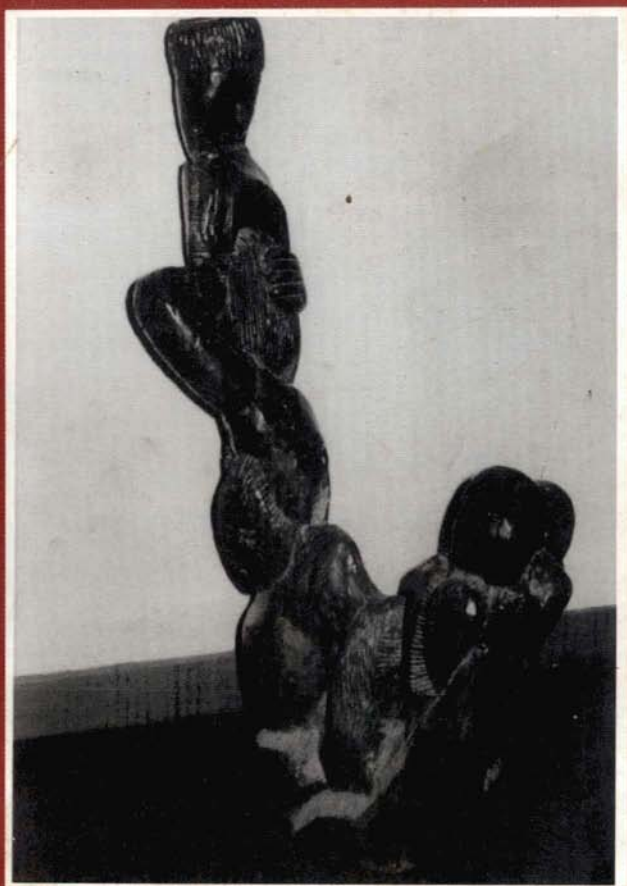




# Okike

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



# O K I K E

An African Journal of New Writing

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## An African Journal of New Writing

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**UDUMA KALU****A Sigh Silenced in the Dust**

A flushing fire ball; a whirling wind  
A gush of lightening; a clap of thunder  
A storm in the sun.  
And a sigh silenced in the dust.

There is darkness now, my dear dancer,  
There are dumb faces now blinking like silent columns of cattle,  
A silence glittering in the dark, a sound silenced in mid-air; a  
ship caught in the sand.

Now you are a receding mask.  
Sand now eats your feet away.

## Beyond the River

Beyond the river, there is dust  
beneath this dust is death  
in a wilting field.

Beyond death is spring  
sparkling like glass,  
as white doves chirrup around the flowery banks.

Before the spring  
a lean, white tree towers above the dust,  
without life, without form,  
like water.

I may be lurking beneath this river,  
silently, I may be pronounced dead.

Still, the spring sparkles in the sun,  
clear, like glass.

**CHUKWUDI ANTHONY NJOKU****London Rats**

London rats  
Come in different sizes and colours.  
And, my God, weights!  
Some are generously hairy, like *Ayakata* masquerade  
Others are as nude as the perennial cold allows them  
Some are fleshy, rounded and smooth like *odu*  
Some are small and nimble like the lineage of *uze*  
Some smell worse than *nkakwu*  
Others exude the attractive fragrance of the hibiscus  
Some are young and playful  
Others have irrepressible wrinkled evidence etched on their  
weary faces  
Their eyes darting with loaded experience

Yet, they all cherish the spacious labyrinth holes  
Punctuating the sprawling landscape of central London

Their telling eyes reflect now their rosy dreams, now their  
anxiety

and for good measure also their different degrees of readiness  
to mate, in this free space, where they are allowed anonymity, in  
spite of our presence!

Generally, they are nimble creatures, familiar with the numerous  
contours of their mazy and sometimes messy holes  
watch them dart about, with fascinating zest,  
as they klock in and klock out



submerge and re-surface to catch some air, almost child-like in their excitement

and at home with their fate as rats

engaged in what else but rat-race

The tube people do not care, I presume,

watching London rats daily can be quite a sports and distraction from the drone of waiting at the gates of the tube for their many customers.

the tube is after all good business

better let the London rats alone in their different

and, yes, strange world, for we are not like them,

and in any case they are here to stay, watch their growing, breeding curve,

even as the union of rats expands with gusto.

### Return the gaze!

Return the gaze!

I see,

Yes, I see my people

Yes, I see us

Bowing to their withering look

Like prisoners of war

Like castrated subjects

Like dumb and deaf people

A raid to return their condescending

And destructive gaze

Hoping eternally they will repent and cast

More loving and friendly looks

It makes me laugh

Can a hungry lion really love a lamb?  
 Can a snake caress a rat in its hole?  
 Can a predator ever shake a friendly hand with its prey?

Return the gaze!  
 Take your freedom  
 Give value to your name  
 Enjoy the fragrance of your presence  
 Shun their conspiratory praises  
 Remember your name  
 And your clan  
 And your history  
 And your colour  
 And your honour  
 Roll out your own agenda  
 Construct your own highway  
 To your future

Return the gaze  
 Return the jokes  
 And the aspersions  
 Make your presence felt  
 Put a bounce on your walk  
 Lower your expectations  
 Of these greedy lot  
 These truly hungry lot  
 These inhuman lot  
 These generation searching for a lost soul

Return the gaze  
 And firmly *take* your freedom.

Hear the drums roll  
 and burst their ballet  
 Come folks!  
 Their rock 'n' roll  
 Will burn your soul.  
 Give you sleep of tongue  
 and lead you to wrong.

Come folks!  
 our jazz will dazzle them.

Gone, sing such songs  
 that will lead you home,  
 and you will no more roam.  
 Come folks!

Hear the tom-tom tap  
 and rouse you from  
 the opium of their trap.  
 Come eat the food of soul  
 I let calypso make you whole.

Africa calls you!  
 We have work to do.  
 Disco lights will make you blind.  
 Come see stars smile.  
 Come find true light.

**NDUBUISI NNANNA****Wake Up Song**

Hear the drums roll  
and burst their ballet  
Come folks!  
Their rock 'n' roll  
Will burn your soul,  
give you sleep of tongue  
and lead you to wrong.  
Come folks!  
our Jazz will dazzle them.

Gongs sing such songs  
that will lead you home,  
and you will no more roam.  
Come folks!  
Hear the tom-tom tap  
and rouse you from  
the opium of their harp.  
Come eat the food of soul.  
Let calypso make you whole.

Africa calls you!  
We have work to do.  
Disco lights will make you blind.  
Come see stars smile,  
Come find true light.



**NGOZI OBASI AWA****Hammer in the Hamlet**

[Dennis Brutus]

Subtle hammer in the Hamlet:

Your black box emits pungent codes  
loud enough to drown daggers of cruelty  
leech-erous limpets raping our plane

Subtle hammer in the Hamlet:

Your stubborn strokes supercharged with finesse  
slaps slumberous brains to memorize our reality  
snug-scissored sludge-sodden-slums

Subtle hammer in the Hamlet:

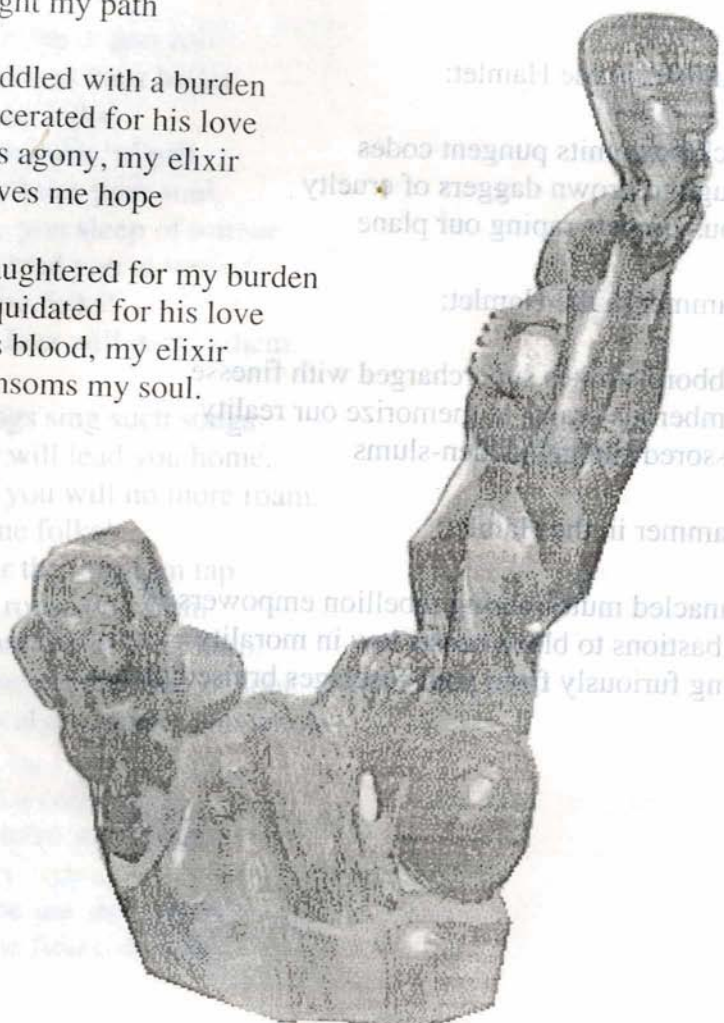
Your manacled mute-roaring rebellion empowers  
capping bastions to bleed beasts low in morality  
fumigating furiously from your fuselages bruised plane

## Elixir

Saddened for my burden  
Laden with great love  
His tears, my elixir  
Light my path

Saddled with a burden  
Lacerated for his love  
His agony, my elixir  
Gives me hope

Slaughtered for my burden  
Liquidated for his love  
His blood, my elixir  
Ransoms my soul.



**CHINEDU ENE-ORJI****Wishes**

The drums rolled, the trumpet blasted and the cymbals clashed to conclude the national anthem. The large body of students roared uproariously in patriotic fervour, as the audience resumed their seats. A modulated murmur filled the auditorium as the compere stepped up to the lectern. He blew into the microphone, tapped it once or twice and the audience held their breath.

“My lords spiritual and temporal, ladies and gentlemen, you are welcome to the fiftieth Annual Academic Excellence Award. For half a century, it has become the tradition to convoke this annual ritual, when everything is put aside, to celebrate the virtue of excellence and hard work...”

In the front row were seated the Chancellor of the university, a monarch of an ancient dynasty, to his right the Vice-Chancellor and to his left, the Pro-Chancellor, a seasoned but retired professor. Around them were the principal officers, deans and dons. On the front row also were four nominees for the much revered doctorate degree of the university. These honours would be conferred the next morning during the convocation ceremony.

The four thousand capacity hall was filled with award winners, their guests, students, alumni, and other members of the university community. “This evening is not for speechmaking. It is meant for the presentation of prizes. As is the tradition, we will start from the Faculty of Agriculture.”



The compere began to call out the names of best students in the constituent departments of that faculty. As their names were mentioned, the students walked down the aisle to the stage, shook hands with and collected their awards from the vice-chancellor. Soon, it got to the Faculty of Engineering.

"Department of Electronic Engineering: Mr. Thomas Johnson." The body of students erupted, chanting: "Guru! Guru!" drowning the auditorium. A young man, in his early twenties, walked down the aisle in his academic robe and up the stage. He shook the vice-chancellor, collected his award, turned to the cheering students, bowed at his waist and doffed his cap. The students screamed in appreciation as the whole auditorium applauded him. Soon enough, the departmental awards were rounded off. The Music Department Orchestra struck up a popular high life tune for an interlude.

"Ladies and gentlemen, now we move to the second segment of our programme for this evening: *The Faculty Prizes*. These prizes are awarded to the best student in each faculty. Some of these awards are endowments by individuals, companies and organizations. However, some are still underwritten by the university. We invite you to come and sponsor these awards. Now, ladies and gentlemen, let us begin from the beginning.

"The Faculty of Agriculture: *the Food and Agriculture Organization award...*"

The compere ran his handkerchief over his face, dusted the lapels of his jacket and blew into the microphone. The auditorium became quiet.

"The Faculty of Engineering. My lords, ladies and gentlemen, permit me to inform you that history is being made tonight. Not once in the half century history of this ivory tower has one individual shown such a superlative academic performance.

I'll stop here to allow you observe for yourselves first hand, what I have found so difficult to express with words.

"The Federal Ministry of Works Prizes for Engineering: Mr. Thomas Johnson."

The auditorium erupted in a thundering applause. "Guru! Guru! Guru!" poured forth from the balconies occupied by students. The young man got up from his seat and walked to the stage. He bowed slightly at his waist, shook the Pro-Chancellor and collected his award. He turned to face the audience, kissed his prize and raised it to them. They showed their appreciation with a resounding applause. As Thomas Johnson walked back to his seat, the compere called out the next prize.

"The *Trion Prize for Software Engineering*: Mr. Thomas Johnson."

Thomas Johnson who was still advancing towards his seat stood still. Then he turned around to face the stage, as a spate of clapping swept swiftly through the auditorium; rising to a climax. He handed his prize to someone and proceeded down stage. There was a brief rumble of drums and a clash of cymbals. He mounted the stage and the smiling Pro-Chancellor shook his hand and embraced him. At that moment of contact, the audience moaned ecstatically. They drew apart and the Pro-Chancellor handed him the prize. Thomas Johnson with a smile playing around his lips scrutinized the prize then pushed it to the audience and brought it close to his chest. He walked down stage. The compere quickly walked to the lectern and peered through his papers.

"Don't be in a hurry young man," he said, "we still need your attention here,"

Thomas Johnson walked back up stage and stood beside the compere. The compere cleared his throat and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the *Nitelcom Prize for Integrated Engineering Design*. This time around, we have joint winners. They are Agatha Nwaoha and ... Thomas Johnson."

A young lady stepped out into the aisle and walked to the stage. Thomas Johnson moved forward, offered his hand to help her up stage.



"One would have imagined that engineering is essentially a masculine preoccupation. But tonight we have seen this myth being demystified. Mr. Pro-Chancellor sir..."

The Pro-Chancellor came forward with a prize. There was a moment of hesitation between the two award winners. Who would accept first? Thomas Johnson urged Agatha Nwaoha towards the Pro-Chancellor. She received her prize and stepped back. Then he collected his prize and joined her. In unison they lifted their awards and showed them to the audience. In a hail of glory, they came down the stage and walked to their seats as Thomas scanned the auditorium briskly for someone.

Early one morning, over twenty years ago, a priest picked up a new born baby abandoned in his church compound on his way to celebrate mass. He took the baby to the diocesan motherless babies home, after baptizing him. He paid the baby a visit everyday except when he was out of town. When the boy was old enough to begin schooling, the priest sent him to the best school in town. There his teachers discovered and nurtured his precocious abilities.

On his tenth birthday, he moved in with the priest. The next week he was sent to a Marist Brothers run school with boarding facilities. During his holidays, he came back to the parish house, where the priest assisted by seminarians continued the good job of burnishing, where his teachers left off. In the morning he started with a dose of prayers and the celebration of mass. In the evenings he was fed a diet of lawn tennis and at night he was taught the rudiments of chess and scrabble. Soon he mastered these games and began to trounce his mentors. The priest sent him to summer tennis clinics and he became the regional junior champion. In his final year, he became the national junior champion.

He left secondary school with the best result that year. At seventeen, he got admitted into the university to read engineering. This time the priest, who had risen to the rank of



monsignor, made sure he lacked nothing. The young man devoted his time to his studies and scored the maximum points available in all his courses. He spent the evening on the tennis courts honing his skills. In his sophomore year, he won a gold medal at the National Universities Games. At the same time, his chess playing ability became unassailable, he became the school captain.

In his final year, it was taken for granted that he would score the maximum academic points. He represented the country at the Chess Olympiad and won a gold medal in tennis at the World Universities Games. He was elected President of Engineering Students Association.

The keyboard gradually set a background against which the oboe, clarinet and flutes wove in and out. The trumpet blasted now and again as the congas maintained a rhythmic pace. The talking drums chanted incantations that only an oracle could decipher. The string instruments delicately tied all these movements together as the soloist sang the misery of an orphaned child, left to his step-mother and an unsympathetic world. The wand wielding hand of the conductor held sway, conjuring rhythm and harmony from disparate elements. Finally, the soloist accompanied by the talking drums described a happy denouement, mediated by benevolent spirits, for the orphan. Then, the orchestra rushed into a crescendo ending with a cataclysmic clash of cymbals.

The audience gave the orchestra a standing ovation.

"It would be an understatement if I say that this beautiful rendition by the students of the music department has set an appropriate tone for the third and final segment of this event: *The University Awards*. These honours are reserved for the best among the very best, the *primus inter pares*. I now invite his Royal Majesty, the Chancellor to present these awards to the recipients.

Thomas Johnson received five of the ten awards. These were Sports Man of the Year, *Nelson Mandela Prize for Leadership*, *National Technology Prize*, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Prize for Academic Excellence* and *Best Over All Graduating Student Prize*.

As he handed the last prize to Thomas Johnson, the monarch had only one thought in mind:

With a son like this, he would wait calmly for death, knowing that his ancestral dynasty would not be overrun by time. With an heir apparent like this young man, his throne would seek and gain constitutional recognition. A son like this would act as the wedge that would stop his legacy from slipping into irrelevance.

At about the same time, the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering looked back at his thirty years of lecturing in universities around the world and realised that there had been no phenomenon like this boy. It was in his course that Thomas Johnson scored his 'B' grade. He did not now regret his decision to penalize him gravely for a minor error. Indeed, now he felt greatly justified.

His head of department mused over the idea of encouraging Thomas Johnson to remain in the Faculty. At least the students would have an icon to look up to. After his first semester in the department, it dawned on the head of department that he would break the twenty one year old academic record performance, which had remained seemingly invincible. He would convince the senate and council to rescind the embargo placed on employment. He considered this issue again and realised his effort might be futile. Scholars like this chap never remained in the ivory towers. Soon enough, tantalising offers, incomparable with the stipend lecturers receive, would come from every direction.

The world-renowned inventor and professor of robotics, nominated for a Honorary Doctor of Science, resolved to make an offer to Thomas Johnson. A few months of internship in his laboratories will expose him to on-going projects. Then he



would send him to one of the Ivy League universities for his masters degree. After this, he would set him loose among his state of the art equipment in his laboratories. The professor knew his own abilities, but this young man stood for immense possibilities. He had kept several seminal ideas on hold for lack of time to exploit them. But with this chap, laden with native intelligence, and insightful brilliance, and an understanding of technological principles and concepts, in his stable he would give his rivals sleepless nights.

Standing up, the whole auditorium rendered the university anthem, accompanied by the orchestra, to signify the end of the ceremony. As people made their way out of the auditorium, a soft ballad serenaded the atmosphere. Thomas Johnson looked expectantly around the auditorium, at the dispersing crowd. His laurels were neatly stacked in front of him. He knew it was not beyond the monsignor to lose himself among the crowd, in anonymity. Then at the very end come out to spring a surprise on him. But the experience would have been different if he was seated right beside him. They would have exchanged banters and shared observations. Then, knowing that the architect of his achievements was beside him as he reaped the benefits of his effort would have been mutually fulfilling for both of them.

He saw the curate waving at him from the other end of the hall; wading against the tide of dispersing people. Now he realised the monsignor had not come after all. A cloud descended on him and he felt lonesome. He had sent an invitation card to the monsignor early enough. A few days ago, when they spoke by telephone, the monsignor had assured him he would be present.

At that moment, the mortar with which he had built his stoic frame of mind gave way. His reasoning took a sudden cynical twist. Perhaps the archbishop had delegated the monsignor on a very important ecclesiastic mission. The monsignor in turn sent the curate to deputise for him at this equally important ceremony. So, after all these years together,



the monsignor had not developed that paternal feeling or be-  
His actions had been based purely on the concept of doing w  
a concomitant aspect of his profession. He was just one am  
the proverbial flock. A veil he never knew existed had just b  
shredded from the face of his consciousness. He wished  
knew his parents. Nothing would have stopped them fr  
gracing this event — the defining moment of his life. At le  
his upbringing would not have been reduced to just anot  
missionary accomplishment. He squinted several times to cl  
his now misty eyes. As the curate put his arm over  
shoulders, he sank into a seat.



**DON BURNES****The Moroccan Belly Dancer**

demure coquettish

lovely and lithe

The swinging, swaying of her body

sings to the pulsing rhythm

of the music

habibi habibi

the elegance, the refinement, the beauty

the seductiveness of the dance

the audience entranced

habibi habibi

as she twirls whirls—her scarf unfurls

habibi habibi

she steps, stops ... and starts again

her body

habibi habibi

now bending softly

like the date palms

in the desert in Tozew

caressed by the Saharan breeze

she knows how to please

telling

with her feet, her hips, her hands

stories carried across the sands

over centuries

from Berber village

to the souls of Tabriz

habibi habibi



the monsignor had not developed that paternal feeling or bond. His actions had been based purely on the concept of doing well, a concomitant aspect of his profession. He was just one among the proverbial flock. A veil he never knew existed had just been shredded from the face of his consciousness. He wished he knew his parents. Nothing would have stopped them from gracing this event — the defining moment of his life. At least, his upbringing would not have been reduced to just another missionary accomplishment. He squinted several times to clear his now misty eyes. As the curate put his arm over his shoulders, he sank into a seat.





**DON BURNES****The Moroccan Belly Dancer**

demure coquettish

lovely and lithe

The swinging, swaying of her body

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of the music

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the elegance, the refinement, the beauty

the seductiveness of the dance

the audience entranced

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telling

with her feet, her hips, her hands

stories carried across the sands

over centuries

from Berber village

to the souls of Tabriz

habibi habibi

**NGOZI EZEIBE****Tears**

Heavy rain poured out of the torn sky.  
Blood gushed out of the wounded skin.  
Tears flowed out of a broken heart.  
The sky, the skin and heart had to give way,  
To the harsh and cruel causes that produced the flow.

Tears won't do, regrets are useless.  
The broken pot cannot be mended.  
The water flowing in many directions is indifferent.  
It cannot be gathered, though wedges are put in place.

What were the missing steps?  
Did the pot tilt from the head?  
Or did the head shift from its position?  
No! pressure from without robbed the head of the wisdom.  
So much cherished by all.

Though difficult, a new beginning has to be made.  
Though far, a trip to the potter has to be made.  
Though costly, a new pot has to be purchased  
A journey to the stream is a must,  
But this time, the water has to be esteemed.

**NDUBUISI ALUU ORJI****Reflections on Tinted Glasses**

The governor has chosen a hot day  
to visit.  
Hot vapours suffuse from the  
shimmering coal-tar.  
The dancing women steaming with sweat  
Have danced for hours  
Yet the governor has not come.

The peasant fathers bearing their  
children on their shoulders  
Have stood for hours  
Waving flags and chanting slogans  
Yet the governor has not come.

Then,  
Suddenly  
Expectant ears  
Decipher sirens from a far

**FRENZY!**

The dancing women fly into  
Convulsive gyrations  
The peasant fathers waving the  
Party colour  
Break into an uproar



The governor has arrived  
His well rehearsed speech  
Raises well rehearsed applause

As he leaves  
He waves once  
Then as the well oiled glasses of  
    His car roll up  
The dancing women  
The sweating fathers  
The waving children  
Once again become  
Mere reflections on tinted glasses



**TONY E. AFEJUKU****The Use of Suspense in Three African Autobiographies****Abstract**

This essay argues that *The African Child*, *Down Second Avenue* and *Ake: The Years of Childhood* are three African literary autobiographies, which gain distinctiveness from the effective way in which their authors employ the novelistic device of suspense to underscore their artistry. It affirms that the autobiographers' use of this narrative device generates great interest in the reader who cannot but see and accept the texts as significant aesthetic expression of a lived experience and reality.

The Guinean Camara Laye's *The African Child*, the South African Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and the Nigerian Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood* are three African autobiographies in which the autobiographers faithfully employ the style of novelistic narration. And one novelistic device which is a distinctive feature of their autobiographies is suspense, a narrative device the writers employ in their respective ways with admirable conscious artistry. Thus to study the use of this device in these texts is to examine their status as written literary narratives at a significant aesthetic level, which is what this essay seeks to do.

In a dictionary of literary terms we read the following definition of suspense: "The condition of wanting to know what will happen or expecting something to happen in a narrative" (202). This definition is similar to an earlier one by Daiches who wrote that "suspense is an intensification of interest in what



happens next, and is necessary in some degree for all drama and most fiction" (232). Suspense in any narrative can be abrupt or prolonged. Abrupt suspense can be achieved in short, brief scenes while prolonged suspense can be achieved in lengthy scenes or throughout the narrative, as will be revealed in the texts under study.

In *The African Child*, the opening snake scene is remarkable for its abrupt suspense and dramatic appeal. Emotional tension, anxiety and excitement are skillfully generated in the reader by the deliberate withholding of pertinent information until the end of the scene.

As the five-or-six-year old Laye approaches the snake, the reader is eager to know what will happen to him. Will the snake bite him or simply crawl away? Will it bury its mortal fangs in his hand before any help comes? Will the boy be saved? Not until we get to the end of the passage do we know what exactly happens: just as he suddenly and unexpectedly sees the snake creeping round his father's hut, so also is he suddenly and unexpectedly saved from the mortal snake whose eyes were "glittering with voluptuous bliss:" "The apprentice shouted to my father, and almost at once I felt myself lifted off my feet; I was safe in the arms of one of my father's friends!" (11). Laye, it should be noted, could easily have narrated his story by glossing over the incident without necessarily building up the reader's expectation to peak of intensity, but this he does not do. This is partly because the incident was such a remarkable experience that could not be easily glossed over or hastily mentioned but more importantly, because it would not have yielded the reader any aesthetic enjoyment and the kind of emotional involvement noticed in the passage.

Now a further question to ask: after his rescue and the warning he gets from his mother, will Laye try to play with a snake in future? The reader is not kept waiting for too long, for in Laye's own words: "Ever since the day I had been forbidden to play with snakes, I would run to my mother as soon as I saw one.



"There's a snake!" I would cry." (15)

As we continue our reading of the book, it becomes clear that suspense is a conscious artistic device employed in its narrative progression. The use of prolonged suspense, we discover, enables us to trace the growth of the child as borne out by his relationship with his father and mother. Both persons, it should be pointed out here, represent different values in the book. While the mother stands for traditional values, the father represents ambition and pre-eminence. Now, who will play a more dominant role in the life of Laye? Is it the mother or the father?

Very early in the book, the father rightly foresees that Laye will follow the path of ambition and pre-eminence symbolized by the Western school: "You are all day at school, and one day you shall depart from the school for a greater one. You will leave me little one ...'" (20). Although the father regrets the inevitable separation and alienation that will arise from this, he encourages his son. Of course, the latter is equally touched by the thought of leaving his family. Alone in bed, after the discussion he had with his father, he moans thus: "Father! ... Father! ... Father, what must I do, what is the right thing to do?" (21). But it is the mother who seems to supply the answer at this early stage. She wants him to remain in Kouroussa and to inherit the family occupation. It is for this reason that she always encourages him on vacations to go to her village of Tindican where, unlike Kouroussa, the "life of the countryside" and other "wonderful things" are still very much intact. It cannot be gainsaid that Laye loves the countryside which fills him with "rapturous delight" (34). He is particularly fascinated by the harvesting of rice which enables the workers to "lose the sense of their separateness," and to express their "oneness by means of song" (Carrol 132): "they were singing in chorus, and reaping in unison: their voices and their gestures were all harmonious, and in harmony; they were one-united by the same task, united by the same song" (51). Will Laye fully accept this life and stay permanently in Tindican? Will he reject

the path that leads to ambition and pre-eminence which his father has chosen for him? Choosing between his father's and mother's irreconcilable values is the real tug-of-war of the autobiography. Everything else seems to be subordinated to it.

The suspense which originates from this is a prolonged one, and it is deliberately employed to sustain the reader's interest in the book; it only subsides at the tail end of the book when Laye departs from Guinea for France for higher education, an indication that he chooses his father's values. But before we get to this point in the story Laye, by sheer contrivance, shows us that he is a precocious child: he observes things carefully, he asks questions, and on the basis of the responses he gets, he is able to contrast and choose between the two values. The careful comparison of the traditional institution and French school which takes place in the middle of the narrative is also part of the contrivance that shows his disengagement from the values of his mother. After the traditional initiation rites he ceases to be a child and whatever influence the mother has over him now wanes; his father, on the other hand, becomes more dominant and encourages him further in his education. The French school he now attends in Kouroussa is notorious for the cruelty, tyranny and arbitrary behaviour of the big boys which contrast with and make mockery of the earlier delightful harvest scene at Tindican. Yet Laye continues in the school and drops the fleeting idea of quitting after the father chastises the headmaster who gave the senior boys so much licence to do as they pleased with the junior ones. It is significant that it is from this school that he proceeds to Conakry and later on to France in continuation of his education. Of course, the book ends here, that is, with his departure for France, but the reader might still be tempted to ask: how will Laye fare there? The suspense definitely continues, and the three dots, which close the book, affirm its suspenseful ending.

In *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele, unlike Laye, deliberately makes use of digressions to create and prolong his suspense. Often these digressions seem sudden and



disconnected, thus suggesting the episodic nature of the narrative with its characteristic paucity of information. Yet Mphahlele's mastery of this manner of writing, as revealed in this autobiography at least,<sup>1</sup> is such that whatever he "bounces off" (be it subject-matter, character or situation) is never left hanging or unconcluded even if it is not developed fully eventually. In characteristic style, he always comes back, after whetting the reader's appetite, to supply the pertinent information:

The class teacher said I was backward. The principal said I was backward. My aunt said I was backward. So said everybody. Mother didn't know. I had no choice but to acknowledge it. So when I was placed in Standard Three instead of continuing from Standard Four, it didn't occur to me that they might be wrong. (47)

This is how chapter seven of the book entitled "Backward Child" begins. Now the reader is anxious to follow the process through which he was transformed from a backward child to a brilliant adult and successful autobiographer. Rather than going into this story of his backwardness straightaway Mphahlele digresses to tell us about Kuzuwi, his strict teacher, who for some unknown reason, caned his niece, Fluenza, harder than any pupil in the class. From here he bounces off to tell us about his playmate Moloi with whom he picks "stray carrots, over-ripe tomatoes and so on to eat in between drives to the suburbs" (50). We are also told of his other friends with whom he as well as Moloi regularly goes to the cinema. We learn that he is "important and useful" to the boys because they rely on him "to read the dialogue and titles on the screen aloud so that they might follow all the story" (50). All these take place in a chapter of roughly four-and-a-half pages. The main topic of the chapter which is about his backwardness is never mentioned



until the end. And this is done in just a paragraph in an endeavour to explain why he is such a fast reader of film dialogues and titles.

The truth of it was that I used to pick up my piece of printed paper to read, whatever it was! It became a mania with me. I couldn't let printed matter pass. I felt inferior to most of my class at school. I was pretty poor in English, which was the medium of instruction. I read, and read, till it hurt. But I also got a good deal of pleasure out of it. And I felt proud because I was overcoming my backwardness. (51)

Although skimpily put, the reader now knows why he was regarded as a backward child: because he was "pretty poor in English, which was the medium of instruction." The reader now knows how he tried to overcome his backwardness: he "read, and read, till it hurt." This definitely says something about his character; it shows that perseverance is characteristic of his personality. It also prepares the reader for total reversal of fortune at the end. But when did he completely overcome his backwardness and no longer feel "inferior to most of my class at school?" The reader is kept in suspense and never knows this until chapter thirteen after another series of digressions:

In Standard Six I felt as if a great light of dawn had flashed into me. In spite of harassing conditions at home, my school career was taking on a definite shape. What had earlier on been a broad and obtuse light, was narrowing, sharpening and finding a point of focus. As far as my performance in various subjects was concerned, I was well

ahead of my class-mates — in every subject  
but arithmetic. (86)

This passage, again a skimpy one, is supposed to be part of the “Backward Child” story mentioned in chapter seven. In fact, everything from page 82 up to this present passage is supposed to be part of that chapter, but because Mphahlele consciously strives to whet the reader’s appetite and to achieve narrative progression by means of suspenseful digression he lets it leap, unduly I think, from there to chapter thirteen.

The acme of this style is Mphahlele’s love-relationship with Rebone, his class-mate. This is first hinted at on page 58: “One afternoon we were all feeling drowsy and heavy in class because of the mid-summer heat. I wrote a short note. *I love you – Eseki*, which I gave to some one behind me to pass it over to Rebone two rows behind me.” Naturally, Rebone rejects his love, but gradually both become close friends. They share one another’s secrets and fears but they are not lovers in the strict sense of the word. Of course, Mphahlele keeps on hoping that he would win her eventually. And the reader is anxious to know when this will happen, or how exactly the relationship will end. The reader is kept waiting for long — until page 154 when, after a series of digressions, Mphahlele falls in love with another woman whom he eventually marries. At this point in the narrative Mphahlele (as well as the reader) is taken by surprise: Rebone who has all along rejected Mphahlele’s love writes him a “long, long letter” telling him “how passionately she loved” him. Now, will Mphahlele fall back on his ‘pact’ with Rebecca, his new love? This time the reader is not kept waiting for long for an answer:

I couldn’t fall back on my pact with Rebecca: I didn’t really want to. No, I couldn’t retrace my steps, even for the sheer exercise of it. Still, I knew it wasn’t going



to be easy driving Rebone out of my thoughts (154).

Eventually, death sweeps Rebone off Mphahlele's thoughts (157) and the whole sequence, which is told in bits and pieces, ends.

Apart from enhancing the reader's interest in the narrative, the overall effect of Mphahlele's suspenseful digression is that it tends to impose form on the autobiographical material. Thus one gets the feeling that it "interferes with the truth of its matter and turn [s] it into fiction" (Izevbaye 13).

In *Ake*, Soyinka also employs digressions to create and prolong his suspense. But his digressions are not as abrupt and are not as devoid of foreshadowing — "hints of what is to come" (Chatman 59) — as Mphahlele's. Moreover, they are not as devoid of details as the latter's. Soyinka can begin a chapter by focusing on a topic or character or situation. In doing any of these, he can supply information and possible hints of what is to come. At a point where the reader thinks his build-up will approach a climax or at least terminate, he leaps and then starts talking, again elaborately, or something else before coming back to his original concern. Of course, at this stage the reader wants to see the expected termination or climax, but after another elaboration and filling-in of details which he did not originally supply, he would again leap and "wield the weapon of suspense," as Forster would say (41). However, in the end, more often than not, there is a denouement but this is after he has sufficiently aroused the reader's interest in what he is saying with his build-up and leap tool. This is specially evident in chapters thirteen, fourteen and fifteen where we have the story of the Women's Movement and the women's quarrel with the Alake, his chiefs and the *Ogboni*. The Movement was founded by Mrs. Kuti and a few other women, including Soyinka's mother to take care of the general interest of women in Egbaland. The Movement's main quarrel, however, was against



the taxation system as it affected women. The women considered it oppressive and exploitative and were ready to rise and revolt against the Government, that is, the Alake and the Colonial administration. The reader was first given hint of this on page 182, but it is not as from page 202 onwards, after a series of digressions and very detailed information and background material in respect of the women's other grievances and resolution, that we see them march to the Palace of the Alake to press for their demand:

Enough! We've heard enough. *Oya en so*  
I' Ake! (It's time. Let us march on Ake).

The women rose in a body. Hands flew to  
Heads and off came the head-ties, unfurling  
In the air like hundreds of banners ...

Kemberi leading the way, they poured out of  
The grammar school compound, filled the  
Streets and marched towards the palace at  
Ake. (202)

At this point in the narrative the reader, already filled with tension and excitement, is eager to see the climactic scene of confrontation between the women and the Alake and his chiefs, all of whom belong to the secret *Ogboni*, "male cult with the task of carrying out sentences" (203). Soyinka handles the scene scrupulously. Emotional tension and excitement are generated by the shifting of attention to and from the pleading Alake to the women's spokespersons — Kemberi and Wild Christian — with increasing pace, until the arrival of their leader, Mrs. Kuti, whose sheer presence alone further charges the already tense atmosphere. Her show-down with the rude white District Officer who comes with policemen to exert pressure on the women to stop their demonstration is the first real sign of the looming danger and violence. But what really worsens matters is the insolence of the Balogun (war lord) of one of the Egba districts:

'Hm-hm-hm, pshee-aw! The world is spoilt, the world is coming to an end when these women, these agb-eyin-to [women who urinate from the rear], can lay siege to the palace and disturb the peace' .... And he raised his voice further, 'Go on, go home and mind your kitchens and feed your children. What do you know about the running of state affairs? Not pay tax indeed! What you need is a good kick on your idle rumps. (212)

What happens next constitutes the real high point of the uprising, at least on the first day. After this insolence from the Balogun, "no one could doubt the collective psychic force of the women," "for from then on any figure in an attire which remotely resembled an *ogboni* was set upon" (21, 213). Thus one unexpected turn is followed by another until there is a startling conclusion, that is, an unexpected resolution of the crisis at the point things are set to fall apart and tear the community to pieces:

The elders [...] sent a message to Mrs. Kuti, their humiliation at the hands of the women forgiven  
'Come and talk to us' they said. "We consider ourselves the sons of Majeobaje [let-things-not-come-to-ruin]; we cannot sit back and watch things get worse and spoil totally in our hands. Come and see us with a list of all the things the women want. You'll be surprised how closely our minds agree'.

At the meeting, the *ogboni* assured them that every thing was happening as it had been written, nothing was strange to them, the elders, because ifa had seen and spoken it all. (221)

'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie whose comprehensive review of the work has made her, in my view, the autobiography's



literary detective, drawing on external and historical sources just to detect its lie, does not appear to believe that the crisis was so resolved in real life. Not only does she claim that the historical ordering of the book is wrong, but also that historical events, particularly the Women's Movement and uprising which take place "in [it] in some notable proportion is chronologically and factually confused and obscured" (14). Ogundipe-Leslie blames this "defect" in the work mostly on Soyinka's "false" memory, and this is where she really goes wrong. For the wary reader there is nothing confusing or obscure about the way Soyinka handles the event. Soyinka is not interested in chronological or factual order. He deliberately uses the narrative device of suspense to pattern the event to a dramatic, artistic end. It is in this connection that Ogundipe-Leslie or any critic who might accuse Soyinka of distortion or falsification may be right. But then we can excuse Soyinka — as we can excuse Laye and Mphahlele — for employing this novelistic device. Indeed by his use of suspense Soyinka, like the other autobiographers, tends to suggest that one cannot read an autobiography solely from a chronological perspective, or backwards, alphabet by alphabet, word by word, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence, or even line by line, without its ceasing to be an autobiography.<sup>2</sup>

One thing that is clear from the above discussion is this: Laye's, Mphahlele's and Soyinka's use of suspense sustain the reader's interest in their autobiographies as artistic recreations or artistic expressions of a lived experience and reality. By their use of suspense these autobiographers tend to have let it be known that autobiography is hardly "factual," "unimaginative," or even "nonfictional," to borrow Howarth's words (86). A reader can legitimately study *The African Child*, *Down Second Avenue* and *Ake: the Years of Childhood* as one studies other literary genres by studying any of their various fundamental aspects and elements or all of them. Here I have chosen to study suspense as used by the autobiographers to gain aesthetic appeal.



## NOTES

1. Mphahlele also employs this technique, albeit less successfully, in his novel, *The Wanderers* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973).
2. Here I have tried to rephrase and amend Gerard Genette whose concern, however, is not autobiography but narrative fiction. See his *Narrative Discourse*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 34.

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## CHINENYE AMONYEZE

### Partakers

There is something in mad men's music  
 Something appealing and mocking at once; A potent  
 In that long sembling chain of lunatics  
 Beating their impoverished gong cans  
 To their heaven-knows-what command

The psycho-wrecks know good rhythm  
 I have seen their ordered lyrics  
 My feet, what? Slowly rebels to their tune  
 They are not mad my people  
 They have prepared music soups with ammo  
 Ammunitions lurk in their orchestra.

Parading on theatre-in-the-round sustenance  
 Unraveled the mystery I have  
 They are not mad, they are my brothers  
 Bugged down by the scourge of time  
 Sucked dry of associative therapy  
 Begging reprieve from nihilistic orders

They play refined music my brothers  
 To the tunes of spritely spirits hostage

Passing them, nose upturned  
 Uncaring, we note their matted hair  
 Disdain the dilating ribs and infinite yawns



And reproach the unmannered half crazed pupils  
Society shuns depressed septic citizens

Their unblinking clanks, tune disordered  
The message I hear is ... C-r-a-z-y  
"Why -t-h-in-k u-s c-r-a-z-y"  
What! So they can think"  
Slowly a hazy rhythm forms  
From the scraggy tinkling emerges wisdom.

We go home with alcohol breaths  
Alluding selves on faked vantage plains  
Thinking the day won; but melancholy retains us still

We lock our doors; prisoners  
The rain wets the undrowned music  
Fearful to the mirror we venture  
A ragged face scarifies us; confirming  
We scream "Mad" at the unbecoming mole  
Scarified conscience haunts us back  
Realization dawns at last  
Each of us is gnarled in his shape

**CHIKA NWANKWO****The Muse of the Seven Hills**

Behold the Muse  
Behold the Muse astir  
Rousing herself from slumber

The corpse we planted  
Three decades and  
A half ago  
The corpse we  
Planted at Opi  
Decimated with  
Scorn and hate  
Is sprouting

The Phoenix  
Is rising  
Wearing the mien  
Of a lioness  
To echoes  
Of *the ikolo*  
Floating in, Lo!  
From the seven hills

SON OF MAN  
THE BONES  
SHALL RISE

The hills resound



The hills resound

With glee

Strains of music

Strains of drumbeats

Ancestral drums

From Equiano to Okigbo

Float in...

With damp air

Of the seven hills

Hugging sleeping

LIONS AND LIONESSES

And the poet

Lied who asked:

"How do you tell

A skull from another?"

And the poet

Lied!

SON OF MAN

THE BONES

SHALL RISE

Heaven says:

"Here I am bringing into you

Air

And you must come to life

And I will put upon you

Cloth

And cause to come upon you

Fur

And I will overlay upon you

Husk

And put into you

Shell

and you must come to life"

# CHIKA UNIGWE

and they will

me to know...."

d

said:

om the four winds

me in O wind

l blow upon

ese killed people

at they may

me to life"

se and sing

se and blow your lutes

l out war drums

the ikolo sound...

ne fortune of the day's

ding cannot be told

he morning"

hills resound

hills resound with rage

rees quiver

ants burrow deeper

sensening humus

bones shall rise....

member the phoenix....

the Muse....

he seven hills....



**CHIKA UNIGWE****Extract From *The Phoenix* (Novel)**

Last night  
your space was empty  
letting in the cold  
to hug my bones (Victor Ehikhamenor, "I wanted to Dream  
about You Last Night")  
I asked you this for I have now met your people in their feral  
state (Caryl Philips, *Higher Ground*.)

Outside, it is raining. It is not the kind of heavy rain to which I am accustomed back in Enugu, but a rain that falls gently, as if it were afraid to offend. I have to look closely at the window to convince myself that it is indeed raining. Everything here is different. I had expected it but the magnitude of the difference still shocks me. And now, my life is different. Completely changed. I feel like I am invisible. An unseen vapour floating odourlessly by. I feel like I do not exist. The feeling is so strong that I pinch my nose, I want to know if I still possess the ability to feel anything. My nose hurts. It is obvious I can still feel. I do not know whether to be relieved. Or sad. In the end, I am neither. I am simply grateful that the pain gives me something else to focus on. Something rather than my meeting with Dr. Suikerbuik this morning in Leuven.

There is a couple opposite me. They are youngish. I guess their ages to be twenty and twenty one, the boy being younger. That is still something that constantly numbs me with shock here; how an older woman can parade a younger man

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\*Unigwe's piece is a chapter from *The phoenix*, a draft of a new work.

without batting an eyelid. I have met quite a few of them. Caro who is thirty and her boyfriend, Joe who is twenty-five. Kare my neighbour and his girlfriend, Tina. There is a three year gap between them. Back home, a man with an older woman is called a gold digger, a lazy man, a disgrace to the exclusive cult of malehood. The woman is called old mama youngy, mutt dressed as lamb. But here, love is allowed to cut across boundaries. All boundaries. Age becomes nothing more than a number, a marker of how long one has been around and nothing more. It does not carry the weight of an importance attached to it back home. I am not allowed to call my older siblings by name. They are *sista* and *broda*. Marks of respect for the years between us.

My father says a traveller is blessed because he sees and hears a world of tales. He always says that a traveller returns with a pouch full of stories. I have seen enough here to last me until I join my ancestors. In the land of the dead, I shall be the official story teller as I would have stored a bag of tales.

The train stops in Herentals and the couple get on swinging their jeans-covered hips, hands in each other's pockets, giggling at a joke one of them makes. I am no longer paranoid enough to think that every laughter is directed at me every joke at my expense. They leave behind a faint scent of something that seems to be a mixture of cologne and soft flowery feminine perfume. There is a dent on the chair they have left behind.

A woman enters and sits into the dent. I imagine it is so warm under her buttocks. She adjusts her red skirt, crosses her legs and gives me a Flemish smile across the small table that sits between us. It is a smile like a child's paper-boat sailing on water. It remains on the surface, not daring to go deeper.

I smile back at her, baring my teeth. It is actually not a version of the Flemish smile. A parting of the lips, a showing of teeth mostly.



I have noticed that my teeth enchant them here. commented on all the time: How white, hoe kan dat? How one's teeth be that white? The unstained white of a ty sheet.

Africans always have strong, white teeth. You need dentists, the plague of the west.

You keep your teeth clean with a stick, ja? Is tha painful? Dat kan ik niet doen hoor!

You do not eat all the *snoepnes* that we do here that our teeth, lucky you!

Africans have white teeth so they can be seen in the dark, ja My smile encourages her. She speaks,

I nod and smile again. It is a brief smile, over before I even begun. I do not want to be drawn into a conversation. enjoying the company of myself. I have to come to realise misery loves its own company. I want to be inside my l alone. I play out favourite memories in my head: waking u Saturday morning to a house bathed in the aroma of akara the colour of polished wood. My mother's voice hummi song as she plaited my hair. My father singing along to a I Martin tune. I hear the laughter of my sister, Ebele. It bubbly sort of sound, like gas escaping a bottle of cola.

*I have been to Africa*, she says. Her voice finds its rudely into my head. I nod. It is the only response I can gi that proclamation. I look out the window and watch ho zoom past as the train moves on. I wonder what kind of l the people inside the houses have. If you ride on a train goes past Brussels North, it is easy to tell what kind of l people in some of the houses lead. The train goes right pas red light district and gives the passengers a view of prostitutes, stomachs as flat as ironing-boards, huge grin: some of the faces, waiting for customers to come in. Bu Herentals, the houses look deserted, devoid of life. They blank and there is nothing to suggest what kind of people liv them. There is a house with a child's plastic swing in the l yard, but there is no child to be seen. The woman opposite

crosses and uncrosses her legs. She digs in her bag, her lips drawn tight in concentration. I expect her to bring out a magazine from the leather bag that sits beside her and bury her head in a copy of *Flair* or *Libelle*. Instead, she pulls out a roll of mentos. She offers me a mint and smiles again. The smile deeper this time, the paper-boat goes lopsided and is sinking into the water. I feel obliged to smile back yet again.

*I went three years ago to Africa*, she says. She rolls the "r" when she says Africa. *I learnt some Swahili in Africa*. She asks if I speak Swahili. I say no, I do not speak Swahili. She looks disappointed, like a child who has been promised a sweet but not been given one after all. *You don't speak Swahili?* She asks again and I say *No*, shaking my head for emphasis. *But you are African ja!* She asks, squeezing her eyes in confusion. *What do you speak then?*

*I speak Igbo*, I answer.

*Is it like Swahili?* She asks and I say *No, it is not like Swahili. It is as different as Dutch is from Swedish.*

Her eyes look embarrassed. Her face clouds. But only for an instant. And then it clears and she beams me a smile.

*I speak a bit of Swahili*, she says. *Naomba unipe tesa*. She enunciates each word carefully, handling them like they were fine pieces of precious china. She repeats it, exhausting her vocabulary of Swahili. *Naomba unipe tesa*.

I think it sounds like a Zulu freedom chant. Like something one would hear Mandela shouting from a podium, fists clenched, standing majestic like an ageless mountain. She looks happy with herself. *You recognise it?* She asks expectantly. I say *No*. I do not.

*But you are African*, she accuses, her eyes blaring with anger (or it might have been hurt). *Surely your language is similar to Swahili*. Her voice rises a bit.

I tell her my Igbo language is nothing like Swahili.

Her voice drops in disappointment as she translates for me. *It means, Friend give me money. I heard it all the time in Africa*, she says. *People coming up to me and opening their palms for*



money, dollars. *I like Africa. People are poor but they are always singing and dancing. There is muziek in their lives.* She smiles again and closes her eyes. It looks as if she is in a gentle sleep.

I do not bother to tell her that Africa is not as small as she makes it seem. I do not tell her that Africa is a continent, like Europe is. I assume that she knows. She must know that she went to a country or some countries in Africa, not an amorphous Africa, with no beginning and no end. No distinctions, nothing to distinguish one part from another.

*You like it here?* She asks, opening her eyes. For the first time, I notice their colour. They are the palest shade of blue, like water in a swimming-pool.

Yes, I say, wondering how eyes can be that colour. They look like a doll's eyes. I had a doll when I was ten, it was the first doll I owned. My Uncle Eze sent it from England. It had pink plastic skin and blue plastic eyes. I liked it until my best friend, Ijeoma jealous of my gift from abroad told me my doll was not beautiful. She said it had *anya busu*, cat eyes. I have never seen a cat with blue eyes but I remember Ijeoma's comments and I laugh inwardly.

*How can you like it here when it is so cold?* She asks, her voice rising incredulously, sounding almost furious. Then her voice softens and she says, *Africa is warm. Zomer everyday, ja?* I say *Yes. It is summer everyday.*

*I like zomer,* she says, her voice sounding like a prayer. I expect her to go on her knees and pay homage to summer and the image that floats to my head is so ridiculous the laughter inside me almost spills out.

*You must miss Africa ja?* She asks, her head cocked to one side in what I can only assume is a show of sympathy. I say *Yes. I miss Africa. Africa is beautiful but is poor, ja?* She asks in a voice that sounds as if it is weighed down by the troubles of the world. *I like Africa,* she says her voice brightening as she plays with the tiny wooden elephant on her left ear. I guess that the earring comes from the Wereld Winkel. She looks like she

does her weekly shopping at Wereld Winkel with its collection of fair trade cocoa from Ghana and bottles of red wine from Chile and necklaces hand made in the back streets of Kenya and Tanzania. Shopping there is her contribution to easing the pain of Africa and the third world, I think.

Her voice drops in sadness again as she repeats that Africa is poor. *Beautiful but poor. Irony, ja?* She pronounces it "eerony".

I nod, Yes, it is an irony.

She continues in what I regard as her weighed-down-with-the-sorrows-of-the-world-voice. *You like it here because this place is rich, ja? Houses are bigger, ja? Not huts, like I saw in Africa. I saw lots of them. We stayed in a big hotel, very modern but it was built especially for tourists. The hotel bus took us past the huts. Lots of them with straw roofs. Is it comfortable insides? Does the rain not come in? I could not ask the children who begged me for money because they did not understand me.*

I do not tell her that I have never seen a hut in my entire life. My father is a psychiatrist doctor who trained in Great Britain. He always adds that he trained in Great Britain to distinguish him from those of his colleagues who did not train in the country of the Queen, God save the Queen. My mother is a pediatric nurse and I am the fourth of five children. We live in a six bedroom house in the city with a swimming pool and a huge back yard, which my mother has turned into a vegetable garden. I do not tell her that the house I share with my husband here is only as big as my father's guest house. Instead I tell her that no, the rain does not come in. I tell her it is very dry. And do people in the huts sleep on mattresses? She wants to know. Or do they sleep on hay? A friend of hers told her that they sleep on hay. I tell her they sleep on mattresses but the doll-blue eyes look doubtful. I can see that she does not entirely believe me. Or perhaps, I think, she does not want to believe me. Her weekly trips to the Wereld Winkel will lose its significance if



the Africans in huts sleep on beds rather than on hay. *Her passion for Africa will wane, I think.*

*Africans*, she says shaking her head, *so poor yet so happy*. She looks at me and comments on how happy I seem. She says, "content." She says to look around the train, see how the young people in all their luxury look sad, angry, aggressive. She says this in a whisper, her eyes darting to a group of five young people, probably in their teens, sitting across the aisle from us. There are three girls and two boys. The girls have charcoal-black lipstick on their lips. Lipstick that makes them look gruesome, like masks created to scare little children. The boys have spiked hair and earrings on their chins. They are all carrying mobile phones on coloured slings around their necks. The two boys have thick-soled Nike sneakers with untied laces. The girls have open-toed sandals with heels as high as stilts for *izaga* masquerades in my village. They sprawl out on their chairs chatting in low tones, their features locked in what appears to be a permanent scowl.

But you, she continues, looking at me as if I were some trophy she has picked up, you look like you do not have a care in the world. Just like the people she saw in Africa, she says. The women were always singing, the children always playing even though they were all barefoot and wore torn shirts and some had no clothes on at all. Africa, she says again, no stress. Then, she adds in a giggle, *no dress, no stress*. Her pun embarrasses her and she covers her mouth with the back of her hands to push down the giggle and to stop more words from coming out. I imagine her fighting with the words, refusing to open her mouth to let out a stream of words she does not want to utter. When she is composed, she tells me again how very happy with life I look, even though where I come from, people still die of hunger.

My mother made us take our bath three times a day. Father said she was obsessed with cleanliness. We took our bath in the morning, took our bath in the afternoon as soon as we got in from school, and then at night before bed time we paid



our tribute to the bath. It is a habit I am fighting to get rid of because water costs a lot more here than it does back home. Mother's obsession extended to our clothes. We had to be neat and tidy at all times. We were never to be seen with torn clothes. Mother inspected our clothes daily, muttering under her breath that a stitch in time saves nine. I wonder if my co-traveller would have thought the African children she saw less happy if they had shoes on. And clean clothes.

I look at the window. The rain is still falling politely. I go inside myself and try to conjure up memories that will take me far away from my present. Memories to comfort me and make me forget. Instead, another memory comes. A recent memory. A memory from this morning at the Gasthuisberg hospital in Leuven. It takes central position and bullies all the other memories away.

I smell the disinfected waiting-room of Dr. Suikerbulk.

I see myself walk into his office, my black boots clicking on the floor.

I am sitting opposite him while he adjusts his silver rimmed glasses.

*I have got some bad news*, he says. He removes his glasses and wipes them, then he says, the lumps we found were cancerous. We shall have to start you on a treatment straight away.

His voice floats in the air like fine dust and it is a while before they settle and make any sense to me. When they do, I want to scream. I want to tell him that he is lying. I want to say I am only twenty nine, I am too young to have cancer. I want to tell him I cannot have cancer because I still have dreams. I want to see my grandchildren I want to say. I want to raise Jordi. I want to say I am afraid to die and could he please help me not to die. I open my mouth but all that comes out is a tiny wail. Like the startled cry of a weak baby. Then the tears follow, ruining the Elizabeth Arden mascara which runs into the tears. They are fast, a furious cascade of warm, murky water. My cheeks burn where they touch. It is as if the tears scarificate my face. I imagine the marks etched on my face, two thin lines, one on

each cheek like the marks on an elder's face in my village, signifiers of their status in society. But mine are markers of pain.

Signifiers of the huge boulder weighing on my chest. Wipe the tears off my cheeks with the back of my palm. My hand is smeared with brown. I look at it in confusion for a moment before I realise that it must be my powder. Ima cream foundation and powder. I paid fifty euro for it at an African shop in Leuven. At that price, it is not a powder I wear everyday. I am miserly with it as I want it to last for years. I save it for outings and weddings. And of course I wear it today for my appointment with Dr. Suikerbuik. I wonder now if the powder will outlast me.

The train stops\* to pick up more passengers in Tielen. A group of five black women enter. One of them, the third to walk in is heavily made up. They manage to sit just as the train pulls off.

The woman opposite me is still talking. What do you like best about Belgium? I hear her ask. I do not answer her. I do not have the strength to. I feel a huge wave of sadness engulf me and like a strong sea wave, drag me further into myself to seek a means of escape. This body, it could be the body of a stranger. (Erwin Mortier, *My Fellow Skin*)

When Dr. Suikerbulk told me that I had cancer, his voice serious and hoarse, like Marlon Brando's in the *Godfather*, I felt as if my body had been invaded by aliens. It was as if I could feel the foreign bodies walking all over my body, colonising bits of the alien invasion. I did not believe it belonged to me anymore.

Cancer was not a word I was familiar with. I knew of it of course, but it was something I always associated with the 'other' that was as far removed from me as it was possible to be. It was not like AIDS, which even though it was discussed in hushed tones, had an existence that I was aware of. Cancer, however, belonged to another realm.



Once, when Mrs. Okeke, my mother's friend came early one morning and brought the news that one of their mutual acquaintances had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, my mother laughed it off, dismissing the news and the gravity with which Mrs. Okeke delivered it with a flick of her right wrist and a high laugh that rang in our ears. She said that cancer was a disease of the west. "It is not for Africans who live in Africa. It is for those in industrialised nations with all their pollution and their tinned fruits and packet juices and artificial food. Artificial lifestyle. That is the cause of cancer. It cannot be found here." She made it sound as if cancer were a life form that could not survive the humidity of Africa. She said that the doctor that made the diagnosis had to be wrong as the woman in question had always lived in Nigeria. "She has never been on an airplane," she said, still laughing at the absurdity of the diagnosis. As she spoke, Mrs. Okeke's lips, which had been tight with worry for the ill woman gradually relaxed until it lost all its tightness. Later that night, when my mother repeated her conversation with Mrs. Okeke to my father, he said, "Nonsense talk. No good. Cancer everywhere." My mother's only reaction to this was to laugh with such certitude that she got me convinced that I was impervious to cancer. And so, I banished the word from my head, sending it to rest with the other words that did not form part of my everyday vocabulary. I buried it so deep that I forgot such a word even existed. But I have lived abroad now for seven years, I thought. Did that make me disposed to cancer? Did the seven years of eating Western food and breathing Belgian air mean that my insurance against cancer had been annulled?

#### Cancer.

The word had come back to haunt me, dropping from the doctor's lips like lead and my mother was not here to laugh it off. She was not here to wave a magic wand with the flick of her wrist and make the word disappear. I was angry with my body for turning traitor and giving me up to the enemy. How could this have happened? I wondered. I wished that I could

have my mother sitting beside me to tell the doctor that he was wrong.

As soon as the doctor let the word escape, rubbing his glasses on his shirt, it sent a chill from the tip of my toes to the roots of my hair. Even though the room was well-heated and the doctor had his shirt sleeves rolled up, I felt like I was outside in the cold. I could feel goose pimples crawling up in a steady procession, taking their positions on my arms. I was sure I could feel my teeth rattle from the cold. I wanted to pick up the word where it had fallen and force the doctor to eat it up, to send it back from where it came. The room seemed to constrict and close around me, echoing the news I had just received. My throat felt as if it had been gripped by something I could not see. I wanted to get out and run out into the open. I wanted to run until I no longer had the smell of the hospital in my nostrils, until I was very far away from this doctor with the checkered shirt and the glasses that he wiped constantly on his shirt. I could not run without looking silly, so I settled for the next best thing. I looked out of the window of the surgery. I looked past the green flower vase with purple tulips. I did not know what I expected to see but I was surprised to find myself looking into the parking lot of the hospital. I had not known that the window overlooked the parking lot. It was a beehive of activities. There were people coming and going. Laughing and talking. Life went on and I had cancer!

Who would look after Jordi if I died? Who would be there waiting for him when he came back?

My hands felt clammy. A feeling of an unfriendly warmth spread through me and suddenly, I wanted to shout my way out of the surgery. I wanted to shout the day through to destroy the day with my shouting so that it no longer existed. I wished the day were a piece of paper I could rip into many little pieces and throw into the wind to be scattered. Minuscule pieces that would be lost and never recovered.

It was almost Christmas. The street decorations have been up for a while now. Nights were beautiful with the lit

reindeers and wreaths blinking above a sleeping city. It was the wrong time of the year to be saddled with such news, I thought. It was the season of joy and cheer and goodwill. How could I be of cheer and goodwill if I had to battle cancer as well? That is what people do to cancer, is it not? They *battle* it. Cancer puts one in a war situation and the only way to face it is to battle it. I did not have the strength to fight. I had too many other things to do.

Dr. Suikerbuik said that I must ask him questions if I had any. He said he knew that I must have a lot of things I wanted to know. "Anything." He said. I wanted to tell him that he did not even know the half of it. I wanted to tell him that the way he kept pulling off his silver-rimmed glasses and then jamming them back again on his nose, only to peer out the top of them like a school headmaster was getting on my nerves. What would he have done if I had asked him to please stop doing that? Would he have stopped? Or would his lower lip had jutted out the way it did while he wiped his glasses on his shirt?

On the shelf beside his desk was a framed colour picture of a woman standing behind a boy. The boy was blowing out candles on a cake. The woman was laughing, her head turned to the side, not looking into the camera. She had brown hair that looked like a dog's tail I saw once. The boy had dark hair that mushroomed out around his head. The hair in front came all the way down to his eyes (that was how it seemed) and I wondered how he saw with hair like that. He looked about the same age as Jordi. I wondered where he was. Was he at home? At school? Was he safe? I found myself wondering about his teachers and how well they supervised the children at play time. At Jordi's school, the supervision was poor. Especially on the playground. I might start a campaign for better supervision of the children on the playground. I would demand for at least three teachers to be on watch duty while the children played and never to take their eyes off them. But I cannot start a campaign all by myself. Gunther did not want to know and I did not know any other parent at the school. I knew some on sight, but we hardly



exchanged anything other than a "*dag*" that was sometimes said so quietly that it got swallowed up by the air. Still, something had to be done about safety at the school.

Lisa, my friend, said Belgium was no longer as safe as it used to be. She said thirty years ago, what happened with Dutroux would never have happened. Children being kidnapped and hidden in cellars and starved. Lisa could not have been more than a child herself thirty years ago, but she said she remembered playing in the park without any fear of being kidnapped. She always talked about going off on her bike without any parent trailing her. "It was bliss then," she said. Often, she would bring out old photographs as if she were intent on proving to me that she led a blissful existence back then. The pictures had the musty smell of age, but they were not frayed at the edges the way my old pictures were. There were pictures of her, hair brushed off her forehead and held in two ponytails, smiling out to the world. There were the ones of her in dungarees, sitting astride a bike, two front teeth meeting. There is no parent in sight. She looks happy in all the pictures.

She used to conclude by saying that Jordi was growing up in terrible times. When Lisa was not grilling me about Africa, she played prophet of doom.

She said things would only get worse. She said she did not vote Vlaamsblock, but she was not entirely happy with the amount of immigrants proliferating the country. It was she who told me about the warring Brussels gangs made up of young *allochtone meisjes*, immigrant girls from Africa and Morocco, she said who were all in their early teens. "They are not good immigrants, like you" she said. "A lot of these people just cause trouble, but you, you are different" she said, refilling my cup with steaming coffee from a thermos in the shape of a chicken. She told me horror stories of old women beaten to death for their purses in the back streets of Brussels, car keys stolen from kitchens in Antwerp. "Luckily, things are not that bad yet here in Turnhout," she said, rubbing her dog's head. "But mark my words," she added, "we are getting there." She told me of the

three black men she ran into in the *centrum* on an early Saturday morning carrying boxes of what seemed to be brand new colour televisions on their heads. "Where were they coming from at that time of the day?" she asked. "They were walking very fast, as if they were afraid of being apprehended. I assure you, they were thieves on their way home after a looting!" She made her pronouncement with such force that she sent spittle flying out of her mouth, across the table to hit me somewhere on my right cheek. I told her that if they were robbers, they would have had a getaway car. Why would they take the risk of carrying stolen goods through town on their heads? She said that I was too naïve, too innocent to know how the mind of a criminal worked. "You are a good one, *meisje*. You are the sort of foreigner we want in our country." I did not tell her that I was hardly a foreigner. I did not bother to remind her that I already had my Belgian passport for three years now. I just sipped my coffee and answered her questions about my past and life over there. Her questions never ceased and each time we met, she had new ones for me and my answers were doors that hid other doors, leading to more questions.

How many meals do you eat a day in your country?

Three. Same as here.

Same as here? What do you eat? *Patal*?

That. And rice. And bread. And pasta. And fufu.

What is that? *Foohfooh*?

It is from paste. Made from cassava. And yam.

What are those? Cassava and yam?

"Manioc. I don't know what yam is called in Flemish. I shall check my dictionary and tell you when next I see you," I offered.

But what does it look like?

"Like an enormous potato," I suggested.

Don't you miss home?

I do but here is my home now.

What did you do for entertainment at home?

We watched television. Listened to music.

What sort of music? Did you make your own? With tam tams and sticks?

No. We played the same kind of music young people here play. Janet Jackson. Luther Vandross. I guess now, they are playing Brittany Spears and Alicia Keys and Christina Aguilera.

Sometimes, she lost herself in the questions and forget to refill our cups of coffee. She would sit at the tip of her chair, leaning across the table so that her face was close to mine, as if she wished to catch my words as soon as they left my mouth. Her eyes glowed and dimmed in turn according to my answers. She was like an anthropologist on a field trip, collecting notes for her research. Sometimes, her questions exasperated me and I made excuses to leave.

But at the moment, sitting opposite the doctor, Lisa's would be a welcome abode. Answering her questions was preferable to staying here, listening to Dr. Suikerbuik tell me about treatments and options. Did he think I wanted to know? I was more worried for Jordi and how he would cope without me. He was only six years old. I thought of the shopping I still had to get through. There were the Sinterklaas presents to buy. And the Christmas presents. And the tree to set up. I would like to put the Christmas tree in front of the old Vitrine. Gunther would not like that, but I would be stubborn and refuse to yield. There was nothing in that old vitrine I wanted to see. Right in front of it would be the ideal spot for the tree. I had to buy from the seller on the Guldensporenlei. He always had good trees. And his were cheaper than what they had in BRICO. I would choose one that was so high that when we put the red plastic star I got from HEMA on top, the star would touch the ceiling. That was the way Jordi liked it. He liked to crane his way all the way up to catch a glimpse of the star. Gunther would complain again about how high the star was but I would refuse to remove it. He complained too much these days, anyway. What was important was Jordi. He should have the Christmas of his dreams. Every child had a right to that and I was not going to disappoint him.



He had not told me what he hoped to find under the tree. That should not be too difficult to find out I thought. I would just watch the advertisements on television and see which toys seemed popular.

Dr. Suikerbuik slid some folders across the table at me. He said I should read them, they would give me an idea of what lay ahead, and answer some other questions I might have. He said it like I had already asked him any question.

His hands were chubby, like those of a baby. Jordi had had such fingers as a baby: full and dimpled at the base. Gunther called them piggy toes, but he said it with a tone in his voice that betrayed that he found them anything as ugly as pigs' toes. "I know it is not easy, getting news like this, but you are in good hands." Dr. Suikerbuik's voice came out in a lazy drawl. "Of course it is not easy," I wanted to say. Instead, I said thank you for the folders and pushed them down into my handbag, out of sight and zipped my bag shut. I looked at his hands that were like a child's and they did not instill confidence.

I wondered if his hands transformed to an adult's when he performed surgery. How could he have reached adulthood with hands like those? They were so out of place with the rest of him: the Marlon Brando voice that commanded respect, the hair that was thinning in front from age, the crows' legs around the eyes and the poker face that seemed never to have belonged to a child.

I had never seen such a study in contradictions.

I watched his lips move. I no longer listened to him. I did not want to hear what he had to say. I longed to be out of there. I still had a lot of shopping to get through. The Christmas tree needed some more decorations and yesterday I had seen some dangling Father Christmas at HEMA. Jordi would like them. I should get some more silver tinsels, I thought. It would be nice to drape some around Jordi's bed. And I had seen in the *reclamefolder* for Kruidvat that they had a singing Father Christmas going for five euro. I imagined it under the tree. I imagined Jordi's face when he got in and

discovered it. I made a mental note in my head not to forget. Gunther would tell me it was all unnecessary but he did not love Jordi with a mother's love. He was not the one who stood at the window overlooking the street, waiting for Jordi to return.

"Are you sure you have no questions, Mevrouw?" The doctor's voice brought me back to the present. I had forgotten where I was. For a few minutes, I had forgotten that he had burdened me with an illness that I did not want to think about. And now, he had dragged me back to that illness. I shook my head and told him I had no questions, but thank you anyway.

The room was quiet. He pulled his glasses off his eyes and wiped them on his shirt again. It sounded like my mother filing her nails. He pushed his chair back, stood up and held out his hand. I knew I was being dismissed.

Gratefully, I walked out of the room. I took the elevator downstairs and skipped all the way to the train station. I had things to do, I told myself. My head filled with the thought of Jordi, of what I still had to buy and the cancer receded into the back of my mind until it was somewhere I could not reach it very easily.

**EILEEN CHIOMA EMEAFOR****Time**

There were times  
I waited for time  
It seemed so unconcerned  
And moved at its pace  
Slowly it went  
In turtle crawl  
Filled with a wave of anxiety  
I felt like  
Giving it a push

But, when I  
Looked up to time  
To wait for me  
It had no patience  
Running as fast  
As its legs  
Could carry it

And I shouted  
Hang on time  
Wait for me  
Wait a while  
But it seemed so deaf  
As lackadaisical as ever  
And went on



And when I  
Neither waited for it  
Nor it for me  
It continued unperturbed  
Like a waterfall

Within and without  
Upon all odds  
As if nothing happened  
And I wondered why?

Time! I know  
Your greatest enemies  
The twin they are  
Harbingers of waste  
Them you abhor most  
Indecision and procrastination  
Always warring against you  
A war you have always won

But I have  
Now learnt that  
Time never changes  
It is meant  
To be this way  
Always same  
At dusk and at dawn  
For the worn-out  
To have rest  
And the refreshed  
To wake up  
And face a new dawn

**SOPHIA IFEOMA AKHUEMOKHAN****The Dream of Freedom in Driss Chraïbi's *Heirs to the Past***

This essay attempts a reading of *Heirs to the Past* by Driss Chraïbi from the perspective of Helen Arendt's distinction between the concepts of "liberation" and "freedom". According to Arendt, a social scientist, the two concepts are not synonymous, and the novel can be used to demonstrate this. Arendt says that liberation implies shaking off the yoke of tyranny, but freedom goes beyond this to incorporate freedom from "shame" "poverty" and "obscurity", among other things. All African literature reflects in one way or another the African's struggle to cross from a state of liberation to a state of freedom, but *Heirs to the Past* portrays with startling clarity both the inadequacy of the former state and the importance of the latter. The essay concludes that freedom is inseparable from African's well-being in the future.

"Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last." These words of an old Negro spiritual close one of the most famous speeches in history, "I Have A Dream", by the late American Civil Rights Leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

King's dream was of *freedom* – neither an end to slavery, for that had been abolished in America a hundred years earlier, nor simply an end to disenfranchisement, because, as he notes in his speech, a number of black Americans were already enfranchised but "believe[d] [they had] nothing for which to vote." King dreamt of an end to the appalling debasement that characterized the African-American situation in racist America

of 1963; an end to "segregation", "discrimination", "lonli[ness]", "poverty", and "exile".

The same year that King made his speech, and in the same land, a social scientist, named Helen Arendt, wrote this in her book *On Revolution*: "It may be a truism to say that liberation and freedom are not the same; that liberation may be the condition of freedom but by no means leads automatically to it" (29). Arendt explains liberation as "liberation from the yoke of tyranny" (74) ( tyrannical political forces, such as slavery, dictatorship, and the like) but freedom she regards as "liberation from the yoke of necessity" (74), which incorporates liberation from "fear" (32), "shame" (48), "poverty" (60), "ignominy" (60), "oblivion" (69) and "obscurity" (69). Arendt argues that an individual who is liberated from tyranny but not from necessity could not claim to have achieved freedom.

Clearly, King and Arendt are referring to the same ideal when they speak of freedom. It is an ideal shared, not only by two Americans in the 60s, but by people far and near up to the present century, and the greater the degree of captivity the more passionate becomes the dream of freedom. Maybe this is why the African novelist hovers so consistently around this ideal, because virtually all African literature, directly or indirectly, reveals Africa's desire to advance from a state of liberation to a state of freedom.

Liberation has been experienced across the continent in the form of Independence and in some cases coups and counter coups, but freedom of the type King and Arendt picture is seemingly yet to materialize. The African of today is still battling poverty and injustice on the home front and the disadvantages of being a Third World citizen on a globe that is First World oriented.

Of the numberless texts that deal with this battle, *Heirs to the Past* is outstanding in its vivid illustration of the issues involved and its delineation of the concepts of liberation and freedom. The novel tells the tale of an Afro-Arab who dreams of freedom but invariably trains himself to be content with



something less. Through its portrayal of the Moroccan experience, it reveals that the failure of Independence is not restricted to black Africa and that independence in the genuine sense of the word is still a universal African project, universally complicated by the African's coloured skin.

The novel has been the subject of critical analysis before, although not from the angle to be adopted in this essay. For example, critics have noted that Chraïbi's protagonist, Driss, is a man in a crisis, but not that he is caught mid-way between liberation and freedom. Rather they see him as being caught between two cultures. "A central theme in [Chraïbi's] novels is the clash between different cultures, the East and the West, Arab and French," records one critic on the internet. He arrives at the verdict that the clash terminates with the triumph of the West: "Gradually Driss realizes how old family values have given way to the ideas of the West." A second critic, Bahadur Tejani, likewise acknowledges the cultural conflict in the novel and its effect upon the major characters: "*Heirs to the Past* by Driss Chraïbi is one of the best expressions of the Afro-Islamic world view as seen through literature and art.... The plot of the novel is representative of the search for a balanced identity and an aim in life" (154). Tejani differs from the first critic in seeing the possibility of striking a balance between the European and the Arab culture; notwithstanding it is clear that neither of the critical opinions focus on the issue of emancipation for the African.

Danielle Marx-Scouras is a third voice, and she discloses that Chraïbi's portrayal of Eastern and Western culture has led to charges of non-commitment on his part:

"[He is] neither an exotic (colonial) nor a nationalistic writer. An advocate of the cross-cultural perspective, he cannot be confined to any politically determined place. Numerous Maghrebian critics, however, continue to reproach Chraïbi for

having failed to provide a counter-hegemonic response to European cultural and political imperialism" (136).

Again Marx-Scouras' comments allude to the cultural dilemma in the text. She even goes a step further to mention "political imperialism" but neither herself nor her co-critics interpret Driss's dilemma as stemming from a deficiency in the liberation he is offered.

In summary, previous studies on *Heirs to the Past* have not focused on the text as an avenue to understanding the difference between "liberation from tyranny" and "liberation from necessity". Despite this the study is worthwhile because it uncovers the reality of the two social circumstances while simultaneously providing a few reasons why one has not led to the other for the African. This essay thus examines Driss's dream of freedom in *Heirs to the Past*, highlighting its frustration in both France and Morocco, and in the process, demonstrating that liberation is no substitute for freedom.

### **The Dream in France**

Driss is an unusual African protagonist; he is a Moroccan who would prefer to be French. This unabashed preference is probably the most singular feature of the text, running through the novel from the first leaf and over-shadowing it with tragedy. Events open in a northern city in France, with Driss walking in isolation through ice and snow towards the psychiatrist's clinic. He has lived in France sixteen years, married a French woman and fathered two children but the hopelessness of ever being affirmed a Frenchman has resulted in his mental collapse. The first four pages alone suffice to show what he is up against as an Arab in the Occident. He testifies of "hatreds" (3), "hostility" (3), "loneliness" (4), "anguish" (5) and "despair" (5). Needless to say, these were not the goals he had in mind when he left Morocco. Driss journeys to France twice in fact – initially as a youth rebelling against his father's authoritarianism and then as

an adult after his father's burial – and on both occasions he is in quest of a golden ideal which he calls a "glimmer of light" (4). It is a vision that he cannot see too distinctly but he alleges that it takes shape in the "darkness" of his life (4), and he cannot contain it in one word but he explains it in many: "... truths... justice, fairness, progress... schemes for changing mankind" (43). The reader is not slow to comprehend what the narrator is trying so earnestly to communicate. The glimmer of light, the shapes in the darkness, the truth, the justice, the fairness and so on are merely details in a more elaborate picture. Driss has a dream, and his dream is of freedom.

It is important to note that this dream is formulated about France while Driss is in Morocco. The inference is that he does not associate freedom with his own land and the reader learns that this is largely owing to his father's autocracy. The Seigneur's repressiveness stands in contradistinction to the imagined license of the Mediterranean and accordingly Driss's decision to re-locate is actually an attempt to exchange a state of oppression for a state of autonomy. He is twenty years old at the time and an heir to a sizeable fortune but for all he knows the Seigneur's luxurious mansion is a "fortress" (30). His perception of his father's lifestyle is sealed up in two words: "Habitude, arabitude" (106). In contrast his perception of Europe is of an indelible truth. Tejani is correct when he says that "[Driss's] expectations of the 'metropolitan parent' civilization are indeed classic" (156). Driss sets out for Europe, armed with an unbelievable faith in French integrity. He is persuaded that France will be to him the model parent that his father has refused to be, showing him the concern and impartiality that is lacking in his native household. With this conviction, he alights on French territory, explaining to his reader enthusiastically: "... the very day that I first entered France, in a hotel lobby, I... looked at [the woman there] as one would look at a mother. I was very willing to be protected, to be colonized, to be given a certificate of acceptance" (16). Unfortunately this is not to be. The young protagonist fails to



find acceptance, talk less of parental concern. The French reject him because he is different in language, in mentality, in religion and "in skin" (16). Rebuff follows rebuff and he cries in sorrow: "Hates became as insistent around me as flies around chunks of meat" (10).

Driss agonizes because he has not come to grips with a prime reality, which is that escape from unfavourable circumstances back home does not guarantee anything better abroad. As Arendt discerns, the translation from liberty to freedom is not automatic. In Driss's case it is his nationality that is the blockade. He is a Moroccan, therefore, he is compelled to act out step by step his designated role as the solitary African in a European cast. As he painfully does so, the words "shame", "oblivion", "ignominy" flit across the screen. One extract in particular summarises the level to which he is reduced as he drifts from one individual to another, appealing for love from those who choose to withhold it. Granted that he was a lord in his birthplace, in Europe he is comparable to the most wretched of citizens; a beggar:

Year after year I went from town to village with my arms held out, a sort of nomad without a staff or Bible, crying through all my pores and my hair: 'I've turned my back on a family of bourgeois and seigneurs, and what kind of family, what kind of world am I going to find here? I've slammed all the doors of my past because I'm heading towards Europe and Western civilization, and where is that civilization then, show it to me, show me one drop of it. I'm ready to believe I'll believe anything... Here I am... welcome me, oh welcome me (16).

Of course Driss errs when he "slam[s] all the doors of [his] past", and incidentally there is no remedy to his problem until he opens them again; that is, until he returns to Morocco.

Pending that time, he remains in "the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination", to quote the words of Dr. King earlier mentioned. King further alleges that unless these manacles are dispensed with, the victim will remain in a sorry position. In the African-American context, the position is tantamount to "languishing in the corners of American society". The same applies to the African in Europe, Driss marks, since there can be no denying that he lives on the borderline of French society.

The reader is tempted to contemplate the novel's hero with pity and conclude that he is an eccentric Afro-Arab who made a regrettable mistake in travelling to the Northern hemisphere, but the matter is not so simple. On the contrary, any African reader who cannot detect the universality of Driss's predicament is missing the point of the narrative. Viewed from the angle of the international community, neither Driss nor the African-Americans are the sole ostracized Africans. The African does not have to be in the white man's abode before he is stationed at a humiliating post; even the elder safely encamped in his tribal headquarters is stationed there. A lecture by the critic, Steve Ogude, helps to throw some light on this. The lecture entitled "English Literature, Race and Africa: The Myth of the Global Village", treats the theme of globalization, which implies common goals and a common worldview, as is well known. More pertinently, it holds the promise of plenty for the famished Third World, which will begin to relate on a man-to-man basis with the developed nations. It is interesting to observe that in the present age when speculations on the global village are so positive, Ogude's opinion is that it is an "alluring abstraction" (36). He cites manifold examples from English literature to support this opinion, insisting that globalization is in the final analysis "the logical extension of the colonial enterprise in the non-European parts of the world" (36). Ogude's thesis is that the global village offers the African only a back bench in international affairs. Literature and bitter

Can a hungry lion really love a lamb?  
Can a snake caress a rat in its hole?  
Can a predator ever shake a friendly hand with its prey?

Return the gaze!  
Take your freedom  
Give value to your name  
Enjoy the fragrance of your presence  
Shun their conspiratory praises  
Remember your name  
And your clan  
And your history  
And your colour  
And your honour  
Roll out your own agenda  
Construct your own highway  
To your future

Return the gaze  
Return the jokes  
And the aspersions  
Make your presence felt  
Put a bounce on your walk  
Lower your expectations  
Of these greedy lot  
These truly hungry lot  
These inhuman lot  
These generation searching for a lost soul

Return the gaze  
And firmly *take* your freedom.



experience have long shown him his place in the European scheme of things and it is not a place to be envied:

There can be nothing great in belonging to a village, global or miniscule, in which one is merely tolerated.... And as Lawino assures us, even in the best of villages, everyone must have his own homestead (41). *But as things now stand, the African can hardly be said to perch, even precariously, on the periphery of the global village.* (34-35, emphasis added)

King grieves over the African-American languishing in the corners of society. Ogude warns of the African perching on the periphery of the global village. The two situations are one, and neither is inviting nor is either equivalent to a life of freedom. Before the African can profit from what Driss yearningly terms the "schemes for changing mankind" there must be changes in African-European relationships and, moreover, in the African people's attitude to themselves. For instance in Ayi Kwei Armah's latest publication, *Osiris Rising*, he informs us that "the beautiful ones" so urgently required in his maiden novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, are now alive and kicking on the African continent. They are the ones with spirit of creativity and orderliness who refuse to sanction the conventional image of the unproductive African. They believe in African excellence and back up their belief with hardwork. Considering such alternatives, Driss's option to completely forego his African heritage may not be the best. All the same, he is human, and like all humanity, he has his weaknesses. He equally has his strengths, his resolve to pursue his human rights ranking chief among them. In this area there is no room for compromise and he is wholly unprepared to sacrifice his ideals on the altar of patriotism.

## The Dream in Morocco

Driss has a passion for freedom. One could even say he is obsessed with it, which is to be expected, bearing in mind his background. Apart from anything else, by virtue of his nationality, he has been liberated more than once and to little purpose, the history of Morocco being that of multiple occupations and multiple overthrows. The nation was first governed by the Greeks and the Romans before it was invaded successively by the Berbers, the Arabs and the French. Each invader terminated the despotism of its predecessor only to become a despot in its own right. Consequently, Marx-Scouras argues that "the French conquest of North Africa was merely the last in a series of conquests that ... occurred in a region where the question of identity has always been linked with the idea of the 'other' in a violent tête-a-tête" (140).

Thus, Driss grows up among a people who are familiar with the disappointment attendant upon mere political liberation. He experiences the disappointment in the final instance, at the crucial moment when France, the last of all Morocco's masters, is ultimately ousted. And the French have been masters in every sense of it. A literary critic, Isaac Yetiv, informs us that the disparity between "the archaic and politically weak civilization" of the Moroccan natives and the "prestigious, conquering and arrogant civilization of the French was so great that it could not be accommodated" (86). In other words there was no chance of striking a balance, as Tejani formerly suggested. According to Yetiv, French North African intellectuals in the colonial regime were constrained to discard their indigenous culture: "Subjected to this double pressure [of Arab and French culture], the 'suddenly civilized' North African intellectual had to make a choice; the two cultures could not co-exist, to blend them was impossible; it was necessary to do away with the old and substitute the new" (86).

The constraint to "do away" with their own culture is lifted when Morocco gains its independence. Driss is in France at the time but when he is recalled to bury his father, he goes

without hesitation, hoping desperately that, in the new Morocco, he will meet with the freedom he has vainly sought in Paris for over one and a half decades. It is his calamity that independence in Morocco is akin to that in other sectors of Africa, and indeed anywhere on the map where freedom is tied purely to the demise of oppression. Liberation from the French imperialist is unaccompanied by liberation from the evils of necessity – unemployment, deprivation and humiliation – and so independence brings neither relief nor respect to the Moroccan populace.

We see Morocco from the intimate perspective of the first person narrator. Driss guides the reader diligently through the newly emancipated nation, registering its sights and sounds with a combination of guilt, torment and amusement. The first episode he describes occurs at the airport in Casablanca and is a succinct lecture on the equivocal legacy of colonialism. A Moroccan gentleman in a European suit, ushering along a European wife, pretends not to know his own father. The ageing parent is depicted as “an old peasant, dark and withered, barefooted, bareheaded... with muck up to his knees ... and dust up to his eyes” (22). Almost weeping with joy, he rides his grey donkey furiously in his son’s direction, whereupon the latter turns to his wife and conceals his supposed disgrace with a lie: “It’s an old servant” (25). Driss watches the drama silently and moves on.

He is struck next by the crowds – in the streets as well as at the entrance to his father’s residence. At first they appear to him as just an indiscriminate mass until one individual disengages from the main body and so gives a clue as to its makeup: “As I went up the steps, a beggar clung to my arm,” Driss reports, “I had probably given him alms when I was still a child. He called down the blessing of Heaven on my head and chased away the swarm of children of both sexes who were jumping around me and crying their hunger” (30). This persistently hungry crowd is near impossible to dismiss, the reader learns; moreso now that the Seigneur’s burial ceremonies



are on. When Driss enters the house, the beggars keep vigil on the ground floor, "waiting for their share of the meat and staving off their hunger by chanting verses from the Koran" (38). Upstairs he is confronted with a group of relatives who bear an uncomfortably close resemblance to the crowd below: "Seated in a horseshoe formation facing the sacrifice [a butchered sheep] and probably the East... were two or three dozen adults, ragged and grave and with good appetites, intoning in chorus some verses from the Koran" (33). In fact, penury and hunger prove to be definitive features of the new Morocco. Even after the ceremonies, the starved crowd withdraws to a respectful distance only; it is always within range. On a normal day, for instance, Driss's mother might occupy herself with some routine almsgiving:

My mother emptied the food into a bowl and told one of my nephews to go and distribute it to the poor. He had not far to go; he had only to open the front door and there the poor were, their name was legion, as though this were the country of the hungry of this earth and their capital were the square where the Seigneur's house stood (50).

The dividing line between rich and poor is sharp in the infant state. When one of Driss's brothers, Jaad, refuses to walk in the Seigneur's autocratic steps, the metamorphosis from rich to poor is almost instantaneous. Abandoning his father's huge estate, Jaad puts up in a shack made of "rotting planks and flattened tins, with the beaten earth for a floor" (90). His wife, Safia, toils sixteen hours a day to support the family because her husband "isn't able to work, work for a man being one of the rarest things in this country" (93). The reader surveys the abject poverty of Jaad's lodgings and remembers the extravagance of the Seigneur's mansion, with its "thick carpets", "gilt-decorated doors and windows", "silken hangings" and "crystal

chandeliers" (34). The reader also distinctly remembers the Seigneur's family reclining in this opulence, drinking mint tea and eating biscuits and honey cakes, while the lean beggars were singing downstairs. Independence undoubtedly has a string of questions attached to it. The worst part is that even the Seigneur, a beneficiary of both pre- and post-Independence inequities, makes jest of the political procedure. In his farewell address, he rounds off his derogatory assessment of the new system with the taunt: "But we are free, are we not?" (83).

Virtually nothing has altered in Morocco. Suffering still holds sway over the hordes, while a minute number of privileged persons enjoy immunity. Dejectedly, Driss floats about his neighbourhood, as much a stranger as he was in Europe, waiting for his father's lawyer to convene a family meeting to read the will. It turns out to be a taped message which the dead Seigneur himself reads to his tense family with a macabre sense of humour. Not a penny is bequeathed upon Driss. He is already reckoned to be gone. This blow irreparably shatters any illusions he might have had about the absence of discrimination in independent Morocco. Even his autocratic father knew he could not actualize his dream there. Driss discovers later that the Seigneur catered for his expenses during the trip and wisely paid for his return ticket to France. He flies back to his wife and children, mentally sounder and having reached an unalterable conclusion: come what may, France is "home" (107), not Morocco.

### Conclusion

So ends the strange and rather sad biography of the protagonist. He decides to make France his home, which is not strange or sad in itself. The distressing thing is that his decision falls short of a solution, because the France he returns to at the end of the novel is the same France he left behind at the beginning. But he has made up his mind. If freedom does not exist in Morocco, he reasons, then he might as well seek it elsewhere.

It can be seen in *Heirs to the Past* that liberation is undeniably no substitute for freedom. There are yokes that are stronger than those of the physical tyrant and these are the ones that Africa must now face. The developed nations will not unsheathe the sword this time around. King dreamt of freedom and then he fought for it to the death. Driss did the dreaming but could not endure the heat of the fight. He collapsed, momentarily, on the battlefield. The reader is left to work out how the fight should continue and whether it will result in victory.



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**A. N. AKWANYA****Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*: and the Question of Failed Expectations**

The failures that have been remarked as regards *No Longer at Ease* arise from two sources mainly. The first is as to the crafting of the novel itself, and is sometimes discussed in the work of Chinua Achebe scholars, that this novel falls short of what one may expect of the master. The second kind of failure pertains to the relationships that hold within the sequence itself, and may confirm or disconfirm expectations without affecting the quality of the work as literature. In this paper, we shall examine the patterns of expectations and disappointments which govern the structure of the work. However, we shall not lose sight of the expectations with which the critical public has confronted this book, since the suggestion, frequently, is that the work has fallen short of the requirements of art.

To take this last point first, scholarly dissatisfaction with *No Longer at Ease* has become almost so well established that few see any reason to attempt new critical readings of the book. Of course, the position may equally be that the younger critics take it that, if the elders have said that the novel is blemished, then that must be the case. Therefore, it makes no sense to investigate the matter, and judge for oneself how to take the book. That way, one would not be disrespectful to the elders. But the fact is that the kinds of things on which judgements on *No Longer at Ease* have been based are things which tell us nothing of the nature of literature. The corollary is that if these are the reasons adduced for pronouncing other works like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* great, an acceptable judgement may have been

handed down for the wrong reasons!

In his 'The Novelist as a Teacher,' Achebe himself reports of an encounter with a Ghanaian school mistress who thought that he ought to have *made* Obi Okonkwo marry the young woman he is in love with, irrespective of the interdiction imposed by Umuofia traditional society. We read that in response,

I made the kind of vague noises I usually make whenever a wise critic comes along to tell me I should have written a different book to the one I wrote (see *Hopes and Impediments*, 1988:28).

It may well be that this remark reflects a distaste on the part of the poet to parley with 'a wise critic.' But it definitely reveals a disinclination to offer a defence for a story that one regards as a literary work of art. It appears to be well-established practice in artistic circles to offer no defence, although some of the artists are quite able to join the party of the critics after the work is accomplished. Henry James, for instance, can be as disinterested and rigorous as any critic, and sometimes excessively severe in the regard of his own work. But he rarely offers a defence. The artist does not offer a defence because it probably falls to the 'wise critic' himself to provide it, if one is in question. In this case, all that criticism can do is to go into the text and try and establish whether the sequence itself, the concatenation of incidents making up the narrative, forms a coherent pattern. In other words, the sole requirement is that the *action* (Aristotle) is internally coherent, and has not been developed by foreclosing all alternatives, and following blindly a single rule, such as that of good sense. This distaste for 'good sense' is not modern, but seems always to have gone hand in hand with art. This is the scandal of Michelangelo's *Moses*, with its pair of horns. Is this Moses man or beast, is he demonic or of the forces of light? To raise this question is to bring to light a scandal that critical practices like Arnoldian humanism and engaged criticism cannot abide. But we find it equally in *Arrow of God*: is it not a scandal that Ulu, made by Umuaro to assist them to fight off



foreign invaders, knowing himself to be in a situation of mortal struggle with Idemili, and having told Ezeulu so himself (p. 191), begins his campaign by putting himself out of action, or in the words of a proverb elsewhere in that narrative by 'danc[ing] himself lame' before the adversary even enters the field? Or still more seriously, is it not a scandal for this warrior-god, who also oversees the movement of time, to have failed to take full measure of the situation he is faced with, imagining that it is a question simply of the old rivalry with Idemili, when far other forces are ranged against him?

The work of art is not embarrassed to subvert the ideology and the foundation from which it derives sustenance. In the issue we have raised with Achebe's *Arrow of God*, just as in that raised by the Ghanaian school mistress over *No Longer at Ease*, the explanation must be in terms of the structure of the sequence itself, the order of succession of the incidents making up the story; that alone is the explanation which is in keeping with the nature of art. Accordingly, what matters is not whether Obi's action is reasonable or not, morally sound or weak and ignoble; not whether or not it is instructive, but whether it is authorized by the sequence itself. The work does not submit to guidance by a logic which is a kind of Super-ego (Freud, 1985:449-5), standing as if with a big stick over the narrative, from the moment of its first articulating into a sequence.

If in *No Longer at Ease* we are faced with a literary work of art, the sequence does not have to be *correct*; nor does Obi's behaviour. The demand to be correct is to be 'correct' according to some code. Such is the conception of 'relevance,' accepted unquestioningly by some critics as the covering law under which poetry must function in order to be poetry; under which all poetry is judged. In the concept of relevance, the Super-ego does not disguise itself. Equally, culture, history, individualism and liberty, democracy and authoritarianism, religious piety and atheism, and so on, may be defined in such a way that they function as a Super-ego in regard to text formation. In principle, the reinforcing of our sensibilities is not the function of art.

Their violation may in fact be one way the work seeks to free itself from the Super-ego (see Deleuze and Guattari 1984:33).

The principle which accounts for the movement of the sequence may indeed be something produced by the text as a force outside the human realm, such as fate, and other forms of necessity frequently encountered in ancient literature. It may arise from a certain apprehension of oneself and one's socio-political or even cultic role, whereby one's freedom of action is curtailed, as with Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* or from a sense of certainty of the rightness of a system, whose order will necessarily recoil in order to restore balance, if upset, as in *Things Fall Apart*. The principle of movement and cohesion may even be related to autonomous self-construction as in Dostoevsky's Underground Man acting out of spite. In realist literature, the character is aware of himself as hemmed in on all sides by convention. He cannot change this in any meaningful way, and may only attempt to win by negotiation, by crook, or by subterfuge some small concession or elbowroom. Weakness, as by declining to do anything out of sheer funk, or irrationality, as by hurling oneself in desperation against this objectionable reality, may equally function as a principle of cohesion in the sequence, in which case we are looking at Northrop Frye's fifth and lowest mimetic level, ironic art and satire generally (1970:34). There are still more permutations, and each can generate a sequence. *Generate* is used here in the strict sense of bringing to birth, bringing forth and causing to appear. If a novelistic sequence is brought into emergence, it thereby renders incomprehensible the Ghanaian schoolmistress's formulation, that Achebe ought to have made Obi to marry Clara, which implies the following rule for literature: that the writer shape his work to support a viewpoint, and therefore that the character's deviations from the approved viewpoint have to be corrected, if the writer is to be faithful to his moral purpose. It is a pragmatic view of literature, and it is in this practical *end* that all meaning is sought; and always, that practical end corresponds to the reader's interests. As Michael Krüger has

written,

For the pragmatist the differentiation between interpretation and utility – between an understanding that aims at the meaning of the word and an assimilation that might have the most banal reasons – is utterly illusory. Pragmatism knows no non-relational characteristics. Everything we find, we find in the light of our own convictions, attitudes and demands (1999:65).

Krüger here indicates that there is another mode of reading which is not pragmatic, but aims at an *understanding*, and therefore, at the meaning of the word itself. That is what we are attempting in this study. Its advantage is that it is investigative and analytic, rather than dogmatic and authoritarian, and that we retain throughout a consciousness of the work of art, one of whose functions in the literary mode is, according to Krüger, to 'teach us what language is capable of' (67).

We must bear in mind that the school mistress's comment is not really a *study* of *No Longer at Ease*, in terms of 'reading, thinking and writing' on the work (Krüger 63). In fact, the book has infrequently been *studied*. Thinking and writing about it has often been in the context of a general survey, under the pragmatic principle of what Achebe is *about* in that book. For Felicity Riddy, in her essay, 'Language as a Theme in *No Longer at Ease*' (1979), the business is to convey certain information about language. On the other hand, Enekwe has maintained that Achebe's point in this novel is something philosophical, and a point that he has made somewhere else: 'In *No Longer at Ease* ... Achebe again shows how both sociological and personal factors determine a man's fate' (1988:33). For his own part, Gareth Griffiths is still more metaphysical: 'the central theme of *No Longer at Ease* is the distance between what is said to be and what is' (1997:92).

All this, particularly the idea of Achebe showing what



factors determine a man's fate, recalls Aristotle's account of thought in literary art, as occurring in the speeches of the characters, 'where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated' (2000:11). This means really that only the one who exercises speech in a literary work has the means to show or to make a case for something. For anyone else to succeed to do so can only be in the form of a *dues ex machina* – a god working through a machine. The impossibility of getting in a word from the outside, except by working a machine, is a constraint inherent in discourse itself – although Achebe not having allowed himself an exercise of speech anywhere in this novel has not discouraged the reader of *No Longer at Ease* as an informative text, or even an instructional one, with the donor of the instruction or the message as Chinua Achebe himself. There are always available ways to get around this discursive constraint for a reader determined on that course.

Accordingly, besides the philosophical and metaphysical approaches we have mentioned, there are others which are practical and commonsensical. We see an example in Roderick Wilson, where he agrees with G.D. Killam that the business is to convey information that the price of modernity in Africa is to be no longer at ease. In fact,

it is Nigerian society itself which is 'no longer at ease' and not merely Obi himself, though of course the social unease centres in Obi, the only 'palm fruit' (Wilson, 1979:163).

This is a lesson which B.I. Chukwukere does not make out for himself in his own reflection on *No Longer at Ease*. And it is doubtful that the noticing of so thoughtful a social lesson would have persuaded him to accept the novel into the canon of Nigerian literature. And yet his reflection is guided by the same question being tackled by Wilson and others: What is Achebe about in this novel?

For Chukwukere, the responsibility of authorship is first of

all self-production, even before the conveying of information. The writer has to establish himself in the given book as such and such a personality by means of his language, and when we are sure who he is, we may submit ourselves to the receiving of a one-way dialogue from him:

the readers expect to recognize without an iota of ambiguity, the moments when the writer himself is talking to us, and when he makes his characters converse with one another or just talk to us, the audience. The most accurate indicator of these levels of speech is the author's own handling of his medium, the language – idiom, vocabulary, imagery, syntax: in short all that goes to make up his style. The extent to which he has fully conceived his story, theme, plot and characters reveals itself in his style (1969: 18).

Chukwukere's critique of *No Longer at Ease* hinges on this issue of style: it is precisely here, on the question of style, that Achebe parts company with his own book. This novel produces itself in the model 'of squeamish true-romance magazines fostered by Hollywood' (22), whereas the 'essential Achebe' is to be found in *Things Fall Apart* (Chukwukere 19).

Chukwukere is telling us that style is how an author gives himself a voice in a novel; and if we can follow his style, we are following his speech act. Style is the backdoor through which the writer re-enters the book, having escaped the discursive constraint which binds all literary art, that speech is the primary way of representing thought or opinion or a preference – therefore, the thought, opinion, or preference of the one who speaks, either the character or the narrator. It precedes even a gesture, as this cannot directly be observed in a literary work, and may only be mediated in the speech act of someone else.

In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe is not assigned a space, so he can make no gesture, much less speak. But if he were a skilled

stylistician, Chukwukere maintains, he could circumvent a constraint: he could go so far as to talk to us directly, or make the characters do it on his behalf. But there has been a catastrophe: Achebe loses hold of *No Longer at Ease*, and the secret place of his voice in it, the style. He cannot now speak in *No Longer at Ease*; it is Hollywood that does. All the same, Chukwukere has this strange remark:

In *No Longer at Ease*, where the world is that of contemporary, urban Nigeria, we find no fault with the use of pidgin; it is true to life, and shows how the author realises very well the dimensions of his work (21).

Even though the pidgin 'is true to life,' in so far as it is not Achebe's style, but that of contemporary urban Nigeria, nevertheless 'shows how the author realises' his work in all its dimensions.

Robert Wren treats the matter of the self-production of the author in a more subtle manner, though he does not depart fundamentally from Chukwukere's position. He writes:

*No Longer at Ease* takes place in historical time, but it is a personal story rather than an historical one. Achebe, writing in the later 1950s, wished apparently to deal with the alienation such educated young men as himself felt in the new nation moving swiftly toward independence.... His theme was the 'mere anarchy' loosed upon the world when things fell apart.... The vehicle for conveying this anarchy in a young, good African mind was 'corruption,' a commonplace word in the lexicon of despairing colonial officials (1980:38).

If as we have said, formulations of the questions that guide the inquiries the literary critics conduct on literary works of art are



rules in so far as they make an assertion about what literature is, and prescribe the kinds of answers which an acceptable investigation of the individual work should yield, there must be something wrong with the multiplicity of themes claimed for *No Longer at Ease*. None of these claims about theme appears to allow the possibility of there being more than one theme, or that the one espoused and purveyed may be the scholar's own personal hunch, which stands to be proved true or false, is provisional, or open to further investigation. It is always that 'the theme is ...' or that 'his theme is ...'

There is probably ground in what we have seen so far to say that these themes derive from what Habermas (1968/87) calls 'interest.' We may certainly relate them to the individual scholar's expectations as to what the novel is good for, what it accomplishes – which, by the logic of this *interest*, must be what Achebe is aiming to accomplish.

But to put it that way is necessarily to relativize theme, to bring it down from the status of objective fact to a personal view – which means that the novel itself need not be about any of that. It is therefore an open question what value to attach to the implicit claims of people like Wren and Wilson that the author not only accomplishes his purpose but also meets all expectations, and those of people like Chukwukere, that he does not. What is more, the tendency of Achebe scholars to overlook *No Longer at Ease* or dismiss it in one sentence or two is as if many are in secret agreement with Chukwukere that there is very little that one can do with this novel. This secret consensus is that the work is not worthy of the author of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Even Wren and Wilson, and all the others who speak on behalf of the themes and messages seem to share this secret consensus, in as much as there is something apologetic in their presentations, the apologetic of relevance.

The expectations of the reviewers and critics about *No Longer at Ease* are one thing, however. The structure of the sequence itself opens quite other expectations. Here the expectations are focused on the protagonist Obi, and he

continually fails. Chukwukere, for instance, points out how in regard to Obi, Clara asserts 'the modern African woman's expectation of companionable relationship with her man' (1969:29), only to be disappointed. But if we ask, *is this a just expectation of Clara?* it is either by making our own the Ghanaian teacher's notion that art should provide the world a model to follow, or by returning to the question of the author and his achievement. The productive path for literary criticism is to ask what that interpretation of the behaviour of Clara and Obi as a pattern of expectation and disappointment brings out about the structure of the narrative itself, whether it correlates to other units in the text's internal networking, and how. This path of questioning is potentially productive because it calls forth a new effort of reading, in order to uncover a definite pattern of movement and follow it through, in order to achieve a new understanding of the text. For the study of structure ensures that one is looking at the text as a singular work of art, not one that fails to be *another* novel, which pre-exists it, or is even contemporary with it. But it must permit that this individual work be seen in relation to other art works, wherever they may originate from, since it is these that establish its character as a work of art. We may think of the sequences of the anti-hero, for instance – those on whom are invested great expectations, or who think of themselves in terms of roles associated with heroes and heroines of the literary tradition. In this regard, one recalls Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, Angel in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and so on. For if *No Longer at Ease* is a literary work of art, it is because it partakes of the properties wherein art stands apart from everything else that is not art. That is to say, it is by virtue of the resemblances it shares with other art works. Hence it can stand shoulder to shoulder with all these others as things of the same kind. As a novel, *No Longer at Ease* partakes of the properties of novelistic art, even down to the novelistic art of a particular subtype.

What this work shares in common with Achebe's other

novels is first of all the novel form. But novels do differ among themselves. In fact, they divide up into different subsets sharing specific sets of properties. For example, there are novels of the high mimetic mode, as well as the low mimetic and ironic modes, besides the mythic and romantic mimetic levels. Unlike *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease* is not a high mimetic sequence. This comes out in the kinds of character who are the subjects of the action in these novels. In *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the chief characters are very strong personalities, and they are in fact *heroes* in the sense of being 'superior to other men' (Frye, 1970:34). At least, they are superior to the other characters involved in the working out of the sequence. This aspect is seen in Okonkwo and Ezeulu, in their shared sense of sureness and fixity of purpose, and the courage to pursue this purpose, come what may. In *A Man of the People*, the two main characters are equally very strong personalities, and equally matched in sureness and tenacity of purpose and decisiveness. No one else in the sequence comes up to that level, not even Max, whose sense of purpose turns out ultimately to be weak. He may even be unprincipled, as he accepts money from Chief Koko on the understanding that he would stand down for him: he not only fails to do so, but also he carries on as if nothing had happened. *Anthills of the Savannah* is also a high mimetic sequence. Each of the four major characters, Sam, Chris, Ikem, and Beatrice, is a leader in his/her own right, and they do not have to make a point of it to be so accepted by the people they have to deal with.

By contrast, the protagonist of *No Longer at Ease* is a man who is not moved by a publicly determinable goal. He does not strike at first sight as having the motivation to stand up to anything. A well known literary character he shares affinities with is T.S. Eliot's Prufrock, who hasn't got the urge to act in order to realize any of his many vague desires. For example, he has a vague longing to go up the stairs and join the women at tea, talking of Michelangelo. But he does not do anything. He knows too of the gap between his wishes and the intention to



bring them about:

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,  
and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid (lines 84-6).

Obi Okonkwo will equally see the moment of his greatness 'flicker,' and can do nothing but let it pass.

Several times, in fact, Obi sees the moment of his greatness flicker. His best moment is probably at his reception at Umuofia, where he is indeed treated as the one and only 'palm fruit.' The role the people assign to him in this celebration is to be present, and be celebrated. He too is content to observe them celebrate. His only wish is, would that the European colonists should be here now to see what is going on:

Let them come to Umuofia and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live (45).

Obi's sentiments here are merely the vague longings of a Prufrockian hero, which means that whether or not what is longed for is achievable, there is a basic lack of the condition for realization, which is the intention to act. In the present case, what is longed for is unachievable.

The high point at which the celebration ends is the brief recounting of the history Umuofia, especially the village of Iguedo, in heroic terms by Ogbuefi Odogwu. The historian has sensed that a new epoch of that heroic history is in the offing, and that Obi, with all his attributes and qualifications, is the man of the moment, an excellent candidate for a spear point and principal mover in this history. Odogwu's narrative is prefaced by the symbolic investiture of Obi with the mantle of Umuofia's heroes:

'I am happy that you returned home safe,' said Matthew to Obi.

'He is a son of Iguedo,' said old Odogwu. There are nine villages in Umuofia, but Iguedo is Iguedo. We have our faults, but we are not empty men who become white when they see white, and black when they see black.'

Obi's heart glowed with pride within him.

'He is the grandson of Ogbuefi Okonkwo who faced the white man single-handed and died in the fight. Stand up!

Obi stood up obediently.

'Remark him,' said Odogwu. 'He is Ogbuefi Okonkwo come back. He is Okonkwo *kpom-kwem*, exact, perfect.'

Obi's father cleared his throat in embarrassment.

'Dead men do not come back,' he said.

'I tell you this is Okonkwo. As it is in the beginning so will it be in the end. That is what your religion tells us' (48-9).

This incident is of the same order of significance as the legendary first Ezeulu going down on his knees to receive the *Alusi* on his head (*Arrow of God* 70-1). Ezeulu will rise up transformed and he will venture forth, drawing strength from 'the heavy tread of all the people' behind him.

For Obi's part, his heart glows to be invested with the mantle of his grandfather, the great Okonkwo. But it does not come to his head whether this involves a mode of being or a manner of action. As a matter of fact, he is taking all this in the spirit in which he is taking the rejoicing going on around him; that is, as a spectator. In this narrative, Obi is more a spectator than an 'actant' (Barthes 1977:84). In this, he differs from Prufrock, who is afraid that he may betray his insubstantiality. Prufrock talks endlessly to sustain a fiction, that he *is* someone. He is keeping the gaze upon himself, and thereby asserting a

substantiality he does not feel. His very talking is itself a mode of action. By contrast, Obi looks on, taking all in, but above all, looking on.

It has cost the protagonist of *No Longer at Ease* no effort whatever to seize the gaze of the people of Umuofia at the homecoming, and it has not crossed his mind that it may do them some good if he should stay in their gaze. Nor does he pick it up from Odogwu's speech. But even if he had done, there may be other reasons why he does not let himself be carried away by their enthusiasm. In a place like Lagos, where the people are somewhat more demanding than at Umuofia, he does not undertake the effort required to engage their gaze. They want him to venture forth on a mission assigned by themselves; and they are massed up, ready to fall in behind him, and supply his strength with their heavy tread.

The people of Umuofia may indeed know how to live, but they are totalitarian when they form a common will as to who to carry their *Alusi*. There may be no dissent, certainly not from the one chosen because, after all, it is a kind of honour to be chosen. In the case of Obi and the people of Umuofia in Lagos, there is no one else to choose: he is the only 'palm fruit.' Obi's failure to rise up to the occasion is part of the pattern of expectation and disappointment which marks his career. He is on the spot, or as General Sam reminds his commissioners in *Anthills of the Savannah*, it is his 'funeral.' But unlike General Sam, Obi thinks that he is one of the crowd, and free to exercise his curiosity.

We see him, for example, at his reception by the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos. The people's expectation is that he should present himself as a spectacle, that he should become not only the object of celebration, but the celebrant. But they do not see the correct signal in his outfit for this reception. Whereas everyone is 'properly dressed in *agbada* or European suit, the guest of honour arrives in his shirtsleeves because of the heat.' This is put down against him as 'mistake Number One' (*No Longer at Ease* 28). He has a further opportunity when he



makes a speech. But he does no better in this. The advantage, so to speak, goes to the writer of the address of welcome presented to Obi. He is the real celebrant:

Needless to say, this address was repeatedly interrupted by the cheers and the clapping of hands. What a sharp young man their secretary was, all said. He deserved to go to England himself. He wrote the kind of English they admired if not understood: the kind that filled the mouth, like the proverbial dry meat (29).

The kind of English admired by the Umuofia people and written by their secretary is probably the kind that would cause consternation in the office where Obi works, but that is the one which meets the peoples need to celebrate at this reception. The man who offers it is their celebrant; he, they celebrate. Obi is reduced to a secondary position.

Another such moment of celebration is the day Obi first comes to the meeting of the Umuofia Union in his new car. He is again casually dressed. His friend Joseph who accompanies him in the car is 'impeccably turned out for the occasion' (7), and is afraid he might put Obi in a poor light, and the people comment on it. In the event, they are so excited about the car that they pay no attention to his and Obi's attires:

They clapped and danced when they saw the car pull up.

*'Umuofia kwenu!'* shouted one old man.

*'Ya!'* replied everyone in unison.

*'Umuofia kwenu!'*

*'Ya!'*

*'Kwenu!'*

*'Ya!'*

*'Ife awolu Ogoli azua n'afia,'* he said.

Obi was given a seat beside the President and had to answer innumerable questions about his job and about his car... (71).

Obi has almost succeeded in spite of himself to meet the people's expectations. He even lets pass without a comment the people's demand that he make his priority the finding of jobs for unemployed members of the Union. But all this is short-lived. Everything is going to be spoiled, and the celebration turn sour, when the President offers advice in respect of his relationship with Clara.

Full of offence at what he sees as unwarrantable interference in his own affairs, Obi flies into an uncontrollable temper, and has shot up unbidden:

'Please, sit down, Mr Okonkwo', said the President calmly.

'Sit down my foot!' Obi shouted in English. 'This is preposterous! I could take you to court for that ... for that...'

'You may take me to court when I have finished.'

'I am not going to listen to you any more...' He made for the door. A number of people tried to intercept him. 'Please sit down.' 'Cool down,' 'There is no quarrel.' Everybody was talking at once. Obi pushed his way through and made blindly for the car....

'Drive off!' he screamed at the driver as soon as he got into the car (75).

Obi is so flustered and upset that he is obliged to make an undignified exit. The President makes no concession whatever, remains absolutely cool and dignified.

In coming out so badly in the above encounter and running off for safety, Obi betrays a deep lack in his personality – something he needs to sustain the mantle that has been put on him. There are still other occasions of this self-betrayal, as in some of his encounters with his friend Christopher. There is no reason why he might be browbeaten by Christopher, as they are of a similar level of education and experience. But Christopher

is self-assured and therefore gives off the air of substantiality. We first meet him when Obi and Clara call at his place and find him with one of the girl friends he is perpetually picking up and dropping again. There is a great deal that is crude about this young man; but he is forthright, full of ideas, and uninclined to stand upon ceremonies. He leads, and all the others follow, including Obi. If Obi is 'no longer at ease,' as Wilson and Killam claim, Christopher is certainly at his ease. And it is hard, observing Christopher, to agree with Wren that in *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe wishes 'to deal with the alienation such educated young men as himself felt in the new nation.' The weakness of this kind of criticism is because of the inaugural question, what Achebe is about, and the assumption that where to seek the answer is in the actions and speeches of the chief character. In this kind of criticism, the novel is seen as the unfolding of the career of an individual person, who is either historical or a masquerade for some real person, most likely, the author himself. By contrast, awareness of people like Christopher and Clara's seamstress, if possible, is by reason of awareness of the novel as a system, a self-contained system, a fictional world.

Christopher, of course, is noticed much more than Clara's seamstress. Obi still more so. The importance of a character may be seen in quantitative terms, in terms of the amount of discursive space he occupies, relative to the other characters. On these terms, Obi is certainly the most important character in *No Longer at Ease*. But if we use other parameters, Obi may turn out to be much less substantial than someone like Christopher. For instance, if the former's situation of unease is owing to his Western education, according to Wilson and Killam, by what rule are we to explain the latter's situation of ease with himself and the world around him? Though he has a university degree in economics, he seems never to have troubled himself to work out a mode of behaviour that would suit his situation. That is an issue entirely subject to his practical sense in the concrete situation, and never arises as a problem confronting thought. We see an instance of his self-assuredness in the following, where



the narrator ends by drawing attention to his adaptability. He has proposed that they all go somewhere for a dance:

Obi tried to make excuses, but Clara cut him short. They would go, she said.

'Na film I wan go,' said Bisi.

'Look here, Bisi, we are not interested in what you want to do. It's for Obi and me to decide. This na Africa, you know.'

Whether Christopher spoke good or 'broken' English depended on what he was saying, where he was saying it, to whom and how he wanted to say it. Of course that was to some extent true of most educated people, especially on Saturday nights. But Christopher was rather outstanding in coming to terms with a double heritage (100).

Of course, he takes them where *he* wants to go. Obi follows, having already been silenced by Clara.

Obi's resentments at being always told what to do are mostly against the white men, particularly his boss, Mr Green. This resentment may in fact be of long-standing, and reflect vague feelings of hostility toward the colonizers of his country. An early indication of this is the letter he had written to Hitler during the World War, which had been intercepted, and was to earn him public disgrace and caning in his school.

Looking back at the incident many years later with adult eyes, he thinks he must have acted out of pity for Hitler. But he does not leave it at that. We read:

'I wonder what came over me. I still think about it sometimes. What was Hitler to me or I to Hitler? I suppose I felt sorry for him. And I didn't like going into the bush every day to pick palm kernels as our "Win the War Effort".' He suddenly became serious. And when you come to think of it, it was quite immoral for the headmaster to tell little children every morning that for every palm-kernel they picked they were buying a nail for Hitler's coffin'

(33).

Clearly, there is a moral dimension in Obi's representation of the war and of Hitler here, though he has just come to consciousness of it in his conversation with his friend Joseph after his return from his studies abroad. His attitude towards the colonists has probably been formed in early childhood. Having been taken up so energetically by the headmaster at the first expression of that attitude, self-repression has followed. But the spirit of rebellion has remained, and has gained release from time to time through grumbling.

Another mode of release is by the imaginary confrontations he endlessly stages against them, in which he has the upper hand. We have already seen him mentally invite the whole white race to come and see for themselves that his people know how to live; they would do still better: they would see him in his glory, being celebrated by these very people who knew how to live. Mr Green, of course, he analyses as a latecomer into the colonial outpost, having missed the time he might have been a great missionary. He would take him up, with all his ridiculous airs, and put him in his place in a novel which, however, remains unrealised in the dream world.

But there are other aspects of experience in regard to which the gratification of a daydream can help but little, and there is need to take overt action. One such unpleasant reality is the prospect of studying law, in order to be available to represent Umuofia in their many land cases. Obi never presents his own side of the story; and so we are left with that of the Umuofia people, which the narrator echoes, that he had accepted their loan on the understanding that he would study law, but had switched to English once he had got away to England.

But this is not to say that Obi is purely an egotist, ready to use other people for his own ends. For instance, as soon as he sees Joseph and ascertains that he may come and stay with him, while he settles down and looks for a job, he quickly moves out of the hotel the Umuofia Union have reserved for him and are

paying for from their own funds. To Joseph's objection that the Umuofia Union would be embarrassed that their son newly returned from England is sharing 'a room in Obalande,' he retorts. 'Let them say what they like;' he is moving out of the hotel the next morning and coming right over (32).

Obi's change of academic programme in England may also be seen in terms of the resenting of those who claim the right to tell him what to do. So far, he has known how to exercise his resentment without provoking a conflict. But in the retort he gives to Joseph in the above, he seems to be saying that he will not let himself be silenced any longer by the fear of causing offence, and that he is going to have his own say, no matter what it costs him. His first big battle will be with this Umuofia Union, whom he resents, perhaps as much as he does the colonist, precisely because having provided the funds for his studies overseas, they seem to take the view that he has to make all their interests his own priorities. As James Booth puts it, the Union 'conceives of Obi as an investment which must be made to pay off' (1981:96). The clash is over the girl Clara, whom he has decided to marry.

Clara has not said anything about her background to Obi all the time they are courting, until he proposes marriage. It is in this context that Obi learns that by their cultural tradition, they are forbidden to each other as a marriage partner:

'I am an *osu*,' she wept. Silence. She stopped weeping and quietly disengaged herself from him. Still he said nothing.

'So you see we cannot get married,' she said, quite firmly, almost gaily – a terrible kind of gaiety. Only the tears showed she had wept.

'Nonsense!' said Obi. He shouted it almost, as if by shouting it now he could wipe away those seconds of silence, when everything had seemed to stop, waiting in vain for him to speak (*No Longer at Ease* 64).

Everything seems to have stopped for those several seconds because Obi has been brought up short, dismayed by a fact



which he cannot then and there encompass by means of thought. Even when he shouts 'Nonsense,' he still does not encompass it: he turns away from it.

Contrary to James Booth who argues that it is Obi's 'European education which makes him so contemptuously reject the taboo against marrying the *osu* or outcast, Clara' (1981:99), his deciding to go ahead and marry her rather seems to be something he arrives at out of a sense of honour – as if he has already gone too far to withdraw, as if he would lose face if he should withdraw. That night he discusses the matter with Joseph and finds that he is going to have strong opposition from his relatives. He then makes up his mind to stand up, not so much for Clara, but for himself:

Obi felt better and more confident in his decision now that there was an opponent, the first of hundreds to come no doubt. Perhaps it was not a decision really; for him there could be only one choice. It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god .... Quite unbelievable .... And here was an educated man telling Obi that he did not understand. 'Not even my mother can stop me,' he said as he lay down beside Joseph (*No Longer at Ease* 65).

Obi is not pleading his love, nor is he outraged by the injustice of tradition against Clara; he is only annoyed that he is being *barred* from achieving his aim. He is now going to assert himself to show that he can, and perhaps ought to be his own man. Not even his mother will be allowed to interfere.

However, the fact remains that he has not acted in a decisive manner at the scene with Clara. Apparently, this is not lost on the young lady herself as the narrator's comment on Obi's exclamation, that it is 'as if by shouting it now he could

wipe away those seconds of silence' seems to echo her point of view. When he speaks to Clara peremptorily the next day, it is not strictly to make up for the evening's lapses. It is the tone of a man with a fight in his hands, anxious to get it going, and determined to prevail:

At half-past two on the following day he called for Clara and told her they were going to Kingsway to buy an engagement ring.

'When?' was all she could ask.

'Now, now.'

'But I haven't said ...'

'Oh don't waste my time. I have other things to do. I haven't got my steward yet, and I haven't bought my pots and pans' (65).

Obi is ready for a fight; paradoxically, it is his friends he is going out against. First, we have this mock battle with Clara, where he tramples her woman's right to say *yes* to a marriage proposal. But the phase of the mock battle will swiftly pass, and reveal that it is the fight of his life that he is faced with. He carries it successfully through the early stages in Lagos, and through what he has promised himself is going to be the decisive encounter with his father. In the end, the decisive encounter is with his mother. In this engagement, he is unable to fire even one shot, before she forces him into submission. He gives up Clara and with her all sense of self-worth and self-respect.

The fight that might have made a political sense is one with the colonial authorities. For instance, he would have liked Mr Green his boss, to know 'what he thought of his type. In fact, he ought to know' (77). But of course he does nothing to bring about this enlightenment. His preferred method of reaction in the face of a choice that offers the chance of ruin (Lukács 1965/76) is to lie low and wait, until the colonist should go away. That is the stratagem he proposes to Clara after his debacle with his mother:

Obi had done his best to make the whole thing sound unimportant. Just a temporary setback and no more. Everything would work out nicely in the end. His mothers mind had been affected by her long illness. But she would soon get over it. As for his father, he was as good as won over. 'All we need do is lie quiet for a little while,' he said (129).

As on the occasion already mentioned, Clara cuts him short. She knows that Obi has never had the stomach for a fight, and that this extraordinary attempt at self-assertion has been apparently comprehensively quelled. But there are other aspects of this self-assertion which Clara is not in a position to observe – nor Obi, for that matter.

His resentments have been a great source of unresolved tension in his consciousness. That against the Umuofia Union he is able to bring into the open because, as he probably sees it, he has nothing to lose, rather he has his freedom to gain. The issue of his marriage to Clara and the refusal to serve the interests of the Umuofia Union relate together as two aspects of one and the same struggle to free himself from the rule of tradition. To the cultural nationalists, it is probably an appalling temerity for Obi to strive in this way to free himself from the rule of tradition. Thus, not only does he fail to go far enough in the eyes of the school mistress, in those of the defenders of tradition he goes rather too far. But as we have said, the art work has no obligation to be correct – in fact, the more correct, the less art – since correctness is in accordance with the code of some father-figure, political, cultural, intellectual-ideological, and so on. As to the colonist, his resentment is as strong as ever. But he is lying quiet. If he is ever going to write his novel, it cannot be before the adversary has departed. Something else he might be moved to take up at the same time is what he calls 'the corrupt Africans at the top,' who in his view have 'worked steadily to the top through bribery – an ordeal by bribery' (p. 18). He equally despises them because they accept the white man's

patronage unthinkingly. He himself submits to it only externally, while keeping mentally aloof and antagonistic.

Obi appears to have been struck down by the white man himself well before the date of commencing of the writing he had promised himself, and secretly threatened Green with, the writing where the novel is to be used as a mode of reflection on colonialism and for paying off the colonists. That Mr Green is 'one of the Crown witnesses' at the trial is probably procedural, since he is Obi's boss, and the charge against him is accepting a bribe ostensibly to influence the decision of the scholarship board, where they both work. But it is another matter that he spends much of his evening on the day of the sentencing playing tennis:

It was most unusual. As a rule his work took up so much of his time that he rarely played. His normal exercise was a short walk in the evenings. But today he had played with a friend who worked for the British Council (2).

Moreover, he is anxious to declaim for all to hear the reason for Obi's behaviour, namely that,

'The African is corrupt through and through.... [For] countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?' (3.)

Has the bribery incident been set up to prove the point that the African is corrupt through and through, and that education has made no difference at all with him? Mr Green has been convinced of these truths all along, but the other colonials are reluctant to accept it. If the proving of this point is Green's



interest, the latter's expectation of Obi would have been the only one the protagonist has fully and squarely met.

The contrasting of *No Longer at Ease* in some of its phases to *Arrow of God* is helpful, particularly if we are to attempt to grasp the work in its total significance. For example, we have seen the legendary Ezeulu accept the role of a forerunner and explorer, to go ahead of the people. The role is actually that of a scapegoat. Hence the people behind him he depends upon for strength have no qualms to take to their heels at the first sign of danger. We read in Ezeulu's exaltation:

'We went on, past streams and forests. Then a smoking ticket crossed my path, and two men were wrestling on their heads. My followers looked once and took to their heels. I looked again and saw that it was Oye' (*Arrow of God* 71).

The great undertaking survives the crisis of desertion because Ezeulu here does not depend on the people behind him for all his strength. What we see in this exaltation, therefore, is a rite of passage successfully accomplished in the mythic situation only because the Carrier of the *Alusi* is transformed by what he is invested with, and becomes in every sense of the word a divine form. Accordingly, he can see through and properly name each of the prodigies that confront him; from now their terror is gone. His counterpart in 'real life' is at best a *figure* of the divine, and may be associated with the properties of the deity by virtue of the 'similitude of convenience' (Foucault 1970; Akwanya, 1997/2004:51-2). He is not himself a deity, although Ezeulu tends to assimilate and realize the deity in himself. In the human community, the Carrier of the *Alusi* depends for strength wholly on the people behind him. But since they will always abandon him in sight of danger, the rite of passage outside the mythic realm is a movement that does not reach its term, but always stops short. That is to say, the rite of passage in this

determination is caught up in tragedy. The hero of *Arrow of God*, as opposed to the legendary Ezeulu, is the subject of a tragic sequence not directly by reason of any act, such as a misdeed of his own, but because he is the protagonist of a quest journey which belongs in its most propriety to the mythic environment, but is ill-adjusted to the human situation.

We have seen old Odogwu call Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* 'great,' because he has faced the white man single-handed and has died in the fight. Like the 'historical' Ezeulu, this hero is a man whose public career begins by his being placed in the van, only to be deserted when he is face to face with his mortal enemy. The question on every lip that day in the square of Umuofia is, 'Why did he do it?' (*Things Fall Apart* 145). Obi, the grandson of this betrayed hero, does not seem to have an inkling what lies in store for him if he should accept the role of the Carrier of his people's *Alusi* to lead the way to the unknown. He refuses to be their champion, apparently, because he thinks that each person is entitled to make the journey for himself and no one should hide behind another's back. Hence he is unwilling to exercise severe judgement on those who use all the means at their command, whether moral or not, to try to win the right to university education. But we are not to overlook the factor of resentment in Obi's story. His self-perception is in opposition to the 'oedipal father' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984), telling him what to do, imposing limits on his freedom, assigning his destiny. His refusal to carry the peoples *Alusi* is first and foremost an instinctive response. Secondly, we may think of the value of every individual making his own way in the world, pursuing his own destiny.

Obi himself is brought down pursuing his own aims. But he thereby forces his people to look upon him as a man, one like themselves. For instance, the reason why they decide to press on with his legal defence, despite that they know that there is very little hope of saving him, is because, according to the president of their Union, 'a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the

bone' (p.1). On the other hand, Obi's refusal of a role in the collectivity, and preference for a solitary existence, is already a form of self incarceration, to be formalized by the prison sentence for taking a bribe.

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**OGONNA AGU****Structure, Theme and Meaning in Onuora Ossie Enekwe's  
*Broken Pots***

Enekwe's collection of poems in *Broken Pots* no doubt represents an important new voice after the generation of Okigbo and Soyinka. We make this assertion, not on grounds of critical responses it has so far received, but by the sheer power of his work. Peter Thomas and Edith Ihekweazu agree on this (see blurb at back cover of the Nigerian edition) though the collection already had its debut in *Greenfield Review*. A whole climate of sober reflection on life and death, based on the experiences he had gone through, informs much of the poetry. Indeed, it seems to me that there is an underlying structural pattern denoted by a leitmotif linking the centers of unity between individual poems, which gives the collection its coherence. We are interested in taking a look at this thematic concern of the poet to examine the underlying basis of the unity of the poems in the collection. Because this organic unity has not been discussed anywhere, it is the central concern of this paper.

Enekwe's poems capture the complexity of modern life. This is achieved through visual and musical accoutrement, as well as other arsenal of poetry of modern sensibility, notably images of modern life, and the language of motion. We have to add that this complexity of life has shaped his sensibility. However, in spite of this, one cannot conceivably talk of his poetry as one that fits within any of the western moulds. We think one can say that the poet belongs to the category of poets whom Chinweizu et al have described as... "Individual voices

of middle ground who, unlike the modernists or the traditionalists, share no strongly distinguishing characteristic". Therefore, the poet ranks with Okara, Lenrie Peters and Dennis Brutus (163).

### **The Idea of Movement and Stillness in *Broken Pots***

From the linguistic angle, Virgy Anohu has inquired into some of the lexical and grammatical devices which make for coherence and cohesion in the poems. But those are not all of it. There is a certain sense of movement and stillness, a structural duality, which pervades most of the poems, and helps to evoke the sober feeling of tragedy in them. This succeeds in merging theme with form.

This matrix which the poet, consciously or unconsciously has adopted, involves components of dance, and the organizing principle of the art of dance. The duality responds to the rhythm of songs, music or orchestra. The reference to some of the poems as songs and their dramatic bearing, which suggests the elements of performance, has to be noted. We might add dance as well, at least to give credence to our observation that there is a dance component to the performance nature of the poems. It is, therefore, not surprising that the poet, a musician, understands the implication of the dynamics of sound and movement in dance as his *Theories of Dance* suggests. His play sketch, *Dance of Restoration* (35) with its strong dance idiom at the centre, further suggests Enekwe's understanding of the use of dance techniques.

In the poems, Enekwe's approach is different from that of a traditional poet, who is concerned with the simplicity of style for its own sake. Ihekweazu's view is that the poems have a striking simplicity (130), but this claim could be misleading. As John Haynes has clearly pointed out, there is the need to distinguish between linguistic simplicity and interpretative accessibility, and to set these within the demands of poetic discourse. Haynes makes the important point that "a poet may be grammatically simple yet hard to understand" or "he may be

grammatically complex yet comprehensible to those who know his subject matter and the culture" (59). Haynes is of the view "that poetic techniques should be looked at functionally in terms of what the poet is trying to do" (65). For sure, we are not in doubt of what Enekewe is trying to do, as far as subject matters are concerned. The poems talk of filial love ("To Mother on Her Birthday"), politics ("A Land of Freedom"), war ("The Story of a Ceylonese Girl") ("No Way for Heroes to Die", "Mass for the Dead"), philosophy ("Silent Arms", "To Cordy", "Let Dew Dwell", "A Wave", "The Poor"). What is interesting to look at within the confines of this discourse is the structural and formal demands of the poems.

### **Movement and Dance Terms**

Already Anohu has suggested some of the most elementary words that suggest movement in *Broken Pots*, but only as lexical and grammatical devices for cohesion: stumble, prance, linger, drunken, slip, crumble (46), all of them dance words. As mere words, they are empty of meaning, but in context, they conjure feelings of liveliness. Others are ride ("Silent Arms"), waves ("A wave"), quake ("The Poor"). The image of squirrels prancing, or birds twittering, or of the drunken lover, slip and fall, crumble, all easily lend themselves to movement capabilities. Other less obvious movement words are those like go, run, hurry, writes. After establishing the necessary social context, that he wants "to go and see the king of the animals..." he suggests a kind of movement that ends in stillness. This is because the king of animals already suggests to us something ferocious, and because some misfortune is involved, death is implied by the stillness. We find this kind of development in many of the poems. Looking at the poem "Broken Pots", the levels of fortune and misfortune become a structural necessity for its meaning. At first "the heavy bosomed hill" and "the winding narrow path" all end in "our farm". The movement essence with its concomitant stillness is also witnessed here. Again, taken as a whole, the movement ends with the slipping



and the crumbling of the water pot, when "its little fountain lingers into our farm", collecting in tranquility, ending the motion that began earlier in stillness.

### **Movement as an organizing principle**

Movement at one end complements its polar quality of stillness. A careful look at the poems shows that this motif is used in scoring the themes of life and death in most of the poems in *Broken Pots*. The poems are given larger significance by the structural component provided by the duality of those movement qualities. In "Joker", for example, the second paragraph intimates us of this movement when

In the coming of winter...

Slip and fall

turtle necks, coats fat

with hair or feathers

and all that make

men walking birds,... (1).

Later, in Manhattan,

... before me hurry

men and women, boys and girls

their dogs on leashes,

their cats like babes in their arms.

In these lines, we can see movement all through suggested by the words "slip and fall", "walking", "hurry" and so on. But then, the "dogs on leashes", suggests a kind of tension between movement and the need to restrain it. The image of babies in their arms, however, suggests at this point that the movement is against the tide of stillness. If in "Joker" the contrapuntal tension produced by movement and stillness is not so clearly etched out, in *The Story of a Ceylonese Girl*, the suggestiveness is even clearer. The poem talks "of a city whose paths she loved to walk" till one day she "rode on the

wings of the wind/like a flower rushed in a storm", till "crushed and drowned" in stillness, death. We know this because as the poet goes on to say, "Mathi should have gone to her mother/not try to stop a falling rock", she comes to her end, *stilled inevitably* through such intervention. Further echoes of the duality of life and death theme, movement and stillness, can be traced from the "dancing in the gloom/to the sad music of a wasted life".

In "A Land of Freedom", this conflicting vehicle of movement and stillness can be seen also. "They cheered: /OSAGYEFO//and followed him//"*till* in the second stanza, "they called him a hawk/and murdered him". Here also, we have the tenor of movement and death, as a structural device holding the stanzas. In "Shadows of Osiri", there is stillness when "the earth that we feed/and sit on/asks for food/and we hurry to do her will". This motif of life and death is repeated in the second stanza "as we cut fangs and lead/from our lungs, sharpen on the crooked stone/the dull edges of our hearts/ and rush across the tattered field/ to meet our foes". As the poem goes, the poet suggests that while fighting a battle, to lift up a weapon is invariably to rush to one's death. This idea is succinctly brought out by a line in "Whatever happened to the memorial drums" when as the poet writes, "soldiers marched", and "kissed the dust".

Sometimes this movement/stillness motif is not so witnessed, subverted, as they seem, by philosophical reflection. In "A Palace of Tomes", movement is suggested by the crisp way the second stanza rounds up the lone thought in the queen's cold skull; for indeed "the birds have since fled her wall,/ the last leaves in their beaks". Similar to this subverted, muffled voice of stillness and movement, is the poem, entitled "The Poor" in which "the antennae.../ like reeds// quake before a palace of gold". In "Let Dew Dwell", "There was a time/ when dew dwelt/ on petals in here// but dust, coming/ with the wind/ laid thick on it". As if the life-death proposition here were not enough, the poet summarizes in the second stanza: "Lord...

Lord!// Let your rains/falling wash// dust to dust/ underfoot to let/ dew dwell inviolate". The concept of stillness here is suggested by dew dwelling on petals, but with dust comes the movement part, which lays thick on it, to deaden it. In "Silent Arms", A bird rides the waves/ and does not know/ the secrets of the sea" till "Chukwu's silent arms", unknown to the birds, come and buoy them up. So far, we have dealt with a number of the poems as they reflect this duality of movement and stillness proposed as a structural device in the poems. Their abiding unity, in fact, is in the way they have been used to score the theme of life and death pervading most of the poems.

### **Structural Ambivalence: movement, stillness, freedom/servitude**

Always, it is this kind of ambivalent position that leads the poet on to a crisis, one in which a proposition leads to a contradiction. As in "A Land of Freedom", an inner tension, or debate, translates itself into a choice between freedom and servitude. Or put differently, the poem proposes that as a political fighter, Nkrumah found for his people "a new farm in the east; "they cheered.../ and followed him". However, the anti-climax comes almost too soon when, because the paths of freedom 'were full/of snakes and thorns", they "called him a hawk/ and murdered him".

In the lightness of these verses, therefore, the issue of death, violence and murder is obvious. In other words, a light attitude masks a dark and tragic spirit. The irony of the rise of Nkrumah to political power is that the same people he came to save brought about his death. Again, in "Joker", we still see the winter as inimical to life, and therefore is the symbol of death. Elsewhere, the poet uses other symbols, but central to them all is the symbol of the pot in his title poem, "*Broken Pots*". In this poem, it would appear that the poet is engaged in sheer romantic fancies. Unlike the other poems, it stands out on its own, and paints a scene of the rural setting in which the experience is located:

The heavy bosomed hill  
Lies close to our hut  
And the winding narrow path  
Stumbles into our farm.

Also, there is the presence of animals and creatures of the forest as:

Up above where the squirrels prance  
Or the naughty little birds twitter  
About my little sister and me  
I want to go and see  
The king of the animals.

It is just in such a setting that "at night when the cold wind/Runs its fingers through our bodies/Like a drunken lover".

We always hear, soft and clear,  
Like the wail of a lost lamb,  
the voice of a virgin  
Whose pot of water  
Has slipped and crumbled  
While its little fountain  
Lingers into our farm (13).

The narrative sequence of the poem is linear and is concerned mainly with what has happened to the pot of water when the virgin carrying it "*stumbles*".

### **Life, death proposition**

Talking of the symbolism of the pot, the poet appears to have merely used it here to express a fundamental human experience. Beneath the veneer of this reality lies some metaphysical truth, namely, that of death. This is to say, also, that there are two levels of poetic insight into life as seen from the symbolism of



*Broken Pots.* The first, and one that is more immediate and central to human experience, is the fact that life comes with that kind of roundness of body that is exemplified by the pot. This is what the opening lines of the poem, which talk of "the heavy bosomed hill", intimate. Night is commonly perceived as the time of creation, when the pot "breaks" and "crumbles" and its seminal flood drains to rejuvenate the earth. Thus, the young maiden is the pot, and the little water the fountain of resurgence. By extension, on the other hand, man is a thing of clay, the pot that carries the water and nurtures all lives. So when a man dies, a pot of water has been broken and forcibly too, through some internal or external agents of destruction.

In this collection of poems, therefore, we witness several instances of the theme of death: "No Death at All (for Pablo Neruda)", "Even After the Grave", "Mass for the Dead", "Beyond Tears". In all these poems, the substantive issue is one of men dying under various circumstances, such as war, for example. "The Story of a Ceylonese Girl" is celebrated as a memorial; so also are the heroes in "Whatever Happened to the Memorial Drums", and so on. Apart from a few love poems with a few lines of philosophical pre-occupations, it appears that this symbolism of the pot may not have easily suggested itself to the poet. One can say that it is only through a somewhat deeper study and analysis of its underlying implications that one has come to appreciate the fact of its uniqueness.

Two very broad areas of the theme of death are easily discernible. The first is death by violence (war) and secondly, the celebration of such deaths through the kind of memorials set up for the dead. Besides, there are others who have simply been claimed by death. So, there is the story of the Ceylonese girl who died while fighting for Biafra, and whom we are told died – "polluted by battle powder". The "skull and bones of a Biafra lover/, are "left to smoulder and crack the flames/ of a city whose paths she loved to walk/ far away from the people she loved so much". What is important here is that, like a broken

pot, her death was brutal like that of "a flower rushed in a storm". This the poet knows too well, for as he says:

Mathi should have gone to her mother,  
Not try to stop a falling rock.  
Mathi's love was the casing  
to take her well to the clay,  
beyond the reaches of the people she loved so much,  
faraway from the dust of her own dear land (2).

Also on war, the poet recognizes that it is men that hurry to their deaths, for in "shadows of Osiris", we are told that

Once in every season  
the earth that we feed  
and sit on  
asks for food  
and we hurry  
to do her will.

He goes on to say that we are all "tillers/of the soil/  
And it is often that men eschew fear,

As we cut fangs and lead  
from our lungs, sharpen  
on the crooked stone  
the dull edges of our hearts  
and rush across the tattered field  
to meet our foes (4).

And what is the outcome of this reckless move to meet our foes if not death, especially after it has been seen that the earth is sitting, famished, waiting for its seasonal meal during an outburst of violence or war.

We have already referred to "A Land of Freedom". Even though a situation of war is not directly witnessed there,

violence is intimated because "they called him a hawk/and murdered him". But in "Whatever Happened to the Memorial Drums", a vast array of heroes had seen war in their times and have become immortalized in the memories of mankind. Likewise, those men were broken pots, whatever the nature of their deaths, for ultimately "wars came and men died/ Hope rose, swayed and shat;/soldiers marched, kissed the dust/ and we made gods of them out of mud and copper". It is obvious that as with those heroes:

... the rock stairs that we built  
crumble on our heads  
and the earth is mortally wounded (10).

### War and the drums of memory

The poet thus sees no use in the drums of memory typified by the memorials that caused our brothers to ride the ordure. Yet, he would sing of the broken ones, who died without any memorial left for them. In "No Way for Heroes to Die" what is left is song only:

I sing to the memory of those who died to be forgotten-  
carcass of heroism stung by rainbows,  
stung till blanched, it was abandoned by flies,  
femurs and joints juggled by the wind...

The heroes appear to have been broken midstream, *rushing* to the tattered field of battle "to meet our foes". It could have meant meeting their deaths as well, for again he sings of those of them that we now know for certain have kissed the dust:

I sing of Nzeogwu, Achibong and Atuegwu  
In the field, their scattered bones jeer  
at the azure sky, and sneer at the masked terrors of  
rainbow.

The destruction of war broke him, and as usual, he is about to be consigned to the land of the forgotten.

In another memorial poem, written 'To a Friend Made and Lost in War', we witness the various tones of violence that had dispatched a friend:

God had saved you  
at Ihiala, Ozubulu  
and Eluama where you lay  
on the tracks of enemy guns.  
But a hungry driver  
And a tired truck  
hauled you into a ditch  
In a thick bush.  
Blood oozed from your nose,  
Mouth and ears.

At those places, Ihiala and Ozubulu and Eluama, it was the terrors of war that menaced him. But that was not all, there was also the everyday terrors of mundane violence on the roads. The second stanza of this poem is a sinister account of what eventually happened to his friend, after making the remark that "God may get tired/ of saving me":

Two days later,  
Soviet bomber rockets  
burst your belly  
and tore your intestine  
on the white sheet  
of the hospital bed.  
Slowly your life spread  
Purple about you .

The hero, like a pot carrying water, has been broken. Men are killed, broken in war. Sometimes the poet "rejoices" at



some kinds of death, for instance in the poem "To a Friend..." Sometimes his attitude changes sharply, contrasting the other kind of death ("Lady Death"), in which love is seen as a dangerous game. Though the poet is here speaking of the tragic nature of such a death, he does appear to "rejoice" in this kind of death. Hence, his concept of death sharply contrasts with that in "Lady Death", in which "Love can be a dangerous game" for:

The mantis seeks his lady  
In the region of terrible heat.  
She clasps him within her thighs  
ensconces his head between her teeth  
And with the swiftness of guillotine blade  
chops it off so the dance can endure  
without remorse or wasteful introspection.

The terror in this type of death derives from the fact that the death is supposed to be a means of expressing love. The poet is aware of its sinister nature, and enjoins that "mankind must rejoice for their love" which in fact, is a sad thing. This ambivalence, which gives substance to Enekwe's poetry in *Broken Pots* is clarified by the contrasting lines that say that man "should be glad/ for the terror in the face of his death". It does appear that what is frightening is not the fact of meeting death, but the knowledge that it is the deceit in life that leads one into death, for knowledge will make one readily accept truth of this.

Outside those poems of war and violent deaths, there are those which are mere reflections on death, such as "Beyond Tears". But always in such poems, the poet is reminding us of "the daily demise of the youth" as in "Mass for the Dead". These men, we find, are betrayed by the misfortune of war and violence that comes.

The gravity of the loss of these heroes appears to be that while

Some heroes are carved in stone for the blind to see  
Others disintegrate in the shifting seasons.  
Nzeogwu died like a lamb ripped apart by invisible claws,  
his body drawn in the dust that could not rise enough to tell  
his people of his whereabouts.  
Achibong's head dropped when a coward found heroism  
in a hatchet chopping the neck of a fallen soldier.  
Atuegwu died in a dark cell while he waited for  
prosecution.

Now, many years after, they are forgotten,  
Their loves lost in the desert of their fall,  
Their resolve turned into folly  
By hungry historians and starveling professors (9).

Concluding, the poet maintains that "this is no way for heroes to die". When not making such comments, the poet is paying tributes to people he had known in circumstances that can only be described as lamentable. In 'The Defiant One', he speaks of the poet, Christopher Okigbo, killed during the Nigerian civil war, while fighting for Biafra. The poet describes him as lacking 'the drift/of the aged smoke...'

So like the beheaded Iroko  
you stood till blasted  
to the roots;  
at the end of the carnage,  
your generation walk  
poker-faced, unmindful  
of your shadow (2).

Again, in "Even After the Grave", it is the generation of his youth that comes to focus:

My generation passes away  
like comets in the gloom.

Awful to watch them go!  
Friends in dry and wet seasons  
die like wax light in the storm (28).

Among the "broken cords" of his generation is Kevin who "lives, ready to sketch his friend whose voice/he loves as much as the person". There is also Igboji who "rides his autobike forward and back", and Utsu whose "golden-gong voice/still tickles sad lips". In "Beyond Tears", the poet expresses his characteristic sadness at the passing of heroes without memorials set up for them. Indeed, even after Togo's death, the poet strongly believes that "there is love... after the grave", as some of those that he celebrates in these poems might not have died in war. At this point, we come back to the central unifying principle of the poems, the structural duality of our movement/stillness proposition. In "Husbandman", the contradiction of death is summarized by the cryptic saying that "life... is war that ends in death ". We notice again that in war is the movement, in death the stillness.

## Conclusion

The poems in this collection owe much of their success to the viewpoint, which the poet adopts and his attitude to his subjects. This, however, is not what we have set out to explore, since the issue of simplicity can be misleading. We have, indeed, attempted through this discourse to make the point that the poems are not as simple as one makes them out to be. There appears to be an underlying feature, suggested by the structural development of the poems, which makes it a work of conscious design.

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**ROMANUS N. EGUDU****The Serpent and the Dove: Woman's Survival  
in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen***

It is generally agreed among the critics of the novel, *Second-Class Citizen*, that Adah's story is one of triumph: she survives on her own terms a type of marriage and other adverse situations which would normally crush a woman who is not made of the stuff we find in Adah. Taiwo (106), for example, remarks that "only strong minded people, like Adah, can hope to survive in the new situation," and that is, the situation in which Adah finds herself and her husband, Francis, in London. Also, Porter (126-129), in spite of what he calls Adah's early "naivete" and her being presented as a "compliant character" (more on this later), notes that Adah has in the final analysis achieved "self-realization" and "her personal independence." Furthermore, Chukwuma (6-7) observes that *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood* "depict women in the marriage institution, the actual test of feminism," and "the test is how does a woman escape the tyranny of a tradition and a system, assert her individuality while still playing out the roles of daughter, wife, mother?" Chukwuma answers her own question by rightly noting that "Adah breaks out on her own," which implies her triumph over the tyrannical situation. And Ogunyemi (237) hails Adah / Emecheta as "a first-rate woman" and goes on to say that "the virilized Adah triumphs over her husband (and the British judicial system) as she cries out against her oppression."

Thus emphasis has been placed on the fact of Adah's survival or triumph, but not much attention has been paid to the

strategies that have enabled her to accomplish the heroic feat of successfully battling a monster of a husband and a terrible racial discriminatory system. Ogunyemi (241) says, for instance, that Adah "is more a soldier than a weak woman." It therefore seems necessary that we inquire into the various resources of the mind, will and heart which Adah has employed in the novel to hurdle her numerous ordeals.

The serpent-dove paradigm is the base of Adah's survival strategies. There are three instances in the novel in which she refers to the Bible, saying: "be as clever / cunning as the serpent but as harmless as the dove." The first instance is on page 16, where she is thinking of whether or not to use the two shillings meant for buying meat for her cousin to pay for the "entrance examination to the school of her dreams." The argument rages in her mind as follows:

Didn't Jesus say that one should not steal? But she was sure there was a place in the Bible where it is said that one could be as clever as the serpent but as harmless as the dove. Would she be harming anybody if she paid for her entrance examination fee with this two shillings? Would Jesus condemn her for doing it: for stealing? After all, her cousin could afford the money, though he could not give it to her if she asked for it in a proper way. What was she to do? That was the trouble with Jesus. He never answered you; He never really gave you a sign of what to do in such a situation. Anybody could twist what He said to suit his own interpretation.

Encouraged by the "Image / Presence" that had predicted greatness for her and has been directing her, Adah decides to use the money to pay for the examination. This shows the choice of reason instead of emotion / sentiment; it shows the use of the mind to master the present and plan for the future.

The second instance of Adah's citing the same Biblical saying appears on page 24 of the novel. Here Francis informs Adah that his "father does not approve of women going to the UK," that she will stay back, look after herself, and pay for his education; for, according to his father, she is "earning more than most people who have been to England," and there will be no sense in losing her good job "just to go and see London" which "they say...is just like Lagos." Applying her mind as usual to the situation, Adah is determined not to "cry"; she sees "no point in arguing with Francis" who "just would not understand." Then she recalls the Biblical saying: "be as cunning as a serpent but as harmless as a dove." And her decision follows, as stern as before: "All she had to do was to change the situation, and that she was determined to do. She pretended to be all for the plan. Of course she would stay in Lagos and look after the family; of course she would send him money regularly and, if possible, move in with her mother-in-law. Francis was not to worry about her at all, everything was going to work out well.

Francis swallows this ironic bait and in his euphoria unveils his father's most insightful assessment of Adah's character and capability, which is prophetic and also ironic. He says: "My father told me I made a right decision the day I said I was going to marry you....He said to me "Adah trained herself. She learnt very early to let her common sense guide her. She has the makings of a woman who would think before she acts" (p. 25). This is a precise foreshadowing of Adah's future employment of her ever alert common sense, serious thinking coupled with solid planning, as well as her calculating shrewdness for the solution of the problems she will encounter. The words of Francis's father are ironic because Adah's use of these intellectual and other resources will in the end work against and not in favour of Francis and his father's family.

The third instance of the occurrence of the Biblical dictum we have been considering is on page 31 of the novel, where Adah is again putting it into practical use to fight the obstruction mounted by her parents-in-law against her going to

England. She first works on the woman, painting for her an irresistible, if deceptive, picture of comfort and pride that will be hers when she (Adah) and Francis would have returned from the UK, with him riding in "his big American car and I in my small one, coming to visit you and Pa when you retire" (p.29). This is reinforced with the fake promise to send her money from England, as well as fund all her daughters' secondary-school education, and with the final deceptive demonstration of her unintended sincerity which she effects by giving her the "several necklaces" which she had bought for herself and her daughter. During that Eden-like spectacle, Adah wears on her face "a fake smile," and on her heart a genuine wish that the woman should instantly return to "her Maker."

The remaining task of hoodwinking her father-in-law, whose main worry is the fear of Adah losing her lucrative American-Embassy job, is accomplished by means of another satisfactory lie to the effect that her "going to England would be regarded as leave without pay" (pp.29-30). With these two obstacles demolished by means of her serpentine craftiness, Adah quickly organizes her trip to England and soon finds herself and her children in the ship. It is there in the sailing ship that she casts her mind back on the scene of her conquests, thinking aloud: "The poor woman had believed her. That was life, she said to herself. Be as cunning as a serpent and as harmless as a dove."

The full Biblical text a part of which Adah has so repeatedly quoted is contained in Matthew, 10:16. It was addressed by Christ to the twelve apostles when he was sending them out to start the work of evangelization: "What I am doing is sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as snakes and innocent as doves." The first two types of animals, "sheep" and "wolves," represent goodness and evil respectively (it can be recalled that the Bible has placed the "sheep" on the right hand of God for salvation, and the "goats" on His left hand for damnation). The second two types of animals, "snakes" and "doves," as indicated in the text, stand for



"cleverness" and "innocence" respectively: these are the two weapons which the "sheep" (the disciples) have to equip themselves with for the purpose of surviving in the midst of "wolves." And Adah has similarly equipped herself with these same weapons for her own survival in the midst of such "wolves" as her school headmaster and the boys that assist him in his caning operations, her guardian-cousin, her parents-in-law, her husband (the major one), the Nigerian co-tenants in London, and the London society at large. And the two weapons clearly crystallize in Adah's intellectual power, will power, self-confidence, and sense of justice (her own innocence).

It is by the mind mainly that Adah lives, moves, and has her being in the novel. Besides the initial instances of her out-witting her antagonists as noted earlier, there are telling occasions (serious and at times comic) on which her survival is effected by the astute application of her mind. When she is offered a "first-class citizen's" appointment as "senior library assistant at North Finchley Library" (p.38) to the consternation of her timid husband and envious co-tenants, she, being pregnant, faces the problem of a medical examination, which will certify her fit for the job. To solve this problem, Adah puts on her "best skirt and blouse," which, "apart from making her feel good...covered the gentle bulge that was already forming...." And at the doctor's clinic, she "set to work on the old doctor. She beamed at him, charmed him and even wanted to flirt with him. In short the doctor got carried away and forgot to look at Adah's belly-button, even though she was stripped to the waist." She of course gets the job, and, later, as is usual with her each time she wields the mind-weapon successfully, she casts her mind back on the victim and reflects: "So, sorry though she was making a fool of an old doctor, this was just one of those cases where honesty would not have been the best policy" (pp.39-40). And one cannot but feel shocked at what looks almost like callous pragmatism: the age-long ethical principle which has taught that "honesty is the best policy" is here brazenly sacrificed, and in this situation which would be

terribly precarious for Adah and her family if she failed to secure the job, the end appears to justify the means.

Furthermore, Adah has to face the psychological issue of class and colour. In "clothes stores" in London, even if she has enough money to buy expensive clothes, "she would automatically go to the counters carrying soiled and discarded items, afraid of what the shop assistants might say." Here again she applies her thinking / planning strategy: "she would start looking at the sub-standard ones and then work her way up," quite unlike "Francis and the others" who "believed that one had to start with the inferior and stay there, because being black means being inferior." To further fight this psychologically oppressive situation, Adah tactfully "started to act in the way expected of her because she was new in England," but after a while, "she was not going to accept it from anyone. She was going to regard herself as the equal of any white. But meanwhile she must look for a place to live" (p.71). Her mind has suddenly switched from ruminating over racial discrimination to the basic need for shelter; but she will come back to the former, for she is simply applying the rational and logical principle of "*primo vivere, deinde philosophari*" (first to be alive, thereafter to philosophize) (Guerard, 58). She is also here re-enacting the essence of that Igbo proverb which says: "The dog is deep in thought but is mistakenly thought to be sleeping." Her temporary and fake compliance with acting "in the way expected of her" is therefore not genuine compliance as Porter thinks (see above), but rather a tactful preparation for future defiance.

The quest for living accommodation constitutes for Adah and Francis a major problem because of the harrowing racial discrimination working against them. In connection with this, Adah has to stretch the resources of her mind to an almost snapping point. We are first treated to her comic, yet serious, elocutionary preparation of herself for a telephone-speech-act encounter with a white landlady. The "battle" plan which she lays out in the library where she is working is as follows:

She would make sure she phoned when the other assistants were out of earshot, otherwise they would think her mad or something. She had it all planned in her head. She had worked and talked for almost six months in London, so she was beginning to distinguish the accents. She knew that any white would recognize the voice of an African woman on the phone. So to eradicate that, she pressed her nostrils together as if to keep out a nasty smell. She practised and practised her voice in the loo, and was satisfied with the result. The landlady would definitely not mistake her for a woman from Birmingham or London, yet she could be Irish, Scots or an English-speaking Italian. At least all these people were white (p.74).

It is striking what goes on in the mind of Adah as she plans this aspect of her survival. She has to avoid being watched by her colleagues as she practises (mimics) the borrowed accent; she thinks of the most convenient hiding place and settles for the not-too-comfortable one, the lavatory; she is realistically conscious of the impossibility of her attaining the level of phonological competence of an English woman, but that does not daunt her; she will at least attain that of the non-English white. All this confirms the fact that she indeed "had it all planned in her head," and that, as Francis's father had foreseen, she thinks before she acts. The principle of not taking even the minutest detail for granted and of anticipating future hurdles is a powering trait of Adah's mind, which enables her to confront issues and problems with self-confidence: she is hardly ever taken unawares. This is a positive result of her tireless use of the mind, the intellect, at all times.

When Adah goes with Francis to see the rooms promised her, she takes up the problem of colour, their being black, a

problem which occurred to her during her battle with "speech," but which she had postponed to this time of the actual visit to the house. She chooses the dark hour of 9.00 p.m., which Francis, who is not used to thinking, analyzing, and planning as she is, is not particularly conscious of. Adah even wishes "they could paint their faces; just until the first rent had been paid," but dismisses the idea because she knows Francis "would not play" (p.76). The fact that they are eventually denied the accommodation does not detract from the reality of Adah's ability to manufacture necessary tricks for the purpose of achieving set objectives.

Also, when she and Francis go to the Nobles in the same quest for accommodation, she is conscious of the possibility that her being pregnant might complicate matters for them since she already has two children: some landlords / landladies object to tenants coming in with an army of kids. So she puts on her white coat, and that shields her condition. And when Pa Noble takes the coat from her and hangs it behind the door, she quickly devices a breathing system whereby she holds in her bulge in spite of the pain she feels in doing so, and relaxes after they have made the inquiry about accommodation (p.94).

And finally in connection with their search for accommodation, Adah has to tell a lie to a Yoruba landlord in order to secure it. This time she has made up her mind to separate herself from Francis and is therefore looking for accommodation for herself and her children, and this means that she is more desperate for it now than ever before. As the narrator informs us, "Adah had lied to the landlord that her husband had gone home to Nigeria and that he would send for them soon when he was fully settled at home. She had to speak all this in Yoruba, otherwise she would not get the flat." And when the man noticed that the surname on the cheque she is writing is Igbo, which can create a new problem, she "silenced him by paying him six weeks in advance, and by cheque as well. This impressed the man, and bought Adah her freedom for a



while" (p.182). Adah's constant presence of mind and her fast use of it have helped her to surmount this problem.

Telling a lie as a device for achieving an objective without harming anybody is, of course, one of the meanings Adah has practically given to the Biblical saying she earlier enunciated as her guiding principle, and she is consistent with its application. Thus besides the instances of lying just noted, she tells the doctor and the library staff a lie about when her baby will be due. Instead of December, which is the right month, she names February. But the motive behind this lie, as in all the other cases, is neither petty nor selfish: the motive is the well-being of her family, for the reason is "so that she could stay as long as possible at work. They would then have enough money to tide them over till she started work again" (pp.97-98), since she is strikingly the bread-winner for the family whose paterfamilias is still alive. The significance of this lie thus includes the fact that Francis is not working and is usually not willing to work, as well as the fact that Adah's forfeiting of her pre-natal leave is indeed a kind of self-denial. So, in this instance as in the previous and subsequent ones, there is often a positive and humane dimension to Adah's use of tricks, even lies, to achieve her aims.

Another issue is that of birth-control, and over this Adah, as usual, does serious thinking and planning, especially with a view to achieving her objective without creating a conflict between her and her husband. She knows he will neither approve it nor sign the form given her by the Family Planning Clinic. But she, with her characteristic firmness, decides to accomplish it. She had made up her mind that, "whatever happened, she was not going to have any more children. She did not care which way she achieved it, but she was having no more children....Adah was not going to have any more" (p.149). So she employs the usual shrewd element in her nature: she forges Francis's signature; she deceives him into believing that the reason she is going to the clinic is because the staff of the clinic would like to take a photograph of their child, Bubu. She

ironically emphasizes this craftiness of hers by appearing remorseful about it without intending to give it up: "It pained her, having to resort to the very method she has always used when she was little. That horrible tendency to twist the facts. But what else was there for her to do? She prayed to God again and again to forgive" (pp.150-151). It is thus clear that Adah intends no harm or evil for anybody in her using tricks and twisting facts; her conscience is not even dead. In her thinking, even if she offends God in the process, it is too bad, and God has to wait for her repentance after she will have achieved her objective!

Having obtained the birth-control "cap" behind her husband's back, and while praying God not to "let Francis find out," Adah faces the problems of where to hide it, where to hide herself when she wants to put it on (they have only one all-purpose room), and how to avoid her movement, which will become unnatural, betraying her. Her mind goes to work like an adept: Bubu's pram is the safest place to hide the "cap" in; their "backyard toilet that had no electric light" is where she goes to fit "herself with the new cap." And when her husband asks whether she has a "boil in the leg," because she walks "funny," she responds with a "sort of lying smile" and comes up with a real lie: "You were calling me so loudly when I was down in the backyard, that I ran upstairs, and I bumped my toe on one of them, and it hurts a bit" (pp.153-154). Although Francis later finds out the truth, Adah had already succeeded in obtaining and keeping the "cap" for some time through the use of her shrewd resources.

Finally in this connection of Adah's use of tricky devices to solve problems, there is that case of real positive pretence, whereby she buys and addresses "twenty greeting cards to herself," which are to be posted to her in the hospital, and three of which are to be posted "a day after the baby was born." She has also bought "two big bunches of flowers," with the instruction to her friend, Irene, who is to post the cards to her, that the flowers are to be sent to her, one on her arrival at the

hospital "with Francis's name attached to it with sentimental words," and the other "after her safe delivery" (p.169).

This elaborate hypocritical design is aimed at redeeming the poor image Adah had cut when she first had a baby in the same hospital, with neither cards nor flowers sent her by anybody, not even her husband. She had reflected on this and resolved just before the present confinement that "one thing she had learnt from Bubu's confinement was that she was not going to that hospital as a poor nigger woman. Her baby was going to arrive in style." To this end, "she knitted and sewed, and this time her maternity grant was not going to Francis. She was buying a brand-new pram, a new shawl and a new outfit for herself for when she came out of the hospital" (pp.168-169). The design is also aimed at creating the wrong, but necessary, impression that there is love and care in her family, and that is why the name of Francis and sentimental words supposed to be from him are to be attached to one of the bunches of flowers. Furthermore, the whole scenario, like the preceding ones, presents Adah as demonstrating one very important principle of the ideology of feminism, which is characterised by Morris (61) as "refusing to accept passively an imposition of suffering as destiny."

The story of Adah is as much one of the power of the will as it has been of that of the mind. In a different context and for a different reason, Ezenwa-Ohaeto (350-351) rightly notes Buchi Emecheta's "determination to survive," and the initial attitudes to the circumstances of her birth, which "rather than depressing the girl, inculcate in her the will to survive." This spirit of determination and the will to survive are naturally replicated in Adah, who is Emecheta's fictional *alter ego*. Very early in her life (at the age of six) in the novel (pp.5-6), Adah on her own initiative sends herself to school, and the reason she gives to Mr. Cole, the teacher, who is shocked by her unexpected (and to him unexplainable) presence is: "I came to school—my parents would not send me." This is a demonstration of a will young, yet very mature in its stoutness

and immensity. From now on, Adah is to consistently prove her un-preparedness to play second fiddle in any circumstance.

When her mother suggests that she should get married at the age of eleven to one of the old men "she was being pushed to by her clever cousins" because, according to her mother, the "older men took better care of their wives than the young and over-educated ones," Adah's unspoken but unshakeable response is: "She would never, never in her life get married to any man, rich or poor, to whom she would have to serve his food on bended knee: she would not consent to live with a husband whom she would have to treat as a master and refer to as 'Sir' even behind his back. She knew that all Igbo women did this, but she wasn't going to!" (p.14). Thus contrary to Porter's thinking (noted above), a girl of only eleven years, who could think and resolve in this revolutionary manner, cannot be described as "compliant." If anything, one has reason to see her as precocious: Emecheta seems to have deliberately equipped this mere child with this kind of will as a sign of what she will become and perform as a grown-up woman. The Igbo have a proverb for characterizing this type of human phenomenon, which says: "A chicken that will become a cock is known the day it is hatched." And, didn't William Wordsworth say that "the child is the father of the man"?

As a mother in London, Adah quarrels with Francis in the hospital when he said that his illiterate mother would have looked after their children if Adah had died in the course of the caesarian operation she had. Adah abuses him and his mother, tells him about her plan for the children, and educates him on what a marital relationship ought to be. She says to him:

If you really want to know, I brought my children here to save them from the clutches of your family, and God help me, they are going back as different people; never, never are they going to be the type of person you are. My sons will learn to treat their wives as people, as individuals, not like



goats that have been taught to talk. My daughters...God help me, nobody is going to pay any bleeding price for them. They will marry because they love and respect their men, not because they are looking for a home...(p.127).

Here, as an adult, Adah reaffirms the philosophy of marriage she enunciated as a child of eleven. This vision of marriage is everything her own marriage unfortunately happens not to be. She has a husband who, instead of being concerned about her life during her child-birth, is planning how to selfishly spend on his own education the lump sum paid to her for her vacation. Adah's response to Francis's callousness on this occasion reflects a will that will not be cowed: "She dried her tears," saying that "crying showed softness and weakness," and that since "he was a dangerous man to live with" and "like all such men...needed victims," she "was not going to be a willing victim" (p.127). This is one of the reasoned resolutions that govern Adah's use of violence on some occasions in the novel, as will be seen later. It is this resolve of Adah's to ensure that her children are well brought up which had earlier in the novel earned her a derisive image from some Nigerian neighbours in London who had tried in vain to persuade her to send her children back to Nigeria. Their impression of her, which ironically confirms the strength of her will and determination, is that "Adah was like a peacock, who kept wanting to win all the time" (p.46).

In the climactic episode of the court scene, Adah demonstrates the strongest type of will and determination. In spite of Francis's lies denying his marriage with her and his fatherhood of the children, which could disarm and demoralize an average woman, and in spite of the magistrate's ruling that Francis has to contribute to the maintenance of the children, which is consoling, Adah has the strength of will enough to ignore Francis's lies and reject the idea of his contributing anything. As the narrator says, "something happened to Adah

that is, "to pass the pain to something else" (not to any particularly targeted person). In other words, it was not pre-meditated. However, "the boy who was doing the backing, happened to be the closest victim, so he had to take it" (pp.15-16). Though Adah's action "gave her a nickname which she never lived down: 'Igbo tigress'," it is, as Ogunyemi (242) rightly notes, a "self-defensive" action.

The next violent action of Adah's is her attack on Trudy, the white-lady daily minder of children, who has been mishandling Adah's children, who she suspects has been having a love affair with Francis, and who has told the hospital staff that Adah's son, Vicky, could have caught the "viral meningitis" he is ill with "from the water you drank at home" (i.e. Nigeria). Adah reflects on these things and concludes: "In front of her was an enemy, insulting her country, her family, her person and, worst of all, her child." This constitutes the rationale for the action she takes, which is to pick up a heavy "carpet-sweeper by the door" and bang it "blindly in the direction of Trudy's head!" (p.65). Trudy stands here not just for herself as a person, but more importantly for the white race—the people who have been discriminating against Adah and other black people—so that Adah's attack on her practicalizes her earlier assertion that she would regard herself as the "equal of any white."

The last acts of violence (physical and legal) of Adah's are directed against Francis, her husband: a husband who is a negation of the Igbo traditional concept of that term. For instance, the Igbo say that the man is the "provider," while the woman is the "consumer," of wealth. But in this novel, Francis becomes the consumer, while Adah is the provider. Again, the Igbo say that a man never rests (he should always be struggling); but Francis is lethargic, gets out of the bed late everyday, and is unwilling to work. Furthermore, the Igbo believe that physical conquest in one's home is not true heroism on the part of a man; but Francis's only heroism consists in beating Adah up. It is because of his incessant "beatings and slappings," that Adah starts "to hit him back, even biting him

when need be," arguing that "that was the language he wanted," and recalling the fact that "she was the greatest biter in her school." But in spite of her physical resistance which only arouses the brute in Francis the more, Adah is seriously worried by the thought "that she could be killed and the world would think it was an accident" (p.162). This reflection is the beginning of the argument that will ultimately lead to the demise of their marriage.

That argument has to do with a metaphorical "killing," which is as devastating to Adah as a literal one. After Francis had burnt the manuscript of her novel, *The Bride Price*, she says to him: "Do you hate me so much that you could kill my child? Because that is what you have done." It is on the basis of this reasoning that she looks for a house to live in and gets "a two-room flat which she had to share with rats and cockroaches." The possibility of literal "killing" which has been furthered by the "killing" of Adah's "brainchild" is again demonstrated by the fight that ensues when she wants to remove her belongings from where they have been living. The landlady calls the police because, as she tells Adah, "he was going to kill you, you know" (p181).

But Adah's departure, which is clearly justified by her legitimate quest for self-preservation and not by any desire to harm Francis, does not quite solve her problem. Francis pursues her to her new home and thoroughly brutalizes her and destroys her property. Like her usual self, she calls reasoning to her aid: "one never knew; Francis was carrying a knife today, she told herself—he did use it to threaten her....No, the law must step in" (p.184); and with that resolution made, she takes the matter to court, as noted above. To Adah, this is the point at which, Francis, like the thief, as the Igbo say and as Achebe (127) notes in a different context for a different reason, "has taken enough 'or the owner to see." This very saying is a justification of such legal action as Adah is taking. Thus, what Umeh (xxvi) says of Emecheta to the effect that "sheer defiance against all odds enabled her and her children to succeed" equally applies to

Adah, who also opposes all odds with defiant mind and will in order for her and her children to survive.

These instances of justified violence bring out the dovelement of "harmlessness" / "innocence" in Adah's character. In each case she is the oppressed, not the oppressor; the offended, not the offender: indeed always the victimized. At no time does she initiate action against any person except for the purpose of defending herself. Her quest is always the quest for justice. And if feminism as a movement is not in quest of justice—sexual, social, political, and moral—one wonders what else it is all about. Her relationship with Francis, who hates her, brings out yet another of her qualities: namely, the quality of humaneness. He had fed and educated himself at her cost consistently throughout the years they lived together; and even though he repays her support of him with nothing but hatred, malice, and brutality, she has the humaneness to say that "she would not harm Francis, because he was the father of her babies" (p.127).

Anyone who has the combination of the heterogeneous qualities of the shrewdness of a serpent, the ferocity of a tiger, the will and heart of a lion, as well as the harmlessness and innocence of a sheep and a dove, must be an extraordinary person; and so is Adah. A little girl who could endure the pain of one hundred and three strokes of the horse-whip without crying, but rather with the will to consciously rebuff the victimizer's ironic request that she should cry, must be a prodigy; and so was Adah as a child. The creation of this complex and indomitable female character in literature is in conformity with Morris's view (7) that one service which imaginative writing can render to the feminist cause is "to increase indignation at gender discrimination and hence help to end it." It also illustrates what Arndt (45) says that African women writers tend to stress: namely, "the fact that African women have dignity, power, self-respect and an identity beyond passivity, voicelessness, motherhood and wifehood." Above all, the totality of Adah's life and struggle in the novel is a sustained war against injustice—sexual, social, and racial. Emecheta,



therefore, must have put Adah up as a model; and a model ought to be more than ordinary, which is what a heroic figure is—simply extraordinary, simply ideal. Adah is a model whose use of her mind, will and heart in the defence of herself against injustice and oppression should be emulated not only by subjugated women, but also by all who are oppressed and unfairly treated anywhere any time.

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**CHINYERE L. NGONEBU****Jokes and Joking Relationship in Chinua Achebe's Novels****Introduction**

A joke is generally regarded as something said or done to cause amusement. It is a universal linguistic phenomenon, a special feature of language whose main objective is to generate laughter. However, enveloped in jokes is a significance—a meaning that is not overtly intelligible. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to explore how Achebe has responded to his universe within the confines of the joke and how this analysis can help in the teaching of Achebe to people of other cultural and political zones. In other words, this paper examines how Achebe uses this particular linguistic form to achieve humour and to express his thoughts and how the expostulation of this form can lead foreign students into greater appreciation and understanding of Achebe's works.

Our study involves all of Achebe's five novels: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1963), *Arrow of God* (1965), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988). From them we derive the nineteen jokes that form the basis of our study. The analysis itself involves a linguistic and literary dissection of each joke, which we expect to yield the representation that the joke embodies. This study is relevant in teaching Achebe because the joke as a form of discourse is rich with layers of meaning. Unraveling any discourse form in a text helps arrive at deeper understanding and appreciation of the text in question. Moreover, because jokes



and joking relationship can be seen to envelope hidden meanings, it can be used to lead students into effective textual analysis of Achebe's novels.

### **The Concept of Jokes and Joking Relationship**

Jokes and joking relationship have been interpreted, defined and analyzed by various people in different disciplines, and from different perspectives. As Cottom (1989) notes, intellectuals have viewed jokes from various angles: anthropological, historical, psychoanalytic, semiotic, and so on. So, then what is a joke? *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* (1974) defines the joke as something said or done to cause amusement; or circumstance that causes amusement. Microsoft Encarta (1998) sees a joke as a humorous utterance or story that often ridicules a person or group of people. Microsoft Encarta expands this definition in its 2001 edition to include:

- a funny story, anecdote, or piece of word play that gets passed round and repeated;
- anything said or done to make people laugh;
- any funny event or circumstance, or something to laugh at;
- somebody or something that is laughably inadequate or absurd.

The *Annotated Teacher's Edition of Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes* (2000) sees jokes as something you read that makes you laugh. Kraeplin (1960) defines a joke as "the arbitrary connecting or linking, usually by means of a verbal association of two ideas which in some way contrast with each other". The joke, according to Cottom (1989), is a form of discourse, "a text in a context that allows someone to take it as an occasion of humour—that is, as conveying a non-serious or playful meaning, usually inspiring smiles or laughter".

From the above definitions, we deduce that the ultimate objective of the joke is to generate laughter, to humour, or to amuse. Consequently, a joke invariably requires an audience,

and, not just any audience, but one that recognizes it as a joke (Cottom, 1989). Thus, there must be a consensus or mutual understanding between the teller and the audience if a text is to be understood as a joke, or as the saying goes, if the joke is to be taken in the right spirit.

Concepts commonly associated with the joke include humour, pun, wit, jest, and quip. *Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes* (2000) distinguishes three aspects of humour: verbal, situational and diction. Verbal humour refers to funny sounding words or clever puns or responding to a character with a wacky attitude towards life. Perhaps, this inscription on Mad Madico's bar in *Anthills of the Savannah* will serve to illustrate verbal humour:

ALL DE BEER  
DEM DRINK FOR HERE  
DE MAKE ME FEAR (55).

Situational humour arises when one sees what is laughable about a particular set of circumstances, actions that take place in widely inappropriate settings with unusual props, circumstances that combine actions, people and settings in funny, and often improbable ways. Unoka's behaviour in *Things Fall Apart* is an appropriate example of an action that generates humour. When one of his creditors asks him to pay what he owes, Unoka complacently replies,

I shall pay you, but not today... I  
shall pay my big debts first. And he  
took another pinch of snuff, as if  
that was paying the big debts first  
(6).

A writer's diction or word choice can also help to achieve humour. For example, writers may invent unusual words, intentionally use the wrong word, or use formal or informal

language in inappropriate situations. They also use slangy expressions that readers will find humorous or overuse jargon, the specialized vocabulary of particular field or profession. An example can be taken from *Anthills of the Savannah*. The Attorney General tells the President:

You can't imagine, your Excellency, how bush people like me were. During my first year in Britain I saw Welsh Rarebit on the menu one fine day and I rubbed my hands together and my mouth began to water because I thought I was going to eat real bush meat from the forests of Wales (24).

The humour here lies in associating "Welsh Rarebit" with real bush meat from the forest of Wales.

Pun is another concept associated with the joke. It is a play on words as we can see in the use of *bar* in the Senior Tutor's joke in *A Man of the People* which will be discussed later. Wit is the ability to say something that is clever and amusing. Jest is something intended to be funny but not serious. Quip is to say something short, clever and amusing, for example "a stitch in time saves embarrassment" (Alves, 1997). These concepts are used for amusement, unlike the joke, which, in addition to giving pleasure, embodies diverse undertones. These associated concepts, therefore, fall outside the scope of this study.

### Jokes in Literary Works

Jokes occur in literary works either as part of conversation, or authorial gloss, or incidences that generate laughter. Most often than not jokes in literary texts are used for comic effects. Nevertheless, Cottom insists that the audience need not laugh—it may take the text in question to be a bad or a failed joke. In such a case where the audience does not hear the joke as such or if it will not perceive the kind of performance

intended by the speaker, one can expect trouble. Hence, Cottom posits that the same text may still be a joke for its teller and yet at the very same time not a joke at all for the audience. Such a situation occurs when jokes are directed to ridicule. We see this in *Arrow of God* when the Court Messenger goes to summon Ezeulu. After delivering his message, the Court Messenger subtly requests for a bribe:

"Everything is in my hands; .... Your kinsman will tell you what I eat." He smiled and put his fez back on his head.

"That is a small matter," said Ezeulu.

"It will not cause a quarrel. I do not think that what you will put into that small belly of yours will be beyond me. If it is, my kinsmen are there to help." He paused and seemed to enjoy the messenger's anger at the mention of his small size (139).

We can, therefore, see that in as much as humour is the primary aim of the joke, its significance goes deeper than that and the joke can in itself embody extensive interpretations, "open to possibility, open to other powers of meaning" (Cottom, 1989). "But then what is the joke about", Cottom asks, "if not the seriousness of language, its power, and the demystification of that power by our native brand of deconstructionist, the shrewd rube?" It is this "significant order" this "seriousness of language, its power" that distinguishes jests from jokes. According to Freud (1960), "only jests are non tendentious or serving only to produce pleasure. Jokes, properly speaking, promote their thought by setting themselves up against an inhibitory and restricting power, which is that of the critical judgement". Consequently, in the one case the joke is an end in itself and serves no particular aim, in the other case it does serve such an aim- it becomes tendentious (Freud, 1960). Hence,



jokes are used as an envelope for thoughts of the greatest substance (Freud, 1960).

Mary Douglas in Daniel Cottom (1989) gives this description of the joke's significance:

It represents a temporary suspension of the social structure, or rather it makes a little disturbance in which the particular structure of society becomes less relevant than another. But the strength of its attack is entirely restricted by the consensus on which it depends for recognition.

In his preface to *The Joke*, Kundera seems to think a joke, or a text, does have a meaning beyond the permutations of authority that may be applied to it (1989). This is why Cottom asserts that a form of humour could also be a form of violence and desire, and so could differ radically from itself.

Jokes can also give a feeling of release from pent up emotions. Freud, of course, suggests that jokes represent a fundamental rebellion against all the social laws extorted from our unconscious drives (1960). We can thus agree with Mikhail Bakhtin (1989) that laughter is a kind of liberation; and with Walter Benjamin (1989) that joke is a quasi-revolutionary action that "puts forth its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it", so as to establish a kind of "dialectical justice".

Jokes might also call into question issues pertaining to societal beliefs, world view, or social structure and might equally turn to make a caricature of them. Other interpretations jokes can yield in literary works include ridicule, conveying hard truths, evoking particular atmosphere, addressing societal problems and even serving as a pedagogical tool.

Cottom (1989) states the matter thus:

The joke, closely regarded, dissolves into a heterogeneous play of differences (wit, humour, comedy, satire, puns, insults, threats, promises, courts of law...). This is not to say that in a text we are faced with an incomprehensible chaos of meaning. The range of meaning in a text is always severely limited by the rhetorical authority called upon in a particular instance of interpretation.

Peter Hammond also in Daniel Cottom (1989) argues that joking

may serve as an adjustive mechanism by providing for the concurrent maintenance of communication, control, and the culturally harmless catharsis of potentially disruptive emotions.

This compels Freud (1960) to describe jokes variously as 'a contrast of ideas', 'sense in nonsense', 'bewilderment and illumination'.

and Lipps (1960) to assert that

A joke says what it has to say, not always in few words, but in too few words—that is, in words that are insufficient by strict logic or by common modes of thought and speech. It may even actually say what it has to say by not saying it.

In the world of Achebe's novels, joking is expected and changed freely among peers and people of the same age. It can be a social game of words and wit and peers can inter with each other endlessly over any issue, as we see between Ezeulu and Ogbuefi in *Arrow of God*:

"Go and tell your mother to bring me a kolanut, Nwafor. ..."

"Must you worry about kolanuts every time? I am not a stranger."

.... "I was not taught that kolanut was the food of strangers," said Ezeulu... "But I know what you are afraid of; they tell me you have lost all your teeth" (94).

Odili and his friend Andrew in *A Man of the People* also never fail to tease each other, imitating the high-pitched voice of girls. Odili tells us:

It was a silly joke Andrew and I never tired of playing on each other. The idea was to sound like a girl and so send the other's blood pressure up (20).

Joking, such as these, is a social game entrusted with a certain degree of freedom. This is because joking relationship is a "relationship of permitted respect", "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Joking relationship in Achebe's world is based on kinship structure and social relations. Joking relatives are those of a person's own generation (Radcliffe-brown, 1952). Hence, while an older person may stand in a joking relationship with his compatriots, a younger person cannot joke with an older person.

The jokes we see between Ezeulu and Akubue, or between Odili and Andrew can only take place among friends who have mutual understanding of each other. When jokes occur in a disparate gathering, that is the young and the old, they are no longer mere innocent jokes but can embody any of the meanings

that we highlighted earlier, like Ezeulu's joke about the Court Messenger.

### Literary Analysis of Jokes in Achebe's Novels

This brings us to the analytical part of our discussion—jokes and their uses in Achebe's novels. This is done by examining the symbolisms evoked by the jokes, their literary effects, plurality of meanings they embody, and tracing the path backwards through a series of easily established associations and inferences. The jokes in Achebe's novels generally give comic effects. Specifically, however, they embody a whole other complex of meanings. Some are used to establish/delineate characterization, communicate the teller's tone, belief or attitude to some issues; others evoke a particular atmosphere, convey hard truth, castigate or ridicule, etc. There are satirical attacks on public figures. For Achebe, also, extended proverbs serve as jokes. We also have what Freud (1960) calls cynical jokes, which disguise as cynicisms.

We will start with Mad Medico's graffiti in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Mad Madico inscribed outside the men's venereal diseases ward:

a huge arrow sitting between two tangential balls  
and pointing like a crazy road sign towards the  
entrance and the words TO THE TWIN CITIES  
OF SODOM AND GONORRHEA (56).

The meaning of this sign can be deduced from the 'two tangential balls' and the words 'Sodom and Gonorrhea'. The phrase "to the twin cities of Sodom and Gonorrhea" evokes the culture of the biblical towns Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their immorality. Mad Madico's phrase thereby reminds us of the embodiment of sexual immorality for which Sodom and Gomorrah are known. What the writer wishes to say is that "this is the ward of those



guilty of sexual immorality.” The joke itself is pointing to a problem in society—promiscuity—, which Mad Madico’s joke implies is the cause of venereal diseases. Promiscuity in modern African society is an issue which is subtly hinted in Achebe’s novels. For how else can we have this answer in *No Longer At Ease* if the girl were not promiscuous. Christopher tells Obi:

A girl who comes the way she did is not an innocent little girl. It’s like the story of the girl who was given a form of fill in. She put down her name and age. But when she came to sex she wrote: “Twice a week”. Obi could not help laughing (110).

This story can be given a different reading, apart from the laughter it generates. With colonialism and its attendant education and urbanization have come an erosion of the strong moral and social values which we see in the pre-colonial societies of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In *Arrow of God* (122), Obika’s bride, Okuata, “could go without shame to salute her husband’s parents because she had been ‘found at home’. Her husband was even now arranging to send the goat and other presents to her mother in Umuezeani for giving him an unspoilt bride”. In *Things Fall Apart*, Amikwu’s bride affirms and swears before the umuada and the men of her husband’s family that she was a virgin (93). But we cannot say the same for this girl in Christopher’s story. Her words give her away. Freud (1960) calls these types of jokes “obscene” jokes, that is, serving the purpose of exposure. Mad Madico’s and Christopher’s jokes thus expose the erosion of morality in postcolonial societies.

A more serious substance of some of Achebe’s jokes is that of political disenchantment. At the impromptu launching of P.O.P. in Odili’s compound, Max gives an unprepared speech accusing the outgoing government of all kinds of swindling and corruption (*A Man of the People*, 123 - 4). As Max provides

instance after instance of how the leaders are embezzling public fund, an ex-policeman takes him up:

“we know they are eating,” he said,” but we are eating too. They are bringing us water and they promise to bring in electricity...; that is why I say we are eating too.”

“Defend them, Couple,” cried someone in the audience to him. “Are you not one of them when it comes to eating aged guinea-fowls?”

This brought a good deal of laughter ... (123-4).

The core of this joke lies in the symbolic use of “eating “, and “aged-guinea-fowls”. From them we can generate multiplicity of meanings embedded in this joke. Taking “aged-guinea fowls” first, we see that the fowl among other things evokes a festal imagery. Now, when the fowl is aged, its meat is tough, tasteless and, consequently, less desirable. To eat aged fowls, therefore, is a sign of excessive greed. It further shows that the person has no scruples in grabbing anything that comes his way. We thus can infer that by referring to the corporal as one of these involved in eating aged guinea fowls, the joker is alluding to those undesirable trifles, the bribes, the pilfering the corporal and his likes are guilty of. This analogy is supported by the fact that the corporal has a dubious past. We are told that he “had served two years in jail for corruptly receiving ten shillings from a lorry driver” (123). At the moment he was involved in supply of stones for the village pipe-borne water scheme and was widely accused of selling one heap of stones in the morning, carrying it away at night and selling it again the next day; and repeating the cycle as long as he liked (123). It is therefore to this that the joker refers, for the corporal will, of course, have no inhibition in “defending his fellow racketeers” (124). If we extend this allusion further, we can assert that in using the expression “eating aged guinea fowls”, Achebe is pointing to the covetousness and unbridled embezzlement of public fund for

which most post-colonial societies are known. Another interpretation might see the joke as referring to the corruption of the police and the poor image the police have among the people.

We also see that the verb 'eat' in this joke is a dynamic symbol, which transcends its original analogy by adding all kinds of variations to the same theme (Yankson, 1990). Yankson asserts that "eat" and its variant forms sum up the political belief of the greater majority of the body politic in the world of *A Man of the People*. It alludes to the people, as well as their elected representatives' consumerist conception of the use of state funds. This conception is that every citizen "must press for (their) fair share of the national cake" (13). Thus, we see every citizen in *A Man of the People* trying to 'eat' as much as the "national cake" as possible. This 'eating' syndrome is associated with the likes of Chief Nanga; The M.P. Hon. Chief Koko; Josiah, the "abominable trader"; Edna's "greedy avaricious father"; Mrs. Agnes Akilo, who sleeps with Chief Nanga for twenty five pounds a night; Mrs. John Eleanor, who has no formal education but is a member of the Library Commission under Chief Nanga's ministry, as well as the expoliceman of our joke. So much is the desire of everybody—the politicians and the people—to try and eat that the regime is described as "the fat –dripping, gummy, eat –and-let-me-eat regime"(167). The verb 'eat' thereby symbolizes the rapacity and corruption that are at the root of the moral and political decadence in *A Man of the People* and invariably in our society.

This issue of greed and corruption of public officers is the underlying point Achebe makes when Prof. Okong, when summoned by His Excellency, says to his fellow commissioners:

I go to prepare a place for you, gentlemen... But rest assured I will keep the most comfortable cell for myself (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 10).

Chris himself could not help but laugh at Prof. Okong's statement. Though Prof. Okong meant this as a joke, yet it brings to the fore another problem in our politics. People elected or appointed in positions of honour first carve a niche of affluence and comfort for themselves, totally forgetting the people they were voted to serve. This attempt at "keeping the most comfortable cells" for themselves brings up a more serious feature of our political arena—treachery and sycophancy. This is because, in the bid to retain and upgrade their position, many politicians engage in slander. A typical example of this interpretation we have arrived at here is the Attorney General's story about "Welsh Rarebit" in *Anthills of the Savannah* (24). The story highlights the political gerrymandering, leadership tussles, lies, blackmails that come into play in this attempt at "keeping the most comfortable cells". These culminate in the politically motivated assassinations and disillusionment that dominate the world of *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Not all of Achebe's jokes, however, satirize the African predicament. Onwuchekwa Jemie in "Sex, Scatology and Pan-African Popular Discourse" (2000) traces the origin of obscene and vulgar words so common in African-American popular discourse. In the course of his investigation, Jemie claims that two most used vulgar terms in Ebonics "shit and ass" are dialectal variation, of which that of the Niger Delta Ndoki Igbo is an example. Instead of the personal pronoun *mu* (I, me), the Delta Igbo use the term *ike-mu* (my buttocks/my ass; and instead of *gi* (you), they say *ike-gi* (your ass). Among the Igbo, especially those hearing them for the first time, these usages are greeted with laughter, and speakers of that dialect are teased continuously (Jemie, 2000).

Chinua Achebe captures this fun in *Things Fall Apart*. A white missionary has arrived at the village of Mbanta, bringing an Igbo interpreter from the Delta.

When they had all gathered, the White man began to speak to them. He spoke through an interpreter



who was an Ibo man, though his dialect was different and harsh to the ears of Mbanta. Many people laughed at his dialect and the way he used words strangely. Instead of saying "myself" he always said "my buttocks". But he was a man of commanding presence and the clansmen listened to him.

"Your buttocks understand our language", said someone light-heartedly and the crowd laughed (102).

Then the interpreter spoke of "Jesus Kristi" who he said "the son of God." A villager queries him:

"You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife, then. The crowd agreed. "I did not say He had a wife," said the interpreter, somewhat lamely.

"Your buttocks said he had a son", said the joker, "so he must have a wife and all of them must have buttocks" (103).

Achebe manifests in this joke a sociological and historical awareness of the linguistic forms and dialectal variance of the language upon which the joke subsists. The white man interpreter also indicates that Christianity came to the hinterland through the Delta region. This can equally be explained by the fact that the Delta provides the waterway through which the European ships sailed. Thus, this single joke embodies historic, linguistic and religious information, apparently seeming not to do so. Such a meaning is deciphered because *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are very important historical narratives centering on a moment of disruption, though it is equally to say that they are acts of interpretation, and an attempt to grasp the confusions surrounding a humiliating collec-

memory by means of a code, foreign to the memory itself (Akwanya, 1996).

Some of Achebe's jokes are directed to ridicule. We see this in *Arrow of God* in the incidence between Ezeulu and the court messenger, which we have discussed earlier. The traditional Igbo belief of a world filled with gods and demigods, each striving to assert its power, may be the point Achebe makes when he says about Nwaka's impertinence

Perhaps Nwaka counted on the protection of the personal god of his village. But the elders were not foolish when they said that a man might have Ngwu and still be killed by Ojukwu (*Arrow of God*, 39).

But a good example of a joke representing the religious-cultural belief of traditional Igbo communities is the one concerning Obiako, the ex-palm wine tapper of *Things Fall Apart*. Nwakibie tells the story:

I have heard that many years ago, when his father had not been dead very long, he had gone to consult the Oracle. The Oracle said to him, 'Your dead father wants you to sacrifice a goat to him'. Do you know what he told the Oracle? He said, "Ask my dead father if he ever had a fowl when he was alive!" Everybody laughed heartily.... (15)

Obiako's reply gives us pleasure and makes us laugh. But it asserts something of value to the traditional African. It embodies the assumptive view in the continual presence of the ancestors—referred to as "the living dead" (Nwaozuzu, 1980). According to Yankson (1990), Simola (2005), to the majority of Africans, a person does not "die". Rather, he passes on to another plane of existence—into a state of immortality—from

where, as a living dead, he still shows concern and interest in the day-to-day lives of his relatives. That might explain why Obiako's dead father is said to have a hand in Obiako's plight. The sacrifice of a goat, it is believed, would placate the spirit of the dead man, thereby paving the way for prosperity for the living. Achebe inserts the following authorial gloss on this fact:

The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, ... (*Things Fall Apart*, 85).

Obiako's response thereby signifies this existing relationship and interaction between the living and the dead in Igbo cosmological concept. We derive this meaning only from re-interpretation of Obiako's funny retort. However, it is appropriate to note that everyone does not qualify to be an ancestor or a living dead. For instance, Okonkwo's father Unoka, the lazy never-do-well that died of the swelling disease and was therefore, left in the Evil Forest to die, does not qualify to be called an ancestor or a living-dead. According to Yankson (1990), he is very dead. In contrast, men like Ezeudu of *Things Fall Apart* and Amalu of *Arrow of God* are men of substance and are given respectable burial. Such men constitute part of the living-dead, which we are talking about. But a poor man not given a decent burial may not enjoy such fate. Achebe informs us that:

A poor man might wander outside for years while his kinsmen scraped their meager resources together, that was his penalty for lack of success in life (*Arrow of God*, 217).

Achebe uses some of his jokes to drive home points or to tell stories. When Obi tells Christopher that he is frightened by his (Obi's) mother's threat to kill herself if he marries Clara, Christopher laughs and tells Obi the story about the woman

whose two children fell into a well and drowned (*No Longer at Ease*, 130–131). What Christopher is emphasizing here is that things are easier said than done. He merely wants to calm down Obi and remove his fears. So Christopher tells Obi the story of this woman who longed to die like her children, but when faced with the crude reality of death had no courage to take the plunge.

Many of the jokes in Achebe's novels are used for character delineation. An example in *Things Fall Apart* involves Ogbuefi Ugonna. He was one of the first men in Umuofia to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, or Holy Feast, as it was called in Igbo.

Ogbuefi Ugonna had thought of the Feast in terms of eating and drinking, only more holy than the village variety. He had therefore put his drinking-horn into his goatskin bag for the occasion (123).

We may laugh at the issue of taking a drinking horn to the Eucharistic feast. We may also laugh at Ogbuefi Ugonna's shallowness of understanding. But perhaps what Achebe wishes to remind us is the people's misconception of early missionaries and of Christianity, a misconception Achebe links to "the magic logic of the Trinity" (*Things Fall Apart*, 104) which they preached and which is part of the butt of ridicule analyzed earlier in the case of the white preacher and his interpreter.

The Senior Tutor's banter in *A Man of the People* portrays him as an inveterate drinker. So, "when he asked why so many young people traveled to Britain to be called to the Bar when he could call them all to Josiah's bar" (20), we have not just a pun in the use of the word "bar", but also a representation of something. If we go backwards within the same page, we would notice that this man "had sallied out of the lodge with one bottle of beer under his armpit". Achebe tells us he "was a jolly old rogue", "a great frequenter of Josiah's bar across the road" (20). Thus, Josiah's bar and all it connotes are more



important to him than any other thing that goes by that same name. This signifies people's disregard for sublime things and a striving after trifles, or as the joker says after "aged guinea fowls".

Not all of Achebe's jokes, however, are taken in good faith. These fall into the category Freud (1960) refers to as cynical jokes, jokes meant to ridicule a person or an institution. We have already discussed Ezeulu's joke at the expense of the Court Messenger in *Arrow of God*. Two other examples will be enough for our purpose here. One is a "popular Anata joke—push me down and take my three pence" (*A Man of the People*, 13), and the other is Mad Madico's inscription in the ward for heart patients (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 55). The "push me down" remark in *A Man of the People* generates so much laughter that Mr. Nwege who it refers to shamefacedly stops his long and boring speech. And Mad Madico's "Blessed are the poor in heart for they shall see God", cannot anywhere in the world pass as a suitable joke to be nailed up in the ward for heart patients (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 55). Ikem tells us that Mad Madico's remarks are 'inexcusable and in deplorable taste' so much so that they "would have cost him his job and residence in the country about a year ago had he (Ikem) and His Excellency not gone to his rescue" (55). Here again we recall what Cottom says about trouble arising when jokes are taken in bad faith.

Achebe also uses some of his jokes to introduce, initiate and carry on conversations. In *Arrow of God*, this occurs mostly between Ezeulu and his friend, Ogbuefi Akubue.

"Who is it? Ezeulu screwed up his eyes in an effort to see.

"It is Ogbuefi Akubue".

As he drew near he raised his voice and asked:

"Is the owner of this house still alive?"

"Who is this man?" asked Ezeulu. "Did they not say that you died two markets come next Afo?"

"Perhaps you do not know that everyone in your age group has long died. Or are you waiting for mushrooms to sprout from your head before you know that your time is over?"(93).

Another example is the joke between Odili and his friend Andrew in *A Man of the People* (20). These provide comic episodes and illustrate friendliness and congeniality. When, for example, this exchange takes place between Ezeulu and Ogbuefi Akubue, it is not taken seriously:

"I did not know that you had palm wine", said Ezeulu. "It has just been sent by the owner of the door I am carving."

"And why do you bring it in the presence of this my friend who took over the stomach of all his dead relatives?"

"But I have not heard Edogo say it was meant for you." He turned to Edogo and asked: "Or did you say so?" Edogo laughed and said it was meant for two of them (97).

Radcliffe-Brown tells us "there is a pretence of hostility and a real friendliness" in the use of jokes. Thus, we see why "the joking relationship is a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism... it is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously "(Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

### Teaching of Achebe Through Textual Analysis of Jokes

We will now explore how what we have discussed can help in the teaching of Chinua Achebe to students from different cultural and political areas across the globe. First, our analysis shows the foreign student that we can decode jokes or any other segment of Achebe's works in three ways: semantically,

syntactically and contextually. Semantic decoding involves identifying the lexical/ denotative meaning of core words in the joke, going over to its connotative meaning, then creating broader implicative of the words within the specific context of the discourse or the culture in which the words are situated. Syntactic analysis of the joke involves recognizing any structural patterns and levels of relationship, which exist in the discourse. Contextual analysis implies relating usages to the socio-cultural milieu they emanate from. We have applied these three techniques in unpacking the use of "eating" and "aged-guinea fowls" in *A Man of the People* and in dissecting the implication of Obiako's retort in *Things Fall Apart*, among others.

Thus, for our students to appreciate Achebe's text, the following strategies will dispose them towards unraveling meaning:

- recognizing that a particular word may be concerned with communicating diverse utilitarian messages peculiar to the users themselves;
- examining the part a particular linguistic item plays in the customs, institutions, myths, belief system and world view of the users;
- discussing other possible meanings or structures used in the text by using synonyms, antonyms and cognates;
- encouraging students to work at deeper interpretation of hidden meaning through analysis of associations, inferences, insinuations and contextual clues;
- creating parallelism, with native language structures, jokes that generate expectations useful in anticipating and predicting the content of the passage that will be read.

However, comprehension of Achebe's works entails more than knowledge of vocabulary and syntax. According to Papalia (1987), reading comprehension requires ability to perceive the exact nature of the passage being communicated- a

deeper form of understanding sometimes called "reading between the lines". We have applied this in interpreting the point Achebe makes about Nwaka's impertinence, in the joke Prof. Okong makes about "keeping a comfortable cell for himself", and in decoding the implicative of eating aged-guinea fowl. Foreign students, therefore, can learn from our analysis to detect views and intentions as well as factual details that are not explicitly stated by using the above listed strategies. Textual elements, Papalia (1987) notes, are conveyed by the syntactic and lexical choices of the writer, which devolve from selected register, or level of language and stylistic devices.

Our interpretation of the jokes in Achebe's novels provides foreign students with "a mind -expanding experience of the way another people think, feel and expresses itself, as an element of the students' general education"(Rivers, 1987). The joke of Obiako's dead father who his son claims left nothing teaches about African world view and the concept about the ancestors being in communion with the living. From this interpretation of the underlying philosophy of this joke, readers

of Achebe can understand why, perhaps, Okonkwo was greatly distressed by Nwoye's conversion to Christianity in *Things Fall Apart* (108). Okonkwo feared that when he died there would be no body to "worship and sacrifice" at their ancestral shrine. Thus his spirit and those of his ancestors would roam restless in the abyss. This also explains why Amalu's children were mostly hit by Ezeulu's refusal to announce the new yam festival in *Arrow of God*. What it meant was that Amalu's spirit is left in the cold too long and this, it is believed, may incur his anger. Foreign readers of Achebe can, therefore, arrive at these levels of understanding from our decoding of Obiako's humorous retort.

The last strategy we will discuss here is the use of questioning. Incorporating open-ended questions that allow many possible answers or interpretations all of which illuminate various meanings of a particular passage (Papalia, 1987) may



prove useful to foreign readers of Achebe. When students are encouraged to develop questions associated with a text, they approach the text with certain schemata in mind (1987). Asking questions, according to Dow and Ryan (1987) furthers group thinking and provides the opportunity to elucidate cultural problems. Teachers, therefore, should incorporate open-ended questions in their classes.

## Conclusion

We have been able to show that Achebe's jokes can embody ambiguous meanings and that this linguistic form has a set of values, which it propagates. In the course of the analysis, it is clear that Achebe has made important statements to depend on apparently trivial phenomenon. We have also shown the strategies to be applied in the teaching of Achebe through our analysis of the jokes. But whatever the substance and value of each joke is, we should always bear in mind that the overriding function of the joke is to amuse. Achebe did not at all lose sight of this in his jokes. And he might not have

consciously meant them to signify much. But, students can be able to arrive at deeper interpretation of hidden meanings through "a series of easily established associations and inferences". This in itself is the essence of literary and linguistic criticism.

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