have taken you in to see them...' I am not as fragile as I look' Taiila assured him" (508). In other words, Taiila affirms that she is not as fragile and ethereal as Ofeyi would like her to be. Determined to break the cocoon of divine mysticism/debilitation in which Ofeyi enshrouds her, she seeks to reappropriate the discourse that is forbidden her by stressing her disillusionment with the "divine nature of things." This rupture

with a previously prescribed mode of apolitical, mystical discourse, out of touch with the tragic specifics of daily life, reflects the desire to re-present oneself as an autonomous speaking subject by reaffirming the silenced, negated "I" / eye. To Ofeyi's question: 'Divine. What's happened since? It used to be divine discontent' - Taiila replies: 'I don't believe that any longer. It threatens to last a lifetime if life is what I observe ... What I have observed since I came here ... Nothing that eats the human life away has the smallest touch of divinity" (476).

The self-reflecting "I" disrupts illusions and falsities by authoring its own subjectivity through a more balanced and realistic perception of things. The ideal's attempts to break its mold by reaffirming itself within the cracks poses a threat to the creator who soon loses control over his pet creation. In an effort to maintain the status quo, there is a renewed imbalance, with Taiila's unaccounted and sudden disappearance from the concluding section, only to be reinvoked in a fleeting reference made to her by Ofeyi on the last page of the text: "Tell her ... we'll, tell her we'll meet again at the next intersection. She'll understand" (534). Ofeyi has made his choice and has already masterminded the next move. The ideal will remain alive and waiting (for him) at the next intersection (of his choosing). Taiila as a woman is merely an episode, the necessary rite of passage to ease the hero's cosmic conquest, while Taiila as ideal, is an open-ended chapter in Ofeyi's life to be invoked and resurrected at the whim of its creator.

This idealized vision of womanhood seems to cancel itself out by the brusque, almost brutal insertion of Monica Faseyi from *The Interpreters* into the male plot. Juxtaposed with the orientalized model is a process of counter-orientalism which negates the feminine attributes described in the previous model. In sharp contrast to Taiila, Monica Faseyi is placed in a non-idealized space of "perpetual disgrace":

> Monica Faseyi was always in disgrace. And so at the entrance to the embassy reception her husband stopped and inspected her thoroughly. Satisfied, he nodded...
> 'You might as well put on your gloves now.'
> 'What gloves? I didn't bring any.... Who do you see wearing gloves in Nigeria?'[12]

By her refusal to wear the gloves that she has, in fact, disposed off earlier, she delegitimizes the pertinence of the "accessory" that is intended to enhance the appearance of women. Her non-conformity to a prescribed dress code is intended to run counter to her husband's expectation of an "ideal" appearance in which the female body is cloaked by a sheath of material, reminiscent of Taiila's introduction to Ofeyi and the reader "swathed in some animal fur" (*Season of Anomy,* 327). As has been mentioned, attention is focused on the accessory which detracts from the individuality of the body, which ultimately becomes a mere extension of the accessory. In this case, the accessory as external signifier serves to project an inner reality of limitation. If clothes "make the person", then, Monica's decision to "show some skin" reveals her desire to be her own person instead of conforming to a cultural stereotype. Monica's stance is an attempt to break the mould of stereotypical typecasting in which she will be positioned as a cultural anomaly, a deflective image of the Nigerian woman due to her otherness as a white woman in a non-white environment.

Images of white women in African literature have traditionally focused on their position of privilege as the white mistress or memsahib leading a life of luxury while creating her own colonial empire within the household. As Meinke Schipper comments:

> In the colonial situation, a woman who would have been an insignificant person in Europe, doing her own housekeeping and taking care of her own children, is granted unprecedented opportunities to exercise power over one or more subordinates. Power which is too

> easily misused, as the African novels about the colonial period show. From the African point of view, the white woman is indeed a serious racist factor in colonial society.[13]

White women have maintained their difference through their condescension and refusal to comprehend and integrate the non-white perspective deemed inferior and hence "needful of colonizing." Monica provides a foil to this representation by appearing to be "outrageously wholesome," as characterized by Odia Ofeimun in a private communication, in an attempt to fit in and counterbalance the negative literary impact made by her white counterparts like Margery Thompson in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, Tundi's French Madame in Oyono's *Une Vie de boy,* etc.

Monica attempts to create her own fictionalized self, independent of her husband's expectations of her. In fact, her wholesomeness exposes the absurdities and hypocrisy of her husband who is portrayed as the real "stranger" or "resident alien." This process of exposing the husband's foibles, while, at the same time, proving to be a constant embarrassment to him, subverts the psychological process outlined by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he emphasizes that oppressed black men seek to liberate themselves through a union with a light-skinned woman. The varied shades of lightness correspond to differing grades of liberation, as a result of which the lighter the skin, the greater the liberation it represents. The black man's own worth is heightened by this process of lactification in which he himself introjects and identifies with the white ideal. In fact, he becomes the white ideal, as exemplified by his efforts to adopt patterns of behaviour that display a greater measure of "whiteness" than those adopted by white people themselves. Ayo Faseyi, while admonishing his wife for her inability to follow protocol, exclaims:

> 'Darling, if the Queen was attending a garden party, would you go dressed without your gloves?'...
>
> 'I really don't know, Ayo. I never moved in such circles.'

> 'Darling, I am surprised at you. These are simple requirements of society which any intelligent person would know' (40-41).

Monica is expected to be cognizant of certain social norms that do not, however, correspond to her own middle-class lifestyle. She is immediately identified with an essentialized presupposition that all British people have access to the Queen's tea-party sociability. In this way, Monica appears to be out of her own league, out of touch with herself through her non-acceptance of a preordained role. She defies categorizations and seems impervious to the rules governing codified behaviour. Her wholesomeness is further evidenced in her preference for local palm wine over the colonial specialties of champagne or mist alba, displaying her disregard for the aura of sophistication and refinement that is generally associated with the colonial dame. Colonial posturing is alien to Monica's behaviour and it is precisely through the process of "colonial subversion" that she has access to a wider range of experiences of her own choosing. Her husband expresses his outrage when he sees her drinking palm wine and responds to the situation in the following fashion:

> 'It was bad enough to refuse the champagne although mind you I just don't see any necessity for it. After all, how many of these women here touch the drink? They just hold the glass in their hand to be sociable, what is wrong with that?'... But you see, that isn't all. She wasn't satisfied with that. She had to go and ask for palm wine at a cocktail reception. Have you ever heard such a thing?' (42-43)

Monica's "respectability" jeopardized by her identification with "non-colonial" signifiers threatening to make her the object of derision and ridicule rather than an object of envy. Her behaviour seems all the more baffling to her husband, given the fact that she has been "appropriately socialized." Faseyi laments: "If she were a bush-girl from some London slum I could understand. But she is educated. She has moved in society. Why does she have to come and disgrace me by drinking palm wine?" (43) His idealization of whiteness is manifested in his reasoning that whiteness is

associated with a certain decorum and sense of style, alien to a bush-girl from a London slum who has not received the necessary social conditioning to make a favourable impression on society.

Monica is a menace to Faseyi's sense of manhood. A husband whose wife is capable of autonomous action by undermining his sense of control over her is a cuckold, castrated of his patriarchal authority, a lesser man. This explains Faseyi's obsessive preoccupation with the impact that Monica's misdemeanors might have on his reputation. While Monica can just be herself, Faseyi has to worry about social conventionality and other details that prevent him from enjoying himself at public gatherings.

In this way, Monica poses a threat to social conventions due to her complete "lack of social graces" which, on the contrary, wins her the admiration of their friend Bandele, who states: "She sounds mild but she isn't. In fact, I have still to meet a tougher girl" (44). This toughness can be ascribed to a certain well-informed directness and candour able to penetrate several layers of social hypocrisy. Monica is nobody's dupe. Her frankness is disarming, true to life, and is a far cry from Taiila's dislocated mind and spirit extensions that float in an existential vacuum. Mind-trips elude Monica, whose earthiness is evidenced in a conversation with a group of friends who have been invited for dinner:

> Monica said, 'Bandele is mother's favourite you know. She can't stand any of Ayo's other friends.'
> 'Darling, how can you tell such a lie?'
> 'All right, we'll wait until Mother comes in and then we'll ask her' (47).

The recourse to direct simple speech, devoid of opaque, mystical ornamentation, gives Monica a certain power through her inability to subscribe to the artifice, to camouflage or veil her reactions.

It could be argued that Monica's non-compliance with convention demonstrates callous disregard and insensitivity, given her youth and inexperience. However, I believe that her unconventional stance makes a statement about society's displacement of women and their roles and functions while providing the necessary (and refreshing) counter-cathexes to replace the social imbalance and its prescriptions for the feminine. Monica is her own creation whose unpredictability renders her incapable of reproduction. Her responses are never anticipated, unlike Taiila, whose enforced idealization leads to a series of pat responses to her cosmic situation. In this manner, Monica debunks the myth of the "eternal feminine" that is based on falsified presumptions by subverting the essentialisms that are traditionally used to characterize the feminine. Monica defies characterization as she serves as a constant element of rupture leading to an effective dismantling of the status quo within the parameters of the male-female dynamic. She circumvents confinement by disrupting binary spatial configurations, separating male-female spheres of influence into the male-dominated outside and the female-relegated inside, by accessing both spheres simultaneously. Her reluctance to retreat to the ladies' corner during a party hosted by Professor Oguazor and his wife is indicative of this dual stand:

> The girl's voice remained a patient whisper: 'I assure you I don't want to go upstairs.'
> 'My dear, you are being very awkward. All the ladies retire upstairs at this point...'
> 'But I don't want to go.
> 'These details of common etiquette cannot be really strange to you. And if they are, simply watch the others and follow their example...'
> 'I used the ground floor toilet about ten minutes ago. I don't feel like going again so soon afterwards' (144).

Non-conformity creates individuality. Moreover, it promotes a certain "humanity of representation." Monica affirms her subjectivity and, in opposition to the conventional image of the

white woman whose status is conferred upon her by her husband's position, she functions as an independent agent. She has a status of her own, characterized by her "defiant form" (183), and her ability to hold her own ground.

Does Monica's whiteness give her the necessary license to self-autonomy? Is she, in fact, just another colonial dame "who has no respect for Africans?" (202). Or is she only an individual who tries to negotiate life through a firm adherence to her convictions? I am inclined to believe that Monica cuts a sympathetic figure by just being herself, which wins her a powerful ally, her formidable mother-in-law. That Mrs. Faseyi sees her daughter-in-law's straightforwardness and humanity is evidenced in an exchange between Kola and Monica in which she expresses her sadness at showing up her husband badly. Her lack of pretense endears her to her mother-in-law, whose obvious dislike for appearances is reflected in her recognition that the Monica-Ayo union is a mismatch: "I know when a marriage is being propped up by sheer sentiment ... There is nothing mysterious in a broken home you know..." (211).

While the orientalizing process is based on a particular posturing of the feminine, the counter-orientalist process leads to a stripping away of superficialities and falsehoods, through a resistance to the stereotype, thereby creating the necessary space for the final stage of female (self-)actualization, as exemplified by the *ajè* of *Madmen and Specialists.* The third phase of holistic reintegration seeks to redress the imbalance inherent in the first two models in which female specificity was negated or affirmed through a process of binary opposition that involved the destruction of one binary component for the other to acquire meaning. The two models were characterized by loss and disproportion - the loss of a sense of self through the creation of the ideal, as in the case of Taiila, and the rupture of marital

communication as the necessary motivator of female self-affirmation, as in the case of Monica Faseyi.

The process to establish a new equilibrium is initiated by the mother figures of the *ajė* who represent a transformative, creative energy, in an attempt to relieve post-war social and political dis-ease. The *ajė*, as the Original Mother, represent an age-long feminine heritage of wisdom, economic self-sufficiency and moral and physical resilience that find a contemporary counterpart in the figure of Dehinwa in *The Interpreters*. This study will not focus specifically on the characterization of Dehinwa, which has already been the subject of Sylvia Bryan's essay. Rather, it will show how the *ajė* facilitate a new beginning, or more accurately, a re-claimed beginning for women by shifting the phallocentric centre in favour of what Ngugi calls "a pluralism of centers, themselves being equally legitimate locations of the human imagination."[14]

The *ajė*, as representatives of unleashed feminine energy and potential, have always been relegated to the margins by the phallocentric centre. This point is demonstrated by the fact that while the male's complete realization of his physical and spiritual potential makes him an epic hero, parallel efforts to qualify women's access to transcendence have confined them to the realm of witches, hysterics and conjuror-women. Male characterizations of the *ajė* in *Madmen and Specialists* echo these ambivalent perceptions. The mendicant Aafa describes the women as witches and devils,[15] while later, Doctor Bero displays a similar aversion to Iya Agba:

> Iya Agba: Does the specialists have time for a word or two? [Bero is startled, leaps aside.]
> Did I scare you?
> Bero [recovering, looks her over carefully]: What is a thing like you still doing alive? (258)

Woman's body, a source of life and creation, has been fetishized by the male psyche in male-dominated societies. Considered to be an object of horror and interest simultaneously, the female body has been subjected to a long tradition of physical aphasia to minimize its "destructive" efforts. The female body is considered dangerous when it is capable of autonomous action as is evidenced by the *ajé*'s powers of transformation, demonstrating their capacity to neutralize the fatal effects of poison and convert it into a healthy, curative ingredient, indicative of women's inherent powers to alter the status quo to their own advantage, by subscribing to "subversive" strategies of self-affirmation destined to create a more favourable social order for them. Iya Agba states:

> You don't see them much. Once in a lifetime. Farmers don't let them live, you know. Burn out the soil where they find it growing just to kill the seeds. Foolishness. Poison has its uses too. You can cure with poison if you use it right. Or kill.
> Si Beri: I'll throw it in the fire.
> Iya Mate: Do nothing of the sort. You don't learn good things unless you learn evil (225).

The *ajé*'s transformative powers are based on an intimate knowledge of nature, strongly influenced by Yoruba beliefs that all forces of nature are united by a primeval Mother spirit. Plants, animals, humans, inanimate objects, constitute a harmonious ensemble gravitating toward a centrifugal feminine force responsible for maintaining levels of connection between various species: "I like to keep close to earth" (234), affirms Si Bero. The principle of interconnection is not based on the either/or paradigm of exclusion or distinction, but more on an intimate understanding of natural and human forces and, as Maryse Condè states in *Parole des Femmes*, on an inherent complicity between the two. There is a definite difference in perception toward nature, and by extension, toward human relationships, by the male and female characters. Bero claims that "power comes from bending Nature to your will"

to include the social or communal mother as well. Mothering, according to Johnson-Reagon, is based on a construction of communal knowledge that deconstructs opposition. Si Bero tries to convince her brother Doctor Bero, of the effects of the mothering promoted by the *ajè* which would serve as an antidote to war and destruction: "We heard terrible things. So much evil. Then I would console myself that I earned the balance by carrying on your work. One thing cancels out another. Bero, they're waiting ... They held your life together while you were away" (236); "They were good to me. I couldn't have done a thing without them" (235). Mothering exemplifies the feminine principle which embraces an unadulterated world vision that eliminates negativity, intimidation and destruction that constitute popular dictates of masculine culture. In other words, the feminine principle cancels the ambivalence demonstrated by the male counterpart, as is reflected in its description by Iya Agba: "Don't look for the sign of broken bodies or wandering souls. Don't look for the sound of rear or the smell of hate. Don't take a blood hound with you; we don't mutilate bodies." To which Bero replies: "Don't teach me my business" (260).

Cohesive feminine force is thus based on its "collectivity of influence," on a shared power through which "women who are united with the mothers by the 'flow of blood,' embody the concept of balance, a female equality that men must understand - indeed emulate - in order to survive."[20] Survival is ensured through a mediation of power that enables women to achieve economic parity with the male, as is evidenced by women's control of the market and related economic activities in Yoruba culture. The economic self-sufficiency of the *ajè* is based on their monopoly of the curative herb trade, evincing their effective entrepreneurial skills, offering a woman-centred alternative to institutionalized medicine that does not favour the equal participation of women.

The *ajė* provide women with possibilities for (self-)expansion through their access to a wide spectrum of social, political and economic activities that facilitate the effective crossing of boundaries and limitations, by situating themselves on the inside as well as the outside, thereby "transgressing" gender-determined divisions of space and labour. Feminine space is a synchronized, three-dimensional space that is intimidating to men because it is the space within which women's stories are told, where her-story is recreated. Women's history is situated at the Origin, offering an alternative to the male creation myth. Iya Agba posits the historicity of the Woman-story by stating: "We move as the Earth moves, nothing more. We age as the Earth ages" (259). The *ajė* situate *her-story* at the very beginning of all creation and their actions represent their right to reclaim the ignored female heritage:

> Iya Agba:...I'll not be a tool in their hands...Too much has fallen in their hands already, it's time to take it back. They spat on my hands when I held them out bearing gifts. Have you ever known it different? (267)

If, as stated before, the *ajė* are located at the very nexus of creation and are destined to enjoy complementary participation with the male in the elaboration of a common, plurivocal human-centred creation myth, why would their obliteration from the annals of his-story be deemed necessary? The one-dimensional perception of her-story by the male is revealed in Bero's relegation of women to a marginalized cult, characterizing feminine space as a devalorized, insiginificant mental space. He berates his sister by saying: "I thought I told you to stay in your little world! Go and take tea with the senile pastor or gossip with your old woman" (241). Her-story leads to the creation of healing space that is vital to the elaboration of any process of female-hood as it provides the essential locus of reintegration for women who have been alienated from themselves and from others as a result of what Vicki Noble

The *ajè* are precursors of a modern-day feminist consciousness, the ultimate womanists committed to "the survival and wholeness of entire people, both male and female."[24] Their story serves as an effective model for both men and women to purge themselves of their bad b'ood and re-assert their shared claim to a common heritage in an effort to achieve wholeness. The *ajè* initiate a dynamic process of self-examination to redress the inequalities of the past by providing the necessary guidelines for women to achieve individuation and for men to re-evaluate their previous misconceptions of women.

Feminine characterizations in the selected Soyinka texts thereby come full circle to embrace a certain "totality of vision", revealing the discrepancies between idealized myth and conflictual reality, based on a search for common ground. While it is impossible to psychoanalyze the precise intentions that motivate the author's conscious or latent portrayals of women in this study, I maintain that these characterizations are flexible and open-ended enough to insert the necessary counter-perspectives to create more realistic representations.

Notes

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2. Bryan, S. "Images of Woman in Wole Soyinka's Work" in *Women in African Literature Today*, No. 15, Durosimi Jones, E., Palmer, E. and M. Jones, eds. (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1987).

3. Said E. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p.1.

4. Alloula, M. *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

5. Soyinka, W. *Season of Anomy* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.256. All subsequent references will be made to this edition.

6. Mohanty, C. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.54.

7. Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p.10.

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9. Baudrillard, J. "Fetichisme et Ideologie" in *Objects du fetichisme, Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, (Paris: Gallimard, Vol.2, Automne 1970).

10. Duncan, C. "The Aesthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art," in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology,* Raven, Langer and Freuh, eds., (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p.59.

11. Warren,. *The Feminine Image in Literature* (New Jersey: Hayden Book Company Inc., 1973) p.8.

12. Soyinka, W. *The Interpreters*, (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1965) p.39. All subsequent references will be made to this edition.

13. For an analysis of the representation of the white woman in African literature consult Mineke Schipper's article "Mother Africa on a Pedestal: The Male Heritage in African Literature and Criticism" in *Women in African Literature Today,* No.15 (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1987), pp.33-54. This particular reference appears on p.41.

14. Wa Thiong'o Ngugi. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1993), p.8.

15. Soyinka, W. *Madmen and Specialists* in *Collected Plays 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) p. 221. All subsequent references will be made to this edition.

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20. Drewal, H., ed. *Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.15.

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24. Definition given by Alice Walker in the preface to her *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (Womanist Prose, op. cit.,), xi-xii.

EZE CHI CHIAZO

Monkey Game

I have not come to show
the whiteness of my teeth
my eyes are red, too wet
to watch this dirty game

loud whispers my soul
hatred for this monkey game
hatred too, for the zoo keepers
and you that applaud the game

Tears of Obedience

I know a land
where the deaf and dumb beat the drums
and the blind dance

I know a land
where dogs bleat like sheep
and wag tails to the thief
I know where I was born

the flapping wings of butterflies
robbed our king of his sleep
he ordered us to raid their homes

we, executioners, obeyed our king
and at night shed tears for the dead
ready to obey him at day

as our fathers had done

our sons learn to bow and bend
sheep in search of non-existent grass
like fathers like sons

I sing our dear son loud
long live the king!
and we too, to obey

Graveyard Dance

The king did it in the backyard
but forbade all to tell his fault
and flies sang it to the audience

I want to vomit, damn it
this raging, howling
this putrid pride

the wives did not see it
children did not hear it
servants closed their eyes too
buzzing flies

the music, the flute called
who is like our king?
none, living or dead
equals his strength

and our king danced
with horde of flies behind
on ancestor's grave

and we danced too
because our king danced
because we are born to dance
so we heard

Once More, a Word of Praise

The street sweeper abandoned his broom
he wants money from passers by

the clerk left the file lying
looked at the owner's purse

rogues stand with guns on the road
the police looks

the army has the government house
to have the money minting machine

priests, prophets even poets
the folks stand and admire
they want theirs

ladies and gentlemen
I thank you for these ...
... falling walls of our house

sincerely yours
... from under Lagos bridge
I do not want your money
I have only hours more to live

The Exile

Saddest of all is to leave a home
and pray never to be homesick

father shakes hands saying
hope not to see you soon
mother's embrace, tight, tears
we are sure one of us will be saved

the gods in the shrine look into void
ears wide open to hear you say
take heart, I will be back soon

their ears will soon know
future is part of the past
and the past is like a magic ring
thrown into the sea

it could be caught by a fish
the fish by a fisherman
it could join the boulders snoring on the sea bed

lost in exile
like me

Jungle Prophets

They said truth is like the sun
not to be looked in the face
and blindfolded surged
into the tunnel shouting
we have the truth

do what I say and not what I do
but what they do is in the tunnel
as dark as their hearts
chasms between sheep and shepherd

lamed hand and foot
we stuck out tongues
for the promised food and got soap-bubbles

our truth-sayers our saviours
can the wolf free the goat
from the hunter's trap

we have the answer

The Emperor and the Poet

The emperor gave the poet
a staff and a hundred sheep

a straying sheep he struck
and howled like a lion foool'

the emperor smiled
but the poet's voice rippled
long in his mind
a stone into the pond

he led the sheep to the mead
and came back with ninety nine
... ...!
unknown

the emperor laughed loud
and again placed his feet
on the head of a subject

ready to hear words
words words and words?

This is Our Life

To see
where the magician parries his wand
out of pigeon comes just pigeon

ex nihilo nihil est[1]

donkeys drive butchers
to the slaughter house
our souls shake in chain orgasms
to the beautiful teeth of our tyrant

my life is my life
is my life, is my life
my life is ...
... an egg in my palms

I decline the call
to throw stones

---

1 *nothing comes for nothing*

No Love Poem

The lies of mothers flow through the breasts
and children suck boil for milk

how loud should we shout our love
and yet feed our kegs with gun powder

let your words lie on the pulpit
the pews are empty the weather is cold

'life is this life is that life...'
ah, leave life let's live life

lean on me and feel my weight
my strength, your love, warmth

but let our love be loud enough
we shall hear sighs of our lonely neighbour

make me hear in loud beat of your heart
the whimpers of children
crippled by woes of men

now let us whisper
let us make love

Forget not the Jews

And the Jews wandered in the desert
forty years long
folk, do not forget this

when your sandals begin to wear
when the desert sun burns like hell

carve your sorrow deep into the rocks
by the wayside
let children know

but forget not to demand for Moses
that we may not become Normads

...
unwillingly

Things Fall Apart

Clay pot fell on concrete!

shambles into the jungles
potter to the pottery

gather your laughter
our man has many daughters
and sons to hoist the banners

A Human Voice

After the eruption came a storm
trees fell, houses too, earthquake
everything covered everything
I took up my flute to play a dirge

the last note, I wiped my tears

I heard a voice from the ruins
play me another note

a human voice!
I will try once again
for just a voice
this human voice!

The Asking Man

He asked in his room: who rules me?
how does he rule?

he asked before his house: why this darkness .
darkness, weeks of darkness

he asked on the street: why drought?
and many pipes and taps?

he asked in the market place
why does the neighbour beat his wife?

he asked in the prison room
why am I thrown into prison?

answer: he asked!
Why?

Words to the Mosquitoes
(13 December 1996)

You that seek to whisper
the one truth in my ears
and sing while you sting

I send you up to them
that shout and shoot to rule
teach them your song
to sleep with their sucks

I have no need of you
Mosquitoes
I live not on blood

suckers of same nozzle
live together

JOSEPH PUJO-DUTHEIL

Hell is... Beyond the Horizon

A Study of the Novel, *Beyond the Horizon*, by the Ghanaian Author Amma Darko

In her first novel, *Beyond the Horizon,*[1] Amma Darko discloses the malediction of Africans whose lives are compromised by the love of riches and materialism, affectation and illusion, especially when they resort to immorality to reach their evil aims. Kofi Awoonor describes their land thus:

> "It is a land of laughing people, very hospitable people. That's what the tourist posters proclaim. They forgot to add that pussy is cheat here, the liquor is indifferent, and the people suffer from a thousand diseases, there are beggars on the tarmac at the airport, and the leaders of government, any government, are amenable to fine financial pressures of undetermined favours."[2]

It is often nicknamed the oldest profession in the world. It has been an economic means of survival for these ladies of the evening idling in the night-clubs of Accra, Kumasi and the capitals of many poverty-stricken countries of Africa, especially since the arrival of moneyed whites and other races. Some of them, especially Ghanaian ones, have even been trying their luck in European metropolises, with a view to pecuniary enhancement. However, the situation becomes dramatically sordid when a pander holds them in bondage. That is exactly the theme of *Beyond the Horizon,* the first novel by Amma Darko, a Ghanaian writer, which was first published in German under the title *Der Verkaufte Traum*, "the traded dream".

Nowhere is Ghana mentioned in the novel. We learn that the heroine is "Ghanaian" on its back cover. This way, the narrative has a much wider scope than if it was restricted to a particular country even, though Amma Darko's criticism is primarily directed at her native country.

Rebuffed by Comfort, a conceited secretary at the Ministries because he earns too scanty a living for her propensity to show off, Akobi, a new city-dweller, bewitched by the superficial values in vogue in his country, vindictively marries Mara, an illiterate and artless girl from his native village. He saves all he can on his paltry salary to finance his future trip to Europe, which may enable him to secure Western commodities and invest on lucrative operations in Africa. Mara assents to sacrifice herself for the triumph of the future been-to's monetary strategy, which enthralls her.

Right before his departure for Europe, Comfort craftily becomes infatuated with Akobi. Once in Hamburg, he illegitimately marries Gitte, an unattractive German woman, so as to procure permission to stay in the country. He invites Comfort to Germany without anyone being the wiser and, to maintain her, as he is jealous and does not allow her to work, he makes Mara come to Germany, ignominiously turns her over to a pimp, for whom she becomes a prostitute.

Yet, Mara turns her predicament into a fruitful situation whereby she can hire a private detective to expose Akobi's perfidy and have him jailed. However, her stupendous income mesmerizes and ensnares her. Her whorishness deters her from appearing in front of her family, and we witness the heroine's slow descent into hell.

This short novel, at first sight oversimple, almost grotesque on account of its manifold exaggerations, in fact divulges the spurious values now ruling Africa, particularly Ghana.

Akobi, the main villain, is conspicuously the parody of the mania for artificiality now pervading the country. This mean messenger clerk at the Ministries is obsessed with materialism and ostentation and spurred by the acquisition of wealth, which may enable him to mimic a Western lifestyle and the ones at the top of the African social ladder. He is similar to the would-be upstarts lampooned by Ayi Kwei Armah in his second novel, *Fragments*[3]. His so-called Christian education at the pompous "Joseph Father of Jesus Roman Catholic School" makes him feel condescending. When snobbish Comfort snubs him, his pride is bitterly hurt. Hence, his marriage with Mara has to be understood as a reprisal. In her, he finds someone he can control in order to reach his aims. Belittled because of his low social status, he uses all his power to abuse and disparage his wife and have his social revenge by getting rich. In Africa, he uses vile methods. In Europe, his means are still more disgraceful and loathsome.

This heartless and unloving husband despises his wife, who is a villager. He is a self-centered covetous churl. A born tyrant, he uses, to good advantage, the tradition of the dutiful wife, turns her into a submissive drudge, coercing her into living in ghastly and foul conditions, beating and overpowering her, extorting from her part of her dowry, her property, inheritance and earnings. He is a steel-hearted and diabolical schemer. Bent as he is on aping his superiors' way of life, affluence and showiness, he becomes the fanatical and satanic caricature of the idea he embodies - foppery and the devotion to things. Amid his machine-like indifferent iciness and his utilitarian flintiness, his sly and wry smile and his teeth-cleaning are the expression of his contented greed and devilish victory, as is the African gorilla grin of Osey, his partner. Mara clearly falls a prey to her husband's voraciousness.

He cheats everyone, including his own family, the whole village of Naka, his two wives. He bribes influential clerks to

hasten his manoeuvres, manipulates Blacks and Whites alike, who are puppets in his iron hands and he scorns all.

Before his departure, he dreams of megalomaniac projects. Once in Europe, he gives them up. The prestige of his new status of "been-to" shows off in his new name, Cobby ("that sounds more civilised"; "It's more hip"[4]), in his neat Western attire and excess of cheap perfume. He becomes "paranoid" about his possessions. Of course, the mythical car is the paramount element of this hysterical fetishism.

With Gitte, Akobi-Cobby bridges the gap that separates him from an African Minister: "between you and the Minister or doctor only his English wife separated you" (p 36). However only a European salary can help him compete with an African Minister and only Black harlotry, which yields good profits in Europe can help him support well-named Comfort in Hamburg. This way, candid Mara is made to slave immorally for Comfort's rent in Germany and the renovation of her native house in Africa! The exaggeration is meant to denounce the outrageousness of the procedure.

Akobi's roguery is the patent censure of the perverted demagoguery that has seized his country. The success of this obsessed knave depends on the innocence and gullibility of those around him. Mara is this overt correlate of candour and trustfulness.

Mara is a "naive Ghanaian village girl", as the back cover puts it. She accepts suffering as something normal. She would go to any lengths to do a woman's duty, just to be a woman. Tradition, through her mother, has taught her that to "respect, obey and worship" (p. 13) her husband is a wife's duty. Once chosen by her father to be Akobi's spouse, she devotes her entire self to that role, though Akobi is no genuine spouse at all. Her eyes are dazzled by veneration:

"I probably have eyes that see blue" (p.14).

Her submissiveness may be regarded as an attempt to reform urban morals through tradition. But Akobi is no husband to let himself soften or make amends. Her education is unmistakably unadapted to deceptive urban life.

In her self-criticism, Mara realizes she needs her husband's domination to exist even though she abhors it. After Akobi's departure to Europe without honouring his wife's lavish and devotedly prepared last meal and without even a decent farewell, she poignantly hug's Akobi's towel, weeping in it, the very towel that occasioned many a beating: the slave is subdued by the power of her torturer who has made her entirely dependent.

Mama Kiosk, Mara's surrogate mother in the city and her awakener, is at the same time one of the characters the narrator uses to inform the reader about the main protagonist's foibles and their causes. She enlightens the green heroine on herself. She warns her about the dangers of the city but Mara does not take her experienced advice into account and consequently goes short of reference marks to live out of harm's way in this alien world.

One of the weaknesses of Africa that the author condemns in Mara is vanity and the false belief that wealth grants social prestige. Mara's commercial success in the city entrances her, gives her self-assurance and power - she is able to drug her husband to sleep - and makes her feel self-important. She becomes literally like her husband, a prisoner of money. Enraptured by Akobi's materialistic dream, she sees in him a Don Juan, the glorious father of her son.

Her first fallacy is not to trust her personality - though it is not conspicuously delineated, to renounce ancestral values, though they are not markedly defined either, and to surmise that a Western bearing will make her look less primitive, more civilized. In a world in which only make-believe counts instead of personal and social values, she wrongly tries to challenge Comfort from the outside by turning into a modern-looking "Afro-combed" woman,

wearing a red dress and summer sandals. In like manner, instead of feeling proud of her cultural identity when arriving in Europe, she dons typical Western clothes as if to negate her origins. Her seamstress teacher naively offers her two red dresses, which will soon make an easier prey of her.

She proudly dreams of being able to look at passers-by plodding along the road while she enjoys a ride in her private car in her native Ghana. Yet, what a pitiful demeanour she shows at the back of Akobi's "gleaming metallic blue Honda Accord" (p.94) in Germany!

"Infected with city disease" (p.47), Mara disclaims village life - though she never distinctly reveals its foundations, she starts selling sweets and cigarettes in front of cinema houses:

> "I considered it to be more civilized than hawking eggs and groundnuts. In short, more compatible with the new me I had set out to be." (p.47)

Nevertheless, in her self-analysis, she finds out this change can only be simulation and mere show:

"I, illiterate Mara, had turned into a modern woman, body and soul; a caricature pseudo-Euro-transformation that brought with it its caricature pseudo-high feel. I felt a new me" (p.55).

Once in Europe, Mara is culturally and socially puzzled because she lacks guide-marks. She is all the more quickly doomed as she thinks that the liberality of Western practices endorse safe values and reliable morals.

The root of Mara's predicament is her original poverty: her marriage is prescribed by money, which her father misuses to remarry: she is "sold" to Akobi's father; thus she belongs to his son before being at Pee's mercy and eventually falling into the clutches of another pimp, Oves, whose emblem is a feline, a symbol of trickery.

Mara's identity is shattered and her few inherited principles torn down. In Europe, Akobi makes her feel beneath contempt and

disreputable. Her clients ask her to play roles, and hence, to have a split personality. She is overused, worn out and reduced to a rag. Feeling contemptible and worthless, she sinks into abdication and compliance. Her words "Once a prostitute, always a prostitute. The stamp would never leave me" (p. 119), echoes Tess's "once victim, always victim - that's the law!" in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy.[5]

Money, foully and yet harshly earned ironically frees her from Akobi's claws both financially and administratively as she becomes a free woman in Germany thanks to her handsomely bought bogus marriage. She turns her slave situation into an advantage to grow even wealthier. She even consents to suffer and be physically deformed for money.

Amma Darko's short novel is an analysis of the shortcomings of African society and its causes. She first accuses traditional society of being corrupt: the lascivious village chief weds one of Akobi's sisters as seventh wife, which is wrongly regarded as a sign of honour by the bride's family. He is obviously not a good example for society and its children.

Customary religion is also under attack because it is debased and unsuitable. The medicine man, whose protection Mara requires, is both crooked and lecherous. Rites are powerless to protect Mara in Europe. They simply do not operate any more. The gods no longer give ear to people's prayers. Tradition is unsuited to a type of life in which yesterday's ideals have collapsed, and everything seems to be all astray and warped. Mara and Akobi's wedding rites are performed in the absence of Akobi, who has symbolically returned to town, whereas he specially comes from the capital to his son's outdooring ceremony in order to embezzle all the gifts. People and their acts are bereft of their sacredness. Furthermore, Akobi sells a sculpture offered to Mara by her mother for her protection: a value from the past is metaphorically nullified and bartered for the treacherous monetary worth.

Superstition is also criticized as sterile. Traditional education and morals are unfit for a perverted modern urban life. Embittered by her victimization, Mara rejects her mother's education and principles, which have not been able to forestall her undoing and which recommend no answer to the fanaticism of materialism and sham, leading to vice and immorality.

"If the gods of Naka intended me to live by them, they should have made sure I was married to a man who loved me and who appreciated the values I was brought up with" (p.131).

Mara's words re-echo Tess's condemnation of her parent's education: "it is a shame for parents to bring up their girls in such dangerous ignorance of the gins and nets that the wicked may set for them" (Tess, 394).

Tess and Mara share the same fate. Both heroines have proud, needy, alcoholic fathers who force vicious men on them. Both are innocent, immature, tractable puppets. Like Mara, Tess bemoans useless ancestors and harbours suspicions about a "beneficent Power" (Tess, 174) that might take her under his wing. After their fall, shame and guilt beset their conscience, upset their psyche and force them to carry their cross across a vale of tears.

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Christian education is also denounced. Akobi's instruction was financed by death: his father, an undertaker who unscrupulously thrives on other people's deaths, took advantage of several cholera casualties in the village to try to capitalize on a supposedly superior type of tuition. With Akobi's departure to Europe, his native village is ironically described as "God's chosen land, the people of Naka, his chosen people" (p.39). Mara bitterly disregards Christian religion as she considers it unfitting.

Moral turpitude already exists in village life. Her father's covetousness is at the incipience of Mara's perdition. This dipsomaniac is recurrently in debt and his daughter's dowry helps

him not only shamefully pay off his debts but also sordidly marry another wife.

Akobi's and Mara's fathers are portrayed as boastful. Akobi's father presents his son with his trip money on a brightly embroidered tray as he is expected to bring honour to Naka.

Ghanaian city life lacks safe guide-marks. People are thoughtless and featherbrained. They are at the mercy of fads, fantasies and whims. No foundations are laid with certainty. Everything wavers on inconsistency and mutability. Women's garish imitation of Western fashion is especially reproved by the author.

Men are portrayed as selfish tricksters, pleasure-seekers and despots. Eroticism, lewdness and sentimentalism have superseded genuine love. Sexuality in the novel is a channel of perversion, cynicism and hegemony. Akobi's Christian education failed to teach him the basics of true love. In this work, the aim of sexual intercourse is not to enable a person to be but to have. Akobi owns his wife, just as Vivian is Osey's property. Through her prostitution, Mara finances her husband's follies. Sexuality does not fulfill a human being, body and soul, but fills bank accounts. It does not consist in giving but in crippling. Sex does not provide joy or life: Akobi does not want to father children with Mara or Gitte; neither does Osey with Vivian.

Mara's first pregnancy is one of the tokens of the deviation of African values. A birth is conventionally a sign of fertility, an honour for the family. Yet it grieves selfish Akobi as it thwarts his pecuniary schemes.

Fornication and prostitution cause traumas, suffering, and soon, death. Vice-ridden wantonness unmistakably stands out as a criticism of the rottenness of Africa's city life.

Prosperity is wrongly associated with honour and social prominence. Opulence, appearances and imitation are thought to be the prime values of life. In this new state of affairs, things are idols

and golden calves acquired for display, not for their function. Symbolically, this frenzy for earthly possessions is sure to prove deadly: "the car was his fetish. He worshipped it like his father worshipped his coffins" (p.92).

Beings are objects, which are used, controlled and exploited to own things. Having and showing off are more important than being. Vivian, Mara's double, is meant to highlight Mara's thing-status. Like her, she is conditioned by her owner, that is her spouse, to surrender and comply.

African society demands financial success from a been-to. As Vivian says, if he returns "empty-handed" (p.89), he will be considered as a "born failure" (p.77). As unemployment is rife in Europe, Africans can only have menial jobs there. They have difficulties miming the Western way of life and therefore, their financial success can be nothing but dishonest: "We must find the money somehow, fair or foul", says Osey (p.77).

The sullied money of prostitution has links with outlawed drugs all along the novel. Vivian's G.I. has "got a big taste for hashish. ... Only a whore's income can finance that" (p.130).

In this world based on money, bribery is rampant. If you are unlucky enough to be a female, then sexual pressure is the rule.

Flouting their traditions, male Africans in Europe marry for convenience so as to be allowed to stay on that continent while females buy themselves bogus marriages, mainly with homosexuals, who need cash for their drug addiction.

All the dissolute characters of the novel understand that they infringe probity. On the day that he prostitutes his wife, Akobi makes himself drunk with vodka out of weakness and cowardice. Osey provocatively tells Mara that African prostitutes are "profanely rich" in "the Lord's own anointed street of Hamburg", where "the cream of Germany's Mary Magdalenes" solicit potential clients (p.68). And Osey adds: "There ain't no Messiah's feet in this whole wide world you cannot wash!" (p.69). Kaye,

Mara's first pimp's wife is aware of her "sins" (p.118); Mara herself is "fast sinking into a place hotter than hell" (p.139), "through the back doors of heaven" (p.131), which is the very antithesis of the promised paradise she hoped for when she boarded her plane for Europe. Her trial is the reiteration of the tragedy of her sister, now "a wreck" (p.4), and on whom her father had also bestowed "a good man" (p.4).

Ashamed of the income she viciously earns, Mara is a pathetic and heart-breaking figure, just like Vivian, who has thoughtlessly fallen into the same snare and whose idea of happiness is utterly distorted:

> "I got Marvin" (an American G.I. in Germany), I got my papers, I got hashish and I got a profession that I can practise in every corner of the world. Can you give me a better formula for happiness?" (p.130)

Mara has a burdened conscience and her soul is saddened:

> "this coldness I feel does not grip my body so much as it does my soul. It's deep inside me that feels this chilliness, from the defected soul my body harbours, a soul grown old from too much use of its shelters" (p.1).

She feels so much like "garbage" (p.3) and "rot" (p. 31), "down to the marrow of my bones" (p. 139), that reclusion is the only solution to avoid public recrimination, especially from her family. The physical and mental torture that she freely withstands requires her to swallow up "pain killers and tranquillisers" (p.120). She becomes hooked on drugs so as to soothe her pain, her misery and the unbearable seclusion resulting from her bondage.

Only repentance could save Mara, or at least, alleviate her guilty conscience. But the god she prays to is so remote that she doubts he may hear her request and fulfill her beseechment. He is the "father of the white man's God and of the gods of the Moslems and the Asians and all" (p.105). In African cosmogony, the supreme being is indeed so far above the lesser gods and the creatures of the earth that he is hardly interested in human affairs.

In primitive religion, people more easily invoke the gods present in their natural environment for their daily protection.

Distressed by the sinful profits she dedicates to her family, Mara feels like a "sacrificial lamb" (p.115). She offers herself as a sacrifice on the altar of money. Moreover, she divulges that her agony is "crucifying" (p.120). Yet the cross she willingly chooses to be crucified on is Mammon's.

Kaye, a double of Mara, whom she sheds light upon, undergoes the same ordeal:

> "If they (my people back home) knew the truth and then took no action, not wanting to forfeit the luxuries they enjoy at my expense, they would indirectly become a party to my sins" (p.118).

Mara tries to redeem herself by sending her winnings to her two sons and her family:

> "Material things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them" (p.140).

They, in their turn, become cankered by Western consumer goods, the very plague that is at the origin of her curse.

If, for Mara, God is inaccessible, her lord is Oves, a procurer: he is "my lord, my master" (p.3). Although she feels like "his pawn, his slave and his property" (p.3), she chooses him with her own free will: the predilection for Mammon rather than God is quite revealing.

Soul-stirring though the story may be, it has nonetheless a few inconsistencies. Mara's ingenuousness, submission and abdication are vital for the plot but artificial. Her servility and her need for subjugation sometimes occasion melodramatics and even bathos that may jeopardize the quality and worth of the novel and threaten to turn it into a penny novelette. Her acceptance of fate and of the blackmail of the sex video - in which she considers herself a co-partner in an orgy instead of the victim of a rape - are frankly stretched.

The novel consists in the awakening of the heroine's consciousness. She evolves from total village candour to a sharp insight into the working of African and European urban systems. This gradual awareness is a requirement to preserve suspense. *Beyond the Horizon* is a first-person narrative, falling into fifteen chapters, in which Mara, who takes part in the story, is a homodiegetic narrator. In the first part of Chapter One (pp. 1-3), she writes about her present situation From this point to the third part of Chapter Fifteen (pp. 3 -138 : "I remember the day clearly..."), an external analepsis conjures up Mara's past. The last part of Chapter Fifteen (pp.138-140): "That was a year ago now...") takes the reader back to the present time after a one-year ellipsis.

As far as narrative levels are concerned, Mara's status as a narrator at a diegetic level, at the very beginning, is virtually that of an extra-diegetic narrator, who is superior to the story she narrates and is fully aware of her dilemma. Then in the long external analepsis in which the narration returns to the past, her position is that of an intradiegetic ignorant narrator since she is in the story she narrates; this hypodiegetic level offers an explanation of the diegetic one. As her comprehension of her fate progresses, so does her position from an intradiegetic to an almost extradiegetic narrator. Therefore, if Mara's benightedness is essential for the plot, the fact of being aware of her final quandary in the first page of the novel is an outstanding strategy to arouse the reader's expectation.

Moreover, Mara's martyrdom is presented in the text through internal focalisation, which is inside the represented events. Mara is the character-focaliser through whose eyes we see her tragedy happen. Mara-narrator can only tell us what Mara-character-focaliser perceives at a particular moment.

From this angle of vision, the characters around Mara are seen or focalised from without. The perceptions of Mara-internal

focaliser are restricted to the outward presentation of the facalised. Akobi's feelings, thoughts, odious motivations and crooked actions remain cryptic. To maintain excitement and uncertainty, it is vital that Mara should not fathom her oppressor's mind. In addition, Akobi rarely speaks to his wife so as not to betray his demonic intrigue, which appears to be stained in the course of time. Being within the represented world, Mara cannot know everything about it: she has a restricted knowledge of people, events, space and time. That is why she is so easily cozened, first when she weds Akobi, secondly when she arrives in the city, finally when she reaches Europe.

Nevertheless, as the darkness of ignorance is clearing little by little, Mara-narrator-focaliser becomes the vehicle of focalisation. The private detective, whose aid she requests, in particular helps her change her facets of focalisation. Her knowledge of the represented world becomes unrestricted. As far as time is concerned, she commands all the temporal dimension of the story, which allows her to start her narrative in the present in external focalisation and afterwards to recollect her past: thanks to the external analepsis that comprises fifteen chapters.

To countervail Mara's ignorance, the author needs to resort to other characters to help the reader penetrate the story. Mama Kiosk, Vivian and Kaye unravel the truth about Mara's situation. Osey, a lewd instigator and Akobi's partner in vice, has to forsake his lust for some time while he becomes the author's mouthpiece and gives an account of the condition of Blacks in Germany.

Equally unnatural are Akobi's villainy, fiendishness and grim tyranny. In fact, he is a static character, constructed around a dominant trait and he is the explicit caricature of the artificial glitter that the author means to denounce. The exaggeration of his delinquency corresponds to a magnification of the vices of society. This overstatement ultimately impairs the narrative despite an infrequent appeal to humour.

The omnipresence of scenes of sexual deviation and erotomania play the same role: they overemphasize the moral decadence of the society. They are deliberately offensive and their multiplicity eventually mars the grandeur and dignity of the novel.

This short novel points out the infirmities of African - in particular Ghanaian - society today. It brings to light the curse that it imposes on itself by wishing to reach a Western lifestyle through Machiavellian means. It chronicles the tragedy of Africans who naively and childishly trust shallow foreign values and who are once again enslaved or colonized, but this time by the love of affluence and affectation.

The narrative boldly uncovers all the subterfuges used for this purpose. These machinations are so damnable and insufferable at times that, once the reading is over, the reader urgently feels the need for potent purification rites.

Notes

1. A. Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, Heinemann, 1995
2. K. Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother...*, Heinemann,1972, p.114
3. A. K. Armar, *Fragments*, Heinemann, 1974.
4. A. Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p.66.
5. T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* Penguin English Library, 1978, p.411.

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ONUORA OSSIE ENEKWE

Interview With Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o
Photo: Ossie Enekwe

Enekwe: Anybody who is familiar with your work will not fail to notice that you have been consistently concerned about the condition of people in Kenya: one, the impact of colonialism, the advent or coming of the white man; two, the economic exploitation of Africans by Europeans; three, the economic exploitation of Africans by Africans. What is your attitude to your work before *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*?

Ngugi: I have been concerned with imperialism in Kenya in its two stages: the colonial and the neo-colonial. Imperialism is a total phenomenon - an economic, a political and a cultural phenomenon. So, its impact on the people tends to be all embracing. So, we can say that the struggle against imperialism is also total: it's economic, it's political and it is also cultural. Writing by Africans then need to be seen in that context. I would say that my earlier work like *The River Between* tended to be

a bit more concerned with the cultural aspect of imperialism but to the near exclusion of economic aspects. And in *A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood* and in my latest work, I try to see imperialism in all its aspects - economic, political and cultural, and see all the aspects of the struggle against the same.

Enekwe: What do you think you achieved in your first novels *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*?

Ngugi: Well, the struggles against cultural imperialism are very important, since they tend to deal with the liberation of the mind, liberation of the soul, if you like. So, any novel that contributes, even a bit, towards that cultural struggle is important. *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* did contribute their bit towards an appreciation of this struggle against cultural imperialism. However, *The River Between* tends to exclude economic and political factors. This contributes to its weakness. The world-view in the novel is idealistic. It does not see sufficiently that values are rooted in political and economic realities.

Enekwe: Could you, then, say that *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* are reflecting a new ideological perspective?

Ngugi: There is a definite shift in the two novels, particularly in *Petals of Blood.* I consider *A Grain of Wheat* to be a transitional novel in the ideological sense. It stands between my two early novels (*The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*) and my later works, like *Petals of Blood* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,* I feel that

there is a shift of emphasis in the sense that I tried to look at the different aspects of the African journey of emancipation from slavery, colonialism to neo-colonialism. There is, for instance in *Petals of Blood*, an examination of the class structure in African societies and the African societies and the class struggles that are inherent in that kind of structure. Now my previous works rarely show the class character of African societies.

Enekwe: How did you get to this stage?

Ngugi: My involvement with the conditions in Kenya, particularly in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi. I was lucky to be in a department which had brilliant scholars who were continually asking themselves about the relevance of literature to life and particularly to the Kenyan situation. In the course of my stay in that department, we collectively tried to work out how the study of literature could be made more relevant to the Kenyan situation. We tried to devise a new syllabus of literature for the University and for the schools in Kenya. Again, in asking ourselves questions about the relevance of literature to life, we held public lectures at the University of Nairobi and these lectures were very useful because of the types of debates and discussions generated. Again, still in the pursuit of that objective of 'Making Literature Relevant to Life', we established the *University of Nairobi Free Public Theater*, which travelled all over the country during the long vacation. So, I would say that my involvement in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi was very

important in my own ideological development.

Enekwe: In *Petals of Blood*, we come across a young lawyer, a man of ideas, who seems to be an ideologue of the group. He articulates the ideas of the revolution. Considering what happened in Kenya at the time (or before) you wrote *Petals of Blood*, are the activities of the lawyer and the young people in the book similar to what you have in Kenya? Do they reflect the situation in Kenya?

Ngugi: Yes, the lawyer's views do reflect the ideological position of a certain class. Kenya is a class structured society with different classes standing in different positions vis-à-vis the forces of production and vis-à-vis the forces of imperialism. There is the comprador bourgeoisie that actively collaborates with foreign economic interests. There is also the national bourgeoisie, which is very tiny, very rudimentary. By this I mean, that class of Kenyans that try to operate a national capitalism. I don't think that foreign capital will ever allow for a liberated national capitalism. Then there is a petty-bourgeois class in Kenya, comprising small traders, farmers, teachers, etc. And finally, peasants and workers. These classes are basically economic, but they do have their ideological reflections. They, that is, these classes, have their ideological spokesmen. In other words, there is an ideological position that corresponds to the economic position of each class. I would say that the lawyer's position represents, not necessarily the ideological mind of the working class, but patriotic nationalism of a national bourgeoisie.

Enekwe: We don't know how you came about the character of Wanja. We think she is a very powerful person and we see such a character in *God's Bits of Wood* by Sembene Ousmane. They are of the same upbringing and similar experience. Were you trying to create that character (Wanja) deliberately or were you trying to portray what could have happened? Did you want this character to carry some message?

Ngugi: Well, I have always been interested in the position of women in Africa. I feel that we can never talk of total liberation of Africa unless the woman is also completely liberated; that the success of our liberation should be measured by the extent to which the African woman is liberated. I am interested in the women struggles and in the position that the Kenyan woman occupy in the history of our country. One of our earliest nationalist leaders was in fact a woman Mekatilili a Giriama from the coastal parts of Kenya. She organised coastal nationalities in a struggle against the British occupation of Kenya in the early part of this century. She was old - about sixty years old or more - but she organised the youth, gave them the oath of unity. She armed them and they started fighting against the British. Later, she was arrested and imprisoned many, many miles from her home area. She escaped from prison and walked all the way about three hundred miles back to her people to continue the struggle. In 1924, Harry Thuku who was then the leader of the working class in Kenya was detained without trial by the British. It was a woman, Mary Nyanjiru Muthon, who organised a demonstration demanding his release.

It turned out to be one of the biggest demonstrations that had ever been seen in Kenya. Demonstrators marched to the government house demanding the release of their leader. Nyanjiru was the first to be shot by the British along with a hundred and fifty other workers. In the fifties, again, the Kenyan woman played a very important role in the kitchen, in the forest, feeding the guerrillas and even in fighting. Some of the fiercest guerrilla fighters among the Mau Mau were women. Some were sent to the detention camps, others to ordinary prisons and so on. The Kenyan woman has played a very very important role in Kenyan history. And a novelist cannot ignore this particular role.

Enekwe: In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, what you are trying to do is to create the role of woman as not only the mother, but also a leading figure in the revolution. I think that is a very important play. Can you please say a few words about the role of the woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,* especially in relation to the girl and the boy?

Ngugi: Well, as you know, I wrote this play together with Micere Mugo, a colleague in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi. Now, and we try also to show the need for total liberation. We show the role of the Kenyan woman in Kenyan history. The woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is important in the sense that she carries a revolutionary consciousness. She can see much more than the boy and the girl can see. In the forest, she can see a bit more than some of the other guerrillas can see. So, she is important in the play as a carrier, if you like, of this revolutionary

consciousness.

Enekwe: Can you compare Wanja to this woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi?*

Ngugi: Well, I'd say they are different. The woman in *Dedan Kimathi* is much more conscious of her political role, much more conscious of the need for a revolutionary change in Kenyan society. I'd say that Wanja is not as politically conscious as this particular woman in the play. Wanja has revolutionary energy, without a revolutionary consciousness. I think this is the difference in the two.

Enekwe: So what you are saying is that Wanja has a potential for a revolutionary role through experience. How could she develop to become like the woman?

Ngugi: It is a potentiality, of course. In that sense, I am more concerned with the waste of women in a neo-colonial society. Their energy is often imprisoned, if you like, between the bed and the kitchen. Society is the loser for imprisoning or confining women to that position. Take it this way, since women form half of the population of the country, if you imprison their total abilities, you are infact imprisoning the abilities of the population as a whole.

Enekwe: It seems that the main achievement of the woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is inculcating revolutionary awareness in the young people, and also in unifying the people; it appears that you in fact introduced her symbolically as a kind of Mary in the trial of Jesus

Christ. Did you want to use the figure of Mary as a kind of symbol here?

Ngugi: We were not conscious of the parallel. I didn't see that parallel myself, but of course, another reader may well see it. It does not mean that the parallel is not there. But we were not conscious of it in writing the play. The play carries our belief that Kenya and Africa would be liberated the time African women become fully politically conscious. The moment they become politically conscious, then things will happen in Africa. And the woman figure is a symbol for these potentialities in the Kenyan and African women.

Enekwe: You seem to be using the Bible in your writing, even in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. It appears that you see the trial as a parody of the trial Jesus underwent.

Ngugi: As I said before, we were not very conscious of these parallels. Now, about the Biblical references in my works, this is not accidental, because for a long time as a child, the Bible was my only literature. The Bible is the one book which is available in nearly all the African languages. It is a common literary heritage. And so, it is quite natural that if I want to make references which will be recognized, I will go to the Bible. I make the same kind of use of traditional stories, proverbs, riddles, etc. In other words, the Bible is part and parcel of the literary framework within which I have been writing.

Enekwe: So that explains why in every book you have written there are quotes from the Bible. But one can see a

definite shift in your attitude to the Bible as from *A Grain of Wheat,* and definitely, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In the latter, for example, you consistently undercut certain ideas in the Bible. Does this correspond to the shift in your ideological position?

Ngugi: Yes, it's definitely part of this shift that we talked about earlier. Obviously my recent works have become more critical, not of the Bible, but of Christianity as a whole. So, you are quite right, Christianity is much more critically examined in *Petals of Blood* than it was, let's say, in *The River Between.* Even in *A Grain of Wheat*, I think, Christianity is not held in an uncritical light.

Enekwe: So what exactly is your response to Christianity right now in relation to the whole struggle?

Ngugi: Well, in all my writings, especially in *Homecoming*, I have been very critical of the role that Christianity has played in the colonisation of the African people. I have taken the position that Christianity was part and parcel of cultural imperialism. Even at a very simple level of symbolism, we can see how Christianity weakened African people. If you look at the Christian imagery of God and Satan, as the devil is seen in terms of blackness. So in pictures in most churches God was displayed as being white; angels were white and of course, people who went to heaven eventually wore white robes of purity. The devils and their angels wear black. African people then were seen as sons of Ham who were cut away from God. African Christians were made to sing songs like: *Wash me Redeemer, I Shall Be Whiter Than Snow.* Quite apart from that, the Bible

was used by the missionaries to preach the doctrine of non-violence, the doctrine of turn the other cheek once the other cheek has been hit by your enemy, the doctrine of giving your enemy the inner garment after he has already taken your outer garment; the doctrine, if you like, of your giving Caesar things that are Caesar's, etc. These meant colonial Caesar, etc. You can see that some of these doctrines are designed to weaken African people in the face of imperialist exploitation and oppression. Christianity and the Bible were part and parcel of the doctrine of pacification of the primitive tribes of lower Africa. This doctrine of non-violence is a contrast to the doctrine of struggle, of resistance to foreign aggression, foreign exploitation and foreign occupation of our people's country.

Enekwe: You just mentioned the pacification of the primitive tribes and immediately one remembered Captain Winterbottom in Chinua Achebe's book. I also see Winterbottom in *Kimathi* and Mr. Smith too. Is this part of or a continuation of the joke as we see Winterbottom, one of the British soldiers tried in *Dedan Kimathi*?

Ngugi: Well, yes, it is a continuation of the joke. It is a very appropriate name for this category of people. It is also a kind of intertextual dialogue with Achebe's work.

Enekwe: Also, is the Smith there in a way related to the Smith in *Arrow of God*?

Ngugi: Novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* have now become part of our common heritage. Borrowing

the name consciously or unconsciously is part of the intertextual communication.

Enekwe: We suppose you would place *The Black Hermit* in the same group as your early works, *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*, in terms of their attitude to revolution?

Ngugi: Yes, that play belongs to that period, the period of *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child.* I would say that the play is not as politically clear as, let's say, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* or in plays in Gikuyu language. The ideological position in *The Black Hermit* is a bit hazy; it is misty; it is not clear and is one of the shortcomings of that particular play.

Enekwe: Apart from the ideological problem in *The Black Hermit*, what other problems do you find in the play? For instance, the problem of structure?

Ngugi: It has got some weaknesses. As you know, it's one of my earliest plays and I was then not as much involved in the theatre as I have come to be. There are a lot of weaknesses in structure, in characterization, in the whole dramatic movement of the play. But remember, ideological mistiness and haziness can also ruin the structure of a play or a novel. It is this ideological haziness or mistiness in certain levels that weakens the play.

Enekwe: So what you are saying is that in fact, it is not possible to write a play that is structurally correct unless the idea is also correct?

Ngugi: The idea and the tone have to be clear. The clarity of idea, or clarity of content often brings about the clarity of structure. But whenever the central idea is not clear, it leads to the general unclarity of content and structure.

Enekwe: So in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,* this problem has been dealt with as it is essentially a very ideological work. What you achieve there is to deal with the ideological question more conclusively and more effectively. We refer to some of the problems you have been talking about in other works. Even though it's a short script, you have succeeded in bringing the whole problem to life. Would this be an accurate assessment?

Ngugi: Yes: I would say that the central ideas in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are much more clear than in the previous plays. But remember that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was a work of two hands, two minds.

Enekwe: You talked about the theatre group that moved round the country in Kenya, the one that travelled from your department in the University. What did you learn from those tours, from the people?

Ngugi: The group was called the *University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre.* I was not myself individually part of the travelling troupe. That is, I did not travel with it, but it was part of our departmental programme. It was led by teachers like John Rugando and Waigwo who were involved in theatre in the department. This '*Free Travelling Theatre'* was instrumental in my later interest in having a theatre based in villages. In other

words, some of us came to the conclusion that while the travelling troupe was important, theatre could never take root in Kenya unless it was based in the villages and towns with the people themselves writing their own scripts and performing them themselves. It is this kind of idea that was behind the setting up of 'Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre', based in a village called Kamiriithu in Limuri that is twenty miles from Nairobi. Members had been present at some performances of the *University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre*. And they were the ones who asked for a play to perform. This resulted in my collaboration with Ngugi Wa Miri in the writing of a play in Gikuyu called *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. The play was written in 1977 and performed the same year for these people in the same village. The standard of performance was very high indeed. All the actors were peasants and workers of the area. The impact they made on the people was also very significant indeed. Peasants and workers would travel for miles and miles to come and see the play. Some would hire buses, others public transport to come and see the play which was obviously reflecting their own history, their own lives. You, of course, know that the play was later stopped by the Kenyan authorities and I was subsequently detained in prison without trial.

Enekwe: Would you like to tell me what happened in the night or day of performance of the *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. How did the audience respond?

Ngugi: As I said, the audience was very enthusiastic. Some of them had followed the production from the initial

stages of rehearsal right through the formal presentation. They were part of the play.

Enekwe: You mean the peasants who were not directly involved with the acting.

Ngugi: They were involved in everything. Yes, they added to the script. The production had done a number of things which were a departure from tradition. For instance, the readings were all open to the public. The selection of actors again was done in the open. So, right from the beginning, we had audiences. And the audiences grew with the growth of the production. And still, many of them later came in as part of the fee paying crowd. The performances reflected an ever increasing audience. The people who came to see the play were growing day in day out. And anybody who had seen the play before would still come to see the play a second, third, fourth, or fifth time. I know some who were with the play right through all the rehearsals and right through all the performances. So, these were anticipating lines from actors. They knew the whole play by heart and they knew what the actor was going to say. If an actor missed his lines, they would correct him. By the way, the rehearsals and the performances were so arranged as to keep in line with the rhythm of life in the village. That is, the rehearsals took into account the working pattern of the peasants and workers. The rehearsals were only done in those periods when these workers were not going to be all that busy in their homes. The formal performances, for instance, were never done at night. They were done in daytime, mostly in the afternoons of Sundays and Saturdays, but towards the

end, you could find all the performances on Sundays only. The theatre was open, of course, in the heart of the village and incidentally the whole theatre with the stage was built by the people themselves.

Enekwe: What type of structure did they construct?

Ngugi: They had a raised stage, but it had no curtains or roof. Behind the stage, there were rooms where the actors could change their dresses, etc. There were no walls separating the actors from the audience. The audience could see the actors coming in or getting out of stage. They had built their seats for the audience. The type of seats you see in a stadium so that people who sit in front would not obstruct the view of those sitting at the back.

Enekwe: How would you describe the response of the audience during the performance?

Ngugi: Very, very enthusiastic. I can remember a number of times when the rain fell, but instead of going to their homes, people sat back or sheltered themselves in nearby huts to wait for the rain to subside. The actors would rush back to the stage, and the whole audience would return to their seats to see the continuation of the play. So even during the formal performances, when they were paying entrance fees, the audience was still very very enthusiastic. And as I said. the audiences came from afar and not only the peasants and workers from the village, but people also trekked from distances of well over a hundred miles to come and see the play. They came on foot, in hired buses, etc.

Enekwe: What exactly do you think made them do so?

Ngugi: As I said, the play correctly reflected their history and their lives. And for the first time, the peasants and the workers could see themselves reflected on the stage, not in a negative light, but in a positive manner. They saw themselves being portrayed as the true makers of history which, of course, they are. So I would say that the content was very important in eliciting this kind of response, as well as the standard of performance. Some people, critics, doubted whether these were really peasants. They thought that these were university students dressed like village people, which of course was ridiculous and showed contempt for the working people. But, the standard of performance was extremely high and nothing like it had ever been seen on the Kenyan stage.

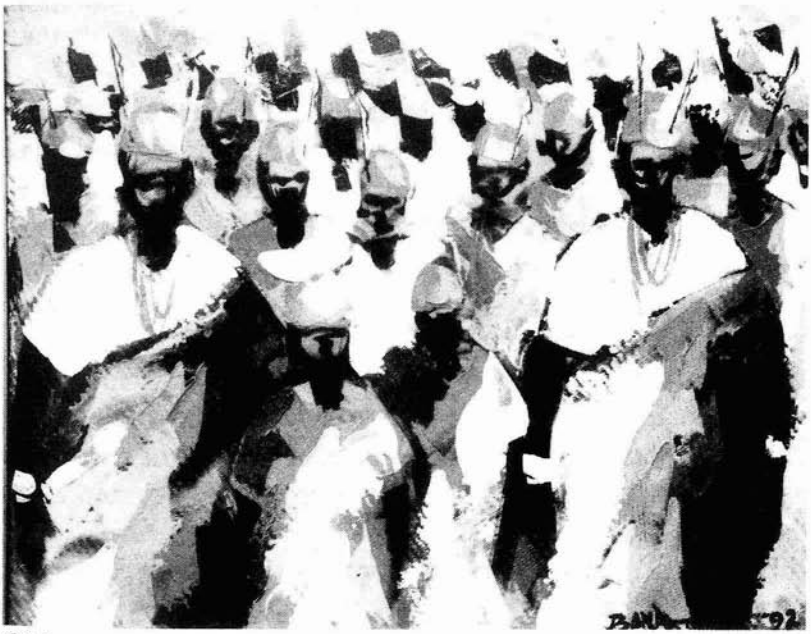
Enekwe: Did this response spill over into the community in terms of discussions, reactions, etc?

Ngugi: Definitely, yes. We started receiving delegations from other villages for advice on how they too could start similar ventures in their own communities. So the play had an impact and effect on people in and beyond the borders of the immediate community.

Enekwe: When you were detained, did these people continue to perform?

Ngugi: Their morale was very depressed by my detention. As I told you, the license to perform the play was stopped by the government. So these people could not continue

with the play. What they did, was to continue with their singing. When I came from detention, a year later, I found that they had been composing when I was in detention in the Maximum security jail.



Ofala

Book Review

TITLE: *Dead Men Don't Pay Tax*
AUTHOR: Barry Chukwujekwu Eneh
PUBLISHER: The Queen's Publications

A dead man is angry. Someone stepped on his toes. This dead man is very vocal. He does not mince words. He tells his creditor that he is dead and 'dead men don't pay tax' (p.45). Whoever is ready to laugh in spite of this distressed environment of ours, should glance through the pages of this book of jokes, the first of its kind, as Ossie Enekwe rightly observes in the Foreward. It is a compendium of African attempts to grapple with the excruciating hardships of life, to save what should not balk in the face of the vicissitudes of life: the cheering spirit.

And thus a child begins to teach its father the good lesson in geography. The earth rotates (p.47). He demonstrates this teaching on the dish containing two unequal pieces of meat. The child rotates the dish allowing the bigger piece of meat to come to his side. And there the rotation stops. And the father now becoming wiser and more learned goes on with the teaching. 'Yes, my son, but the earth never stops rotation.'

Samuel Beckett, one of the literary giants that have made us realise how absurd our life is, would have certainly felt very pleased to have this little book of jokes to hand. Let us consider the depth of wisdom in a man who applies opportunity cost (p.71), sells his car and buys a bicycle because it would not need fuel.

Those who have the responsibility to teach are jokingly advised to beware of the method they apply. Many of such methods cause more havoc in the minds of the young than the good

they are meant to cause. A mother warns her son not to steal from the refrigerator (p.34). Whenever he steals he would have a protruded belly. The mother becomes pregnant and the boy asks the father whether she steals from the refrigerator.

But are you prepared only to laugh?

The earth rotates but never stops at a given time. Everyone seeks his own advantage and people are ready to exploit or evolve any theory to justify their exploitation. After laughter comes the sober moment of reflection. Am I the child that teaches for its personal advantage? This question which rather sounds religious would certainly not be out of place in the thinking of this religious man (Roman Catholic Priest) who has turned literary. Am I disfiguring the truth in order to attain a personal goal?

Do dead men pay tax? Are we really living? Can our rulers boast that we, the ruled, are living? Has anyone a right to demand tax from the many un-employed, the poorly paid people who practically 'drink' dust on the road. Herein lies the literary quality of the book. Satire, irony, sarcasm, metaphor. They are all there.

This erudite catholic priest is, however, aware of the limitations of just praying. Prayers alone have never constructed a kingdom. He, therefore, enjoins the believers to watch and pray (p.46). A child closes his eyes while saying the grace before meal. While he prays their housedog steals the piece of meat in his food. He gets angry and asks the mother why she taught him always to close his eyes while praying. 'But you must also watch and pray.'

Unfortunately, however, there are jokes which certainly cannot enhance the course of ecumenism among Christians. In 'You don't know what you are mising' (p.44), a catholic priest is made to understand that he does not know what he is missing after being treated to a delicious meal prepared by the wife of a protestant pastor. When the protestant pastor has a quarrel with the wife and the catholic priest is called to help bring peace, the

catholic priest tells him: 'Reverend, it's a pity you don't know what you are missing,' - as if catholic priests are 'quarrel-free'.

The collection of jokes, *'Dead Men Don't Pay Tax'* is otherwise a rich literary adventure, not only for Nigerians but for all who are ready to laugh and sigh and think and think and think...

Age Grade Dance

ADA UGAH

Book Review

TITLE: *Songs of Lokoja*
AUTHOR: JIP Ubah
PUBLISHER: Editions Ehi International, 1996

Is the poet an exile? Is his language a coded chant of the Shaman decoded only by the initiates? Is he an incurable narcissist whose musings only reflect his internal turmoil and the perennial worries of a recluse? Or is the poet a member of the community of men who is a mere spokesman of a people's commonwealth and has a place in our everyday life? In assessing the work of a contemporary poet it is often best to pose the above questions in order to fully grasp the poetic credo of the artist that one is encountering in his poetic universe. In *Songs of Lokoja, Nigeria's Cradle*, his Excellency, Colonel JIP Ubah, Military Administrator of Kebbi State of Nigeria, dorns the garb of a poet of people's collective memory. In his maiden volume of poetry, Ubah captures the richness and the multi-layered splendour of Lokoja, a peaceful splendid city in Nigeria's heartland. A junction city where Nigeria's two foremost rivers Niger and Benue meet. In our quest for collective selfhood as a Nation, Lokoja enjoys a prideful rostrum having played host as a seat of Colonial Colonel Lugard in his journey into Nigeria's heartland. Lokoja too was host to colonial merchants of the trading Royal Niger Company.

Written with aesthetic simplicity and lyrical equipoise JIP Ubah sings of the grandeur of Lokoja past and present, of her architecture both natural and man-made. For Ubah, poetry is an ally in man's long march towards collective memory. Using memory as vision, the poet offers both new and confirmed readers of Nigerian Poetry its multi-layered variety. In *Songs of Lokoja,*

Nigeria's Cradle, Ubah found beauty and sang it. Lover of land, rocks, waters, in brief, life and its infinite shifting variety, the landscapes of Ubah's poetry celebrate the congruence of man and his environment. Having bade farewell to his youth, Ubah's poetry reminds us of a voice of a village elder whose proverbial eloquence rhymes with philosophic musing, a symbol of distinction in the community of titled men in an African village. Neither youthful exuberance nor linguistic vibrancy of an inexperienced singer but a mature, confident, dignified, clear, rotund voice revealing the vicissitudes of life through a rich spectrum of the treasures of the past, the pleasures of the present and hopeful gaze into the illuminating future. *Songs of Lokoja, Nigeria's Cradle* is rendered in three parts or phases as the poet calls them.

Phase one entitled *Treasures of the Past* offers us a peep into the very beginning of Lokoja as a human settlement. Here the original inhabitants are chronicled by the poetic eye. These original settlers can still be found in their quarters in old Lokoja. Who is the first settler? The poet takes no sides but rather guides us through the various claims and counter-claims in a superb poem entitled: ' In Search of the Native-Son'

One early morning
At the rise of the waking sun
I had the blues of the city of Lokoja
Heir to the past
I opened the window of history
In search of the Native son.

The poems in this section celebrate the rich cultural diversity of the original inhabitant of this great city. In this section also, the poet unveils the subsequent chapters in the history of the town namely the period of slavery, contact with the Western World, the world

wars and its relics of cenotaphs and cemeteries. Nothing is omitted in the collective memory of the poet's beloved city.

The second section of this book takes a look at the contemporary Lokoja with its stately Government House, Man-made beautification efforts like colorful roundabouts, squares and rehabilitated barracks for soldiers. The emphasis of the poet here is on the harmonious relationship between man and his environment. Giant edifices are built only in peace times and when man is allowed to master his destiny. This point comes out succinctly in the poem 'Government House Lokoja'

Standing stately proud in parade
Ramrod erect
Like the towering Iroko presence
Of a confluence King
At the birth of our century
You were a seal of colonial empire
At the end of our century
You are home to people's power.

The final poetic glance at Lokoja comes up in the third phase which consists of a song of re-affirmation in the town's continuous presence as a tourist haven in Nigeria's heartland.

I am Lokoja
Born on a conjugal seal
Of Futa Jallon dame
And Cameroon mountain lad
(.....)
I am Lokoja
City of twin-rivers
My bossom brimful echoes
of Nigeria's cradle
(....)

I am Lokoja
Not Laird's town
Romantic city
Of confluence fame
No one can arrest my ascent
No one can forget my song.

The achievements of Colonel John Ikwebe Paul Ubah in this book are manifold. His book is a celebration of peaceful co-existence of the diverse peoples that inhabit Lokoja. This is a subtle metaphor which invites other city dwellers in Nigeria and beyond to emulate Lokoja's citizens. This is a no mean feat especially in the light of bigotry and urban violence that have been sprouting up here and there in Nigeria and other flash points in Africa. Additionally, the effort in providing reading material for our youth in Nigeria especially in the light of wanton book famine in our shores is commendable. Finally, the poet's decision to publish his poetry in book form has afforded a larger audience to benefit from the special endowment of a multi-talented professional soldier outside the restricted circle of his professional colleagues and friends who were already quite familiar with his calling as a seasoned writer. JIP Ubah has been writing poetry since 1967 and has corpus of over a hundred poems mostly unpublished but some have been published in anthologies like *Voices From The Trench (*July 1979) edited by the late Mamman Vatsa, *Anthology of Poems* by five Army Officers edited by LOC Anene and specialized publications of Nigeria's Command and Staff College, Jaji, *Eagle 80, Eagle 86* and *Litani Unifil Bulletin*, (1981). His second volume of poems *Where The Eagle Perches* (Selected Poems) is already in the press.

Songs of Lokoja, Nigeria's Cradle is commended to all lovers of poetry interested in aesthetic beauty and mature artistic craftsmanship. It is an ennobling experience to read this book. It is a compelling book for use in our schools and colleges as an introductory text to the beautiful world of poetry.

CHINYERE L. NGONEBU

Book Review

TITLE: *Breaking the Silence: An Anthology of Short Stories*
EDITORS: Toyin Adewale-Nduka and Omowunmi Segun
PUBLISHER: The Women Writers of Nigeria, Lagos

The Women Writers of Nigeria (WRITA) established for promoting women writers and writing in Nigeria has come of age with its publication of *Breaking the Silence*, the first ever anthology of short stories written exclusively by Nigerian women . In the Introduction to the work, the co-editor, Toyin Adewale-Nduka proudly states that "*Breaking the Silence* is the first anthology of creative writing by Nigerian women in the more than a century of scribal creativity in Nigeria." And this is justifiable, for male writers have always taken an upper hand in the genre of short story collections.

This book, therefore, can rightly be called 'a curtain raiser' to the world of sole feminine productivity and literary creativity . With its nineteen stories, WRITA has stepped into the erstwhile male-centred world, and has shown once more that the Nigerian woman is not just a mere consumer or second class citizen. She too has sterling capabilities and is determined to leave her marks of excellence for posterity. She is bound, as Toyin Adewale-Nduka says in the Introduction, to "have a memorial to her pen, and affirmation to the fact that she can write."

The female writers featured in this collection span diverse cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds and age limit. From the young budding Biodun Sowemimo to the more seasoned Mabel Segun, Ifeoma Okoye, Toyin Adewale-Nduka, Bunmi

Oyinsan, we get a scintillating and enthralling combination of stories in a rich, descriptive, and picturesque language. The writers, each in her own style and conception, present a clear picture of contemporary life in the country. Just like the writers, most of the stories centre on the woman, her hopes and aspirations, her fears and pains, her joys and disappointments. Running through most of these stories are the problems that have worried and tormented womenfolk worldwide: motherhood, childlessness, infidelity of husbands, sexual harassment, broken hearts, broken homes, broken dreams. It is an endless list of the burden the woman bears in a world that wants to make her the 'wretched of the earth', a world that lays on her every blame for every failure.

These writers now have come out with one voice to fight this inhumanity and degradation. The first story in the collection is rightly entitled, "No Sweetness Here", for there is no sweetness for the woman when she has to bear the torments of the world alone. If she is childless, everybody blames her for that, from her mother-in-law to the neighbours, and eventually the husband himself who simply and callously opts for extra-marital affairs. In the story, Efe, however, goes to the extreme by killing her faithless husband. But that shows the enormity of her shock and disappointment at the betrayal by one whom she has loved and cared for all her life, one whom she has slaved and suffered for throughout his under-graduate days. Her bitterness is intense. But, of course, she fails to realise that in our society a childless marriage is a failure, and the affected woman suffers most for that.

Another pathetic case is that even when the woman bears a child through any means other than the normal way, she is castigated. One wonders whether a child born by Caesarean operation is less human than one born naturally. But that is still the unfortunate lot of the woman, as Ozioma Izuora shows in "A Baby named Miracle". The protagonist, Margret, has had two healthy children by Caeserean operation but that does not prevent

her neighbour or her mother-in-law from taunting her. "Another Macduff!" the mother-in-law had exclaimed, "I wish you were woman enough to bear your children yourself"(p.72).

Yes, there is no sweetness here when the once lovely woman is discarded like a piece of soiled rag, as Vera Osuokwu writes in "Our Best Years", or when the mother-in-law, in May Ifeoma Nwoye's "The Mirage" sees to it that her daughter-in-law does not come back to her home again. "The Mirage" falls in line with Kemi Anu Orimoloye's "Woman" both of which condemn woman's maltreatment of her fellow woman. Nwoye and Orimoloye present their stories with an objective stance. They expose and attack those women who assist society in debasing their fellow women.

In Kemi Anu Orimoloye's "Woman", Steve rightly tells his wife:

> "Don't you think your struggle for the emancipation of your sisters is being slowed down by people like Yinka? .... As long as there are many of Yinka's type among the womenfolk, the struggle has not really begun. Don't you think it's best to carry out the struggle among the women first?"(p. 91).

This in reality is the message of the entire story. Shouting over afflictions is not all that matters. For women to achieve their aim, they must first keep their house in order.

Apart from women-related issues, a number of the stories deal with contemporary affairs in the nation. Unomah Azuah's "The Bulging Bag" and Mabel Segun's "The Philanthropist and The Journalist" deal with the sordid rituals and murder that have suddenly engulfed the nation. Embezzlement of funds, and liquidation of banks, in Dupe-Dosumu Clement's "Butterflies", and drug trafficking in Maria Ajima's "Mary and the Business" show a society bedevilled by illgot wealth and sinking under the activities of vice-ridden, shameless men. In various ways these stories expose and condemn the nefarious activities of our loud

mouthed philanthropists and the get-rich-quick syndrome in society. Poverty , unemployment, and despair are other features of society highlighted in Angela Agali's "Until October" while Toyin Adewale-Nduka's "Boxer Shorts" portrays the rough-handling of innocent girls by lecherous wolves in the guise of men. "The Power of a Plate of Rice" is a funny tale by Ifeoma Okoye. In desperation, Mrs Cheta Adu eats up the plate of rice belonging to her obstinate headmaster, who is forced by Mrs Adu's surprising reaction to rescind his earlier decision not to pay her January salary in time.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's "The Departure" tries to re-assert the humanity of the woman while portraying men as selfish pleasure-seekers. In spite of their vaunted superiority, masculinity, and bravery, men have failed to rid this world of famine, injustice, pestilence, crime, and wars. "The Depature," therefore, is a clarion call for women to step in in humanizing society. When we think of Amuche, a trader, we see the redemptive and recreative role of women. Amuche succeeded while Amadi failed in preventing the death of a friend's wife. The writer contrasts the bravery, confidence, and determination of women symbolised in Amuche, with the weakness and cowardice of Amadi, the male prototype, whose strength has been sapped by illicit love affair.

But there are some avoidable errors in the story. First, the plot is episodic and defective. There is no relationship between Amadi's nocturnal affair and Amuche's laudable act. The story starts with Amadi but ends with another story unrelated to the first. Second, there is a sentence that mars the smooth flow of the narrative. In the second paragraph we read: "Amadi became anxious as he considered the repercussion on Ahurelu's reputation and future prospects of marriage"(p.26). If the writer is talking about prospects of marriage for Ahurelu, then this sentence "Wait until her husband catches you like the thief you are"(p.27) becomes both irrelevant and confusing. Such defects in plot and

inconsistencies of facts are often the result of hurried writing and/or inadequate revision. It is unfortunate that they escaped both the writer and the two editors.

Nonetheless, the women writers in this collection have tried to mirror society as objectively as possible and equally fight the stereotyped classification of women in the country. As I say "Congratulations" to WRITA for standing up resolutely to making this anthology a dream come true, I also say to all those women writers who are striving against all odds to restore the dignity of womenfolk in the country not to let the now glowing embers die.

Hope in our Time

Notes on Contributors

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

Iro AGHEDO is of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State. He has written several poems which are yet to be published.

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