BLACK ORPHEUS

A JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AND AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

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Art Supplement: Arabic Calligraphy by Shibrain (Khartoum) and recent paintings by Demas Nwoko (Nigeria.)

AN EXTRACT FROM 'THE BRAVE HUNTER IN THE JUNGLE OF THE FOUR HUNDRED GODS' BY D. O. FAGUNWA

TRANSLATED FROM THE YORUBA BY WOLE SOYINKA

(Another of the ghommids has just given the Redoubtable Hunter yet another severe lecture on his and the generally evil behaviour of human beings...)

And thus he had his say and went his way. I was now thoroughly fed up with the whole business; every ghommid alike appeared to use me ill. After this one had gone, I began to sense the approach of game, leaping they were from tree to tree. Investigating, I found them to be the brown monkey and 'edun'. A shot bagged me one monkey, I tucked it in my bag, tossed it onto my head, and gun on shoulder, directed my legs to my rude hunting-lodge at the base of the palm tree.

On arriving there, I took up my knife and skinned it, built a little truss no higher than my knee, stacked a fire beneath, piled my venison on top of it and fired it. Those which I would not pile on the truss — being the scraps and tit-bits — I began to roast in the fire, eating them on the spot. Mighty enjoyable they were too for a most juicy tumescence is the meat of the monkey.

Not long afterwards, it darkened, and on towards the eighth hour of the evening. I lit my hunting-lamp and began to seek game. I did not search very far before my eyes fastened on another pair of eyes, belonging to some creature, glinting a short way away from me. I shot and killed it and it turned out to be a civet. I took it to my lair, skinned and carved it, piled it beside the monkey and conflagrated them both. I did not trouble to hunt any more that night, and when I had tended the civet, I lowered my back to earth and slept off, and it was not till the cooing of the bush-cuckoo that I awoke the following morning.

On the dawning of the next day therefore — and this was the third day of my sojourn in the Forest of Irunmale — I ate, filled up properly and my belly protuberated most roundly. I reached for my gun, primed it diligently, seized my hunting-bag, slung it over my shoulder and so into the jungle. It grieves me to admit that I had out-eaten remembrance of those talismans which I should have taken with me. I left them at the foot of the palm and took nothing but the bullets of my gun and my cutlass.

I had not walked very far before I began to encounter game, but they would not be patient and persisted in running pointlessly about. And just when an opportunity presented itself for a shot, I heard a rumble as of six he-men approaching; indeed, it was no less a monster than the sixteen-eyed dewild; often had I listened to hunters recount tales of him. Agbako, yes, that is his name.

When I set eyes on him, I was — unless I lie in this matter — smitten with terror. He wore a cap of iron, a coat of brass, and on his loins were leather shorts. His knees, right down to his feet appeared to be palm leaves; from his navel to the bulge of his buttocks, metal network, and there was no creature on earth which had not found a home in this netting which even embraced a live snake among its links, darting out its tongue as Agbako trod the earth.

His head was long and large, the sixteen eyes being arranged around the base of his head, and there was no living man who could stare into those eyes without trembling, they rolled endlessly round like the face of a clock. His head was matted with hair, black as the hearth and very long, often swishing his hips as he swung his legs. Agbako held two clubs in his hand and three swords reposed in his sheath. A very evil spirit was Agbako.

As soon as he spied me, he made my person his highway, trampling the ground with purpose. And when I felt that he had come close enough, I ordered the road to seize him and it seized him and cast him in the bush. But even as the road obeyed me, so did it heave me also and I found myself right in front of Agbako. I was terrified and conjured earth to return me to the road and so it was. But even as I emerged on the road, who should await me there but Agbako! This time I invoked 'Ogede'and commanded the road to return him to the bush where the ropes of the forest would bind him. And the road obeyed and the forest bound him.

But just as he was flung into the bush even so was I served, and I found myself on the facing side of him and the ropes began to bind me. When the thongs began to strangle me, I yelled on the forest to release me and set me back on the road. It obeyed. Needless to say, Agbako was there to welcome me. So seeing how things stood, I prepared for fight and we joined in a death grapple. We fought for long but neither toppled the other. We were smothered wholly in sweat, my eyes reddened and as for Agbako, his eye-balls were as blood-drops. The ground on which we fought shone like glazing.

Later, I tired, but not he. I untwined my arms but he held fast to me. But when he perceived himself that I was too exhausted, he released me. Dipping into his pouch, he brought forth a gourdlet, and when he had warruped it hard, a keg of palm-wine materialised. Agbako sat him down and began to serve me, while he refreshed himself likewise. When the keg of palm-wine had been depleted by half and I had rested somewhat, he suggested that we had drunk enough and that we should resume our strife. This we did forthwith.

We had been wrestling awhile when I retreated a little and drew my cutlass, and even as he began to draw his, I slipped behind him and slammed him one on his occiput. But it was my cutlass which broke in two, one half flirriting off, while he wasn't daunted one bit. Then he turned from me, picked up the truant part of my weapon and taking the stump from me, joined them together so that the break vanished completely and the cutlass was as before. And he said we should continue with the fight. And now was I truly exhausted. My breath came and went in rapid bloats like the hawing of a toad. Just the same I continued the fight and lifting my cutlass, brought it down hard on his side. Before I could retract the blow, he in turn slashed me on the sword-hand, cutting it off cutlass and all. I followed my buttocks to the ground, wallowing in the throes of death.

Even where I groaned in pain, Agbako again took my missing arm, fitted it on the rump, spat on his hand, and when he had rubbed the spittle on the join, my arm returned to normal, and I could not believe that anything had happened to it. Then he

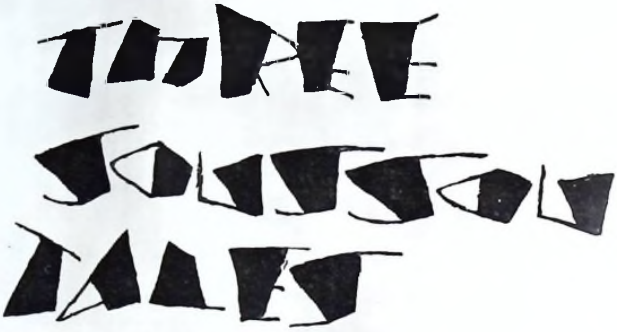
looked at me and bursting into laughter, declared that we must continue the contest. My terror was now complete and I said to myself, E-ya! Is this not the certain approach of my end? So I cried aloud: 'Spirits of the woods! Pilgrims of the road — hasten to my rescue!'

And shortly after, every being in the Forest of Irunmale came, the ghommids on one side, the birds on one side, the animals separately, but Agbako gave no sign that he saw anyone. He pulled me from the ground and we grappled anew. If I swayed him he swayed me: if I threw him he threw me. The fight was long and fierce. Every leaf was stilled and the forest lulled in silence.

The ghommids had been watching us for a while when I saw one of them detach himself from the rest and come to the scene of struggle. He signed to Agbako to leave me alone for the present, and Agbako complied. Then he offered me a slice of kola-nut which I took and ate. And instantly a new vitality flooded me and my strength became the strength of sixteen men. I bulled into Agbako and seized him by the neck, when I had squeezed it hard he bellowed like a beast and all the ghommids cheered.

But when I tried to lift him from the ground and smash him in the fatal throw, his foot did not even turn aside; firm he was as a lode in a crag. And he in turn strove to lift my leg to his shoulder, slap off the other foot and paste my marrow on the ground, but he failed in this and I stood robustified. He fisted me and I felt it not, he kicked me but he did not triumph; then he turned scorching hot from his head to his toes, and the breath of his nostrils was like a violent storm.

And then it was that he slarruped sparks ablaze in my face, proving to me that he was indeed Agbako the Master. He thudded earth with his feet and the earth opened beneath us and Agbako and I were sucked into the void.



SWEETNESS

There is in this world something
that surpasses all other things
in sweetness.
It is sweeter than honey
It is sweeter than salt
It is sweeter than sugar
It is sweeter than all
existing things.
This thing is sleep.
When you are conquered by sleep
Nothing can ever prevent you
Nothing can stop you from sleeping.
When you are conquered by sleep
And numerous millions arrive
Millions arrive to disturb you
But millions will find you asleep.

THE MOON

The moon lights the earth
It lights the earth but still
The night must remain the night.
The night cannot be like the day.
The moon cannot dry our washing.
Just like a woman cannot be a man
Just like black can never be white.

THE WELL

There is a well
that has five kinds of water.
There is sugared water
and salty water.
There is tasteless water
and bitter water.
The fifth water is red
red like blood.
This well is the head.

Translated from "Etudes Guineennes" No. 1 Conakry

Arabic
Calligraphy
By Shibrain
(Khartoum)

AN EXTRACT FROM A NOVEL BY SHEIKH AMIDOU KHANE

When the madman came, he found the master in the same position lying down, one arm along his body, the other over his eyes.

The man was wrapped in an old frock coat. His slightest gesture revealed that he wore the full habit of the Diallobe. The frock coat's age, its questionable cleanliness compared to the immaculate boubous gave him an unusual quality. His appearance, like his clothes, also left a strange impression. His features were motionless with the exception of his eyes where there was a continual restlessness. One might have said that he knew an uncanny secret harmful to the world which he constantly strove not to reveal. He had a shifting glance. Expressions were destroyed hardly after they were born. One doubted that he could have a single lucid thought.

He spoke very little, and that, only since they had named him "the madman".

This man, who was an authentic son of the region had once gone away. Even his family had not known where he went. He had remained away for many years. Then one morning he came back, dressed in his frock coat. When he returned he talked all the time. He claimed that he had come back from the white man's country and that there he had fought against the whites. In the beginning one took him at his word, although none of the other sons of the region, who had been in the war against the whites, reported having seen him there. But rather soon, one began to question what he said.

At first it was that his tale was so extravagant that it was difficult to believe him. But even more than this extravagance, it was the mimicry of the man which was alarming. For while he spoke, the madman began to relive, as if delirious, the circumstances of his tale. One day, explaining how he had been wounded in the stomach — he did, in fact, have a scar there — the man suddenly shrivelled up, then fell down, his arms to his stomach, gasping in agony. A long fever had followed. Since then they contrived to avoid him, while he himself only recovered from his fits in order to search for obliging listeners. Before them, he dramatically relived his memories.

One day, he learned that he had been named "the madman". Then he was silent. Nevertheless the name remained.

The man sat down next to the master whom he believed asleep and waited for him to awaken.

— "Ah! Is it you ? What are you doing here ?"

— "They wear you out a lot, all those people.....don't they ?"

And the madman vaguely designated the houses around the master's home.

— "Chase them away. You will chase them away, won't you, the next time they come ?"

His glittering look seemed, for a fraction of a second, to be anxiously awaiting an answer.

— "Tell me you'll chase them away..."

— "Yes, I will."

The man became calm.

— "Now they come to you. They are as humble and sweet as lambs. But don't let that fool you. At heart, they are not lambs. It's because you are still here, with your empty house and your old clothes, that they are still lambs. But you are going to die. Then they will change, I assure you; as soon as you die. You alone delay their metamorphosis.

He leaned over and passionately kissed the master's hand. The master started and pulled back his hand as if it had been burned. Then, reconsidering, he gave it back to the madman who began to stroke it.

— "You see, when you die, all these straw huts will die with you. Everything here will be as it is there. You know, there...."

The master, who was still lying down, wanted to get up, but the madman gently held him back. He drew a little nearer and carefully raising the master's head, he placed it comfortably on his lap.

— "What is it like there ?" asked the master.

A furtive expression of joy flashed across the madman's face.

— "Really ? Do you want me to tell you ?"

— "Yes, tell me."

And then the madman spoke:

— "It was the morning that I landed there. From the very beginning I felt an unspeakable anguish. It seemed that my heart and my body were shrivelling up. I shuddered and went back to the huge landing shed. My legs were limp and trembling. I wanted desperately to sit down. Around me, the tile-floor was like a glittering mirror which echoed the sound of footsteps. In the middle of the immense shed, I noticed several arm-chairs. But I had hardly looked over there when once again I felt myself shrivelling. It was as if my whole body was rebelling. I put down my suitcases and sat on the cold tiling. Around me, the passers-by stopped. A woman came over to me. She spoke to me. I thought she was asking if I felt well. My body became quiet despite the cold of the tiling which penetrated my bones. I lowered my hands on the icy floor. I even had the desire to take off my shoes, in order to touch the glittering sea-green mirror. But I was vaguely aware of an incongruity. I simply extended my legs on the chilling block."

The master raised himself a little to meet the look of the madman. He was struck by the sudden coherence of the tale. His amazement grew when he saw that this look was fixed. He had never seen him like this. The master put his head back on the madman's lap. He realized that the man was trembling slightly.

— "Already a small group had gathered around me. A man pushed his way to me and took me by the wrist. Then he beckoned (to) someone to put me on a nearby sofa. Eager hands were held out to lift me up. I kept them off and stood up by myself, rising above the group. I had recovered my serenity and now that I was standing, there was nothing about me that did not appear stable and sane. Around me, I sensed the people consulting, surprised at my sudden recovery. I sputtered out words of excuse. Then, bending down, I took a heavy suitcase in each hand, and went through the circle of wondering spectators. But I was hardly in the street when once again I felt myself shrivelling. I concealed it with considerable effort and hurried away from there. Behind me, I sensed everyone staring from the immense room. I turned a corner and finding an entrance-way sheltered from the passers-by, I sat down on one of my suitcases. It was just in time for my trembling had once again become apparent. What I felt was more than my body's rebellion. Now that I was sitting down, the trembling again diminished. It had seemed to correspond to my inner anguish. A man, passing by, wanted to stop. I turned my head. He hesitated, then, shaking his head, continued on his way. I watched him go. His back was lost among other backs, his gray suit among other gray suits. The hard sound of his shoes mingled with the sound of others which rang out on the asphalt. The asphalt..... I glanced over the whole expanse and saw no end to the stone. There the ice of the felspar, here the clear gray of the stone, this lustreless black of asphalt. Nowhere the fresh softness of the bare earth. Over the hard asphalt, my eyes thirsted in vain for an unadorned foot. But there were no feet. On the hard stone, nothing but the cracking of a thousand egg-shells. Had man no longer feet of flesh? A woman went by. Her pink calves hardened weirdly into two black spikes. Since I had arrived I hadn't seen a single foot. All I saw was the tide of shells sweeping over the asphalt. Everywhere, from the ground to the top of the buildings, the bare and resonant shell made the street into a granite basin. This valley of stone was split by a fantastic river of maddened machines. I was familiar with automobiles. Yet never had they seemed so sovereign and desperate. On the street where they had precedence, not one human being walked. I had never seen that, master of the Diallobe. There, before me, in the midst of that great mass of inhabited dwellings, I contemplated an inhuman vista, devoid of men. Imagine, master, in the very heart of what man has made, an expanse forbidden to his own flesh, forbidden even to his bare feet....."

— "Is that really true? Can it be true that in the heart of his own dwelling the furtive silhouette of man only knows confined spaces?"

The madman trembled with joy, seeing how well he had been understood.

— "Yes, I saw him. You know, master, the fragile silhouette which leans upon one leg, then the other, in order to advance..."

— "Well?"

— "I have seen him, in his own dwelling of confined spaces. Machines reigned there."

The madman was silent. For a long time the two men didn't speak; then, gently, the master asked:

— "What else did you see?"

— "Really? Do you want me to tell you?"

— "Yes, tell me."

— "I saw the machines. They are shells, twisted into many forms, and move as they will. But, you know that the expanse has no inner life at all; it has, therefore, nothing to lose. It cannot be hurt, like the silhouette, but only become further twisted. Also, it has driven back the silhouette, easily frightened, and has destroyed its inner life."

— "I understand, go on."

— "This expanse is autonomous. But, you know that it is the stability itself which makes the movement apparent. And now it has begun to move. Its movement is more complete than the jerky advance of the hesitant silhouette. It cannot fall, where would it fall? Also, it has driven back the silhouette, easily frightened, and destroyed its movement."

The madman was silent. The master, supporting himself on his elbow, raised himself up and saw that the madman was weeping.

The master sat down then and drew the madman to him. The madman leaned on him, his head resting on the master's shoulder. The master wiped away his tears, then, tenderly, began to rock him.

— "Master, I want to pray with you, to drive back the horde. Once more, obscene chaos is in the world and threatens us."

Translated by Wendy Spiegel

BY FELIX TCHIKAYA U'TAMSI

there is no better key to dreams
than my name sang a bird
in a lake of blood
the sea danced alongside
dressed in blue jeans
blowing the squalling gulls to bits

a black boatman
who claimed to have no stars
said he could cure with the mud of his sad eyes
the lepers of their leprosy
if a tonic love would unlose his arms

my name is key of dreams
I am not leprous
take me across this river before you speak my name
and your arms will be unloosed

I hold the singing oar
where is this river I must cross
is it that lake of blood

follow me
close your eyes
think of the moon
contemplate my river
and let us cross

the man and the bird sang
steered three days three nights to cross
the dirty bed of a river

listen
the wave rocks the boatman
he sleeps
he dreams

a charnel house offers a feast
where his bowels are eaten at once
then his arms then his memory

where the putrid bodies eat each other
by the glimmer of fire flies
which each carries at his temples
to carry all to the christian god
where they drank the slow song of the nightingale

one innocent pities his legs
scrapes from the bowl of ebony wood
the last scrap of his memory
rope dancer on the thread
of low water mark

he knows the love which opposes his pain
the nightmare of the boatman in his troubled sleep
the wings of the birds who float their anthem
and who row too happily over the singing water

on the far bank the plain comes to drink
with its troops of wild grasses
bellowing their thirst in a tropical rhythm
while the peevish sun stabs at them

the sun pricks the side of the fishermen
his swords all newly forged
all newly tempered
with blood
and this blood oozes from the earth
and trickles from the sky
on a night of yellow rain

the boatman tells his name to the quail

no my name is key of dreams
I am not leprous
quail is not my name
do not die awaiting me

I am your soul farewell
my dark body farewell
your arms will unloose themselves
I am not leprous

do not die awaiting me
arms opened in a cross

Translated by Gerald Moore

BY SYLVAIN BEMBA

I didn't say he pleased me;
I said he fascinated me.
— Oscar Wilde.

N'Toko was fond of ambulating his hirsute face through the streets of Paris, the face of a bearded, grinning faun. He was conscious of his ugliness and took a kind of secret pleasure in exhibiting that repulsive face of his, quietly and without shame. He was obviously amused by the stumbling bewilderment he aroused in the street when the people he met turned back to gaze at this large black man walking away from them. With his loose-fitting clothes, he cut a vague, unfinished, floating, almost ghostly figure. And yet, when you knew him better, you were surprised to find that you no longer felt the slightest malaise in his presence, but had to admit that he had charm, and even an undoubted magnetic attraction.

N'Toko adored Paris. He still remembered his first days in the famous city. When he arrived, he had been disappointed. He expected a deluxe, finely gilt-edged edition. Instead, a glum and murky sky over bleak walls had presented him with a Paris that was like an old book discovered in a *bouquiniste's* box on the river bank. The miracle occurred when he began to browse through the well-worn volume. At each page, each line, he felt the hypnotic power in the empty eyes of the statues. He lived again through those centuries of history learnt at school, whose stream still came beating with its violent surf against the cliffs of modern times.

N'Toko's first joys in Paris were those of a Conquistador. He was discovering a new land. His imagination purposely blurred the too familiar monuments of the capital. He wanted to discover his own Paris. His first monument was five foot ten high; topped with a *kepi*, it redistributed to absent-minded passers-by the streets which they had lost. Soon, he returned with the joy of an habitué to a familiar monument culminating at around five foot six, irrigated by two great rivers, coffee and good wine, a generous exporter of voluble speech, lusty of movement and happy with life. Then he acquired a passion for the Métropolitain. He saw in it a carnal symbol, and figured Paris in an indecent posture, while the subterranean rumbling groan of the two frenzied

lovers reverberated through. A little later, his monuments became performing dolls, who giggled foolishly at the slightest contact, and repeated the same things like an electronic head caught in the groove of a worn record. He took pleasure in savaging those dolls, rather like a child who will not rest until he has destroyed the new toy whose works he wanted to understand. Indeed, he regarded his temporary motherland as an enormous toy which he tried to pull to bits, with the obscure feeling that he must take revenge. On whom, on what? The answer slumbered somewhere in the depths of his mind.

Once more, N'Toko rose and, with uncertain steps, walked towards the juke-box, glittering with all its chromium. He stopped in front of the machine and began a systematic search of his pockets. From a distance, he looked defenceless in front of a threatening monster. At last, he found a silver coin, examined it carefully and slipped it into the slot. A sort of muffled howl arose. It reminded him of the wails of the weepers at home. Over there, the women offer their services free to the bereaved families. Each weeper uses the image of a dead relative to compose her weeping face and to praise, amid tears and sighs, the merits of the departed one, thus directing towards the assisted family her stream of tears.

This had exactly the same result as the 'jam-session' which seemed to be oozing out of the bowels of the massive music-box.

Leaning on their stools, the two women, who looked like models, exchanged a brief look.

'That record is getting on my nerves', said one in a low voice, 'I bet he's played it fifty times this afternoon'. The other one, more practical, replied:

'I think the customer is ready for the works. I would never have accosted him when he came in, because he looked too fierce. I think I'll try now'.

'Be careful', said the first one in a confidential tone, 'that bloke don't seem easy to me, and you might be working for toffee'.

Through a flickering screen, N'Toko suddenly saw one of the two fashion plates walk towards him. He hadn't paid any attention at all to the creatures. They had been keeping so still that he thought they belonged to the *decor*. He started when the dummy stopped in front of him and began to talk. He retorted with a selection of insults which he recited with the studied application of a well-learnt lesson. Then, out of breath, the woman smiling impassively, he had a gesture of impotence. He would not be able to get rid of the intruder. To hell with these leeches! and he waved his hand, with clear intent. But she was still there. All he could do now was to capitulate. Smiling triumphantly, she sat down in front of him and called the waiter with a vulgar gesture. She ordered a complicated mixture and seemed to consume it with ecstatic relish.

'Darling', she said a few moments later, 'I'm going to put something more lively on. Won't you dance, sugar'?

Later, when they were in his room, he became more and more disconcerting. With his embattled beard, his jerky movements, he looked like an ill-wound automaton. He paced up and down his room, eloquent and cynical in turn. He swung his arms up and down to endow his words with rhythm.

'You're probably wondering why I'm only looking at your belly? All my childhood I could see nothing but my mother's belly. She didn't dress *chez Dior*, and all she had on was a small loin-cloth. I was the last of a big family — thirteen brothers,

if I'm not mistaken — and my mother's belly was the haven where I sheltered at night, hanging from the life-giving flasks. That belly warmed me and protected me from the outside world. Even now, the belly of a woman has that slightly mystic meaning for me. The belly, you see, is the home of many social scourges, like hunger, cold, fear, unsatisfied desires. You ought to see the bellies of our women at home! We live in indescribable poverty, and yet our women have many children. Enough to think that a fellow like me is a by-product of poverty. Presently, in the bar, you were surprised to see me play that jazz record over and over again. Why has jazz conquered the world? Because it is the fruit of the bowels of human suffering. Look, I'm a catholic, and even if I don't practise any more, I sometimes go into a church just to hear the music. Only, that music is made to serve as a heaven for the flight of souls. What is wanted in a church is a music to express also what the bodies feel. I was reading the other day that in Central Europe some priests have written scores inspired by jazz, in order to attract the young. Well, I don't care what their aim is. What interests me is the rehabilitation of negro music. It's the cast-off stone Christ spoke of, becoming the keystone. Do you know that in my country, in Africa, black has been presented as the colour of sin, the colour of the curse, and the tom-tom as the instrument of the devil? But everything changes. The tom-tom has made a noisy entry into the African Church. They don't talk any more about the curse hanging over the issue of Ham. Easter is now the colour of an Africa that has succeeded in overturning the tombstone under which it was immured.'

He stopped to catch his breath, and the woman snatched the opportunity to say, tentatively:

'You talk too much, darling. Come and lie down with me'.

'I don't want the cross to be the only symbol of universal suffering', he continued, ignoring the interruption. 'Look, there, on the wall, what is that?'

The woman looked, without understanding, and saw a simple object in the shape of a hook.

'I don't quite see what it is', she stammered.

He sniggered back:

'Ah! Ah! She belongs to the most intelligent race in the world, and she can't decipher symbols! You're the only exception, then. True, we're not in Africa. Over there, only the Whites know how to open the gates of the past. In vain do the Blacks say: 'Sesame', nothing opens for them. What the Africans need, is themselves to find the master word which will empower them to remove mountains. I would like to have attempted this job, but unfortunately I can't. I have grave problems with myself. I am a bit like that character in Tolstoy who says that he has become his own prison. So you don't know what this image means? This image is what I judge to be the cross of the black man's world. That sort of hook represents, in fact, a black man bending his back as a sign of respect or as a sign of grief under the punishment inflicted on him. Do you know that the black man is descended from rubber?'

The woman was sure now. That man was mad. She had only one move to make to reach the door and get out. But she remained, little understanding the abracadabra, but fascinated by the gab.

'Yes', rejoined the negro, 'we are descended from rubber, and our ancestor, with your permission, is Michelin, or rather that character you can see on the posters praising a make of tyres. That is why our grandfathers and the slaves sent to America were able to yield to a situation which was new to them. Do you realize what Flood crashed down

for forty days and forty nights on our primeval life, drowning our beliefs, our idols, replacing them with others, carrying away in a great tide all that was our customary world? If I wanted to play the Dunce Game, which is the craze in Paris just now, I would begin by comparing our African life before the European penetration to a Dutch cheese. I would then say that your civilization is a rat-tide come to nibble at this cheese to change it into a gruyére. Aren't you laughing? You don't think it funny?'

He was beginning to calm down. It was always like that. After one of his inexplicable fits of nerves, he first became intoxicated and then looked for someone to use as an audience and a victim. For the others, the White accused had long been discharged. For him, the trial was only beginning and he never missed an opportunity to deliver his indictment, as he was doing now.

'A terrible Flood', he went on. 'Those who had stayed in the Ark threw themselves into the current to avoid being called savages. All those already swirling in these tumultous waters were floating wrecks. The less effort they made to swim against the current, the more they were reputed civilized. We owe that nice little tornado to those of your race.'

'Eh!' protested the young woman, 'why do you look at me like that? I have never been interested in politics?'

'Oh! I see, you believe that colonisation is politics? You're even sillier than I thought! Come here now.'

She allowed him to lead her, passively, and they went into a small room. 'This is my dark-room', he declared, 'this is where I develop my photos. You seem to be surprised! But it's true. Thanks to influence, I'm sort of a photographer on a popular paper. But what's the matter? You're shaking, little girl. Would you be afraid of Bluebeard now?'

'I'm not shaking.'

'You are. Wait. I'll put the light on.'

The small room, which had probably not been swept for months, was incredibly untidy. A wash-basin lay forgotten on the floor, which was strewn with bits of paper. On an old chest-of-drawers, a few empty picture-frames and a camera still in good condition. An undefinable smell caught you by the throat, or rather you could detect many smells lingering in the room. N'Toko made a quick search of the drawers and produced a thick wad of photos.

'Look. Bluebeard's victims. Have a shot at counting them. The collection includes only women — my mistresses, of course. I own other collections here, on many other subjects, but those you will not see. Take a good look at the pictures I have given you. That is how I, Bluebeard, kill you: with ridicule. In the colonies, you are insufferable with your airs of belonging to another planet, but here, in your own country...'

The woman looked, in spite of herself, and blushed to her ears. On each new picture, she discovered poses more daring than before. How could these persons have accepted to pose so humiliatingly? She took some time to run through the collection. Her temples and her heart were beating violently. Suddenly, she could see no more. The room was plunged in darkness and the woman felt great hands running over her body, like monstrous spiders.

'We had a pretty stormy interview', said Bernard Quillet on the telephone. (Bernard Quillet was the editor of the paper on which N'Toko, in his own words, was 'sort

of a photographer'). 'Finally he said I wouldn't see him again and slammed the door. I'm still smarting. After all, I had him in only to talk about his job. I told him that with his education, he was mad to be content with casual, badly-paid work. I once more offered him that writing job on the paper I mentioned to you a year ago, when you recommended that young man, one of your old students, you said. He refused, in very rude terms. Since then, I have had a 'phone call from his hotel, asking whether I knew where he was. He is missing, exactly since the day we had... a few words. I began to worry and even thought of telephoning the police. But then I remembered you, Professor; you are or you were more or less his protector. Have you any news?'

'Unfortunately no,' replied the professor, 'but I don't think there's any need to worry. Temperamental, you know. He went through University in an armchair, so to speak, having a good time. He was morbidly lazy, but gifted with a phenomenal memory. He was quite insufferable, never seemed to be there during the lectures. But he never cut the *vivas* nor the written tests. I even felt he attended the University to pass the time. What was he waiting for? I am still wondering. He not only had a staggering memory, but a keen intelligence. We often had scintillating exchanges. That boy was intelligent, but disconcerting. A hundred times I thought I had sketched in my mind an outline of his true character. The next day I had to admit that the outline was wrong. Something escaped me. And now, I still miss the boy. I must tell you that I haven't seen him since the time I so warmly recommended him to you. That's him all right, to have accepted such a poor job, out of defiance. Yes, defiance: he was the *enfant terrible* of the University. He played hell with the lives of his contemporaries and teachers. He didn't have a friend in the place. He was the most stubbornly anti-social animal I have known. He never took part in games or dances, never went to the cinema or the theatre...'

'Do you think, Professor, that this might be due to — how shall I put it? — 'anti-White" feelings?'

'Not particularly. To tell you the truth, I never thought about it. In most cases, the Africans who come to France are quite capable of exorcising the demon of colonialism by themselves.'

'Well, all this does not get us very far, Professor. I have something like a premonition.'

'I haven't', retorted the professor. 'Nevertheless, just to make sure, I will go and see him at his hotel. I'll keep you informed.'

'Good. I would have done so myself, but we parted on such terms...'

'I understand. In any case, I'll let you know. Good-bye, my dear Quillet.'

The Professor was in his library, like a sailor on an ocean of books. From his fifth floor, he had a magnificent view of Paris, of the Eiffel Tower in particular. He was pacing up and down, in his dressing-gown, deeply engrossed in his thoughts. He smoked jerkily, throwing his cigarettes away after a while. In the ash-tray on his desk, there was a carnage of long ends.

'Professor', whispered a tiny voice by his side, 'your soup is going to be cold. It is past seven.'

He hadn't heard her steps. He had always thought, jokingly, that she belonged to the cat family. Her behaviour suggested a remarkable balance of body and mind. Never a loud word, never a hasty movement. She hailed every new day with unshakable serenity. Seventeen years the Professor had known this good woman. During that long time, there had formed between them such an economy of words and demonstrations

of feeling as exists only in old couples or friendships. And yet she was only his char. He had engaged her on the strength of a newspaper advertisement. At that time, having lost his wife, he needed a servant to keep house for him. He had not married again.

'Oh yes, the soup', said the Professor unthinkingly. 'It can wait, Mrs. Bonnet'.

Having said these few words, he resumed his slow walking up and down the room. A moment later, he came to a standstill in front of Mrs. Bonnet and began talking, not to her in particular, which did not surprise her — nothing did any more in that household.

'You see', said the Professor, 'that boy lived on a challenge to himself and to his entourage. He wanted to destroy the others, and maybe he has destroyed himself in the end. Where the devil can he have fled in this big city? I don't like to make too tragic a supposition, but I can't see him accepting the hospitality of friends. Yes, I believe that boy was suffering from persecution-mania', the soliloquy went on. 'Everybody knows that this mania is close to madness. The sufferers are always thinking that someone wants to harm them. Either they fold up behind a shield which is supposed to deaden blows which exist only in their imagination, or else fear creates arrows which the self-styled victim shoots at all who come near. Now, Mrs. Bonnet, suppose I went to see you at your house. You are not in, and I leave, but taking with me, out of curiosity, some trinket that was lying around. Am I a thief?'

'It depends, Professor. For you it would be just a curio, but for the person concerned it might be an object of great sentimental value, perhaps?'

'Yes, of course,' said the Professor, looking far away, 'this black moleskin note-book which I am holding in my hand may be very valuable to its owner — one of my old students, an African. He has been missing from his address for several days. I tried to see him the other day and I mentioned that I was his old teacher, in order to be allowed to enter his room. That is when I picked up this note-book. But I have not yet dared to open it. It seems to me that people are too prone to open every door that appears before them. Liberty illuminating the world? My long experience as a teacher makes me rather sceptical. What is more accurate, I think, is curiosity illuminating the world. One of these days, man will open a door beyond which he will be unable to retrace his steps. That is where I have stood for several days: wondering whether or not I must take a look at this note-book. On the other hand, I say to myself that it could contain some clues which might lead to my former pupil.'

The professor plunged again into silent meditation. Mrs. Bonnet waited a while, and then left the room as she had entered, without making any noise.

The Professor had an irritating feeling that he was committing a sacrilege, but curiosity and uncertainty proved the stronger. With a slightly shaking hand, he began to turn the pages of his protégé's intimate note-book. He felt overwhelmingly embarrassed reading all those dates followed by a woman's first name and the entry "Has submitted to my will". Sometimes, the word 'will' was replaced by 'law', 'whim', or, more prosaically, 'desire', but they were invariably preceded by "has submitted to my..."

Obviously, N'Toko had a well-filled love-life, but then Professor was only moderately interested. He was looking for something else, without knowing exactly what. He thumbed the book mechanically, read more dates, more feminine names; then, on one page, some paragraphs danced before his eyes. His heart missed a beat, and he concentrated his attention on the following.

N'TOKO'S NOTE-BOOK

'I have just arrived in Paris. What a pandemonium! What difference with Africa, where it is time which turns around the people who are indifferent by fate or by tem-

perament. Here, agitation. Over there, we are, or were, like Theseus, condemned to sit still. It is changing; they are putting cogs and wheels and springs in our bellies, so that they can wind us up and make us walk when they want.

*

Punctuality, the courtesy of civilised slaves. I can't see Kings, the real ones, paying service or homage to it.

Comparison. Photography, field of vision of my ancestors. The 'advanced' peoples: ambitious gigantism of the cinema, with its hunger for the wide-open spaces, too wide for its screens. Photography modestly frames a channel, the cinema claims to represent the whole ocean, but it can't show at the same time the springs, the streams, the rivers that flow into the ocean.

*

The most sophisticated telescopes in the world have only just discovered a close satellite of the earth, Shanty Town, orbiting at a distance not of thousands of light-years, but only of a few billion francs. Who will be the first astronaut to land on this planet?

*

If I were a big-wig in the cinema, what a message would reach this world! I would make an anti-conformist film, floating outside the gravitational zone of mass-reiterated ideas, towards a sort of stratosphere where space and time would be abolished. Have always dreamed of this allegorical film of a hundred scenes.

The first scene would stage two characters; one a photographer, one just a sitter, obeying the other slavishly. Dialogue. The sitter would say: 'I am blinded by the flashes of your camera'. Photographer: 'Inevitable. My civilization aims at blinding you. Thus you will wear the spectacles which I make'. 'What if I don't wear them?' — 'Then you will be sentenced, in this new world which I substitute for yours, to grope your way.'

Another dialogue. The sitter: 'You have taught me the poses, but you restrict my actions. Why?' 'I can't entrust you at once with the secret of the motions. You would escape from my domination. For the time being, my law is unchanged: don't move!'

Tirelessly, implacably, the photographer would go on taking pictures, gradually stripping the sitter of everything he previously possessed. The sitter: 'Now I am quite naked.' — 'That was my aim: to increase your want to such an extent that you couldn't do without me.'

*

Western colonisation in Africa should be prosecuted for the rape of a minor. Not for nothing that this phenomenon is immodestly called penetration. For posterity, the 19th century will be the time when a wave of rut swept over Europe. They all vied to see who would penetrate furthest. So much the worse if the victim who brutally lost her virginity remained branded for life!

And they call that making history!

Moral ugliness and machiavellianism of the Western World. There will never be enough vices to keep it in its place. Vices, they have made an export of them to Africa in pretty Pandora's boxes. Of course, these boxes are opened in Africa, and inexplicable new scourges and diseases appear.

Look for man here, and all you find is crowds. Grave insult against God, implicitly accused of being but a maker of mass-produced men. In the beginning, God created the Word. And men have created words. Great rivers displacing millions of cubic feet of promises and hopes, but never ending in the ocean of universal felicity. Their Spanish leaning for logomachic disputations, reiterating the same things without changing the face of the world.

*

To-day Galileo would say: 'Eppure si Muove', and the 'eppure' would be pregnant with meaning. It would mean: 'Yes, but in what direction?' Africa, yesterday the Kingdom of H.M. Doolittle the First, seated on his throne (a couch). But the industrialised West has never had as many idle rich as now. They prolong the Doolittle dynasty on their relaxing chairs. The West, in turn, is moving towards the rule of sloth: shorter working week, machine-age, etc.

*

What unholy sights I have seen since I arrived in Paris! A comforting feeling. The god has fallen from his pedestal. To be sure of it, I must pile up the evidence. The idea of making a film unrealistic. A novel? I fear I shan't have enough patience to write it. Such a book should be written with everyday words, but charged with nailing the so-called material power of this fallen God. With words charged with 'demystifying' power. Alas! I am afraid I could not find such words. Photography would do. Failing a closer authenticity, I want at least an accurate reproduction of this ugly life. Make masses of photographs of all those who have fallen in a well. Don't the Europeans use the same methods at home? What they photograph is Africa in rags, painted, grimacing Africa, which is supposed to be more photogenic.

*

The ideal: achieve the composite photograph of this world in full decay.

*

I could have gone home, having finished my studies, to a top job in the civil service. Instead, I have become a deserter. Why? I think I've never been able to adapt myself. This morbid timidity, which has to be hidden behind a mask of hardness. I am afraid. Am I a monster? I always experience a thrill and a ferocious joy whenever I photograph a fatal accident. Those awful wounds, that horrible agglutination of flesh, they give me a dark feeling of revenge. It's terrible. Every time this has happened to me, I have had to drown the depression in a flood of alcohol. There is in me a Mr. Hyde holding down Dr. Jekyll. Nothing doing. Can't shake him off. It's as though I were in a dark room. I don't know where the door is. Paris is now but a prison to me, and I am my own gaoler...

*

The notes stopped there. Then, suddenly, light prevailed in the Professor's mind. The words 'I am my own gaoler' whirled madly in his head. He knew then that N'Toko had not 'disappeared' from his room, but that he must be there — probably rid for ever of the crushing burden of all that had ever weighed on his short life. A sentence of Stephan Zweig's flashed in his memory: 'To try to judge a man overcome by passion would be as absurd as to call to account a storm or indict a volcano'.

Translated by Professor G. Evans

This Story won First Prize in the African Short Story Contest organised by the French Magazine PREUVES.

BY GEORGE AWOONOR WILLIAMS

There was a tree which dried in the desert
Birds came and built their nests on it
Funeral songs reached us on the village square
And our eyes were filled with tears
The singing voice which the gods gave me
Has become the desert wind
Talk, my heart, talk,
Talk and let me hear,
And I will ask you how
How they avoided the sacred rams.

Your tears are running like flood river,
They are as bitter as the waters of the sea.
Why are your eyes so red?
Do you cover your head with your hands
And tremble like the orphan child by the road-side?
I shall leave you
So that I go to perform the rites for my Gods
My father's Gods I left behind
Seven moons ago.

I shall weave new sisal ropes
And kill two white cocks
Whose bloods will cleanse the stools.
The bitterness of your tears,
Still lingers on my tongue
And your blood still clings to my cloth.

Do you remember that day,
When I saw you
And asked whether you too
Believed in the resurrection of the living?
Remember that the greenfields
Are waiting for the feet of the striving.

Hush, I heard a bird cry!

The winds of the storm have blown,
Destroying my hut
Goats came and did a war dance
On the fallen walls of my father's house
What happened before the vulture's head is naked?

Swear to me that you saw the widows
Who beat the funeral drums
And put tears in the eyes of the orphans by the road-side

The path to the farm is long
Very, very long
The earthworm ate our new yams
And left the skins near the smith shop
The smith shop is on fire, my people
It is on fire
Remember the day the smith shop caught fire
Remember you who are in the smith shop.
Let me hear funeral songs
Amidst the songs of the rebel gods
Marching to the dung-hill
With fetish bells in their hands

Hush! I heard a bird cry!

If you turn your neck
Look at the whole world
The heat and the restlessness
Now drunken dogs are
Tramping precious things underfoot
And stray hyaenas carry their loot
To the cleared patch in the forest
Tears will gather on your eyes
What has not happened before?
Though they said
The prince should not hasten for the stool
And the young leopard
Should not be in haste to walk

But noises are in the air
The young leopard should stand up against the tree
And the prince should run for his father's stool
The turbulent river becomes calm again
The desert river was dry
Before the harmattan came
And the storm wind does not
Frighten the eagle.

My people, where have you been
And there are tears in your eyes
Your eyes are red like chewed Kola
And you limp towards the fetish hut.
My people, what has happened
Before you bear many cudgel wounds
And rope marks cover your naked bodies?
Wipe away your tears
And knock the door of the sacred hut
The gone-befores are waiting for you.

That day when they opened the sacred hut
And made pledges to the gone-befores
I was there
They wound a cloth around my loins
A fly-whisk in my right
And a calabash in my left hand
I was there
When we pledged to the ancestors
And swore the oath
That you do not thirst for drink
When your palm trees are prospering
That day we killed the sacred ram
And the thunder drums sounded
I was there
I put down my whiteman's clothes
And rolled a cloth
To carry the ram's head
And go into the thunder house
When you started the song
I sang it with you
My steps fell in
With the movement of your feet to the drums
I put my hand in the blood pot with you.

We sang new songs that day
It was the season of burning feet
Those who stood around the ring laughed
And said my feet have blundered

And our hands have lost the cunning of the drums
We answered them, answered them
That the crow asked the vulture
You an uneatable bird
Why are you so full of your own importance?

I am the bird on the dung-hill
The birds flew and left me behind
My wings have not broken
But my joints are weak.

I too shall carry the fetish bell
And start towards the sacred hut
I will shout and call the ancestors
And tell them, tell them
That an evil snake came
And bit me on Modui hillock
I looked for a stick to kill it
But I never found one.

Hush! I heard a bird cry.

Look for a canoe for me
That I go home in it
Look for it
The lagoon waters are in storm
And the hippos are roaring
But I will cross the river
And go beyond.

Where are the canoes?
I broke my paddle in the marshes
Mad dogs chased me
And I left my cloth on the dung-hill.

The fetish drums are beating from Ghost's head
And the priests are in trance.

My people, listen;
Listen and I will sing a song of sorrow.
Me and my people went fishing
And met the evil god on the water.

Who are those coming
With their heads covered with velvet?
May be they are the moondwellers
Tell them, tell them that the dog

Does not bear a child in public
And the fowl-stealing hyaena
Strikes only at night

I heard the voice of a gun
I came to have a look
Who are those?
Who are those saying
They have surplus gunpowder
And so we cannot have peace?

I met Agodzo by the road-side
A net on his shoulders
Complaining about the sea being bad these days
So their wives have run away to many strangers

It has happened again
The swooping eagle does not give to its child
So the child must turn a beggar in the market place
Brave warriors, come and hear
If the gun refuses to fire
Is it not the conservation of powder?
There is war in the land of the dead
And ghosts are doing a war dance
Marching with drums towards the land of the living.

If I had known, if I had known
I would have stayed at home
I would not have gone to them
To ask what came to pass.

Listen, my countrymen, listen;
The bush fire burnt the bush
But did not touch the bush rope
Where has it been heard before?
Call my god of songs for me
That it will start a song for me.
I have a song to sing
I will sing it before death comes.
Let me be under the trees
And it will thunder
I will hear the voice of thunder

We are on a stormy river
Rowing a boat to ghost's land
The journey beyond is a long journey
That is why not one alone can make it
The gone-befores will receive us

And give us water to drink
Cool, cool water from the long pot.

We are on a journey
Somebody give me velvet
And I will put down the bark
And wear a gold chain
And walk a chiefly walk
For all to see.

Mad dogs came and bit people
In our house, in our own house.
We killed them, threw them on the dung-hill
And ignored the linguist stick when it came.

Hush! I heard a bird cry just now.

The heroes, where are the war heroes?
Did they smear themselves
With the blood of fowls
And are bellowing, bellowing,
Like wounded hippos?

If I had known,
If only I had known,
I would have stayed at home
And cleared the bush
That has crowded the sacred hut.
Then I would not have followed
The trancers to another land
Which cannot give me food to eat.
The swallow says
It is the harmattan wind
That chased him into the rafters of the rick.

Hush! I have just heard a bird cry.

They say it is in the night
When the monster terrorizes the people
They say it is in the night
When they gave birth to the evil child
And the small-pox god walked the village lanes
Chasing with a stick
The dogs that barked at him

They say it is in the night
When the big drums sounded
And evil-doers left their treads by the river side
They say it is in the night
When the white man deceived the chiefs
And took the young men to the battle front.

The day has broken
Men are still in their easy-chairs
Pipes in their mouths
Waiting for the women to return
They are still under the baobad tree
Telling tales of long-ago.

Under the trees, under the trees
I will be under the trees
And the rain will come and beat me

When I spoke in public
They said I was drunk with gin
My rich neighbour spoke in public
They said his wisdom is great
And the elders shook hands on it.

Weaver-birds came and ravaged my corn-field.

I put my canoe on the river
I want to go beyond.

The river is wide, very wide
Then I saw two bamboos
Dancing on the wide wide river

A cock has laid an egg by the river-side
But a hawk came and snatched it.
What shall we do?

Some say we must cover our heads
With our hands, and burst into tears.
But I will not cry.
I shall put my smelling cloth
And speak in the market place.
If the elders protest
I shall ask them, ask them,
That when the sea was sterile
And the poor died of hunger on Modui hillock?
Where were you?

A woman in pain of labour
Came and delivered a child on the dung-hill
And named it "they don't know poverty".

Tell Agonyo that I am coming
The singing voice I have,
I have it from the gods.
Those who cannot bear my songs,
Let them patch their ear-holes with clay.
Where has it been heard before
That a snake bit a child
In front of its own mother?

The rain that beat me yesterday
Has become the flood water
That ravaged the rich people's corn-barns.
Let the tree die, and the branches remain.
The royal-palm said he does not talk in vain
It is the whirlwind that provokes him.

Ask the fishermen, ask them,
That when they went to sea,
What did they see?

Listen, and I shall sing a song of sorrow.

Someday, by some rivers
I shall sit down among the elephant-grass
And listen to the roar of the estuary
Till the end of the world.

My people, listen to my song
The drunken dogs you saw yesterday
They have returned.

The rich men prepared a goat feast,
To this they invited all men,
But if you go without the whiteman's coat
You will be told the truth
That your grandfather lived on a tree.

That is how it has become.

When the church mothers waved palm branches
And sang of Jerusalem the golden city
And hossannaed to the pentecostal spirit
They said that Christ's Kindness is great
It is great, it is very great,
And his mercy endureth for ever.

Stay with us, abide
You the everlasting merciful
That our corn should fill the cobs
And the sea retain her fertility.

They say, they say,
The day they release the prisoners
There will be blessings
And joy will be found again.

But who will release the prisoners
And break the poor-man's hunger?
I was there when they released the prisoners
I heard tears of anguish
And the agony of hunger.
Let the earth keep silent
And let us hear!

The deaf ran home that day
Shaking their heads.

Hush, I heard a bird cry
The vulture says, it says,
Because helpers are not there
That is why
I have shorn my head
Awaiting my funeral.

My heart, be at rest,
For the vultures that came,
Shaking the rafters of your house,
Have flown away, flown far away,
Towards the land of my fore-fathers.

It was in the season of burning feet,
And the feast is ready for us.

BY U. S. MERWIN

Agostinho Neto, a Negro from Angola, has spent a good part of the past ten years incarcerated under the auspices of the Portuguese dictator, Salazar. He has recently managed to escape and join the Angolan liberation force of which he is the head.

It is possible for a poet to assume his gift of articulation as a responsibility not only to the fates but to his neighbours, and to feel himself obligated to try to speak for those who are in circumstances resembling his own, but who are less capable of bearing witness to them. There are many kinds of dangers involved in any such view of what he owes himself and his voice. There is, for instance, the danger that his gift itself, necessarily one of the genuinely private and integral things he lives for, may be deformed into a mere loud-speaker, losing the singularity which made it irreplaceable, the candor which made it unteachable and unpredictable. Most poets whom I have in mind would have considered this the prime danger. But the other risks have all claimed their victims. Where injustice prevails (and where does it not?) a poet endowed with the form of conscience I am speaking about has no choice but to name the wrong as truthfully as he can, and to try to indicate the claims of justice in terms of the victims he lives among. The better he does these things the more he may have to pay for doing them. He may lose his financial security, if he has any. Or his health, his comfort, the presence of those he loves, his liberty. Or his life, of course. Worst, he may lose, in the process, the faith which led him to the decision, and then have to suffer for the decision just the same.

Put at its simplest, and with its implications laid out all plain and neat; the decision to speak as clearly and truthfully and fully as possible for the other human beings a poet

finds himself among is a challenge to obscurantism, silence and extinction. And the author of such a decision, I imagine, accepts the inevitability of death. He finds a sufficient triumph in the decision itself, in its deliberate defiance, in the effort which it makes possible, the risks it impels him to run, and in any clarity which it helps him to create out of the murk and chaos of experience. In the long run his testimony will be partial at best. But its limits will have been those of his condition itself, rooted, as that is, in death; he will have recognized the enemy. He will not have been another priest or ornament. He will have been contending against that which restricted his use and his virtue.

I have to talk about Agostinho Neto as though he were dead. I mean that, after I have read what poems of his have found their way into print, and what information about him has managed to evade the obscurantists who govern his country, I have to accept my remaining ignorance of him and of his situation as though it were final. He is a man whose vocation it is to articulate, to say, to make sense out of language; yet as far as the man himself is concerned I must rely to a great extent upon inference, as though he were incapable of saying anything more on his own account. I infer, to begin with, that he is a poet who, early in his life, made the decision I have been trying to describe, and adhered to it.

But that much is easy. Neto's crime was an articulate objection to Salazar's cynical and brutal use of the Angolan people— a transgression which is scarcely surprising. The plight of the people of Angola is not a school for indifference, and one of the dominant themes of Neto's poetry is the relation between his personal predicament and the experience of the people among whom he grew up. Such a preoccupation has led some poets toward propaganda; they have employed their talents in the making of public announcements. As far as I can tell, that is not Neto's temptation. Rather, in the best of his poems about Africa, he is at pains to reveal his own situation as he glimpses it in the lives of other Africans. It is best to give an example:

Night

I live
in the dark quarters of the world
without light, nor life.

Anxious to live,
I walk in the streets
feeling my way
leaning into my shapeless dreams,
stumbling into servitude.
— Dark quarters,
worlds of wretchedness
where the will is watered down
and men
are confused with things.

I walk, lurching
through the unlit
unknown streets crowded
with mystery and terror,
I, arm in arm with ghosts.
And the night too is dark.

To keep to what is known about him, (this time to factual information obtainable from the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies, 6 rue Paul Tirard, Rabat, Morocco), Agostinho Neto was born in September 1922, in Icolo Bengo, Angola, and went to school in Luanda, in that country. He had to interrupt his studies in order to work. From 1944 to 1947, he served in the Department of Health in Angola, and then an Angolan workingmen's organization made it possible for him to go to Portugal and continue his medical education at the University of Coimbra. In 1948, some of Neto's poems were published for the first time, in Luanda, where a national cultural movement representing the young generation of Angola had just come into existence. He was at once acclaimed. Some of those for whom he was speaking recognized a voice.

In Lisbon he and other Angolan intellectuals came together to work out some means of protest against Salazar's colonial regime. There was a petition. Neto helped collect signatures. Here I am indebted to an editorial appeal in *Africa Today*, February, 1962. Canvassing a poor section of Lisbon, he knocked on a door and had presented his request before he noticed (he is apparently not one who looks at people's feet when he is talking to them) that the man wore policeman's boots. He was arrested, for the first time. That was in 1952. It was not a long sentence, the first one.

On his release, he returned to his studies, to his writing and to his efforts on behalf of the liberation of Angola. He became a leader of the African students in Portugal, and represented them in Paris, in December 1953, at the annual congress of the Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France, where he spoke of the wretched conditions of the native peoples in the Portuguese colonies, with special reference to the vast inadequacies of the educational facilities. Probably no one was astonished when, in 1955, Neto was again arrested by Salazar's PIDE (Policia Internacional de Defesa do Estado) on a charge of subversive activities. But by that time his name and his character were known outside the Portuguese-speaking dominions, and Francois Mauriac, Louis Aragon, Georges Duhamel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Edouard Pignon, Simone de Beauvoir, from France; Nicolas Guillén from Cuba; Diego Rivera from Mexico; André Kebros from Greece, and many others, demanded his release. Nevertheless his second term in prison lasted from December 1955 until June 1957, and before he was released he was condemned to the loss of all political rights (whatever that phrase may mean in Portugal) for five years.

He managed to finish his medical studies, and in 1959, returned to Angola, and to political activity — this time as one of the leaders of the Movimento Popular de Libertaccao de Angola. His importance in this work was conceded by the Portuguese Government: when he was next arrested, on June 9th, 1960, it was the Director of the PIDE himself who came to Neto's office in Luanda to take him into custody. Neto was sent to Lisbon, to prison.

When the news of his third arrest became known in Angola, his native town of Icolo Bengo organized a peaceful demonstration of protest. The Portuguese troops fired on the assembly, killing thirty and wounding 200.

Once again Neto's arrest was deplored and his release demanded by organizations and individuals from many parts of the world. Whether or not such protests influenced the Portuguese government, Neto, with his wife and children, was banished to Santiago, in the Cape Verde Islands, where he was kept under surveillance until September 21st, 1961. Then he was again arrested and taken back to Lisbon, to the Aljube Prison. He is still there, as far as is known. According to the authorities, his most recent mis-

demeanor has consisted in showing friends a photograph of Portuguese soldiers assembled around a spear adorned with the head of an Angolan nationalist. No doubt the authorities were right that such exhibits are apt to create an unhappy impression. They took no pride, either, in the publication of the same photograph in newspapers in Belgium, Tunisia and Morocco, nor in its display, along with many others of the same nature, in the United Nations Building.

From what information is available, it would seem that Salazar's prison system is in keeping with the humanity of his colonial administration. The treatment currently being accorded Neto is not known and inference in this connection is dangerous; one does not wish to exasperate the authorities by ascribing to them, on mere inference, conduct consistent with what one knows of their other activities. If by any chance they were behaving toward Neto with any measure of clemency, such imputation might leave them feeling unappreciated and discouraged, and tempt them to return to more familiar practice. The possible extent of Neto's sentence is not known; his chances of coming out alive are not known. One must infer and it is not pleasant. How Neto himself is facing his situation, what he plans, if he dares to plan, what he hopes for, what he remembers, all these must be inferred, and it is to the poems that one returns in search of an image of the man; to such poems as appear on the following page.

Even if the Portuguese authorities were deaf to all other considerations, they might reflect on the possible consequences of giving the people of Angola a martyr just at this point and, especially a martyr whom the Angolans already recognize as someone who speaks for them, and who acclaims

> "my Desire
> transformed into strength,
> inspiring desperate consciences."

THREE POEMS BY AGOSTINHO NETO

AFRICAN POEM

There on the horizon
the fire
and the dark silhouettes of the imbondeiro trees
with their arms raised
in the air the green smell of burnt palm trees

On the road
the line of Bailundo porters
groaning under their loads of crueira
in the room
the sweet sweet-eyed mulatress
retouching her face with rouge and rice-powder
the woman under her many clothes moving her hips
on the bed
the sleepless man thinking
of buying knives and forks to eat with at a table

On the sky the reflections
of the fire
and the silhouettes of the blacks at the drums
with their arms raised
in the air the warm tune of marimbas

On the road the porters
in the room the mulatress
on the bed the sleepless man

The burning coals consuming
consuming with fire
the warm country of the horizons.

FRIEND MUSSUNDA

Here I am,
Friend Mussunda,
Here I am,

With you.
With the established victory of your joy
and of your conscience.

— you whom the god of death has made!
you whom the god of death has made, made. . . (*)

Remember?

The sadness of those days
when we were there
with mangoes to eat,
bewailing our fate
and the women of Funda,
our songs of lament,
our despairs,
the clouds of our eyes,
remember?

Here I am,
friend Mussunda.

To you
I owe my life,
to the same devotion, the same love
with which you saved me
from the constrictor's embrace.

To your strength
which transforms the fates of men.

To you
friend Mussunda, I owe my life to you.

And I write
poems you don't understand!
Can you imagine my anguish?

Here I am
friend Mussunda,
writing poems you don't understand.

* These two lines, n the native language of Angola, are part of a children's chant in "The NATION" February 24th, 1962

It wasn't this
that we wanted, I know that,
but in the mind, in the intelligence,
that's where we're alive.

We're alive
friend Mussunda
we're alive!

Inseparable
still on the road to our vision.

The hearts beat
rhythms of foggy nights,
the feet dance

The sounds do not die in our ears
— you whom the god of death has made. . .
We are alive!

KINAXIXI

I was glad to sit down
on a bench in Kinaxixi
at six o'clock of a hot evening
and just sit there...

Someone would come
maybe
to sit beside me

And I would see the black faces
of the people going uptown
in no hurry
expressing absence in the
jumbled Kimbundu they conversed in.

I would see the tired footsteps
of the servants whose fathers also are servants
looking for love here, glory there, wanting
something more than drunkenness in every
alchohol

Neither happiness nor hate

After the sun had set
lights would be turned on and I
would wander off
thinking that our life after all is simple
too simple
for anyone who is tired and still has to walk.

THE CLOSING SCENE OF A TRAGEDY BY DURO LADIPO
ADAPTED FROM THE YORUBA BY ULLI BEIER

SANGO
I am now tired — let us stay awhile
And see what friends may follow us
From our old city.
In anger I have killed my people —
Now I am left alone.

OYA
My Lord, my husband the one I trust
The one I adore, the one whose tongue commands
Small bird, whose song carries far in the forest
Though small, he is still the husband of all the queens.
Ajala Iji
I have tried much for you — but I will follow you no further.
Let me go back to my town at Ira, where I was born.
Small bird whose song carries far in the forest,
Farewell.

SANGO
holding her back
What can I think, what can I do
All my friends have deserted me.
All my wives have run away.
All my slaves have dispersed.
You alone remain.
I am a king who learnt too late
To love his people.
These things are more than I can bear alone.
What shall I think, what shall I do.
Farewell, — now only death is sweet.
I will hang — I will hang from the Ayan tree.
Farewell — now only death is sweet.

OYA

Sango don't hang! Sango don't hang!
How could we ever repeat those dreadful words:
"The king has hanged himself!"
You are a small bird,
But your song carries far through the forest.
You are a small bird,
Yet husband of all the queens.

Sango tears loose and hangs himself.
Oya is left in despair.

OYA

Sango hangs, Sango hangs,
Sango a very hot fire.
They used his name to swear,
They used his name to curse,
Ajala Iji,
Father of the young, father of the old.
The pounded yam will stay fresh for twenty years!
Don't throw it away.
The yam flour will keep for thirty months!
Don't throw it away!
For Sango, Ajala Iji, is coming back to eat the food
He prepared before going away!
Sango o! Sango o! Sango o!
Let it not be heard that Sango
Hangs at Koso from the Ayan tree,
From the Ayan tree of which drums are made.
When the Bata drum sounds — is it not Sango who speaks?
When the Dundun drum trembles — is it not Sango who dances?
Sango hangs, Sango hangs,
O let it not be heard that Sango hangs at Koso.

OYO PEOPLE

The king hangs, the king hangs
When the drummer excels himself,
He tears the membrane of his drum.
Kabiyesi Sango,
Your town is in utter confusion,
We warned you often, you would not hear.
We talked and talked — but you refused.
Now the Akara seller stumbles
The calabash is tottering on her head,
Her bean cakes scatter in the mud.
The king hangs, the king hangs,
On the way to Koso.
How long, before he will return?

THE MAGBAS
(Sango's friends)

Friends listen to us.
The news we hear is strange to us.
Sango is the leopard who killed the sheep
And bathed in its blood.
Sango is the one who shaved the child's head
With thunder.
Sango is the one who is killed in the house
And wakes up in the market.
Sango is the banana near the river —
When you cut it down,
It will sprout again to bear another fruit.
Sango is not dead — he has just gone to look for food.
What has caused the vulture to become bald?
What has caused the hornbill to go in rags?
They were deserted by their friends.
You deserted Sango when he was fighting for you!
He hangs from the Ayan tree:
But when the Bata drum will sound — he will speak to you.
When the Dundun drum trembles — he will dance for you.

OYO PEOPLE Save us, you Sango's friends.
You Magbas save us.
We cannot prosper without Sango.
Since our king has disappeared,
Fire has been raging in the town,
Our houses lie in ruins,
Save us from his wrath.

MAGBAS Sango the mighty fire,
His chest is red as fire,
There is fire in his eye,
Fire in his mouth,
Fire on the roof.
Has a stone ever died?
If you cut open the chest of a bat,
You will meet a new bat inside it.
That bat that has children upon children,
Ever renewing itself!
The king does not hang!
When the kite flies high into the sky,
People think he is lost,
Yet he returns to his nest.
Those who will say, Sango is dead,
Will know his wrath today.

THUNDER FROM ABOVE
SANGO'S VOICE: E E E E E E E !!!!

Two hundred glowing embers
Must bow down to the fire.
One thousand warriors cannot fight death.
Two thousand stars must pay homage to the sun
If you pay homage to me
I will do for you
As I have done for the king of Ara
Who is happy.
I will do for you
As I have done for the king of Ijero
Who is wealthy.
I will do for you
As I have done for the king of Illa
Who has peace.
Two hundred glowing embers
Must bow down to the fire.
One thousand warriors
Must prostrate to death.
Two hundred stars,
Must pay homage to the sun.

THUNDER IS HEARD FROM ABOVE

PEOPLE OF OYO

Kabiyesi o!
To to to to fuuuun!
Fire in your eyes
Fire in your mouth
Fire on the roofs!
The kite was lost in the sky
And returned to its nest.
The banana was cut down
But bears a new fruit.
You will speak to us
Through the Bata drum
You will dance for us
With the Dundun drum.
Two hundred glowing embers
Must bow down to fire.
One thousand warriors
Must succumb to death.
Two hundred stars
Must worship the sun.
Kabiyesi o!
The king does not hang!

OBA KOSO or "The King does not Hang" is a Yoruba musical play about Sango, the second king of Oyo, who is also the Yoruba God of thunder. The last scene shows Sango with his wife Oya when he goes into exile and kills himself, and is subsequently deified by the people of Oyo.

SOYINKA'S INTERNATIONAL DRAMA

BY UNA MACLEAN

During one of the later sessions of the Drama Conference at this year's Edinburgh Festival the subject matter was Nationalism in the Theatre. Wole Soyinka, the only African dramatist present, suddenly interrupted a fairly prosaic general discussion with an impassioned denunciation of what he described as "exotica" in the theatre. The incident which directly provoked this outburst was the recital of a poem-song by an Indian writer and director. Soyinka, it appeared, deplored all the irrelevant and superficial traditional trappings which can form the spurious appeal of a foreign culture. Valueless in themselves, such exotic details may provide an excellent excuse for condescension on the part of audiences who exclaim loudly over the quaintness of what they do not wish to comprehend. African drama had, Soyinka maintained, been persistently patronized, belittled and retarded in this way by those whose main concern was with "anthropological data" in the shape of bare breasts, barbaric costumes and barbarous customs. He was insistent that drama from Africa deserved to be judged by universal standards of criticism and that the enduring value of any African drama must depend upon the adequacy of its representation of universal human experiences. At the same time he regretted the European tendency to expect, from all African dramatists, either a reiteration of the theme of racial conflict or a sense of political and social commitment. Such preoccupations might permeate the South African writings but need not dominate the drama from other parts of the continent.

The recent publication of five of Wole Soyinka's plays provides an opportunity for deciding how far Soyinka's own work conforms to his exacting requirements. *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Lion and the Jewel* are now available, singly, as paperbacks in the Crown Series of the Oxford University Press. *The Swamp Dwellers, The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Strong Breed* appear together, in more attractive format, from Mbari Publications, Ibadan. All except the last of these plays have already been seen in Nigeria and *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka's main work, was written and produced specifically for Nigerian Independence.

These plays are not simply African, they are Nigerian. Their settings range from Delta swamps to Lagos beaches by way of sundry stretches of forest in whose recesses Yoruba villages lead an intense and crowded life. The characters are no mere abstractions of nostalgic Négritude. Recognizably Nigerian in name, gods and mortals betray their national origin not only in appearance but in many details of behaviour and in the complicated inter-relationships of their extended family systems. Ogun protects his iron workers in a perfectly orthodox manner in *A Dance of the Forests*, Sadiku plays the Bale's chief wife in the *Lion and the Jewel* with a judicious mixture of ribaldry and disrespect and *Brother Jero* in his *Trials* encourages the ambitions of a recognisably regional politician.

Such a résumé of the background to some of the plays would, however, completely mislead were it to suggest that the themes are also of limited interest. On the contrary, in both comedy and tragedy Soyinka, by his broad sympathy combined with great creative power, transmutes this basic local material into theatre with the widest general appeal. This is not a trite recital of native lore and custom tricked out for the curious gaze of antique hunters. Music and the dance are present, as is appropriate in the African scene, but they are employed judiciously, to intensify and express emotions already implicit in the action. Proverbs pepper the dialogue of old and young and fall from the lips of deities whose passions reflect those of their followers, but the admixture of sage saws is always pointed and often sardonic and noticably avoids the tedium which too often attends upon them in the works of authors for whom folk wisdom has become an end in itself. Poetry abounds in Soyinka's plays, but it is original poetry of the highest merit, far removed from the meaningless doggerel, ill-translated from oral tradition, which sometimes passes, dubiously, for African verse.

Soyinka deals with situations and persons well known to his Nigerian audiences and which draw from them responses of delighted recognition. The wily, bearded prophet of the sands, the schoolmaster in *The Lion and the Jewel*, the blind Moslem in *The Swamp Dwellers* are all familiar types. But they are appreciated by audiences who have never known Nigeria. Soyinka's characterization is soundly established by his powers of verbal expression and is not dependent primarily upon costume, gestures or tricks of speech. Such details of acting and production, whilst forming a useful shorthand for initiated local audiences, would be, by themselves, both inadequate and incomprehensible to outsiders.

Soyinka's most notably successful exercise in the transformation of national material into international theatre has been *A Dance of the Forests*. It is a mythological dramatic poem on a grand scale in which the dramatist explores the theme of the ancestors in its relation to the present.

On the occasion of "The Gathering of the Tribes", which can be taken to correspond to some sort of independence celebration, the elder inhabitants of a forest village had decided to honour the extraordinary event in two unusual ways. In the first place, a huge carving had been commissioned, a kind of totem pole which, carved from the living trunk of a tree, would provide the focal point for the celebrations. The village councillors had taken the further bold steps of inviting representatives of their ancestors to attend the ceremonies. It was clear that they expected a delegation of some importance, consisting of dignified and magnificent shades who would add a high level of historical tone to the occasion. But the emissaries of the dead who come to the gathering turn out to be so disreputable that the living are positively ashamed to have them around and spend a great deal of time and trouble in trying to drive them underground again.

These ancestors are real spectres at the feast. A shabby warrior, with some grudge about having been castrated and sold into slavery after he had defied imperial authority, is accompanied by his melancholy, perpetually pregnant wife. He is anxious to obtain justice and a fair hearing and approaches, with his grievances, a group of present-day citizens. The politician, the artist and the prostitute, whom Soyinka selects as representative types, are all preoccupied with their own concerns, however, and show little inclination to unearth this aspect of the past.

In the guise of a detached, interested observer Soyinka introduces a character who is clearly intended to represent the supreme God of Yoruba theology. This individual, Obaneji, succeeds in uncovering the hypocrisies of each of the present-day pillars of society. Adenebi, the politician, has been involved in shady deals in dangerous passenger lorries; Rola, the prostitute, has driven her lovers to madness and self-destruction; Demoke, the carver, has been guilty of the murder of his apprentice whom he unbalanced as they were both engaged upon carving the totem.

It is in Demoke, the artist, that Soyinka has created his most sensitive character and into his mouth he puts his finest poetry. Demoke is obsessed with the fear of heights and with thoughts of death coming in a fall from a great height. He suddenly breaks forth, in a magnificent passage of poetry, into a full confession of his guilt, recounting his jealousy of the apprentice who could surmount him on the tree. And at the same time he begins to realize an affinity, recollected rather than real, with the prostitute, Rola.

At this point the familiar device of the flashback is linked to the conception of the ancestors as the scene changes to the court of a mythical West African kingdom. In splendid surroundings the historical equivalents of the politician, the prostitute and the carver are revealed, behaving in a manner which is essentially the same as their performance in the present.

Demoke was then court poet and favourite of Madame Tortoise, whom the Emperor had ordained as his wife. (The tortoise is the common African symbol for prostitute.) She dominates the court and demands of Demoke that he should search for her canary. He sends his servant instead and sees him fall to his death.

The whims of Madame Tortoise are defied by the warrior who declines to lead his men to battle to recover her trousseau. The court historian, precursor of Adenebi the politician, tries plausibly to convince him of the just nature of this war, but finding himself unable to persuade the soldier he soon has recourse to threats. The traitorous soldier is eventually emasculated and delivered to the slave dealers.

Soyinka introduces two of the gods from the Yoruba pantheon who participate in the action as protagonists of the carver and his murdered apprentice. Ogun, god of iron, is anxious to protect both the carver and the warrior, whilst Eshuoro is enraged at the desecration of his trees and determined to avenge the death of his follower.

As the events of this African midsummer night's dream draw towards their climax the spirits of the palm, the rivers, the ants and many others all engage in the ritual dance which gives its name to the play and into which the action finally evolves. Ultimately all the chants of the various spirits bear a common reference to redness. This colour, which in itself suggests agitation, intensifies the mounting tension of the closing scene.

The release of Demoke, the artist, from his guilt, however, is not finally dependent upon the intervention of any god or spirit but follows from his own act. He shields the "half-child", the offspring of the warrior and his wife, from the wrath of Ogun and so obtains peace.

Several different meanings can be seen developed within this play. In the first place, Soyinka is concerned to ridicule the current desire amongst the new West African nations for a glorious past. This search for a history, which is in some sense indicative of a feeling of inferiority, leads to romantic and sentimentalized versions of the past. Ancient kingdoms, which bore little relation geographically to the present nations of this part of Africa, are pictured in glowing terms. Soyinka as a realist and satirist demonstrates the abiding follies of mankind from generation to generation and ruthlessly destroys the notion that the ancestors could do no wrong.

It is, however, highly appropriate that this theme of the ancestors, which forms the focal point of African philosophy, should have been made central to a play inspired by the advent of Nigerian independence. Soyinka is deeply conscious of the religious imagination of his own people and he shows this awareness by the way in which he uses African mythology and theology in the play. Gods, mortals and spirits mix freely in the enchanted African forest and the distinction between the living and the dead, between the supernatural world and "reality" is vague and variable. Gods and ancestors are seen to be vitally concerned in the every-day life of the people, whose passions they reflect in magnified form.

The importance of Demoke in the play must not be underestimated. Upon him Soyinka lavishes his poetic gifts and develops him as a living character to an extent far beyond that of the other human "types". At the very end of the play he is seen protecting the newly-born child of the warrior. But this hope of the future is still only a "half-child" waiting to be given full and assured existence. The conception of the "half-child" derives from a Yoruba belief in a certain group of children who are "born to die", passing through an unending cycle of death and rebirth to the great distress of their parents.

In Demoke's final action can be seen Soyinka's conception of the role of the artist in the new society. The new child or nation is born of the warrior, who was the one man of integrity from the past. But without the protection of the artist the child remains in danger of destruction. Soyinka is suggesting that it is the artist, with his heightened perception of events and his sense of responsibility, who will not only interpret the past to the present but will protect the potentialities of the future.

The dramatist employs some of the same dramatic devices in *The Strong Breed* where past and present are again juxtaposed but only, in this case, across two generations. An enigmatic, philanthropic stranger has settled in a village where he declines to establish close relationships with the local people. He becomes involved in a grim annual ceremony which requires a human scapegoat to carry away the sins of the old year. Distressed at the cruel choice of an idiot as the terrified whipping boy, the stranger Eman is compelled to offer himself.

In the course of his suffering, as he is pursued with blows through the village and beyond, he has a vision of his own father who had voluntarily performed the same function in his native land, where the role was the pride of a courageous man. As one of the strong breed, Eman should have remained at home to take his father's place ultimately. Instead he had fled upon the death of his wife in childbirth. But his instinct for sacrifice was inescapable and the manner of his end inevitable.

This play has few characters. A woman loves Eman and tries vainly to discourage him from his destiny, a young girl plays with a rough image which represents the "carrier" of sins, the idiot boy comes and goes, the villagers pursue their purposes with business-like callousness. The night atmosphere is fraught with fear and impending doom.

Eman and the woman talk alone and at length while she urges her warm claims, but the end seems ordained from the beginning and we await the coming of the villagers, like Judas to Gethsemane.

This sinister play captures a sense of ancient evil by economical means beyond the reach of a non-African dramatist. Witchdoctors dancing wildly around a fire in the worst manner of African "adventure" films can excite no more emotion than the sight of a boiling missionary in a cartoon cooking pot. The African playwright sets two people in a hut at night, playing at an "ayo" board, and as they talk quietly together the fears and compulsions of a continent are revealed.

In *The Swamp Dwellers* Soyinka again strikes a sombre note, at times verging on monotony, as he deals with the disillusionment of Igwezu, one of the twin sons of an aged farmer. Igwezu had followed his twin brother to the city, hoping to make his fortune. Instead he loses everything, including his wife, to his more enterprising brother to whom he even promises his farm in payment of debts. On returning home he finds his farm totally destroyed as the result of a disastrous rainy season and he proceeds to look around for a cause for his multiple misfortunes.

He finds one in the form of the Kadiye, corpulent, complacent priest to the local deity, the serpent of the swamps. The priest robs credulous villagers who depend upon him to placate the arbitrary god.

A wandering blind Moslem has in the meantime reached the hut of Igwezu's parents. He had also suffered at the hands of the elements. In the north the customary dryness had been assuaged by a brief season of rain which seemed to promise a good harvest. But the sun and locusts had destroyed his hopes and he had set out to follow the river southwards to its mouth, where he was sure he should find fertile soil. He sees in Igwezu a fellow sufferer and offers to be his bondsman.

The parents of Igwezu are very finely drawn as a contented old African couple amid the most depressing surroundings. The floods have left them philosophical and, while alone together, they engage in affectionate badinage. But when visitors arrive the husband reverts to a suitably authoritarian manner towards his wife. The character of Igwezu, however, is predominantly querulous and ineffectual. The study of personal and religious despair has great possibilities but Igwezu does not properly sustain his tragic role, remaining throughout merely the victim of circumstances, and it is hard to credit the devotion of the earnest Moslem towards such a feeble master.

Nevertheless the extent to which the lives of African villagers can be at the mercy of the elements and their differing reactions to this basic situation is very effectively conveyed, in language which is often sonorous and at times becomes poetry. Soyinka also no doubt intended to contrast the reaction of the Moslem, whom misfortune drives to action, with that of Igwezu who simply rails against fate.

Both *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Lion and the Jewel* are pure comedy and excellent entertainment. Brother Jero is a cynical, latter-day prophet of the sands who makes considerable sexual and financial capital out of the gullibility of his neighbours. The extent and pungency of Brother Jero's blasphemy shocked some of the university students before whom the play was first performed. It is not necessary to have seen the Cherubims and Seraphims worshipping on Lagos beach to appreciate the brilliance of this caricature by Soyinka at his ironical best.

The Lion and the Jewel is a kind of African beauty and the beast fable. Sidi, the village belle whose head has been turned by a magazine photographer, sets out to conquer

the beast in the form of the aged Bale, ruler of the town. The latter potentate has for some time been said to be impotent, a scurrilous rumour begun by his eldest wife to make him appear ridiculous. But Sidi's advances prove the contrary and, to the horror of her suitor, a self-conscious and prudish school teacher, she ends up as the Bale's latest addition to the harem. The whole mixture is hilarious and the conventions of polygamy simply add to possibilities of this Nigerian bedroom farce.

Soyinka, in fact, has been equally successful in both serious drama and light entertainment in reanimating the emblems of a passing age and in reinterpreting the past to the present. He employs for his own purposes local images whose significance he, as poet, makes universal and symbols which had become dulled through much use. When he uses legend, religion or history for his plays he never becomes enslaved to this material, for many at time he breaks free in order to cut or to condense, to combine and create characters and to diversify endlessly in order to divert.

Although a knowledge of Nigerian mythology and customs can add to the appreciation of these plays, such special knowledge is by no means essential since the implications of any specifically African references are always revealed in the course of the dialogue. The Nigerian content of the plays can, parodoxically, confuse those very Nigerian critics who might be expected to see beyond them to the underlying meaning. This actually occurred at the time when *A Dance of the Forests* was first performed and the author was upbraided for his lavish and confusing pagan themes, scarcely suitable, it was implied, for respectable modern drama. On the other hand, those of the Nigerian audience who merely want entertainment are invariably satisfied by Soyinka's clever portrayal of familiar figures and situations.

But there is certainly nothing esoteric about the main substance of Soyinka's thought. It requires no special knowledge to appreciate the reluctance of young nations to display the less creditable aspects of their past; the problem of civil or military disobedience is strikingly topical; and the sight of guilt crying out for punishment or despair seeking an outlet are familiar enough in any human situation. Soyinka is, therefore, fully justified in his condemnation of exotic effects; his own work is the demonstration of a totally different achievement. For he alone among African dramatists has managed brilliantly to mould mythology into a new image by inviting the participation of pagan symbols in a dramatic ritual of universal import.

FROM: "LE PAUVRE CHRIST DE BOMBA" BY MONGO BETI

It was last night and I did not suspect anything. I was simply lying in bed and I was worried about the Reverend Father, who was ill with a hundred and two degrees of fever as a result of his accident on the river. With fear I remembered all the water the Reverend Father had coughed up on the river bank. I suspected nothing, I could not possibly know. She knocked on my door. Before I could get up and see who had knocked, she had already opened, because I had not pushed the bolt. Oh! I should have suspected it then. She entered the room. Before I could even talk she had lit a match. She said to me:

— Aren't you asleep yet? Ah! I am catching you dreaming about women, vicious little fellow!...

I said nothing: I was astonished. In the brief light of the match I saw her white combination, her bare neck, and her breasts whose nipples stood out just under the straps. Already she had sat down on my bed. The match had gone out and once again my room was all black. I had half risen on my left elbow. In the hollow that was formed between my belly and my legs I could feel the lower part of her back which was almost naked. Then she gently pressed herself against my thighs, moving her hips. And I stayed there, resting on my left elbow, unable to speak, because I was stupefied; I had never been so close to a woman. I even began to be afraid. My heart was beating with extraordinary violence, and with every heart beat the blood rose to my head and shook me like a wild river. A diabolic drum rumbled in my ears, sirens howled in my skull, and one would have said that an aeroplane was buzzing around in it. This woman had carried all the charivari of hell into my skull. Oh my God, why wasn't I aware of it?... Oh that woman... I should have suspected it. I should have fled from that room. I am still asking myself what prevented me from doing it.

And still her naked bottom in the hollow between my belly and my legs. Her naked bottom which she pushed everytime she moved her hips. Once I withdrew towards the wall in order to remove myself from her touch; but she moved after me and wedged me in with her bottom and I had a heightened sensation of contact. She said to me:

— I don't know what is happening to me, I can't sleep. You can't either, can you?

I said nothing, and she laughed softly. I heard her laugh in little jerks and she said again:

— You little priest's boy, you! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? A pretty young man like you, you want to play the priest! What an idea!.....

I did not reply. I remained, half sitting up, supported on my left elbow. She pushed harder against me, moving her hips.

I was at the end of my strength with all that uproar in my head; the bells that pealed with all their force, as if it was the day for the consecration of a new church; the engines of the aeroplane that were roaring for the departure of I don't know who; the chorus of sirens howling for I don't know which feast; and that bedevilled drum.

And now the xylophones started to chime in. And that machine that shook my chest as if I was riding in the train or on the platform of a kit car rolling over a road, furrowed out by the rains.

My throat was dry. She said:

— So you never talk? You have a bad character ...

Three times I wetted my lips and in the end I managed to say:

— This is my room, here, this is not the room of Zacharias. I came because the other house was too damp, but this is my room ...

I noticed that my voice had acquired a tremolo, like the voice of the new vicar when he is reading mass.

She laughed and she said:

— Do you imagine I am going to eat you?

She turned her back on me.

I felt the sweat running down me everywhere; on my temples, in my hair, on my arms, on my belly, on my back. I was shivering with cold... But no, I was not cold; I am sure I was hot, because I was sweating...Dear me! I don't even know whether I was hot or cold. I was sweating in large drops, and at the same time I was shivering as if I had spent a whole night outside in the rain. My chest was heavy.

My sex began to hurt me, because it wanted to rise, as it does in the morning when the partridges sing. But there was no room and it could not rise, because that woman, Catherine, had planted her bottom in the hollow between my belly and my legs, and she was pressing me hard.

I wanted to piss!.....Now I was certain, that if my sex, which wanted to rise would continue to press against the naked bottom of that woman, I would finish up pissing in my bed. And yet I had pissed before going to bed.

She lit a match and she looked at me. Then she asked:

— But why are you afraid?

I felt ashamed.

— And who told you that I am afraid? I told her nervously

— Who told me? But I can see that you are dying with fear!

— I implore you, go back to your room. For God's sake, get out of here...

She laughed, then she said:

— Don't talk so loud, you big fool. Your Reverend Father will hear you. Imagine he will find you with a woman. Don't you know what that means?

And I kept silent. Later I said:

— Zacharias will come; what will he think? Go now...

— You big fool, Zacharias will not come; he will pass the night over there. And even if he came, I would tell him that we have been chatting together. You see, I told you that you were afraid. Aren't you ashamed?

I felt exhausted and I lay down. I stretched out on my back and she lay down close to me. She had her back turned to me. Then, suddenly, she turned round towards me, and I did not stir. The desire to piss, which had left me for a while, returned. Again my sex rose up under my sheet, but this time it did not bother me too much. I was still shaking, like a kit car on a road furrowed out by the rains. One moment, when my desire to piss seemed to pass a little, I said to her:

— And just what are you doing here? What do you want?

In reality I did not even want to see her go anymore; I was merely curious. I even preferred her mysterious and even suspicious gestures, to anything she might have said. At the same time it seemed a good idea to bully her and adopt a supercilious tone.

But suddenly I started sobbing, and I didn't really know why. I cried in little muffled sobs. My God, you are a witness that I cried, that I did not want to do this thing. Her's is the entire fault. You know it well; I could not help it. It was she who came to my room, at the moment when I was only worried about the Reverend Father; I was not thinking about women, it is not true. My God, it was her fault, you are my witness.

I cried and she slipped her arm under my head and she said:

— Now stop crying, my pretty young man. When one is a pretty young man like you, one doesn't cry, does one?

She fondled my cheek. She said:

— I am your dear friend, don't you know? Now then...

— I will cry! I said.

I heard her low laugh. She said that if I cried, it wouldn't be nice, neither for her nor for me. I kept quiet and stopped crying. I wanted to ask her questions: for how long she had been with Zacharias; and where she came from; and why it seemed to me that I had already seen her somewhere. But I don't know what kind of disgust prevented me from asking these questions.

I wiped my eyes with my right hand. My right hand met hers on my cheek. Our hands interlocked and she said:

— You won't cry anymore, will you?

I did not reply.

I had not noticed her hand slipping under my sheet; I trembled at the contact. I asked myself what she was after, but I was not suspicious, because this had never happened to me before. Alas, if only I had guessed what was going to happen, surely I would have been suspicious. But I knew nothing, and because of that I was lost...

How she smelt sweet, Catherine!... She smelt sweet and her hard breast was pressing on my left arm. For a moment, I thought of turning towards the wall, but I did not know what she was after and so I did not do it. And her hand was running and creeping along my side, and her hand was cold like a snake: I shivered frequently and she laughed. I almost stopped breathing and my head had become clear. Only, I wanted to piss, again, like mad.

She tickled me; I laughed, inspite of myself. My God, you are my witness, that if I laughed, it was inspite of myself. I laughed when she tickled me and she told me not to laugh too loud, because we might be heard. But really, I think she was glad when I laughed, because up till then I had only expressed the desire to see her go.

She started to tickle me without stop, and I took all my will together in order not to laugh. But she continued to tickle me and I told her:

— Catherine, I beg you, stop...

She stopped suddenly to tickle me, she sat up lightly, she struck a match and she bent over me, who was lying on my back. Her face had a strange expression. Everything I had admired in her face was there, just a couple of inches away from me: her teeth which were exposed by her smile, her cheeks showing slight dimples as she laughed; her wide open eyes; and she smelt so sweet!

She said:

— How do you know my name is Catherine?

Oh well, I said; I heard Zacharias...

I heard her subdued laugh and she said:

— I never thought you would listen; you always seemed as if you were not listening at all.

She gave me a little slap on the cheek. The match went out.

— Guess my own name, I said.

— Oh! I know, it is Denis.

As our hands had disentangled themselves, I took her hand and once more our fingers interlocked. Alas! This time it was my fault. But I did it without thinking any evil. My God, you know that I have done it without thinking any evil. I can't even remember now why I did it at all.

Gently she squeezed my fingers. And once more she stretched out on the bed. She said to me:

— Turn round to me and lie on your side.....

I did not obey her and she said:

— Don't be afraid you big fool; I won't hurt you, I won't even tickle you; you will see, this will be fun.

I turned over and I did not know what she was driving at. Alas! My God, you are my witness, that I would never have turned round, if I had known what she was driving at.

But I turned. I felt Catherine's hand run gently like a serpent towards my belly, then my thigh, then along my leg right down to the sole of my foot; then she ran up the other leg, along the thigh, and then...but she did not go back to my belly. I felt her hand slipping in between my thighs and she grabbed my sex!...I shivered, and Catherine said:

— Don't play the fool! Keep quiet.

I did not budge. I did not know where I was. I let her do. My sex was erect now and she was pulling it and it hurt. Catherine pressed me against her and I could hardly breathe. I felt her hard breasts against my chest and my mouth was planted against her cheek. We were both breathing heavily. I could hardly endure it any longer, as she pulled at my sex which had swollen enormously. I realised now that it had become as hard as a piece of wood. My head was now clear, but the desire to piss had returned and it seemed to flood me and there was a sharp pain in my sex which was dreadful.

I said to Catherine:

— Leave me, but leave me Catherine, I am going to piss!

She took me in her arms, and at first I thought she was going to throw me out of the bed, but she simply rolled over on her back and she pressed me against her. She opened her legs and she gripped my sex.

And suddenly it seemed to me that I had no more sex!...And Catherine was rolling about in the bed from left to right from right to left without stop...And I

was drowning in a swamp and at the same time a fire was burning in my belly. Catherine had gripped my buttocks with both her hands and she was moving about incessantly in the bed. She bit my cheek and her hard breasts were pressing on my chest. And still this desire to piss. Now I could no longer hold myself and I told Catherine.

— Well, piss for God's sake, what on earth are you waiting for!...

At this moment I realized that my sex had not been cut off, and that it was he alone who was sunk in the swamp, just as sometimes one might dip a foot into a swamp, while all the rest of the body stays outside. But it was a strange swamp, that sometimes hardened and sometimes softened; simultaneously the desire to piss overcame me madly at times and then again it seemed to recede again.

— For God's sake, piss, piss! What are you waiting for! breathed Catherine.

— I am coming, I am coming, I said.

I was terribly ashamed. At a certain moment I even told her:

— Maybe it would be better for me to go and piss outside, I do not like to piss in the bed.

Catherine got angry and she said:

— You big fool!

Then I felt that the desire to piss left me rapidly, like a child that has been frightened. Catherine took my two buttocks in both her hands and she began to roll her hips. I began to get tired. She said to me:

— Move! Move like this...

And I moved. Now I did everything she asked me, I was so tired. And I moved around as best as I could.

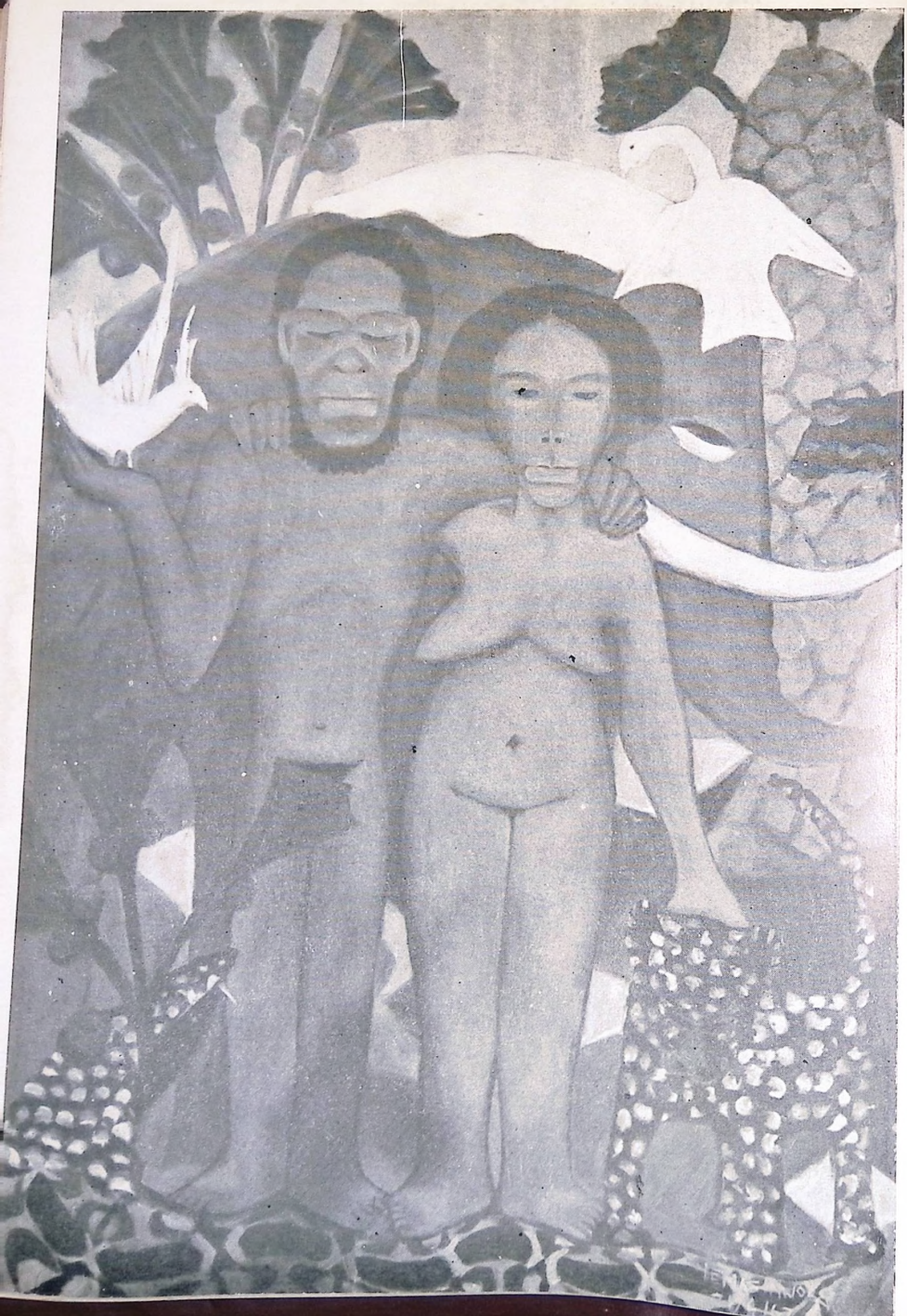
A little snake, a very little snake detached itself slowly from my spine where it had been living; without haste it rolled its convultions into my pelvis; gently it shot forward, furtively and timidly slipped out of my lower belly. What I felt now, was no longer the desire to piss, but to die!... It was a terrible sensation. I wanted to shout; I even think I may have shouted a bit: I felt Catherine's hand clamping down on my mouth.

Catherine rolled about terribly... I contracted in a spasm of ultimate agony...

I cannot say what happened then; I think I fell asleep, but I am not even very sure. Perhaps I really died and it was a miracle that I woke up. Before she died, my mother used to tell me about people who died, in order to wake up some minutes later. She said they couldn't stay dead too long, or else they could never wake up again. That was perhaps what happened to me. I must have really died, and I must have woken up a moment later. A miracle!

When I woke up, Catherine was no longer there...

DEMAS NWOKO
The "Adam and Eve"
Series (Paris 1962)



BY ALEX LA GUMA

Choker lay on the floor of the lean-to in the back yard where they had carried him. It was cooler under the sagging roof, with the pile of assorted junk in one corner; an ancient motor tyre, sundry split and warped boxes, an old enamel display sign with patches like maps of continents on another planet where the enamelling had cracked away, and the dusty footboard of a bed. There was also the smell of dust and chicken droppings and urine in the lean-to.

From outside, beyond a chrome-yellow rhomboid of sun, came a clatter of voices. In the yard they were discussing him. Choker opened his eyes, and peering down the length of his body, past the bare, grimy toes, he saw several pairs of legs, male and female, in tattered trousers and laddered stockings.

Somebody, a man, was saying: ". . .that was coward. . .from behind, *mos*." "*Ja*. But look what he done to others. . ."

Choker thought, to hell with those baskets. To hell with them all.

Somebody had thrown an old blanket over him. It smelled of sweat and having-been-slept-in-unwashed, and it was torn and threadbare and stained. He touched the exhausted blanket with thick, grubby fingers. The texture was rough in parts and shiny thin where it had worn away. He was used to blankets like this.

Choker had been stabbed three times, each time from behind. Once in the head, then between the shoulder blades and again in the right side, out in the street, by an old enemy who had once sworn to get him.

The bleeding had stopped and there was not much pain. He had been knifed before, admittedly not as bad as this, but he thought through the pain, the basket couldn't even do a decent job. He lay there and waited for the ambulance. There was blood drying slowly on the side of his hammered-copper face, and he also had a bad headache.

The voices, now and then raised in laughter, crackled outside. Feet moved on the rough floor of the yard and a face not unlike that of a brown dog wearing an expiring cloth cap, looked in.

"You still awright, Choker? Am'ulance is coming just now, hey."

". . . . off", Choker said. His voice croaked.

The face withdrew, laughing: "*Ou* Choker. *Ou* Choker."

He was feeling tired now. The grubby fingers, like corroded iron clamps, strayed over the parched field of the blanket. . . .He was being taken down a wet, tarred yard with tough wire netting over the windows which looked into it. The place smelled of carbolic disinfectant, and the bunch of heavy keys clink-clinked as it swung from the hooked finger of the guard.

They reached a room fitted with shelving that was stacked here and there with piled blankets. "Take two, *jong*," the guard said, and Choker began to rummage through

The protagonist who began in *Heavensgate* as a suppliant is deified. This is the last glory of flesh i.e. to be a living god and the final triumph over death and re-incarnation i.e. to be a dead god. It is this that re-vitalises the protagonist, making him symbiotic with non-being: & the cancelling out is complete.

O. R. Dathorne.

BIM (ed. Frank Collymore, Barbados, Vol. 10, No. 38, Jan-June, 1964).
PRESENCE AFRICAINE (Paris, No. 48, 4e Trimestre, 1963).
TRANSITION (ed. Rajat Neogy, Kampala, Uganda, Vol. 3, No. 11, November, 1963).

The periodicals that exist as reservoirs for Afro-Caribbean literature serve to domesticate a great deal of indigenous writing that might otherwise never be printed in English, French and American journals, which demand a kind of compromise from their overseas contributors in order to make their material suitable for their own readers. Indeed, the oft-lamented problem of publishing abroad is why, by creating their own reading public with matter that has a particular type of esoteric appeal, these Afro-Caribbean journals can help their writers to be most completely themselves. It seems a pity that they do not very often take advantage of this.

The current issue of *Bim* is a souvenir number — a remarkable thing when the rise and fall of the little periodical is almost a symbol of our times. *Bim* is in its twenty-first year and the editor comments on the financial pressures that it underwent and is still undergoing. However it continues to attract well-known names — V. S. Naipaul, the well-known "don't call me a West Indian" West Indian writer, has a shoddy article on "Critics and Criticism", Austin Clarke, whose first novel *Survivors of the Crossing* is to be published next year, has a good short story about boyhood, and Michael Anthony, who has made a refreshing re-appraisal of history in his short story "The Captain of the Fleet". A. J. Seymour, former editor of the now defunct *Kyk-over-al*, has a rather short but interesting account of Wilson Harris' novels. It is perhaps only right that Seymour should be the first to write about Wilson Harris, for as long ago as 1940 it was Seymour who discovered Harris's amazing talent for organising meaning. The poetry in this issue is particularly bad, although there are good lines in Collymore's own "Rhymed Reflections", rather reminiscent of Ogden Nash.

René Depestre has three good poems in *Presence Africaine*. They are not imprisoned in the straight-jacket of skin-colour, as so many of his poems tend to be, but have a lift and a span that intensify their meaning:

Dans mon coeur il y a quelque part
Un mur du son
Qui se dresse, géant, nuit et jour
Entre le monde et moi.

There is too little poetry in this issue, too much politics, and only two articles of literary interest, one on the theme of négritude and one by Jahn "Sur la littérature africaine" in which he tries to consider the Africaness of African Literature.

Transition has devoted this number to Denis Williams; there is an extract from his novel, a letter from him and a review of the novel. The extract does not tell me much about Denis Williams's *Other Leopards*, as it is a difficult book to anthologise and the most interesting part is the last two chapters, where Froad (fraud ?) kills what he cannot beat and then attempts to nullify his outer self that was neither Lionel (Western) nor Lobo (African). In addition to this there is a good article on "The New Negro Dramatist" and another on Mphahlele's experiences as extra-mural tutor in Nigeria — "you should prepare people for exams" — a sentiment I must say I whole heartedly agree with and which I incorporated into every report I sent the then U.C.I. from Zaria. The only thing that spoils an otherwise good number is a ridiculous correspondence, centred around a Mr. Wali, who made some childishly insipid remarks of remarkable stupidity in a previous issue and which for some reason received the spanking of the "intellectual" set. Even Wole Soyinka was provoked enough to write five lines. The correspondence, I am informed, is to be continued in the next issue.

O. R. Dathorne.

THE GAMES WERE COMING BY MICHAEL ANTHONY. (DEUTSCH, 1964)

Those of us who followed the progress of Michael Anthony, first in *The Trinidad Guardian* and then in *Bim* and on the BBC's 'Caribbean Voices', will not be surprised by the delicacy and engaging simplicity of this, his first novel.

Those who know him personally will also expect the successful evocation of atmosphere which he achieves in this book. Some of the most indulgently nostalgic moments I have spent have been with Michael Anthony, recalling occasions and events on 'the old rock', as Trinidad is often affectionately called by her migratory sons and daughters. It is so characteristic that he should go fully back to Trinidad for his first novel, putting aside if only for the time being the fictive island of West Indian novelists and migrant problems. After all, he can still recite chunky passages from the *Little Folks' Trinidad.*

He returns to his Trinidad with a love and tenderness reminiscent of his own earlier attempts in verse. There is his feeling for the beauty of San Fernando, for the atmosphere of The Games at Guaracara Park and of Carnival Monday and Tuesday down The Coffee.

The story is simple enough. Leon having turned cyclist and registered a victory over the current champion, is spurred on by this and his one ambition is to become champion. This requires two of the greatest sacrifices a Trinidadian can be called upon to make, to put the approaching Carnival out of his mind and his girl out of his life almost. (It is a little strange that only the latter is a temptation; but then one of the weaknesses of the novel is the failure of the author to get *inside* Leon.)

Now Sylvia, Leon's girl, "a nice, cool easy-going girl", admired by one and all for her uprightness, has been enjoying a complete affair with Leon. So she becomes truly lonely and frustrated and falls an easy prey to her employer. The ensuing disaster compels her to take steps quite alien to her nature, steps which humiliate her and may yet do worse for both herself and Leon.

A very slight story indeed, with very little incident. I had always feared that Michael Anthony's appeal as a short-story writer might well prove to be his weakness as a novelist. For I had loved his short stories for their simplicity, almost for their fragility. It turns out that he seeks, quite rightly, to make capital of this, and in the attempt imparts a certain gracefulness to the book.

But it is a pity there is not more character-interest. Leon is dull and hardly drawn at all, so that there is a world of possibilities in the Leon-Sylvia conflict that go unexploited. We regret this all the more because of Mr. Anthony's success, without attempting too much, in getting inside Dolphus, the smaller brother, and making us like him to the point of forgetting Leon. Dolphus, likeable a portrait as he is, would in fact be called by E. M. Forster a ragged end. Similarly the apparent intention is unrealised of using the off-state copulation of the mother and father and the happiness this engenders in the middle-aged couple as a foil to the unwholesome relationship between the youthful Sylvia and her ageing employer.

There are other weaknesses. But when all is said, this is not a novel of which it could be said that it ought not to have been written at all. Simplicity and gracefulness are Mr. Anthony's forte and are very much in evidence here. One is also struck by the naturalness with which he weaves the Trinidad idiom into the texture of his prose. The effect of all this is to charm us on, and we are duly rewarded when every now and then a section of the book lights up. There are indeed not a few promising and rewarding things in this novel, and not least among them the final scene when we are literally and completely transplanted into the emotional arena of The Games.

Mr. Anthony's second will be eagerly awaited by all who read his first.

Arthur D. Drayton

ANTHOLOGIE DE LA LITERATURE NEGRO—AFRICAINE: ROMANCIERS ET CONTEURS I by Leonard Sainville (Presence Africaine, Paris, 1963).

In the long introduction he wrote to his *Anthology of Negro-African Prose Writers* Leonard Sainville emphasized his conception of his work as follows: "This book is a tool and a means of propaganda...

a repertory of the works that have expressed unequivocally the fight of the negroes against colonial or imperialist oppression."

Needless to say one adheres to this moral aim; no political or moral appreciation is to be found here, only a literary one. As an anthology that is a tool for students, Sainville's work is an interesting but not a very handy book.

The matter itself is abundant enough, and if the second volume is similar to the first, no notorious writer will have been neglected. It is rather the technical form which can be discussed. Sainville has made an effort to give a new formula of an anthology. The work is made of seven parts (3 for the first volume), each part grouping a series of texts referring to a common theme. For instance part 2 is entitled: "Primacy of the picturesque in the traditions and morals." This conception of an anthology by main themes rather than by mere geographical distribution results in a fairly confusing cutting up of national literatures. Obviously, any novel is rich enough to provide a text fitting each of the 7 "themes". This leads to certain cases of injustice. Consequently without apparent reason, a double importance is given to "The old negro and the medal" (2 extracts in 2 different parts) rather than to Oyono's main work: *Une vie de boy;* a double importance is given to Sainville's extracts compared with Edouard Glissant's, whose novel "La Lézarde" is justly world-famous.

Again and consequent to his method, the very same extract is given twice in two different parts; there are two such cases. Then, the choice of the extracts is not always appropriate to the headline. *Down Second Avenue* by E. Mphahlele is done in 20 lines about "two goats", the first part entitled, "The homeland, awakening of nationalism". Curiously enough, Sainville's choice of his own extracts under this same headline, consists in two descriptions of landscapes, having just stated the leading theme of his novel as being the social problems in Martinique.

This is enough to show the difficulty of an anthology by themes, the choice of which requires an exceptionally rigorous mind. There is some injustice in the relative importance of extracts, questionable choice of quite a few extracts under certain headlines; these are general defects in the structure of the book.

There is besides a complete irregularity in the presentation of each writer. To take examples near to us: Chinua Achebe is given a good analysis with an extract of 20 lines, Cyprian Ekwensi is granted a summary of *People of the City* and no quotation at all. Benjamin Matip is given an analysis 5 times longer than the actual extract of "Africa, we ignore thee!".

The usual pattern of presentation is: (a) an appreciation of the author in large letters, (b) a summary of the work in italics, (c) an extract, the first two items being, as a rule, much longer than the extract.

We come, lastly, to consider the style which cannot pass undetected, since Sainville himself writes: "...but it is time to come back to the heart of the matter"...or:..."texts will talk better than we ...", as he is obviously aware of his own prolixity. The introduction is a piece of political pamphlet-style writing and while we can adhere to the spirit, we cannot appreciate the letter.

To his credit, Sainville has done justice to African and American writers, especially to American writers, who are usually neglected in literary histories and anthologies. He gives for instance a remarkable appreciation of Richard Wright's *A Native Son*, as well as an interesting survey of West Indian literature, both of French and English expression.

Much richer than the also very recent "Anthologie de la Littérature Africaine", Sainville's work offers a comprehensive view of negro prose writing brought together without distinction of language, which is a new and interesting perspective.

This, Sainville says, is only a step further on the way to universal culture, ... "others will do better". Indeed, after this compromise between literary criticism and anthology, after Lylian Kestelot's analysis of "The themes in negro literature", scholars still feel the need of an anthology in the traditional manner, with as comprehensive a span as Sainville's *Anthology of Negro-African Novelists and Story-tellers.*

Christine Makward.

YEMI BISIRI: A YORUBA BRASS CASTER by Ulli Beier. (Mbari Publications, Ibadan, 1963).

Ulli Beier has been doing a very interesting and welcome series of photographic books on traditional Nigerian arts. Among them have been the one on mud-sculpture and others on modern artists in Africa. The most interesting thing about these books is the opportunity it affords everyone to know about a number of the works of these artists at a fairly detailed and close range. Although we cannot say that we enjoy a work of art in a photograph as much as we do the original, nevertheless what his lost in the process is gained in the type of detailed knowledge of the forms which we normally tend to miss at first when looking at an original.

Edan is a very intimate type of art, the beauty of which is almost reserved for members of the cult. Ulli Beier's book has brought to the uninitiated an opportunity to participate to some extent in this beautiful art-form. Since these *edans* are fairly small figures which are very difficult to see and appreciate fully except at very close quarters, this makes a photographic book about them very enjoyable and aesthetically satisfying.

I do not think that the style of abstraction is an attempt at expressing the symbols of the cult, as Beier suggests, in the shape of the limbs and the face. I think that this style of distortion came very naturally with the limiting size of this art-form and the natural tendency for African artists to be bold in expression. As an artist I cannot think of how else I could put facial features on figures of this size except, broadly, in the way done on the *edans*. In fact in general outline and shape they look very much like mud sculpture of this size which we did as children — a sort of matchstick-art in mud. (A piece of mud is rolled between the palms and then cut to the length required for the torso. More mud is rolled thinner and stuck on for the limbs in one continuous shape and bent at the ends for the hands and feet. After that one can stick on as many additional features as one likes, like ornaments and head-dresses, apart from the mouth, the eye and the nose which are stuck on boldly as on *edans*).

This in no way means that Bisiri's art is infantile but instead he has been able to achieve works of beauty and power working within the limitations imposed by the size, and has developed a subtlety in brass casting. Ulli Beier's book amply states this.

Demas Nwoko.

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BLACK ORPHEUS

A JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AND AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

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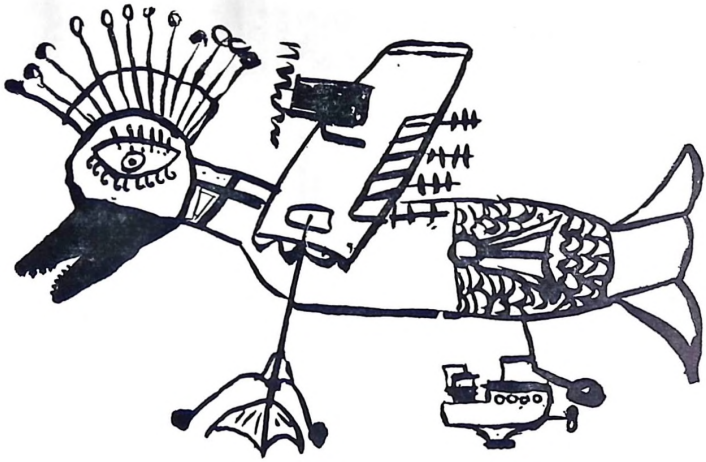

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BLACK ORPHEUS No. 16

OCTOBER, 1964.

EXCERPT FROM A NEW UNFINISHED NOVEL — THE EYE OF THE SCARECROW.

BY WILSON HARRIS

The horse was trotting amiably along Water Street when suddenly — without the slightest warning — it reared; neighed stridently. The respectable-looking carriage it drew lurched and appeared to be toppling on its side when it narrowly righted itself. The driver descended from his high box, held the dream-ridden horse by the reins, and began reassuring him. The horse seemed to possess a sinister memory and yet still to respond — out of a grateful and fearful desire — to the human, if not divine hand upon its neck and head. It was the custom in these parts for horses to wear shades against their eyes which allowed them to see straight ahead, up or beneath, but never from side to side, so whatever it was had frightened the creature may have passed right under or above its nose and then beyond the cloak of sight.

An old man and a young boy sat inside the carriage. They, too, like the supernatural driver and the supernatural horse belonged to this and every age of an insufficiency of vision. They came out into the street looking bewildered and blindfolded themselves. It was a still flowing night all around them they did not appear to see. Sightless they may have been like the bright lid of the street light overhead which had acquired a curious halo of flying insects, out of which unbroken circle every now and then a pair of wings flew straight at the vulnerable pilot of flame which revealed itself to be less vulnerable than imagined; — its own alert and deadly and protective skull of a transparency like glass.

The incident occurred within a stone's throw of the ancient and modern riverwall, and the timeless river stood waiting to be discerned like a dark floating ball on which the lighted shadow of its own interior had formed itself into ships whose cargo was no less than the motion of the earth.

It was impossible to say what had startled the cryptic head of the horse. Its hide crinkled and shuddered and trembled all over and through its beaked eyes there issued a rolling and endlessly perturbed glance.

The driver endeavoured to calm its affright so that the carriage might proceed but without success. The horse stood as if riveted to the ground; with its head flung back and its presence against the river and the sky it acquired both the illumination and the fringes of shadow inherent in Night — an extraordinary witness of Raven's Head gate or barrier. It was turning into its own forbidding gateway on the North, the Gateway of Fear.

There were, after all, four possible approaches to Raven's Head town sometimes called Hebra's Town: Raven's Head Gate on the North, Hebra's Gate on the South, the Suspension Bridge on the West and Sorrow Hill on the East. And these approaches were ceaselessly inclined to grow blurred and insensible to their origins — to be drained as it were of all consciousness of a dialogue with the emotion or genius of place and to become outcrops of common mud or stone shaped by the indifferent hand of the dead god of the seasons into an arrested weathercock.

On all sides a siege was laid to the *will*, the will to go forward until one's resolve became — caught in its own paradox — the fortress of environment. The ancient gun which had once boomed at the gateway of the Demerara fort on the riverwall was now silent; silent as a dream of infant thunder in the heart of Sorrow Hill, a silence which was both the mature issue and the startled product of a crippled role and inborn struggle anew for comprehension within incomprehension.

Morning and night for a century or more the great gun used to shake the primitive approaches to the city and it was at such an early or late pregnant hour — though it had long ceased to fire as in the commanding years before — the horse and carriage of the Ancient of Days stopped and responded: a permanent fixture or capture this was which had nevertheless been transported into the interior, elsewhere and everywhere, appearing equally fixed — the late mental door and early battering ram of besieger and besieged.

It was — in spite of the universal predilection for waging symbolic war — a totally different ornamental approach if one sought to enter the lost town by re-discovering Hebra's Gate. It had always been, even in the best of years, a difficult problem to keep this unpredictable door and roadway open to the traffic of work-ridden and travel-ridden vehicles crawling like nightmare motorised infantry against the endless density and abstraction of space on earth. The ghosts which paraded were equally reminiscent of mechanical age and youth though it was most difficult to say who was captor and who captive. No image of respectable fantasy existed here; neither stately procession nor horse nor carriage; the landscape was genuinely wild in a manner which seemed to lay bare the true and darkest intimate recesses of the life of proliferate nature, the life of the born jungle against the life of a disintegrating tribal society.

There were even expanses along the variable road — like stitched cloth of grass within a hostile though withdrawn brooding encirclement — where the tribal shepherd appeared still intact. The grazing spirits of his cattle sometimes broke the fences and crossed the open road hereabouts, seeming still almost totally oblivious to the sudden possible acceleration of enemy traffic. In fact everything depended on the alien driver's reflex or invading clutch of instinct, the fluid brake of all vehicular times present to him, to save them (and himself from running them down) in a stationary past which was all that was present to them. The mooning cows spent an age in their slow exasperating

walk from one eternal parapet to another reflecting their own archaic memory of address and landscape where the surviving march of ridge or valley was infinitely retarded, infinitely slow. The volcanic pace of everything subsided within a certain reduction of the span of lightning consciousness into an obsolescent earthborne sleep which came close to recapturing the dreamless clarity and innocence of babe in an antique cradle. Within such a slow almost totally withdrawn figure of progress the animal of fate and patience learnt to move; its advantage over the horse, dream-ridden horsepower, gear, clutch, brake and driver, lay in its insusceptibility to the nerves of both flight and fear. It never actually ceased to move across its pedestal, however indifferently and still slowly, in response to its own scale of proportion and attunement, the universal arrested diaphragm of every glaring landslide; and with this unerring statuesque degree of just motion the animal's head lifted, swung *now*, *deliberately*, to address the oncoming rush and menace of an approaching machine: something which was — in the eye of the sacred cow of Raven's Head — truly lacking in all swift exposure, instant credibility, substance or dread.

But (and it was the first time the driver of the machine was deceived) a misconception arose which remained implacably framed in the mind of place — the *Inn or Resthouse of the Quartering of the Cow* — one of a number of signs pointing to the ancient mining town. *He* (the driver) was certain the animal had swung its head in order to turn and sidle to the left as well as back the way it had come. It was an elementary manoeuvre, he felt, and the equilibrium and assurance of the beast made it appear obvious and inevitable. Furthermore a certain self-confidence in his own eye of judgement — room and place — had been paradoxically aroused scarcely a moment ago, when shortly before he drove out of the twilight encampment of the jungle into the shepherd's clearing he had discerned the tigercat of the bush. The tiger — known in this locality as deer-tiger — the 'cat with the devil's horns' — was dressed as always in her deceptively gentle reddish brown coat. Her eyes, however, were naked in their own fierce right. The instant she spotted the driver upon her, there was a flash of lightning, vibration, tuning fork, *spring*, the plucked harp of motion, *gone*. She had vanished as if the earth had opened and swallowed her and the intervening light void of black consciousness, the open tumult of everything, nervous precipice, vicarious *impact*, death (for though she had escaped he almost dreamed he had hit her) landfall, waterfall, were all reduced to incomprehension and vast silence. Out of which emerged an inflation of *his* not *her* achievement, the certainty that it was *he* who had seen *it* and skilfully avoided all.

The balloon of false reaction led straight to the roots of premature self-assurance and conviction. Far from sidling back to her side of the road, the cow, that incredibly slower beast, continued to march forward. It was too late for him to stop or for her to change her hide and escape. The mortal blow she received was like a shattering of his own barrier of stupidity and indifference and predictable image.

BY A. B. SPELLMAN

AFTER THE HORSES

it was in her hands
& he tasted it.

no water was ever
sweeter, or more welcome,
as the flowers that bloom.

he thought, it waits, i see
it there, like a man with an
answer. he said, love
i'd see you grow
in the snow. i
would blow on your fist
& have it open to my mouth
as petals.

for they were never
lovers. it was more a fire
they held in their heads
& gave freely, &
quietly, in a country
& time where all lies
& all theft were impossible.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?? (4 QUICKIES)

I

it's a cat climbing
a tree
fat cat
with a fat fly-
he climbed
so high the entire public
eye could see
the lump swell on his thigh

oo-ee!
lookit me
in this tree !!

II

faster than i am
are you

funny as you
are, am i.

faster than funny,
you are than i, am, to
me, baby.

III

times was dangerous. the darkbrownskinned buck
aroo was backedup to the bar. the bartender split. everybody split. & the light
went out.

to use his advantage
he reached without warning. his lightning hand shot
to his hip & came up empty.

IV

her face is unusual. it has no line
to speak of. no shadow.

her eyes are brown. they follow
you to the wall.

MY HAT IN THE RING

Woman will always be there. she
will be the glass over my eye
& I will see nothing
but in her focus:
moon & water
Sun
& sky
what noise the light makes, going out

: I lay her flat
against the face of the world

& she makes no noise at all

THE HONEYDRIPPER

mine
the hot eye

love, the sun, water
her will's in the bedroom
her knees in the sky

the night's happening somewhere else
let's party.

remember this rhyme
'dime' & 'wine'? piccolos
in bus stations? 1943?

wine i didn't drink. the
soft parts of women were all the way
in paris to me, but to the man in the piccolo
i was as spodiodi as anybody.

given that heaven that preachers deal
i'd rather steal my meals

when love, the hot rhyme
beats in time, slime, wine, dark, knees.

THE BEAUTIFUL DAY

i'm watching you standing
in the bathtub like a lake
staring
at your flowers in the windows
wiping your tits with a pink & white towel.

you have a face beneath
your face & it seeps out of the lines
of your prussian profile

i think of what hides & rears up
your face
the soft pink cunt beneath the pink towel
i reach like a pauper for my crotch.
in the window the pic-a-bec pulls the day
to its roots from a world where war breaks
like a day in my conscious mind.
in my hand
swells my other mind on a streak of pink
in my eye.
once moved the eye jumps along
your body as an impure want
as a thirst of flowers for sun
it reaches

BY ALBERT COSSERY

The sudden riot of her inflamed senses carried Faiza into another world. She felt herself growing and overflowing manyfold into infinity. She felt that life itself filled every fibre of her existence, while the man's life dissolved into infinite detachment. There was something in her of the tense, provocative laziness of the city, an oriental city with its palaces and lights.

Her passion swayed to the rhythm of barbaric music. Like the hips of a dancer, twitching in trance, she was seized over and over again by sudden waves of hot desire. The sound of castanets approached from dark surrounding, coming closer and closer. She heard the screams of a group of gesticulating women, as if they were celebrating the exorcism of a demon. All this happened at the outer, extremely pain conscious level of her existence. Her nerves were tense to the point of tearing. The man's sex pierced her like a blade. He was impatient like a stream. What stream? The gigantic Nile with its treacherous currents flowed through her. She felt it carried her kindly to its mouth and into the infinity of the sea. A holy flood fertilised the land of her happiness. This sense of happiness rose, swelled like a mounting wave. She was entirely saturated with happiness, became happiness herself.

They both lived only the thoughtless up and down of their desire. Just like the Sakieh, the water wheel, turns with its many buckets, so they were turning round the centre of their desire.

Faiza was seized by a madness, that still grew all the time. The exorcism seemed to reach a unique degree of intensity. The devil raged within herself, and she was ready to succumb to him and weep in solitude. She was simple minded and really believed she was the victim of an evil spirit. That was the opinion of all her relatives too and above all of her father, Abou Affan Effendi, the customs officer. And the girl

believed that the evil spirit was the fire that glowed in the depths of her body and consummed her night and day, and that she could calm it only in the dominating embrace of the strange, sleeping man.

Mahmoud slowly withdrew, in order to be by himself. When the embrace had ended, he fell back into his usual lethargy. His exhausted body was calm and without desire. There was nothing in him but calm, and a strange narcosis. He had never felt as tired, as after this fight. He felt somehow repentent, because he had disturbed his dreamlike existence with this tiring behaviour. His entire body revolted against it. He glowed. And this girl at his side, preventing him from sleeping... there she was now, and sighed. How useless it all seemed.

"Bastards, bastards" he mumbled into the emptyness. But however weak his voice, the girl had heard him cursing. She had always heard him murmur that, as if in his sleep. It was his favourite rhyme, with which he returned to her from his frequent withdrawals from the world. She believed that whenever he left her, it was in order to descend into the depths of hell.

"What bastards? Whom are you always insulting?"

With a dull almost extinguished look he regarded her from the side and appeared to think. The girl's question had destroyed the narcosis that had filled him so pleasantly. He did not like questions, not even the harmless words that called for an automatic answer.

"How should I know" he said, and his absent voice seemed to come from a deep well. "Creatures, people, animals who knows. They are all bastards, I tell you."

"But where are they, tell me that" the worried girl pressed him again.

She was pale and quite confused by his incomprehensible words. She never succeeded in getting anything out of him. His conversations were shapeless and disconnected like the rags of a beggar. She could never find the thread with which she might have stitched them together.

"Listen, answer me. You are falling asleep again," she said and groped with a fearful hand for his lazy body.

Yes, he was falling asleep again, and she knew that she would not be able to keep him awake any longer. Thus she left him in peace and remained steeped in her own thoughts.

It was strange, but she was not frightened to be alone with this man in this weirdly uncanny chamber under the roof. She was not thinking of the position she was in nor the place. She thought of all the time she had spent in his bed, trembling and sweating with heat. The afternoon had been endless: endless also the supper with the entire family. As soon as her parents had gone to sleep, she had escaped, had swayed an eternity on the dark stairs until she reached the roof. He nearly refused to open at first. She had to light the candle herself. Then she had slipped to him on to the stinking, disgusting fibre matress. Submissively she had waited for him to take possession of her, had waited for his desire to deliver her from her tension. In order to tempt him out of his lethargy, she had dared caresses that had been unknown to her until that day. Caresses, which an evil spirit had evoked from the depths of her knowledge.

Faiza thought she was dreaming, everything around her seemed to confirm this opinion. If she was not dreaming, how could she be here without being afraid? Only in one's dreams one lived outside time. She was unable to grasp reality except in the narrow framework in which she had grown up and matured. But outside this family

circle, everything was a dream. And that attracted her and gave her the courage to do all these unusual things.

And this oppressive heat — was it a dream too? No, she could not believe that any longer. Whether she liked it or not, her dull spirit finally refused to cling to the unreal. She decided to awaken Mahmoud.

Shaken out of his dreams, the man's voice appeared feeble and distant, as if it had wandered through the entire world: "Bastards! Bastards!"

"Again? Have you not yet finished with your curses? Wake up, in the name of the Prophet. Why are you sleeping all the time? I am frightened to be alone here."

"All those bastards," Mahmoud proclaimed slowly and moved his hand over his face. "No, now they are gone... I dreamed just now, I was being pursued by a pack of dogs. There were black ones, white ones and some with red skins. They frightened me tremendously... I escaped into a narrow hedgelined path, got lost in cul-de-sacs but they were always behind me with their long, long teeth. Maybe they were wolves, I don't know. Listen, girl. You better go now."

He wanted her to go away quickly, so that he could continue his dizzy race without witnesses in sleep. This girl, who offered herself to him, meant nothing to him at all. The only thing that mattered to him was this little hashish ball, that one could chew with relish, in order to extract all the juice, or that one could dissolve in the intoxicating smoke of a *goza*. Simply because he had taken the girl once, when he was under the influence of the heavenly drug, he could not get rid of her now. If at least she would keep quiet! But no, she had frightening and ridiculous habits that irritated him. He would have liked to teach her to sleep, to revere sleep, this brother of death, whom he loved so much, but she did not understand these things. She was stubborn, like all girls of her kind.

For five days now, the poor Mahmoud had not had a grain of hashish. It was an unparrelled achievement, that looked like the beginning of repentance, but which in reality was due only to the lack of the extraordinary metal called silver. He could not understand why people attached so much importance to that damned metal, nor why it existed at all. This very morning he had explained in vain to Master Darwish, the owner of the hashish joint in Abdini, how inhuman it was to demand money from people who could not earn any, and how absolutely necessary it was for him, Mahmoud, never to run out of the fatal drug. But the bastard did not want to listen. He simply shook his head, and stroked a little boy sitting beside him. They were all narrow minded people who prevented him from enjoying the only real happiness he had found in this miserable world. There were probably thousands of this type, who constantly disturbed him by crossing his path, delaying him and giving him no peace. When he walked through the streets he did not look at anybody he hated them so much. All these busy people around him carried out meaningless work, that seemed to weigh down his own shoulders and threatened to squash him.

"Why are you lying there like that staring into space," the girl said, who did not notice that she ought to go away. "Black and white dogs and others with red skins: What is that supposed to mean? I will ask Om Hanafy. She knows how to interpret dreams. What are you really, a man or a demon? By the beard of the Prophet, what kind of life is this you are leading?"

Mahmoud had really no desire to reply, but the last question worried him just a little bit. How he lived? A rare question. He told himself that it really ought to be answered, yet he could not do it. No, he did not know how he lived. And it was good

like that. "How I live? Is that your concern? It is true, that I dream all the time. Your Om Hanafy is a whore. She knows nothing about it. No woman understands anything about it. The dogs do not only occur in my dreams; they are always after me; I cannot leave this room without being discovered by them; they follow me, appear in a thousand different shapes and transform themselves into all kinds of vehicles. One day I will be run over by them and die. They will bury me in an old peasant oven..."

To be buried in an old peasant oven was not one of his usual hashish jokes. No, he knew it, and his mouth smiled in the grey landscape of his face, drunk with sleep. The fact was that under the influence of hashish he often dreamed that he was inside a large peasant oven. Its walls were crusted with soot and its ceiling was lost in the overcast sky. Very new twenty piastre pieces were glistening temptingly on the floor; reluctantly he picked them up in one corner, from which white clouds emerged, an adolescent girl imitated the belly dance, with the obscene gestures of an old funfair dancer. In another corner there were dwarf palms, that carried all kinds of precious stones instead of dates. Mahmoud discovered himself squatting next to an apple seller who exclaimed incessantly;" I sell virgins' breasts." From where he sat, he could watch the baker, as he lined up the large maize loaves after pulling them out of the oven. And then the most lovely and amazing thing happened. These loaves, which the baker had lined up put on the appearance of living flesh and they swelled up until finally they were shaking like fat smooth women's bottoms. Mahmoud was disturbed and amazed by the sight. And then, without knowing how, he was suddenly on a large deserted field on which hashish grew in wild confusion.

"An old peasant stove? Who can be buried in an old peasant stove? That is not true, nobody is buried there. Why are you always telling such tales? By the beard of the Prophet, you are sick. Somebody said the other day, that you were smoking some such dirty drug, that would make you mad. No, I can't remember who it was. But they talk all kinds of things about you in the quarter and I shudder when I hear them talk, and I wish I would die."

"Stop it now, you foolish thing," said Mahmoud impatiently. "Will you stop worrying my ears with your accursed gossip? Do I care what they are talking about me? Am I a virgin wanting to be married? All the people living in this quarter are fools. And the women are all whores. The only thing they know, when there is no man at hand with whom they could sleep is to gossip. I should like to piss on their heads! As for the drug that is supposed to make me mad, I haven't even smelted it for five days. The world will soon come to an end. If this lasts for a few more days, the world will not last."

"And why should the world not last?" enquired the girl. She was quite confused in her naivety.

"Yes my girl. I am telling you, the world cannot continue to exist. How can you want a world without hashish to exist? And hashish is about to vanish from the earth. God does not want to allow hashish smoking again. Kaabour has told me that. Don't you know Kaabour? He is an amazing fellow. You know what he does since he heard the news? He collects all the hashish he can find and hides it carefully in the shop of his uncle, the shoemaker. But he is a bastard. How can he hide it? Who hides hashish?"

Mahmoud had never believed the strange news that Kaabour had given him. The thought that hashish might disapear completely, had occupied him throughout several

days, but he had not been able to find the slightest indication that it could be true. But now, when he had failed to obtain the desired drug, he imagined the disastrous order had come into force and enjoyed to see himself a victim among thousands of others. If it was a general catastrophe it seemed more bearable.

"Is anybody hiding hashish?" he repeated. "Curse be his father! It must be spoiled hashish if he hides it. Otherwise he would have smoked it. May Allah transform all those bastards into pigs. I want to smoke, girl, I must smoke."

"Must you really smoke?" The girl asked. And she began to grow tired of the mysterious incomprehensible talk.

"Why smoke?"

"Why smoke? To forget, girl."

"To forget what?"

"Don't you understand? To forget all those bastards. All these dogs, who pursue me with their long teeth. To forget — and to avoid all those cars, trains, vehicles and shopkeepers who always demand money. Oh, to escape into the oven and then on to the enormous meadow, where hashish grows wild... like clover."

He stopped, amazed at having talked so much. As after an hashish orgy he felt a sudden desire for fruit and sweets. The air was stuffy in the room, because the door was closed. The candle in its bottle neck was slowly burning down. The girls limbs were pressed closely to Mahmoud's body, and he felt his desire awakening once more with the contact; as if under the compulsion of an irrestible fate he carressed her full hips right down to her thighs.

But his carresses did not provoke any more lust in Faiza. Her satisfied flesh could no longer be excited. The evil spirit was dead this time, really dead. This realisation confused her. An agreeable calm overcome her from all sides, like a fresh breeze, fanned her, lulled her and sang her to sleep. Everything around her seemed endlessly remote. She sat up, looked for her crumpled dress on the mattress and slowly put it on. She was determined to go away.

"Go on, go and leave me in peace," the moody voice of the man was heard. "Because of you, I may lose my sleep all to-gether. By Allah, I do not know who has thrown me into this roof. Cursed be the day on which I moved in here. But it seems to be fate, that I have to experience nothing but disgust. Before I lived in the cellar of a house that belonged to the Wakfs', nobody asked one for rent. Next door lived a newly married street lighter. But that bastard used to rush to his wife every time he was overcome by desire and he left the streets of the government unlit. After a few weeks he got the sack. Then his wife started to cry day and night and prevented me from sleeping. That's why I moved. I can't find peace anywhere. If only I had a little bit of hashish. But no, there isn't any more hashish and the world won't last long."

When Faiza had come for the first time she had been terrified. She had wanted to leave but she could not. An overpowering narcosis had held her back and her imobilized look was directed towards everything and nothing. The candle which was nearly extinguished formed black smoke that rose to the ceiling like a thin strand of hair. Next to a disorderly pile of rags there was a water cooler, crusted with dirt and affecting her like a growing menace. Faiza remembered also the worn out cap in the kitchen, and the sink that overflowed on the bricks.

She tried to get up and stop the water that threatened to flow over the whole house. But how could she tear herself away from the sleeping man? How to leave him entirely

alone surrounded by so much danger? While he slept she could not abandon him to his fate. Even in his sleep she felt tied to him.

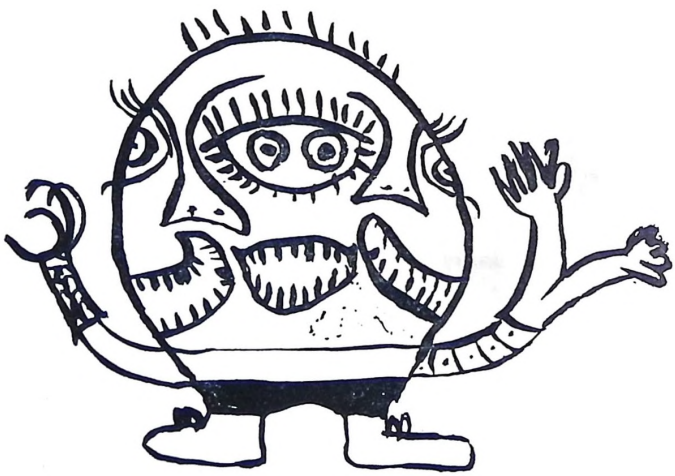
In the flickering light of the candle it looked as if small waves ran over the naked body of the man. The girl looked at the thin sinewy body over which the light danced with blue reflections, and it gave her an unbelievable, wonderful satisfaction. She stretched out her hand in order to touch him. She found that he glowed like a city in the summer. He stored in him the heat of all hot days, like glowing sand. She bent over him, as over a desert.

Thus she remained deeply tied to this body from which emanated a breath of animal and primitive tenderness. She sensed him in every fibre of her body. This was stronger than everything else. Stronger than the house with its firm walls. Stronger than the wind blowing through the doors. Stronger than the wild current of the river during the floods. She was thirsty. She did not know what kind of thirst this was. She bent over the naked body of the man and kissed him. Now she understood what this man meant to her. No, not he was the evil spirit. The evil spirit was all that separated her from him. The hours she had to spend without him, the sad room in which he lived, her parents, who kept her imprisoned with their stupidly exaggerated fear and their undignified prejudices — they were the evil spirits. No, this man certainly was not an evil spirit. On the contrary, he was the death of the evil spirit. He was happiness, the greatest bliss of the liberated, living flesh.

She began to understand everything and to grasp his reality. Thus she discovered the tremendous power of the flesh. The man now looked to her like a small sick child which she wanted to cuddle and look after like a mother. Oh, to give him everything and to be able to make him happy.

"The world will never come to an end," she said. "Be not afraid. Let me stay with you and if you cannot live without hashish, I will bring you some. May Allah."

He did not listen. He was far away. He was on the enormous meadow, on which hashish grows wild like clover.



BY PAUL THEROUX

SUCCUBUS

Instead of trees or flowers, her
And the faces she hauls with her
I sample.

A lotus blooms pink from an old husk
After many years; but my head
Turns from this symmetry to her mouth, eyes.

Isn't it safety, pause we seek
In lotus petals or in the grass?
Hold them in your left hand, define with your right.

But try to define the demon held against
Your chest as you write sometime;
Ogle and repeat those black blossoms.

Natural things are still. But man
Cannot blossom bound,
Wisped with smiles. She, unfragrant,

Makes the tracery that takes me on,
Exacts my awful patience; the faces, the eyes,
I sample all prone as I crawl now with the demon inside.

ORGANUM FOR THE EUNUCH HORN

Cut and fit, a child of music,
He plans his glandless organum.
He picks out the stray sounds
From the throats of the loutish
Gone raw in heat.

He waits to riddle the air,
To prong the air with his sound;
Air, a willing copulatrix
To plug with music
Her head to ring. He waits.

Fitting music to words:
The job for this busy castrato
Doomed to watch from his various lofts,
Church and harem; yet he is cursed,
Doomed and charmed to watch.

He makes the curses lovely
With his meddling horn;
All his precious truth.
Yet full of dread when he sees nothing
But himself making those high sounds.

He fears the high gay sounds,
Queenish and without desire.
He strums on us who die.
But sing the truth he must, he says,
In a world of sour muscle.

He sees all the bordelieri
From his lofty point somewhere;
Holy, they say, because of his loss.
We pay for the trick.
He runs and blurts it out.

A squawk creeps into his song
When he sees men on our faces.
He is loathed for his eye,
Glassy and neutral and meaning no harm.
His, not a fairly unique horn.

I look up and hate him at once,
The one with the sung advice;
Neither girl nor boy nor god,

But closer than I,
Up to my conk in bodies.

He hovers next to the bed,
Beside it in a fever of scrutiny;
A gay fly with a high buzz,
Strafing us struggling out of fat skins.
He listens to the groans of the twins.

He hurtles too easily the hubbub,
The bodies before him, cok and chalky,
Peels back his eyes in my dark,
Apart, he prays to stay alive unchanged
So he can screech at me.

SONG

Now in our fire
We sing, rising,
Songs of dead eggs
Which crackle above the
Raw music of tin horns.

Should we bother to talk?
Should we bother to
speak of birth
Knowing the smell of the yolk?

Should we bother to talk?
Should we bother to
speak gagging
Knowing the throat-catching bones of words?

We should bother to sing,
To sing at most,
To sing with standing flames
Songs of dead eggs
Even if the words fall winged;
To sing.

POEM

Mirrored images of bitches' murderous beauty
Great me, call me to rooms reflected,
And I rush into the eyes of spaniel broads

Abandoning a vista for dressfuls of awkward parts,
Parcels for my own low calling.
I return my salute in their huffing way.

The assassins in glass sparkle coldly near
And almost touch me. Busy muses
And medusas of a past of the freak ballet.

They limber in the many-windowed rooms.
I choose one cold pane and, ribbon-like, embrace
The barking image of a bitch's just murderous beauty.

THREE PLAYS, BY JOHN PEPPER CLARK

BY ANTHONY ASTRACHAN

John Pepper Clark is in an unusual position for any playwright, much less a young playwright in a young country: his plays must be reviewed as literature by critics who have not seen them performed. This is the condition in which one often writes about Sophocles, Shakespeare, Racine. Fortunately, Clark can stand the comparison. At his weakest, he is more competent than many dramatists more widely known outside Africa; at his strongest, he is magnificent. His *Three Plays* can compete as equals on the stage of world literature without losing a cowrie's worth of their African qualities.

Lest the gods of tragedy deem the drawing of such praise *hubris*, let us ward off nemesis with a close, even a carping look. My doubts and disturbances, where they arise, do not detract from my opinion that Clark is a first-rate dramatist; great quality produces great expectations, and expectations should be examined.

Song of a Goat (proviously published by Mbari and performed, unfortunately for me, before I arrived in Nigeria) and *The Masquerade* are a related pair of tragedies that make one look to the *Oedipus* plays for analogy. The language and feeling of both are so rich in action that the reader is compelled to stage them in the theatre of his interior vision, and not having seen them becomes less of a handicap. The third play, *The Raft*, is not strictly speaking a tragedy and is less brilliant than the others, but as we shall see, it has something in common with them.

Song of a Goat tells of the fisherman, Zifa, who has become impotent after the birth of his first child. He and his wife Ebiere ask a masseur for help, but the masseur can neither cure nor remove the curse and suggests that Zifa make over Ebiere to his brother, Tonye. All three reject the notion, but the idea has been planted, and eventually Tonye and Ebiere make love but without ceremony. When discovered, Tonye hangs himself before Zifa can kill him, and Zifa drowns himself. Clark lists neighbours as chorus in this tragedy, but to me half the function of chorus is exercised by Orukorere, Zifa's

half-possessed aunt. Orukorere and the masseur between them also fulfil the role of Tiresias in *Oedipus Tyrannos.*

The language evokes the pity and terror which are the prime aims of tragedy, and the dramatic construction has an aura of doom. Both come out even in simple exchanges, as when Zifa, rejecting the masseur's suggestion, pleads for some other way out: "They say the crooked wood tells the expert carver." The masseur replies, "Not when the tree is blasted, my son." Orukorere evokes the terror of the offense that is still to come, in her half-crazed nightmare:

> I must find him, the leopard
> That will devour my goat, I must
> Find him. Surely his footsteps will show
> Upon the mud? Surely, those claws bloody
> From hunt of antelopes in the forest
> Will show in the sand? Or has the wind
> Swept them off before housewives come
> Upon them with brooms at break of day?
> Or sports him no spoors?

These and other lines are so rich in myth that again and again they bring to mind the Oedipus plays. And this speech of Orukorere's hints at a development by unveilling, a tragedy of revelation that is the keynote and the vehicle of action in *Oedipus Tyrannos.* Yet this is what in fact is missing in *Song of a Goat.* There is no development, no suspense, nothing like the change of Oedipus from saviour of Thebes to ruler to investigator to prosecutor to transgressor and victim. There is no change, growth or degeneration in Tonye and Ebiere to bring them to sin, nor are we sure their coming together is a sin. The masseur has said the forefathers allowed what he suggests, and at the very moment of passion Ebiere tells Tonye "it is a thing not forbidden!" If Clark means that adultery without ceremony is a sin, he does not make it clear.

And indeed the basis of the tragedy is not clear. Is Zifa's impotence after he has fathered one child punishment for an offense? An offense of Zifa's and one by his father are hinted, but never given enough emphasis to bear the burden of tragedy. Perhaps impotence is an offense in itself in a society where fertility is all; the sexual and agricultural imagery strengthens this suspicion. But there is no action on Zifa's part that brings him low. He even fails in his attempt to kill his offending brother — and it seems to me to ask too much of the reader or spectator to think that Tonye's suicide is caused by Zifa's pursuit of him. Tonye kills himself because he has offended his brother or dishonoured his family, not because — at least not only because — he is afraid of Zifa's wrath. Zifa's tragedy is a tragedy without cause. Tonye and Ebiere too, though they have done something, have had their act predicated from the beginning in Zifa's impotence so that they too seem victims of external forces.

The Masquerade is not only a sequel to *Song*, but a tragedy of the same kind, a tragedy without *hubris.* A young man, Tufa, has won the heart of Titi, a girl who has previously refused all suitors. There is some mystery about Tufa. In mid-play it is revealed that Tufa is the offspring of the accurst union of Tonye and Ebiere (who is now said to have died giving birth to him, though in *Song* she is merely said to have miscarried), and Diribi, Titi's father, drives him forth. When Titi follows him, Diribi pursues and kills her. Tufa goes off to kill himself, and Diribi, spiritually emasculated by his vengeance, is left to punishment in Forcados.

Pity and terror are again present in language and plot, the more so in the contrast between the lyrical love passage between Tufa and Titi in the first scene and the grim destruction of the last. There is more suspense, more development in the dramatic construction — the revelation does not come at the beginning and the characters react more strongly when it does come. Titi, for instance, rejects the idea that marrying Tufa necessarily means pollution:

> Well, is the seed to be crushed and cast
> Away because of aberration
> And blunder by those who laid out
> The field?

But Titi also rejects the chance to elope with Tufa, which might mean eluding the curse, because she wants to finish her bridal pageant. By insisting on the fulfilment of one custom, she lays herself open to the nemesis of another. This strengthens the myth qualities of the play.

So, perhaps, does the curse pursuing the family of Zifa, but again the curse is not brought down by action on the part of the tragic hero-victim. Diribi implies that Tufa transgressed by concealing his birth — the masquerade of the title. But how can it be a masquerade when Tufa does not know the circumstances of his birth until they are revealed in the market place? The curse on the house of Laius is renewed by a fresh act in each generation, witting (Antigone's burial of her brother) or unwitting (Oedipus's slaying of Laius and marriage with Jocasta). Similarly with the curse on the house of Atreus. But the curse on the house of Zifa depends on no act. It is an external force whose victims are helpless against it at best children of the tenth generation expiating their fathers Isms.

Even those not in the family become victims of its curse, like Diribi, magnificent in his passion after killing Titi:

> These hands you see are two streams
> And through several distributaries
> Have drained me to waste. For, you see,
> I have burst open my heart who was
> My daughter. Now who is man enough
> To take me to him at Forcados? They say
> He has stitches so strong
> They still and staunch the worst breach
> In the dam. But first sling about me
> The chains: So! Oh, how soothing their chime!
> Now pull tighter till trap come up
> With fish and nuts. But I will talk
> No more, no, no, no, no more till
> Skies crack open and soil thunders back.

In fact, this man is magnificent because he has acted, because he is an active victim rather than a passive one.

The Raft, too, is a play of victims, though it is no tragedy. It is the story of four men on a timber raft drifting down the Niger. They get caught in a whirlpool and rig

a sail so a storm will blow them out, but the raft breaks up and Oloto is carried off on the part with the sail. The three survivors drift until a steamboat comes up; Ogrope, trying to swim to the boat to ask a rescue, is beaten off by its crew and caught in its stern-wheel. Kengide and Ibobo drift on toward Burutu but become lost in the fog while trying to make a landfall by night. There is no why and wherefore — only the showing of four fairly well differentiated characters falling victim in different ways to a hostile environment. There is no apparent connection between a character and his particular misfortune.

The language is not so rich as in the other two plays; there are fewer metaphors, and the strengths lie in the evocation of life on the river and of Ijaw proverbs and customs rather than in the virtue of the words themselves. *The Raft* lacks the qualities of myth that make the other plays so intense.

One might say that the characters have too little action and the raft too much. When I read the play I thought it would be difficult to stage. The recent performance at the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan only confirmed the belief, despite clever staging by Wole Soyinka and good acting by Soyinka as Kengide and Segun Olusola as Ogrope. Clever staging cannot make great theatre out of a piece that has too little dramatic action. The difficulty might more easily be overcome on film or on television.

Still, producing all three plays at once on the interior stage, I am excited by the pity and terror of the two tragedies, by the vividness of their language and their myth-like qualities. I am more quietly pleased by the apparent accuracy of the dialogue and the unveiling of character in *The Raft*. I am also depressed by the fact that in all three plays, the protagonists are victims of punishment without cause, or punishment beyond their deserts, whether from society, gods or nature. Whatever the external force, it is like Zifa in *Song of a Goat* when he says, "See how with one stroke of my knife I sever the head from the trunk..... See how erect the blood spurts! It should cleanse the compound of all corruption today....." Only Zifa and the others are the goats, and like goats they go to the slaughter, not really knowing what kills them or what corruption they are to cleanse.

I can imagine someone saying, "Well, this is the way of Ijaw tragedy, and you cannot expect it to be like Greek tragedy." I would not be satisfied. Greek tragedy set the canons for world tragedy, and if Clark is good enough to be mentioned in the same breath with Sophocles, he owes us and himself a better strophe. The novels of Achebe and the plays of Soyinka show that individuals can assert themselves against society and environment and gods, in the most traditional cultures of Africa. I wonder if the things I find missing in Clark's plays are entirely deliberate omissions, left out in accordance with the dictates of a philosophy, a world view or a culture. These plays are all quite short. If Clark had to write a three-hour play as rich and intense as these, he might be forced to a degree of plot development and character assertion that he has not yet achieved.

Despite these dissatisfactions, John Pepper Clark has already achieved a great deal. Read these plays, see them when they are produced, and hope that Nigeria will soon be in a position to present them on foreign stages. Despite *and* because of Aristotle's canons of tragedy, Clark's plays are good plays, and if his best work is still to be written, Nigerian drama has a truly exciting future on which to raise the curtain.

BY LENRIE PETERS

Autumn burns me with
primaeval fire. Makes my skin
taut with vague expectation,
hurls me out of summer fatigue
on to a new Bridge of Sighs.

Somewhere I feel the heart
of the earth pumping, and down below
it bleeds in a million ripples.
I drop a sweet memory into
the flow and the cascading grips me with fascination.

Great trees in transit fall
are made naked in langour of shame
solitary like actors on a stage
like stars, orphans, celebrities,
politicians, uncomfortably mysteriously like you and me.

But I will not mourn the sadness.
I will go dead-leaf gathering
for the fire in a slice of sunlight
to fill my lungs with odours of decay
and my eyes with mellowed rainbow colours.

I will go creeping down tasselled
latticed tree-avenues of light
and listen to squirrel tantrums
punctuate the orchestration of autumn silence
and hold in my hand the coiling stuff of nature.

Then I will love
Yes, love; extravagantly under
the flutter of dying leaves
and in a shadow of mist
in wonder; for autumn is wonder and wonder is hope.

Yevtushenko disdains
Stalin was a barrier to art
You had to put him in
Like pepper and salt
And then play the part.
At least he was a hard nut
To be cracked with a sledge-hammer
Or simple disaster

Here you write as you please
But need a talent without music
Mind without ideas or desires
A bleeding ignorance of form
And language of obscurity
Then you are well mounted
And may even get published
If you don't forget the impotence of sex in words.

You can ruin your art
Trying to please them
Although you know you shouldn't
And that like affluent puppies
They will turn round and bite your fingers.

Look out of the window
The air is free swaying with lilac
Young cheeks are rosy
Malaria is out of the way
But the cold invisible hand
Call him Stalin, bureaucrat or tramp
Rules the professions, politics, religion
As well as art, inside and out.

Watching someone die
is a fraudulent experience
The deep significance if felt
the meaning escapes
like a child's first punishment.
The dying ravish your strength
whether by throttle of convulsive gasp
Or tideless fading away
like ancient familiar sounds in sea shells
the moment is the same
reinforced brutality to life
a rugged cliff bloodstained
with the agonising rhythm of many heads.
A cold demise; each
successive moment a banishment.
The terror is in leaving behind
the ache is in departing.

Humming phantasies crowd their stings
to seize and record the moment
the hands curl in spasm
to hold it back; this life, this infidel.
It is too late. Everything and nothing
has happened. A huge machine
the earth, grinds to a bolt-knocking halt.

It is the changing of the tide
at the boundary hour
Life like a handful of feathers
engulfed by cliff winds
one like yourself swept
Oh so swiftly into the anchorage of History
Tears and sighs sighs and tears
stamping the leaden feet
the solid agony of years
they all abound
one life or a million
contrived by nature or by man
greatly obscures the issue.
Face to face with dying
you are none-the-wiser
Yet it seems a most ignoble epitaph
'He was a man and had to die; after all.'

We need the eagerness
of children to listen,
learn, reflect as
well as for milk

Solid self reliance
is worth more than votes
as the voice of a bird
itself creates a meaning

Greatness is needful
and not to be
despised or feared; fear
only the half-leader

The sun disintegrates
in fragments; not
down the middle;
Integration is needful

Flesh and red clay
alike comprehend
the futility of
dissociation

Yet all dissociates
disintegrates like
autumn leaves
people too and love and sunlight.

Grief for loss
of faith threatens
the spirit; bisects the will
in oblique planes.

By diffusion we
lose syrup of greatness
the sky is too
familiar to lead

Knowledge and Democracy
Pledged equalisers
Corrupt will-marrow
and tell too many lies

Life's fuel is
greatness and mediocrity
Hitler burned away
Let saints have their round

Nietzsche fashioned
a diamond from black coal
The world stole it
smothered it in blood

Life moves vertically
and in circles
in Geometric extensions
close wedged with purpose

Buck passing seethes
with rush; contempt
of self indemnifies
but breeds chaos.

Love is juxtaposed to the Ego
    Competes with the Ego
Stands between it and life
    Like a dark photographic screen, inverted;
Terrifies with rat-tailed ambience
    As the French and Pagans use it
Nibbles at resistance with blaze of spectroscopic light.

At cellular level
    A mutilation of stress fractures
Ensure dangerous alteration of mood and shape
    Escape narrows the gaps
Makes solid ground — imprisons pain
    Of sharp modality.

A tight fermenting nucleus
    Procreates or dies
And each exploded fragment
    Punctures the flesh, wrings out the verves
Drives somnolence from the eyes.

The bones glow with rubbing as cave man knew
    And soul distilled in tears
Does not assuage the yearning or fears
    Yet through the cloudy maceration
A Gossamer line of destiny
    Transmits the rapture of danger
Into a flowered eternity of years.

BY GLORY OKOGBULE NWANODI

A MEMORIAL:

The shadow of dusk insists on house tops,
the songs of the moonlight play echo
in the ears;
there is a bugle call
and the dum-dum of drums
now and in time for the memorial,
a moulding of images of yesteryears ...

The sun is mellow on palmtops
and the rays of yellow beauty
reassert the dawn on window panes;
there is a bugle call
and the dum-dum of drums,
but only to rehearse
long-left legacies

in the midst of alien values —
rehearse in a tongue profane
to sacred creeds.

Rays of light permeate the smoke
of noisy factories
and the songs of moonlight plays
are fresh on youthful lips;

before these are lost and gone
our memorial shall be full and done.

SALUTE TO SONGHAI:

We have swum to the shore,
out of the waters,
away from the waves
on to a dry land;
but the land shakes
and our bodies smell
of the river mud,
and the water,
saline,
sticks on us
smelling, scratching.....

Elders look on
while goats give birth in barns.

Who then shall rid the land
of the smell of ourselves
decked and drenched on a land
that our tongues call strange,
that we may walk our land
as sons of our fathers?

The land shakes
and demons,
baptised in courts and councils
walk the streets;
and to live
we walk on toes, shivering,
like the *chameleon*
threading the infant earth —
shaking,
changing,
fearful.....

and silent dangers
greater than the rivers we swam
rock the shores,
wash our farms,
flood our homes.

ASIRU I

Details from two church doors: Daniel in the Lions den and Balaam's Ass.

II

Eve and the Snake

The Foxes and the Sour Grapes

IV The Camel and the needle ear and Jonah and the Whale

THE WORSHIPPER:

I have lain behind closed doors
naked,
sniffing the odours of camwood;
for four floods,
sighing at the fading indigo,
counting mauled cowries
among fish rafts
and stools of wood;
while the rest,
immersed in chalk and clay
chant:
Kwambelle! Kwambelle!

The echo resounds
and my head is immersed
in pitchers of ashes,
in broken pots and waters
of ressurrection
stagnant in pools of sacrificial blood:
my face will be cleaned
my hands will be cleansed.

Ojukwu!
that is unabating, untiring,
powerful wrathful.
Ojukwu!
undying..... life-long.
No.
Not till these trees fall,
till the body melts
between birth and rebirth
shall I cease pilgrimage
to your court.....

following the rest undress
feeling at rest and dressed,
chanting:
Kwambelle! Kwambelle!

II

Who shall stop you
Onuchi,
reeling your voice
at dusk and dawn,
calling for the search
of the palm-cutter
lost between dusk and dawn?

In the rush of blood,
in the flow of prophesy
your nerves stiffen around your waist
and you sit,
while the drummers stir
and the dancers heave
and chant:
Kwambelle! Kwambelle!

III

I have lain behind closed doors,
counting mauled cowries,
calling on the powerful, wrathful
Ojukwu.

On the threshold of prophesy,
without profanity;
on the truth of chalk and clay
and the immersion of the head
await the godhead —
in broken pots and waters
of resurrection

By J. P. CLARK

The sky, spliced as between a pair of scissors, falls in one vast, voluminous fold of night over the face of earth. Blindly, over wet weeds soaking through to my socks, I part my way up the drive to where a one-room flat squats smiling uncertainly by a bush no longer so primeval.

Out from the porch lurching into the lawn and no light, a shadow, declining encounter with my oncoming silhouette, shuffles on straight to beyond the hedge of hibiscus and cactus, although stuck really to one place.

I plomp univited into one of a twin set of straight-back deckies set outside the white-washed walls as if in readiness for a scene. And in silence, too, my hostess sinks, skirts neatly tucked between her knees, into the other, her anaemic cheeks burning to a fag-end brightness the laggard wind could not put out.

'In the wash of your eyes," suddenly she starts, 'I see the dirty frock of my life."

'That's not bad at all' I laugh, trying at the same time to take her hands in mine.

'Oh, no,' she shies away, refusing even to touch knees. 'I want to mend it, as from now, and I want your help.'

'Life or frock?' I ask in studied denseness.

'That's it' she giggles a little, quite like bells at communion.

'Now I don't even know which is which. But it certainly is choking me to death.'

'You are wet', I offer. 'Let me fan you. Here, that magazine, by the tea-set.'

'No, no, you mustn't touch me, yes, never again!'

'Are you all right?'

'Yes, I am. It's only a cold. I'll take two APCs and go to bed straight away.'

In the close volume of the evening the starch and the press of the apron-front of her dress shine like the underbelly of a fish doing a dying turn before the run. But still one sits, frail yet refusing to flounder any more for me to hang to my hook-end.

'Well, your frock is not buttoned up to the neck,' I splutter now, like a candle sprayed with table salt.

As a matter of fact, the collar, it's been frayed for some time now. And you know that yourself. I wear the frock still because my mother gave it to me as my twenty-first birthday present. Every week the washer people apply still more starch to give it shape and poise. Yes, as if the freshness will come back! And these buttons you see so bright fit into no particular holes.'

'When you are finished with picking all your loose stitches, there should be a gorgeous dress left to go to church or cocktails,' I tried to make light of the matter.

'You see, that's the rub!' she moves up to me, her face a mask behind which her eyes are two shifty dancing cowries. 'This dress that now holds as a safety belt went with me into the ward.'

'What ward? Tell me, were you ill? And when was this?'

'Poor, poor fool,' she pushes me gently aside for I had reached for her again without knowing. 'My dear fellow, of course that's my secret. The forbidden fruit lay wrapped in the parcel seven whole months. And who was to pluck it out? Neither bird nor beast would have it. I called out to the wild wind that ripens the corn to shake it free. Although among all that crowd in office and shops, I walked innocent-looking and dumb as ever, politely minding my own business as should every bachelor girl from a true Christian home.'

'You are making all this up — this is not your own dress you are trying on,' I laugh again. But quite composed she pushes further into the sheath and reaches of her new dress: 'one stage one night, with my cook-steward gone home, I even thought of a final drive out in my car. There on the highway, I thought, one headlong crash at a lump or telegraph post might empty the whole cart and so my entire garbage bin, since the one rotten apple in it would not be cast out on its own. Honestly, wouldn't that have raised a real stench!' She laughs, a hard dry laugh like dead leaves crawling along a coal-tarred road.

'Now, stop it,' I shouted at her, 'stop this joke, will you?'

'Well, Providence took pity upon a poor girl with a problem for at this point,' she brushes me aside, 'the only man I shall ever call friend introduced me to a pal of his — an expert at these things. He wasn't a quack you know, if that's what you are laughing at.' She stops to scold me.

'Well?' I ask, almost tilting over her.

'Fifty pounds down, and the man forked the unfortunate foetus out of me, yes, before and full beyond its time. My child, I could have loved him, and who knows what distinguished citizen he could have grown to be? But I had to snuff him out, and maybe I shall never have another.'

Now she is weeping, silently and softly, like that kind of rain whose coming and going are here before the sharpest weatherman observes it. In the silent wash and slush of it I got up from my seat. 'Fifty bloody pounds!' I let out a whistle. 'Fifty bloody pounds to shed an unwanted flesh!' And the wind long gone limpid to sleep on the grass, even like a nightwatch, staggers up to his feet to full attention, and with one wet palm peeling at his bleary face, blares forth the news into the night, except that only the bush, looking quite primeval now, and all huddled close, heard it.

'Surely, you aren't going to tell on me?' she rises up to where I stand looking into the dark. 'I had to do it, I had to. Much as I hated it, what would people have said here and back home? The shame of it would have killed me, not that it matters now.'

'Sure,' I take a gulp, holding her by the elbows, 'but you see, dearie, they only charge a fiver.'

Crushed, limp, shivering but very much alive and prehensile, her slim hands folded demurely now across her unmilked breast, light breaks like beads over her, although but for a short intermittent time only, just as with the glow-worm.

'Well,' she sniffs weakly, 'my colour and class then. Yes, they sure have been my curse. So be it, so be it.'

About us two, night sprawls out a damp awning, flagging in the wind, weighed down by cobwebs, all tangling with cries and laughs of others so near and yet so far away, each alone in his cocoon and the other situation.

'Come out of the cold' I put my hand about her. And for one prickly moment we stand knee to knee by the folding doors, the serpent length of a threaded needle dropping to the floor, dangerously erect between us.

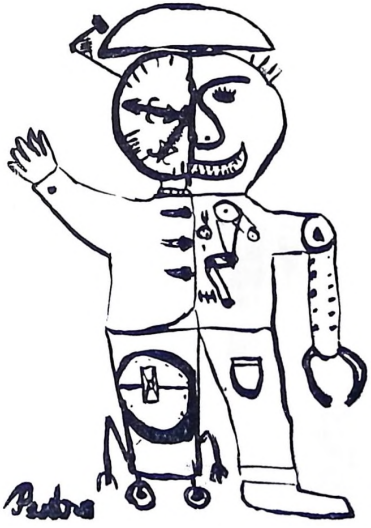
'I want to mend my dress, you heard that?' she cries hot into my face, apropos of the irresolution of spirit that surrounds her with a halo of good intentions.

'Of course, I did, my dear,' I laugh, 'and that's exactly why I now will help you out of this wretched dress.'

'You have not listened to me at all..... I really want to mend my dress.....'

'Well, I too am cold, and want cover from Mummy.'

'You fool, oh, you poor bungling fool,' she runs lightly ahead of me though still in my arms. 'Oh, when will you learn? Here, first, don't you know you must unzip me?'



Alajere,
We ask you to be patient,
You are very quicktempered,
And we worship you for it.

Alajere,
We ask you to be moderate,
You are wildly extravagant,
And we pray to you for it.

Alajere,
We ask you not to be jealous,
You are madly jealous,
And we love you for it.

Alajere,
You have a strange kind of pity:
Will you swallow my head,
While you are licking away the tears from my face?

Alajere,
You are the wandering madman
Who roams about aimlessly
Who knows no roads and no directions
Yet walks straight into the heart of wisdom.

Alajere is a half forgotten Yoruba God, whose shrine was recently rebuilt by Susanne Wenger in Oshogbo. When the shrine was created there was no body left in Oshogbo who remembered the *oriki* (or praise names) of this ancient deity. But the God himself has since revealed a number of sacred poems about himself in messages which the Yoruba call *iko*. The messages are received by Susanne Wenger or her drummers, often during the ceremonies for Alajere. Above is a selection of these *Iko*, translated into English.

There is no wrong way
That could not be the right way
Into the wisdom of Alajere.

Alajere
I will make you laugh.
The one legged man is angry with his friend:
He accuses him of giving away his secret
And telling everybody
That he has only one leg!

Alajere
You sleep peacefully in the fire
Like a child in his mothers arms.
Alajere
You live in the little fist of a child
Like a king in his palace.

Alajere
You to whom children's laughter is food and drink,
How is it that I love the smell of your breath?
Was it not yesterday that you swallowed the corpse of my child?

Alajere
You do not sell prayers to the sufferer
But you accept suffering as payment
For your own blood.

Be merciful!
We know you love beauty.
Do not covet the beauty
On the faces of dead children.
Have mercy!
Give us peace.
It is hot.
The streets are hot and dusty in the sun.
Have some rest.
Sit down and eat.
We have brought you a goat,
A cock and snails.
Here is red oil and salt and gin,
Palmwine, honey and black pepper.

Come,
Sit down and eat until you are satisfied.
May your appetite be spoilt for things
We do not want to give you.

No man can know
How much he can do.
The man who bathes God's eye
Does not realise what he is doing.
The man who is destroying God's world
Does not know what he is doing.

Yesterday, before yesterday and today
Sent out the lion to kill Alajere.
The lion went and killed Alajere for them.
The lion died on the spot:
He had forgotten that he was Alajere himself.

You think you can tie Alajere with a rope
And take him to the market to sell.
Beware!
You may be strangled in your own rope.
A man could say he lives without love
And he may not even lie.
A man could say he can live without pity
And he may not even lie.
A man could say that he lives without Alajere
But he lies!
No man can live without his heart.

Wisdom we acquired yesterday
Fails us today.
Wisdom we gain today
Is lost tomorrow.
Let us be wise like the snake:
It sheds its beautiful skin,
Confident
That a more beautiful one lies underneath.

Be patient
Whispers the egret to the cow
As he picks the ticks from its neck.
Be patient
Says the butcher to the cow
As he places the knife on its neck.
Alajere, Alajere,
Which is the patience
We are speaking of?

Alajere,
You fall gently
Like a withered leaf.
But where you fall
The sun is born
The world is changed
Dreams become true
Lions pounce
And horses flee
Madness befalls flowers
Rivers overflow
Mountains raise their voices
And the dead return to life.
Alajere
You fall gently
Like a withered leaf.

Alajere
The bur holds on to us,
And it knows it not.
Alajere
You hold on to us
And we know it not.

Black horses carry
Wide eyed riders
Who point their spears
To the sky
And swarm over the red hot field.
That is the first dream.
Children born in dark cool rooms
Play in our laps.
Suffering throws them down
And our hope is suspended
Between their dying and returning.
That is the second dream.

Alajere, let us escape!

BY O. R. DATHORNE

'Africa' in West Indian literature consists of a series of half-understood beliefs and values; so much so that when it is considered one realises that what the Sierra Leonean poet, Abioseh Nicol, has said has great relevance:

> You are not a Country, Africa
> You are a concept,
> Fashioned in our minds, each to each,
> To hide our separate fears
> To dream our separate dreams.[1]

Or, to put it another way, Africa, for the West Indian who has known it first hand or not is a composite mixture of fertile wish and barren memory, what J. P. Sartre has called "Africa beyond reach, imaginary continent".[2]

In no West Indian work that I know of is the theme of Africa as an imaginary continent so clearly brought out, as in the ensuing dialogue in *Africa-Sling-Shot*:-by Cicely Waite-Smith:

Mary: Him a stranger and him come from Africa

Policeman: Him? Him come from Africa? Him don't never go further than Kingston.

Miss Nath: How you can know that?

Clare: Yes, how you know?

Policeman: We no have the record o' this man? Is the same thing he tell the prison guard — that he is a African and he know obeah and all that sort o' thing, and them make him escape.

Mary: (*desperate*) But how you know him don't never go a Africa?
Policeman: Ask him nuh. Ask him if he ever go a Africa
Clara: (*obstinately*) No need fe ask him (*Silence.*)
Gordie: (*suddenly running up to fence: to Stranger*) Sir Don't it true you been a Africa?
(*The Stranger shrugs his shoulders and says nothing. The villagers are stunned.*)
Rattler: (sucking his teeth) Him ever fool me, you know. I did know him was telling lie all the time.
Clara: (*savagely*) Shut your mouth, Rattler! You never know nothing at all!
Mary: (*going up to gate; with bitter contempt*) Then is true you did fool us, Mr. Witch-doctor o' Africa?
Miss Nath: What a brute though, eeh?
Mary: All you did want was we food and we rum, that right? Take him away, Corpie!
Several: Yes, take him a jail.....We don't want see him round here again. You worthless thief!.....Damn liar!.....etc.
Policeman: The man fool you up proper, eh? Well, I glad you get sense at last.
Gordie: (*making one last bid*) True, true, Mr. Africa, you don't never leave Jamaica at all?
Stranger: Same like you, me son. I go a Africa in me mind.[3]

The scene of the play is a backyard in a country village and the characters represent the peasant interest. They almost *will* the Stranger to be African — a mythical survival of themselves in a unique moment of truth. When he is exposed them to the reminder that they are without ethnical reference; so they all turn on him He reminds them that their cultural existence is a phantom one, of the mind.

If the West Indian writer considers Africa as an imaginary continent, it means that it can be all countries or one country, and we find this geographical shuffling and re-shuffling to suit the whimsies of the imaginative artist. Claude McKay, in his poem, "Africa", includes Egyptian achievement as part of the slave heritage:

> New peoples marvel at thy pyramid.
> The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes[4]
> Watches the mad world with immobile lids.

In still another poem, by Harold M. Telemaque, the African heritage is also Egyptian; the West Indian's inheritance includes

> .....those
> Who lifted into shape
> The huge stones of the pyramid;
> Who formed the Sphinx in the desert
> And bid it
> Look down upon the centuries like yesterday.[5]

But the heritage in the same poem has also something to do with those

> Who walked blithely
> On the banks of the Congo
> And heard the deep rolling moan
> Of the Niger.[5]

Sometimes it can be Ethiopia, as the Jamaican Rastafarians believe.
Perhaps Sylvia Wynter had them in mind when she describes the following scene in her novel:

> The van swept out of the market. Through the high barred window in the back, Obadiah saw the bearded man kneeling with his head thrown back, chanting with fervour:
>
> 'Ethiopia awaken and hear thy children's cry
> Ethiopia now is free, our cry rings o'er the land,
> Ethiopia awaken, the morning is at hand!'
>
> The sound of the chanting and of the police van died away. One of the men who sat propped against his hand-cart, his cap over his eyes, lifted his cap for a few seconds, laughed raucously, and said:
>
> 'The poor fool! He don't even know that Mussolini beat the hell out of the Conquering Lion of Judah and not even there the black man is free!'[6]

But in most cases Africa is a vague general concept for the West Indian writer.

The theme of Africa, unspecified and without locality, becomes in many writers either the conglomeration or the collision of attitudes. In Andrew Salkey's novel, *A Quality of Violence*, two popular West Indian attitudes towards Africa are shown. Miss Mellie upbraids Mother Johnson's powers:

> We not frighten by white fowl talk or Africa or slave power! We don't belong to them things. We is people that you always living-off of. *We is people who live on the land in St. Thomas, not Africa.*[7]

In George Lamming's first novel, *In The Castle of My Skin*, written before he came to Africa, the hero expresses a similar view:

> I see the purchase of tribes on the silver sailing vessels, some to Jamaica, Antigua, Grenada, some to Barbados and the island of oil and the mountains tops. And then as it is now, though the season change, some was trying to live and some trying to die, and some were too tired to worry about either. The families fall to pieces and many a brother never see his sister nor father the son. Now there's been new combinations and those that come after make quite a different collection. *So if you hear some young fool fretting about back to Africa, keep far from the invalid and don't force a passage to where you won't yet belong.*[8]

V. S. Naipaul goes a little further and in a review claimed that for the West Indian "Africa has been forgotten, films about African tribesmen excite derisive West Indian laughter."[9] But Lamming, after a few years in England and his visit to Africa, was to adopt a different attitude. He replied in *The Pleasures of Exile*, to Naipaul's criticism by saying that, "it is precisely because Africa has not been forgotten that the West Indian embarrassment takes the form of derisive laughter." [10]Often we get the laughter in literature and Louise Bennett, the Jamaican humourist, asks:

> Back to Africa, Miss Matty?
> Yuh no know wa yuh dah sey?
> Yuh haffe come from some weh fus
> Before yuh go back deh.[11]

In *Ballad of Canga* by Eric Roach one finds a light-hearted treatment of African superstitions:

> He is a old Ashantee man
> Full of wickedness;
> Bring obeah straight from Africa;
> What he curse don't bless.[12]

But Mother Johnson, in Andrew Salkey's novel, puts forward the other point of view:

> Me and you and the rest-a people in St. Thomas all belong to the days that pass by when slavery was with the land. Everybody is a part of slavery days, is a part of the climate-a-Africa and the feelings in the heart is Africa feelings that beating there, far down.....We all come from Ashanti people who did powerful plenty, and we have the same bad feelings that them did have. We have the same powerhouse brains that them did have.[13]

Later on, she thinks even more positively:

> We haven't changed at all Africa is still with us. We belong nowhere else.[14]

Apart from the fact that Dada Johnson in the novel knows nothing of the Ashanti religion, the important point here is that Mother Johnson's attitude is aggressively pro-African, based on the West Indian concept of Africa.

Very often for the West Indian writer Africa can be a means of integrating or disintegrating person or society. In Philip Sherlock's poem, "Pocomania", we find the combination of African and Asian elements which establish a new religious association:

> Power of the past returns
> Africa among the trees
> Asia with her mysteries.[16]

Sometimes it is the European world and the African one which fuse and form the West Indian social inheritance. A white West Indian writer, Geoffrey Drayton, says in his poem "The Singing Negress" that he can share something of her world:

> A song it was of little sweetness
> But old as slavery
> And in the cradle days
> My nurse had sung it
> Sadly like this —
> As though her world were still in chains,
> As though when dreams come true
> One has forgotten all the joy of dreaming them,
> And cannot make fulfilment sweet
> With tears of empty waking.[17]

In his semi-authobiographical novel, *Christopher*, his white hero responds sympathetically to the imaginative stimulus of the African world round him.

> On moonlit nights the labourers in the plantation villages collected to sing hymns. Their hymns were Christian, but the rhythms to which they sang them were African, simple and respectitive, gaining speed and volume as they gained in length. In the churches the negroes had built for themselves, where untrained negro priests presided, the con-

gregations beat time with tambourines. At nights, in the open air, drums syncopated.

Christopher's body grew taut as he heard the drums begin.....The drums beat swiftly and more loudly. He felt his body grow tight and small as their rhythm grew.[18]

In George Lamming's *Season of adventure*, written after he had been to Africa, there is the description of a ceremony which was "a religious manifestation based on a serpent cult that originated on the slave coast of West Africa. Again,[19] as in *Christopher*, we realise that it is "the music that seemed to preserve the total spirit of this cult"[20] and the whole ceremony is a merging of Christianity and Paganism, of Europe and Africa:

Above two brief alcoves of candle flame, white pots of clay were crowded on the shelf. Spirits were alive in the two earthen jars where the *Houngnan* had knelt to appease the revolt of the last dead voice. The African goddess, Erzulie, resided in the left alcove. She stared across a cubicle of space at a picture of the Virgin Mary on the other side. The saints of Congo and Senegal were observing them from the far corner of the room. The saints of the Church were in easy alliance with the gods of the *tonelle*.[21]

Frequently for the West Indian writer the African theme combines effectively with other racial themes to produce, in literature, as in society, a racial harmony, which the writers use to express their nationalistic feelings; so the same poet who praised the African heritage, Harold M. Telemaque, describes in a moving poem, "In Our Land", the fusion of the races:

In our land
We do not breed
The taloned king, the eagle,
In our land,
The black birds
And the chickens of our mountains
Speak our dreams.[22]

The same sort of sentiment is expressed by George Cambell; love for Africa and for Jamaica can co-exist:

She sings of the African womb
Everlasting above the tomb
She sings of her island Jamaica
She sings of the glory of Africa.[23]

Very often West Indian poets painstakingly construct an image of Africa, only to explode the myth in a burst of conscious anger at the end of the poem, as with Claude Mckay:

Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done
Of all the mighty nations of the sun.[24]

It is as if in the structure of the poem we have a cynical reconstruction of a certain aspect of West Indian society.

Some West Indian writers, in contrast, do concern themselves with the adoration of Africa and African culture. Often this involves a rejection of European culture and Christianity; so instead of fusion we get social dislocation. E. M. Roach for instance, in "I am the Archipelago" sees the African heritage as one that affords no compromise with other cultures:

The cock, the totem of his craft, his luck

The obeahman infects me to my heart
Although I wear my Jesus on my breast
And burn a holy candle for my saint
I am a shaker and a shouter and a myal man;
My voodoo passion swings sweet chariots low.[25]

The gods are not companions here, as in Lamming; the African triumphs. Often the supernatural strength of Africa can influence even white people and Annie Palmer in de Lisser's *The White witch of Roashall* is suspected of being under the powerful influence of Haitian voodoo priests "who are versed in all the old African sorcery, and who do understand how to influence the minds of their dupes".[26] But in Derek Walcott it is the personal disorientation that is emphasized. Both cultures are equally strong but to absorb them both involves a betrayal of one:

How choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?[27]

In Claude McKay's "Outcast", this point is made in much more flamboyant language, and he sees the West Indian as someone who cannot make the break. He states his predicament in a nostalgic way:

My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
I would go back to darkness and to peace,
But the great western world holds me in fee,[28]
And I may never hope for full release.....

For him therefore the West Indian is

a ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart.
For I was born far from my native clime,
Under the white man's menace, out of time'[29]

Looking back on the African past often causes a certain amount of romantic attitudinising, which can transcend itself into spiritual analysis with good writers, but which, with bad writers, descends to sentimental affectation, as we shall see later. One way of looking at this past is from the viewpoint of slavery, sometimes seen in what Coulthard calls "attacks levelled against Western civilisation's treatment of the Negro in the past". In a [30]poem by Vera Bell, the African slave past is seen as something to be ashamed of:

Across the years your eyes seek mine
Compelling me to look
I see your shackled feet
Your primitive black face
I see your humiliation
And turn away
Ashamed.[31]

But frequently, as in the conclusion of this poem and in Martin Carter's "Death of a slave", the slave past can be the incentive for evolutionary fervour:

Slave staggers and falls
face is on earth
drum is silent
silent like night

hollow like boat
between the tides of sorrow
in the dark floor
in the cold dark earth
time plants the seeds of anger.[32]

Another West Indian poet, A. M. Clarke, sees the slave past in "Native Aliens" as a fertile one:

Your spirits were dancing on African shores
To wild jungle rhythms
On beaten earth floors.....
So while some curbed your freedom
With bayonet and gun
You snatched crumbs of freedom
From music and song.[33]

It is surprising, however, how little West Indian writing is concerned with slavery, probably because of the very practical reason that there are several other racial groups in the West Indies who would not according to E. R. Braithwaite "necessarily wish to be absorbed into an ex-slave society which is by admission lacking in 'culture', poor, irresponsible, lacking in direction and purpose".[34]

Perhaps it is for this reason that Africa is often mentioned as a place of freedom. In one of Claude McKay's novels, *Home to Harlem*, Jake hears about his African past from a Haitian waiter:

> He told Jake of the old destroyed cultures of West Africa and of their vestiges, of black kings who struggled stoutly for independence of their kingdoms: Prempeh of Ashanti, Behanzin of Dahomey, Ewari of Benin, Cetawayo of Zulu-land, Menelile of Abyssinia.
>
> Had Jake ever heard of the little Republic of Liberia, founded by American Negroes? And Abyssinia, deep-set in the shoulder of Africa, besieged by the hungry wolves of Europe? The only nation that had existed free and independent from the earliest records of history until today![35]

Here there is no mention of slavery and the African past becomes an anthology of certain historical moments of glory.

To John Hearne's Marcus Heneky (Marcus Garvey) in *Land of the Living*, his African past is the stabilising of a chosen moment of wonder. In his house his visitors are amazed:

> Instead of the customary Hanoverian images and meaningless landscapes from an unrelated climate, there was a large photograph of the Ethiopian Emperor, with two green, yellow and red flags above the frame, their sticks crossed, the cloth spread flat, and a loudly coloured relief map of Africa on which Addis Ababa was symbolized by a huge, gilt Star of David. On the third wall, facing this, was a framed text in twelve point Baskerville: *For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me.*[36]

Marcus Heneky is very different from Sylvia Wynter's bearded eccentric. Later on, Stefan, the hero of the novel, tries to explain what he thought Marcus Heneky and his Pure Church of Africa Triumphant stood for:

> "That's what I'm trying to tell you", I said. The triumph of Africa and the black race was only the external part of it. A...sort of

symptom. He continues:

> "In Heneky's case the lie was that the black man was faceless. What he had to do was to try to change that, to give the black man the sort of vision of himself that would make him free. And make the whites and the browns free, because they were shackled to the lie too."[37]

The interest in Africa is to some extent therefore a conscious attempt at re-ordering the consequences of history.

The West Indian who comes to Africa as writer or hero makes a conscious attempt to interpret this history in two ways. As George Lamming says in *The Pleasures of Exile* when comparing the West Indian in Africa and the white American in Europe:

> His relation to that continent is more personal and more problematic. It is more personal because the conditions of his life today, his status as a man, are a clear indication of the reasons which led to the departure of his ancestors from that continent.....His relation to Africa is more problematic because he has not, like the (white) American, been introduced to it through history.[38]

E.R. Braithwaite in his travel book, *A Kind of Homecoming*, first experiences the personal relationship:

> I thought, "So this is Africa, and these trees were here a long, long time. It must take many, many years to make such big trees, and maybe, in the long ago, someone walked here, or slept here and loved here to start or continue the sequence which involved me, produced me....."[39]

My hero, Adam Questus, in *The Scholar-Man*, begins by viewing himself in this personal way and on his flight to Africa feels "the slave blood in his veins that made him somehow a part of the whole of Africa".[40] But on his very first night in Africa he wakes to the realisation that "neither song nor singers nor the voices of the strangers who spoke a foreign language meant anything to him".[41] This is the beginning of his estrangement and I wonder if this is not the main difference — a kind of discomfiting realism — between the Africa of the West Indies and the real one — if, indeed this does not show the difference between the West Indian writer who has *actually lived* in Africa (apart from the casual visitor) and the West Indian writer who lives through his Africa in the West Indies. How else can we explain the similar predicament of Denis Williams's hero, Froad (Fraud?):

> I am a man, you see, plagued by these two names, and this is their history: Lionel, the who I was, dealing with Lobo, the who I continually felt I ought to become.[42]

For *Other Leopards* and *The Scholar-Man* are both concerned with an attempt at resolving these dilemas. But in both cases their solutions are in the nature of a prescription, not a recipe.

The search for identification is in its most interesting and universal aspect not a racial theme at all, but the private quest of a bemused individual in an alienated world. Consequently as Lamming once wrote in *Caribbean Quarterly:*

> The Negro writer joins hands therefore not so much with a Negro audience as with every other writer whose work is a form of self-enquiry, a clarification of his relations with other men, and a report of his own,[43] very highly subjective conception of the possible meaning of man's life.

Froad's predicament in *Other Leopards* is that he is not permitted to have a kind of

moral neutralism:

> Selling Christians to Arabs: Arabs to Christians: needed time to think out the difference.[44]

There is of course no difference. He is socially malajusted among stable people. Even the Chief, *his own countryman*, has a certainty of purpose that he lacks:

> Catherine and her granite hillsides and ruins and legends and history flitted through my mind. Now what the hell does it really feel like? Hughie and his traditions and his burden and his conscientious fanaticism. The Chief and his certainty and his duty and truth and all that. Every man a place! I'm like the bloody scavengers; no shadows.[45]

At the end — because the novel is about self and not race — he has to annihilate his physical being to come to terms with himself in community — a re-enactment of self-crucifixion that jeopardises body in order to re-align man with society.

In *The Leopard* — set in East Africa, Vic Reid seems to be saying much the same thing. Nebu, the African, has killed a white man and is pursued by a leopard. In his company he has a "half-bwana" boy with a lame foot who turns out to be Nebu's son by the wife of the murdered white man. The novel is written by a West Indian who only visited Africa after the novel was published, but it is remarkable for certain things. It would not be stretching a point too far to see the half-bwana as a West Indian, having two fathers, the dead European, to whom he wants to cling and the dying African who loves him but whom he continually abuses. But although the novel can stand up to this interpretation, it is a much less ambitious attempt than say, Denis Williams's. This is mainly because a great deal of the dialogue between father and son is unconvincing and the thought of the novel is not enough to sustain prolonged periods of inaction. But it redeems itself at an instant when it establishes a truth, one that goes beyond the racial confines that have bogged it down and it becomes a sincere statement of every man's quest for origins.

> "Nebu," the boy said softly. The black looked curiously at him "You love me very much," the boy said.
>
> The boy's eyes were opened wide, stretched boldly wide so that they were two strangely lit rooms into which the black almost wandered.[46]

Then the boy tells Nebu that he knows he is his father:

> "Father," the boy said softly, grinning at him.[47]
>
> Through the soles of his feet, he could hear the ocean at Mombasa. The great waves stood straight up in the water, fifty yards out, and tossed their shaggy heads and roared in and shook the beach in their teeth.
>
> The negro said gently: "Then you know, Toto. I would not have hurt the half-bwana by telling him."

When father and son attain to this truce of their ideologies, the significance of the dialogue attains to more than racial comprehension; it is the attainment of a new kind of comprehensive truth which annuls difference. It is here that we realise that the West Indian writer in his search for roots is in the words of Lamming "forced to consider the whole problem of significance."[48]

One of these problems is faced by Azi, the African in Lamming's *The Emigrants*. It is this — what constitutes freedom? Is it "an experience of the self in a state of unconditioned awareness"[49] Azi has been given the accolades of success in the European

world but he has to reject these to find his freedom. Indeed he does not convince us that he is an African at all but that he is a West Indian concept of an African — in a wider sense he symbolises a man at loggerheads with his history. For as with Walcott, Lamming in his later novels tends to emphasize the cultural disunity, but of course, as I have said, it is visualised in much wider and more significant terms. And for Lamming, as with so many other West Indian writers, the African presence, whether one absorbs it or rejects it, incorporates it or estranges it from one's culture, nevertheless exists. Few writers would be bold enough to agree with George Campbell in "*Black Cat Eyes*" that there is:

No more reality from our
Forbears
Only this fervid languid
Severance
Of limp moonlight
Mountain bamboo trellis
Darkness gaol night.[50]

George Lamming must have seen the dangers that could result from over-concern with Africa and the Negro question when he advocated that the concept of the Negro writer should be more universal; for there have been several poems written by West Indians in which Africa becomes a stock theme. Consider this one by Philip Sherlock, for instance:

Across the sand I saw a black man stride
To fetch his fishing gear and broken things,
And silently that splendid body cried
Its proud descent from ancient chiefs and kings
Across the sand I saw him naked stride;
Sang his black body in the sun's white light
The velvet coolness of dark forests wide,
The blackness of the jungle's starless night.[51]

This is externalised romanticising whereas in "Pocomania" I feel the poet has come close to his subject; indeed his interpretation is from within. But Sherlock is at least not overtly sentimental; his ability as a poet enables him to carry his theme forward with some conviction. Not so, however, with this poem by another West Indian, Calvin S. Lambert, where every effect seems piled on, from a hazy pastoralism to a luke-warm love-content

When in Africa we dwelt
Our love was nourished by the sun
And kisses were like drops of dew
That even fading shrubs renew —
It was a perfect paradise
In which we dwelt with hearts aglow.[52]

Often the veneration for the African can descend to depths of absolute stupidity, as when a French Caribbean novelist, Joseph Zobel, praises an African wearing European accoutrements that must surely detract from the author's exaltation:

Ousmane Diop was a man of Africa.....
Ousmane Diop seated in his scarlet green-fringed
dressing-gown, had the serene majesty of
a good king in all his splendour.[53]

Frequently we find Lamming doing the same thing. In *Season of Adventure* we have a powerful evocation that is somewhat spoilt by excessive romanticising:

> The smell of cemeteries rotted his hands. His eyes were the colour of burn hay.....He carried an axe in his right hand, a bracelet of black bones was swinging freely round his wrist when he waved the axe in worship round his head.[54]

But the description is not a failure because what one might call Lamming's imaginative reservoir comes to the rescue. The description concludes:

> The gods resided in every tooth of point and blade. Invisible by choice, their absence had made the night more nervous.[55]

Often the romanticising is confined to remarks by characters. We have already seen an example of this in McKay's *Home to Harlem*. In another novel, *Banjo*, one of his characters says that he loves to hear African dialects and puts forward the claim that Africans are superior to West Indian and American Negroes [55]

Perhaps it should be apparent by now that West Indians who have never been to Africa, or West Indians who prefer to accept the fact that there is no country called Africa, can often express a truer concept of Africa embodied in larger and more significant terms. By this I mean that to a large extent the realistic shock of Africa being a large not easily comprehended continent and the subsequent feeling of the West Indian that he is "lost", tends to subjugate that wider concept of man in search of his roots beneath the theme of the West Indian in search of his past. In a recent novel by Wilson Harris I feel the theme of the African in West Indian literature has been given greater dimensions. Poseidon, in *The Secret Ladder*, is an archetypal figure from myth embodying the vigour of the aboriginal:

> His grandfather had been a runaway African slave who had succeeded in evading capture and had turned into a wild cannibal man in the swamps devouring melting white cocerite flesh wherever he spied the mirage of high banking land; feasting on the quivering meat of sensitive turtle (until he turned to human jellyfish himself) as well as the soft underbelly of fearsome alligator.[56]

Poseidon's links are therefore firm; he is himself completely rehabilitated with the forces of the natural world.:

> he was as dry as a gnarled stump.....his ancient feet — webbed with grass and much.....his hands were wreathed in a fisherman's writhing net of cord.....The living cords seemed to grow along his arms and body until they turned matted as thick hairy straw upon his chest.[57]

This is no externalised romanticising of the African, nor do we find here the repetitive West Indian attitudes towards Africa. Instead Poseidon is universal; he is a reservoir of the original freedom of Man before the Fall, before the professions of civilisation "would turn the tables on him and rob him of the last freedom he possessed".[58] When he dies it is not only because the old must give way to the new, nor is it only of racial significance, since he dies "on the cruel knuckles of the one who loved him best, the grandson he had begotten in the dreadful apotheosis of history"; it is[59] because our historical stature cannot compare with the grandeur of myth and what we cannot understand, we destroy.

Perhaps Wilson Harris sees this as the inevitable fate of African influences in the West Indies. As regards this W. E. Abraham, the Ghanaian author of *The Mind of Africa*, would agree:

> The West Indies, where the acculturation into Europe has gone very far, will by contrast find very little to pose against the European cultures, now or at independence. The West Indies are Western and might do well to accelerate the process of westernisation as the only really practical alternative given to them.[60]

But not so, Ezekiel Mphahlele, the South African author of *The African Image*. He says rather embitteredly:

> I am not asking them (the West Indians) to identify themselves with us; after all it isn't their fault if they were taught some nasty things about us by their colonial masters and pseudo-historians.[61]

It would seem that even the Africans cannot make up their minds about West Indians so it is not surprising that West Indians themselves are poles apart on the issue. But it is from this, and in attempting to reconcile the paradoxes, that some worthwhile literature has been written. And it is from this too that the future of some West Indian writing can be engendered; for in its largest interpretation it is no narrow racialist pamphleteering but a search for origins and man's reconciliation with his past, to help him interpret his present and to fortify him with convictions and safeguards for the future.

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BY JOYCE HOPE

She was terrified of the ravaging of lust.
She remembered, shuddering,
children shining torches into their mouths
the red flesh burning.

She was afraid of the fierce tropic heat.
She sheltered; her sun-shade
spun above her head, her feet were circled
by the black shadow it made.

She shrank away but the reflected rays
got at her; the attack
coming in all directions made her pale skin flush
her hands tremble; she couldn't fight back.

Will she come out of the fire transformed and exultant
a martyr translated? Will she dare
walk through the flames again and again
without fear?

ORNAMENTS

Three soapstone monkeys squat
smothering sensuality with desperate paws

Buddha smiles complacently at his stomach
bloated with indulgence

the wrinkled face of an old man
rests on gnarled fists on twisted pilgrim's staff

the jade bowl will feel cool
the brass gong will boom loud
the embroidered butterflies might, even
flutter through the window

none of them has anything to do
with their owner.

DELILA

Trapped by the urgency of passion
"for ever" he heard himself say
and she beside him began to shake with fury
and this was easy
to misinterpret

nevertheless her appetite was whetted
her thighs like scissors sliced the sky
the world fell to pieces

When he lay calmly in the turning dark
she rolled his head gently between cupped palms
and slid her fingers through his hair
and cut.

Look how rivers silt up
how weeds spread
think of jungles
remember the cracked red
earth dried, blown
turned to desert dust

I know that dredging is messy
all that slime
and cultivation
takes so much time
and well water
must be bucketed up

but it's the only way
since Adam's banishment
to keep even
a small allotment going
let alone create
an illusion of Eden.

REVIEWS

WEEP NOT, CHILD by James Ngugi
(Heinemann, London, 1964)
154 pp—16/-.

Weep Not, Child is a story about an African family whose happiness is destroyed by the struggle for self-government in Kenya. Njoroge, the youngest son, is forced to give up the education which means so much to him. His father, Ngotho, is tortured as a Mau-Mau suspect by his former employer, Howlands, and dies. His elder brother, Boro, avenges his father by killing Howlands and is himself arrested. The story ends in sadness and desolation. Njoroge feels that he has played a coward's part in the fight against the Europeans and his love for Mwihaki is soured by this sense of failure.

Njoroge is the central figure of the novel. Through his father and brothers he is linked with the growth of violent opposition to European domination. His love affair is caught up in this violence : it is Ngotho who kills Mwihaki's father, an African who co-operates with the white settlers.

This is a young man's book. Its insight into character and human motivation is not very convincing. The world does of course contain its Howlands, but one is not given any persuasive account of why this particular Howlands should become the monster he does in the end, nor why his hatred should concentrate so savagely on Ngotho. It is a moral, perhaps even a morality, tale where good and evil are opposed in the simplest terms. Written in a plain, direct style, it has some passages, such as Ngotho's story of the Creator's gift of land to the African, which make their point with force and assurance. But the narrative bridge passages between the dramatised episodes are often somewhat flat and weakened by cliche. One character has a "rough exterior" concealing "a warm heart"; conditions "go from bad to worse"; education is "the key to the future".

Weep Not, Child is worth reading for its picture of African family life in Kenya, for its insight into, for instance, the ordinary African's bewilderment at and indifference to the great European wars : "In spite of the fact that they were all white, they killed one another with poison, fire and big bombs that destroyed the land." But as Mr. Ngugi appears to recognise, the irrational quarrels of the white men have their unhappy counterpart among the black, though the point is rather obscured by sentiment. Mr. Ngugi's heart is in the right place but he has still to discipline his feelings into art.

D. E. S. Maxwell.

ARROW OF GOD by Chinua Achebe.
(Heinemann, London, 1964) 287 pp — 21/-.

Ezeulu, priest of the protector-god of Umuaru, and Captain Winterbottom, an English divisional officer, have met once. The period is the 1920s, the place Eastern Nigeria. The guardian of the old ways has met the representative of the new power in the land. Chinua Achebe in his third novel returns to a theme which he has already made familiar.

The ambitious scope of Achebe's novel can be gauged by his own distance from the two characters on whom its events hang: an Englishman and a priest. Winterbottom, of course, can remain an outsider without detracting much from the novel's achievement: he is more important in his function than in himself. The writer does not intend more than a sympathetic sketch here. But in the hero, we are presented with a priest who accepts — as his society accepts — the belief that he has been chosen by his god as a recipient of supernatural powers, a keeper of mysteries. This is where Achebe's chief difficulties lies. His own attitude to the religious beliefs of the people of Umuaru is detached, at times even faintly ironical. The tone is set by a description

the moon-watching scene, at the beginning of the book, in one of the rare glimpses which we are given into the mind of Ezeulu the priest.

Later, there is a beautifully managed description of a purification ceremony in which the village women participate and Ezeulu is the leading figure. One feels here that it is Achebe's interest in social psychology that causes him to dwell on such a scene. In the description of a different ceremony — the first appearance of a new mask — we see the individual performer in relation to his social group: Obikwelu is doubly humiliated when he allows his matchet to fall to the ground and when he fails to sever a ram's head at a single blow. There is humour in the account of Obika's marriage ceremony when a disreputable diviner picks up the sacrificial hen at the conclusion of his duties and takes it off to the cooking pot followed by the suspicious eyes of his clients.

As we have come to expect, Achebe skilfully evokes the daily life of his village people. The pace of the story is leisurely. The line of the plot at times seems to disappear, just as the line of argument in the speeches made at a village council may become obscured; yet the story is continually and surely carried forward. Achebe rarely tells us directly what we should think, but leaves us to draw our own conclusions, as do his villagers when they use proverbs, not as decorations to an argument, but as the argument itself.

As an undercurrent there are the sometimes melancholy hints of change. Wars and slave raids are becoming things of the past; where the white men have congregated markets have become phenomenally prosperous. But not all change is for the good. The 'new men', when they leave behind their native tongue and attempt the white man's, lose their quiet dignity and become unconsciously absurd; we are given a colourful picture of the old priest as he returns to Umuaru from Government Hill — yellow and white cloths, a red cap with an eagle feather, a goatskin bag and an iron wand of office; by his side, Captain Winterbottom's steward 'wore a thick brown shirt over khaki trousers'; and the uncompleted road — the bringer of progress — onto which Obika and his friend emerge from a bush track 'made one feel lost like a grain of maize in an empty goatskin bag'.

John Ginger.

A SELECTION OF AFRICAN PROSE

ed. W. H. Whiteley.

1. Traditional Oral Texts (Clarendon press, Oxford, 1964) 200 pp — 21/-
2. Written Prose (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964) 185 pp — 21/-

These two volumes are the first in the Oxford Library of African Literature series. To a large extent the collection and editing of traditional oral material have suffered at the hands of European specialists — vocational or academic; consequently traveller, missionary, administrative officer and sociologist have all had their separate approaches which informed but presented a disintegrated picture of the whole. Perhaps now that still another approach has been added — a purely literary one — aesthetic judgement will counterbalance the demands of literary choice and a sympathetic response will necessitate some study of the functional and ceremonial aspect of the oral heritage.

At the very core, this is what is wrong with the present series. There is an artificial attempt to separate "prose" and "verse". In the first volume of the present series this is unfortunately so, but we are to some extent compensated by the fairly representative selection from South Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, Somaliland and West Africa. The divisions are unfortunate for if we believe that the African background is one (and this is surely implied in the title of the series) then geographical divisions would seem of little importance. Perhaps a better division might have been along the lines of say, myths, legends and folktales with a sub-division of folk-tales into various types.

I am personally, however, very glad that Professor Whiteley undertook this very formidable task; it is easy, from the lofty ivory tower of the review page, to say that this or that should or should not have been done, but the sad fact is that, to my knowledge, nothing of the dimension of this first book exists in English. The Germans and the Belgians have been far more interested in the kind of approach I am talking about. That is why the poor unfortunates who had to review these books in the English Sunday press, apart from muttering the stock inanities about African culture and personality, were really stuck;

what they lacked was the yardstick against which Professor Whiteley's achievement in the first book could be measured.

For the second volume I have little praise; indeed I don't really understand what the editor intended. I fail to see how Equiano (18th century) could be lumped with Mofolo (1930's) and Ekwensi, who surely belongs most definitely to an urbanised 1960's. There is very little from East Africa here; most is from West Africa. This is the pitiful position at the moment; very little in the way of *English* writing has come from East Africa but there is a great deal of vernacular literature in Eastern and Southern Africa; it seems a pity that we did not see some of this.

Apart from this I am not sure even if some of the material that has been chosen can stand up to any literary criticism. I think all in all Fagunwa, Tutuola, Laye and Achebe come off best of all. I didn't particularly see the relevance or the value of two extracts from speeches, nor the Nyasaland letters. One reads so little by Oscar Ribas that it was good to see *The Medallion* included, even though short.

I thought that the *Introduction* to both volumes was accurate and showed some perception, although it would seem to me that there was a great deal of heavy padding in Volume 2. On the whole however, I welcome both these volumes, although I think it is a bit too soon for the second. After all it is the function of any useful anthology to preserve, and these prose selections surely seek to do that. But we are too near to the expression of written literature to be able to select with ease and relish; at the moment there *must* be a great deal of bad writing (if African literature is to mature) and good writing side by side with it. Perhaps Professor Whiteley's selections show us some good writing and some bad writing; perhaps to this extent it has taken stock of what has happened, the conditions from which it occurred; it is within this context that the newer written literature will emerge.

O. R. Dathorne.

THE HEROIC RECITATIONS OF THE BAHIMA OF ANKOLE ed. Henry F. Morris (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964) 142 pp —. 30/-

I am more than usually suspicious when people start publishing their Ph.D theses. The petty demands of University institutions — triplicate, to every quote a number, to every number a note — do not seem to me to be invaluable aids towards academic substance. This is just such an effort and there is nothing in it that makes me think otherwise. The Foreword, apart from the last three paragraphs which tell us about the form and content of the recitations, is irrelevant to the main purpose of the book, indeed the series. We are then treated to eighteen pages on the Bahima and only three paragraphs tell us anything about the poems under consideration. However, there is a very valuable chapter on the structure and characteristics of the recitations — there are two types — *ebyevugo* and *ekirahiro*.

The book is, however, an interesting contribution to African Literature. It would seem to me that the poetry of the Bahima is really long eulogies; the praise-names coming line after line develop the majestic egocentricity of the reciter:

> I who am quick was drawn from afar by lust for the fight...
> I who encircle the foe...

The reciter is the hero, the narrative development slow; the poetry depends almost exclusively on the build-up of heavy praise — words, coming one after another, culminating in an effect of grandeur:

> I who am capable...
> I who depend not on the advice of others...
> I who prepare for battle...
> I who am moved to anger...

The former example belongs to nineteenth century *ebyevugo*, the latter to twentieth century; they demonstrate the continuance of a tradition.

The poetry often effectively makes use of exaggeration and circumlocution. Sometimes in twentieth century *ebyevugo* there is mention of the amenities of modernism, but it jars:

> The letters went through the printing press
> They passed through the linotype
> The cyclostyling was done by Manaase
> Murumba's letter was taken by Kabwitwa.

Indeed this reads like a departmental report and one wonders if it could have had any literary significance in the original language.

Just as the *ebyevugo* are in praise of the self, the *ekirahiro* are in praise of cattle. I have not found in any other African traditional verse such pathe

identification with the animal world. Indeed this is what makes these poems so different; a great deal of African traditional literature expresses the spirit of the community; the individual is submerged beneath the communal assertion. In these poems, as if to compensate, we have an over-concern with individual qualities, which are, in *ekirahiro*, transferred to animals:

> She Whose Horns Stand Out Above The Herd gave birth and so did She Who Has Straightened Her Horns; She Who Prevents Others Approaching became friendly with The One Whose Horns Are As Straight As Planks.

The book could have been written in half the length and incidentally been sold for half the price. I do not think there was much need for the copious notes, the elaborate introduction, the appendices or the vernacular text. But there is need for us to know about the imaginative literary enclave of a great deal more of Africa. Dr. Morris has shifted us nearer to an appreciation of the oral literature of the Bahima.

O. R. Dathome.

SOMALI POETRY: An Introduction ed. B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964) 167 pp — 30/-

Perhaps I misunderstand the purpose of the Oxford Library of African Literature but if it is "the task of recording oral compositions before they are lost to memory", then the present one in the series is clearly a misfit. However on its own it can stand as a valuable contribution towards our understanding and appreciation of Somali Poetry.

The Introduction tells us something about the social and cultural setting, a *sine qua non* towards our appreciation of the poems. But the chapter on the Somali Language is sketchy and, I suspect, irrelevant. It is a pity that the other editors in the series did not include more on the characteristics of the literature, as these editors have done; in a field which is a closed one, we can do with all the help we can get towards a full comprehension of what is presented to us.

The majority of the poetry in this selection is classical; one is immediately aware that this is a different tradition from Africa South of the Sahara. The classical poetry has something more in keeping with Hebrew verse:

> With evil mouths they would not have babbled against me, consenting to evil talk

They would not have pitched their tents in Harar..... It is extremely moral in tone, often of purely religious significance. Very little idiom comes across in the translation, but often there are memorable vivid images:

When I curse a person God cuts his tendon. Or in another poem:

> Quarrels are not good, truth is where one should water.

In some other places the vision is cynical:

> The tongue is like a sword cutting off life.

Nketia commented somewhere that in general African oral literature has little to say about landscape or the lovelorn; I see this in the more wider concept of communal life expressing the individual — it is the pooling of the imaginatively significant. Modern Somali Poetry looks more towards the East — some of it reads like Rabindranauth Tagore's Bengali translations, others like Arthur Waley's Chinese translations:

> You were the fence standing between our land and the descendants of Ali,
> (Now in departure) you are the sky which gives no rain while mist shrouds the world.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

> I don't take any of the best meat,
> I don't drink from a big vessel,
> But I have a great appetite for dancing.
> But I have a great appetite for dancing.

Often there is down-to-earth realism that on often encounters in traditional African literature:

> Unless I marry a wife who has been married before,
> Unless I eat her sweet-meats,
> I will not have the strength to lift my foot in dance.

Here again I would quarrel with the layout. A great deal could have been said in less words, many of the footnotes could have been ommitted and again the vernacular text is almost unnecessary. But on the whole this volume is a useful introduction and is, with the other three in the series, an important land mark in the development of, and interest in, African Literature. The next stage is initial assessment.

O. R. Dathome.

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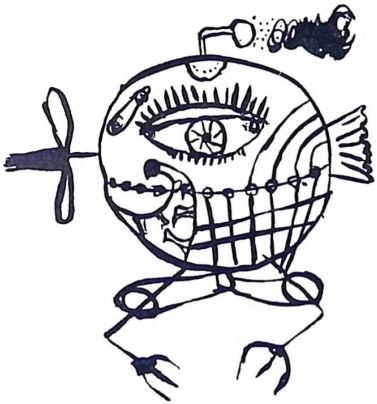

Ibadan

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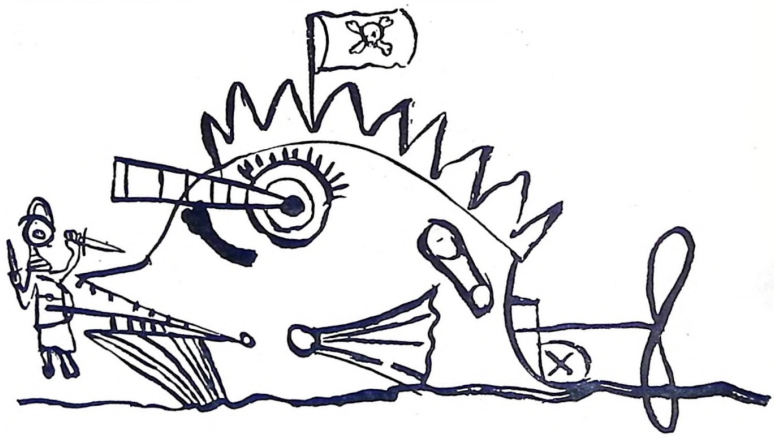

BLACK ORPHEUS

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OCTOBER 1965

EGYPTIAN POETRY

THE BIRD CATCHER

My beloved, I adore you,
I am dying for your love.
Everything is readiness:
See what I am doing.

I have come to catch birds,
I carry my bird net with me,
A trap in one hand
The net and missile in the other.

Look, all the birds of Punt
Are descending on Egypt,
Scented with myrrh.
The first bird that lands
Fooled by my bait
Is fragrant with the perfume of Punt.
His claws steeped in balm.

This is my desire:
With you to release him,
To be alone with you
When he ejaculates the call of freedom,
My bird, scented with myrrh.

I know nothing more beautiful,
When I set my traps,
Than to have you with me;
Glorious: to walk across the field
Towards my beloved.

The Irresponsible Student

If only you knew
The horror that is wine;
You would curse it.

They taught you to sing to the flute;
They taught you to lament to the shepherd's reed;
They taught you to recite to the harp;
They taught you to sing praises to the zither.

You sit in the bar
Sit between harlots,
You want to be aggressive.

You sit between the girls
Steeped in fragrant ointment,
A wreath of flowers round your neck—
You are drumming on your belly.

You sway, you fall on your face,
You are covered with dirt.

Hymn to the God Thot

The tall palm tree, sixty feet high,
Heavy, with fruit:
The fruit contain kernels
The kernels water.
You who bring water to the remotest place,
Come and save me, because I am humble.
O Thot you are a sweet well,
for him who starves in the desert.
A well that remains closed to the talkative,
But opens itself to the silent.
When the silent approaches, the well reveals itself;
When the noisy man comes, you remain hidden.

Death as a Lotos Flower

I am the pure Lotos
That blossomed on the horizon,
That grows in the nostril of the sungod.
I am the pure Lotos
That blossomed in the field.

The Hymn of the Cannibal

The sky is heavy, it is raining stars.
The arches of the sky are cracking; the bones of the earthgod tremble;
The Pleiads are struck dumb by the sight of Unas
who rises towards the sky, transfigured like a God,
Who lives off his father and eats his mother.
He is the bull of the sky; his heart lives of the divine being;
He devours their intestines, when their bodies are charged with magic.
It is he who passes judgement, when the elders are slaughtered.
He is Lord over all meals.
He ties the sling with which he catches his prey,
He prepares the meal himself.
It is he who eats men and lives of the Gods.
He has servants who execute his orders.
Scullgrabber catches them for him, like bulls with a lasso.
Headerect watches them for him and brings them to him;
Willow-croucher binds them
And tears their intestines from their body,
Winespresser slaughters them
And cooks a meal for him in his evening pots.
Unas swallows their magic power
He relishes their glory.
The large ones among them are his morning meal,
the medium size are his lunch,
The small ones among them he eats for supper.
Their senile men and women he burns as incense.
The great ones in the North sky lay the fire for him
With the bones of the elders,
Who simmer in the cauldrons themselves;
Look, those in the sky work and labour for Unas.
They polish the cookingpots for him with thighs of their wives.
O Unas has reappeared in the sky,
He is crowned as Lord of the Horizon,
Those he meets in his path he swallows raw.
He has broken the joints of the Gods,
Their spines and their vertebrae.
He has taken away their hearts,
He has swallowed the red crown
He has eaten the green crown,
He feeds on the lungs of the Wise,
He feasts, as he now lives on hearts,
And on the power they contain.
He thrives luxuriously, for all their power is in his belly,
His nobility can no longer be taken away.
He has consumed the brain of every God,
His life time is eternity,
His limit is infinity.

Prayer to Thot

Be praised Lord of the house
You white haired monkey, beautiful in body
And gentle in mind, beloved by everyone.

My God Thot is of precious stones,
He lights up the earth with his sparkle.
The moon disc on his head is of red Jaspis,
His phallus is of quartz.

His love leaps on his eyebrows;
He opens his mouth to give life;
My house is full of joy since Thot entered,
It thrives and flourishes since he dwells here.

Thot, I fear nothing,
Since you became my strength.

Incantation

Return, you who are coming in the dark.
You who enter secretly,
The nose pointing backwards,
The Face turned away;
Forget why you came!
Return, you who are coming in the dark,
You who enter unseen.

Have you come to kiss this child?
I shall not allow you to kiss it.
Have you come to silence it?
I shall not allow you to silence it.
Have you come to insult it?
I shall not allow you to insult it.
Have you come to take it away?
I shall not allow you to take it away.

I have prepared a potion of clover
To protect my child from you.
A potion of onions,
That shall harm you,
A potion of honey,
Sweet to men but bitter to those who live beyond,
A potion of fish's rogue
Of a fish's jaw
And the spine of a fish.

Excises

Are you leaving me because you are hungry?
How! Are you the slave of your stomach?

Are you leaving me to cover yourself?
Haven't I got a blanket on my bed?

Are you leaving me because you are thirsty?
Then take my breast.
It flows over for you.
Blessed the day of our meeting.

The Little Bather

O my love,
I like to dip in the water
To bathe before your eyes
To show you my beauty
Under the linen garment
When it is wet and dripping.
With you I glide into the water.
I emerge from the water towards you,
A red fish between my fingers
Sparkling between my fingers. . . .
Oh come and look at me!

FOUR DIMENSIONS

by I. N. C. ANIEBO

"Hack her to pieces! She must not be born again," cried the Third Priest in a rasping voice.

"Throw her pieces to the four winds. Let them be blown to the ends of the earth so that even her *chi* cannot find them," the Second Priest intoned.

"Who are we that we should sit in final judgement over her?" asked the First Priest shaking his white head sorrowfully.

"We are the appointed Judges of Ajala, our great mother earth. This woman sinned against *her* and should not be returned to her," answered the Second Priest contemptuously.

"We were appointed to judge mortals not spirits" countered the First Priest. "Therefore let us be merciful. The woman has sinned it is true, but her sins have been washed away by her death." His mellow, slow voice calmed the acolytes whose hysterical chanting now became a low dirge.

"You are the First, the annointed head," said the Third Priest. "But let my dissention be recorded. Not all sins can be washed away by death alone, else there will be no evil or tormented spirit and all mortals dying will automatically be washed pure and re-born. But the spirit of sinners must sojourn in Hades, to be tormented and to wander around for some time with hopes of being born again. One of the greatest punishments that can be meted out to a mortal or spirit is to be left wandering without hope. This woman's sin cannot be washed away by death nor even by letting her spirit wander for some time. It is better she be cut to pieces so that she can never be born again and her spirit will wander endlessly."

"So let it be, oh First," chanted the Second Priest.

"No! It shall not be. Let it not be said we stretched our mortal hand into a world we know nothing of. Let the spirits judge the spirits and the mortals, mortals. Therefore, let the spirit of the dead woman wander for a while and not endlessly. We will bury her with the honours befitting a noble woman—with chalk and cam-wood markings on her face and body; with a root of the Iroko and spittle of the tortoise mixed into a potion to annoint her belly and her *okike* stringed across the top of the two tallest palm trees in the village and not untied till it has either been shot down or eight days have elapsed; with the mat woven from the *ute* that grows on the banks of the sacred stream. I, the First, have passed judgement. We will now wait for mother Ajala to declare her wishes."

There was a hushed silence. Even the acolytes with their heavily chalked faces and foam-specked mouths controlled their moaning.

Presently the rays of the full moon cut through the foliage of the giant age-old trees surrounding Ajala's shrine and fell on the circular sacrificial stone on which lay the naked body of the dead young woman. Ranged round her were the three squatting priests who waited, their closely-shaven heads bent, to learn the wishes of their goddess—but their minds could not concentrate on the same thing for a very long time. And as the time rolled inexorably by, retarded by the silence of the surrounding forest, their thoughts veered away to . . .

* * * *

She had walked into his house that afternoon two years ago, her three multi-coloured beads sitting so becomingly on her slim, dark waist. On her beautiful lips was the smile he knew so well, the teasing smile that could set the muddy blood of an old man on fire. Without touching her breasts, he knew her nipples were hard because of the way they stood out, and round them, as always, were two concentric circles of *uli*.

"Okwomma," she greeted him.

"My child," he answered controlling, with difficulty, the trembling of the lips and hands that often assailed him in her presence.

She sat down on the opposite *ngidi* (mud bed), not the way women always sat with legs stretched out together in front of them, but in her own exciting way—legs drawn up and hands hugging her knees as if she were cold.

"I just thought I should come by and greet you, Third Priest," she said in her low, husky voice, her eyes modestly lowered.

"You did well, my child. Had your beloved father been alive, he would have approved. But why didn't you go to the Afo Ezinma today?"

"I had nothing to sell, Third Priest. And besides, mother and the other wives were going, so I decided to stay home to look after the children and cook dinner."

He grunted and brought out his old black clay pipe and leaf tobacco from his soot-covered raffia bag which had been handed down to him from his grandfather. With superflous concentration, he began to fill his pipe. He had often discovered that a smoke quieted his blood, and took his mind away from mundane thoughts, particularly the one that bothered him at that moment.

The sound of children playing under the heat-haze of the afternoon, the bark of lean, dirty dogs, the occasional squawks of frightened chicken taking cover from the sharp claws of a diving hawk and the bleating of goats, emphasized the absence of all the able-bodied men and women in the village who had gone to the Afo market in Ezinma, five miles away.

His pipe lighted he leaned back on the red mud wall, and sucked a grateful lung full. "Don t you like my staying at home?" asked Maruma.

"Why do you ask, child?"

"Because you grunted after I explained why I stayed."

"I was filling my pipe."

"You hadn't brought out your pipe then." She had dropped the formal manner of addressing the priests of Ajala, and her legs were now curled up under her.

"No, my child," said the Third Priest slowly. "I don't dislike your staying home. In fact, I like it."

"I knew you would, Third Priest."

As if caught unawares, he puffed away nervously at his dying pipe. He had been staring at her for some time, figuring what *it* would be like. Now he bent forward and re-arranged the smouldering wood of the fire between them. Deftly, he picked up a glowing charcoal with his fingers and put it into the bowl of his pipe. He drew hard at the pipe, his large adam's apple moving rhythmically up and down, and now and again he pressed the charcoal in with his index finger. Before long, he was enveloped in pungent smoke.

"I don't like the smell of your tobacco."

"Why, child? It smells good to me."

"Don't call me a child. I'm a full-grown woman."

He removed his pipe and stared at her. Her long slim legs were now stretched out in front of her, thus exposing her wide hips, flat belly and large bosom, and on her lips played that smile—innocent, teasing and inviting, all at the same time.

"Yes, you're right," he said slowly. "I'm sorry . . ."

"It's all right," she hastily assured him. She had begun to feel uneasy and afraid she might not be able to control the emotion she was stirring up. Those looks of his were not of a Priest, and she had felt his eyes mauling her. "It's all right, Third Priest," she said recalling that he was, at a mere 35, the youngest of the three and had become a Priest by inheritance, and not by personal achievement or remarkable holiness.

She stood up, tall and straight, luscious and desirable, a woman at eighteen, conscious and proud of her bloom.

"I'm going to prepare lunch for the children." The flesh was strong, but the will weak.

He, too, was standing.

Without looking, she could see the cloth *ugbolo* tied between his legs in the form of pants, striving and straining to contain the stirring of life down there. She could also feel, without touching, the heat radiating from his hardpacked, bare body, and the fire between them accentuating it. She swallowed hard in an effort to clear the impending clogging of her throat, and her other self wondered why she felt as she did, why she had become hypersensitive to every nuance in the environment. She had been in this situation with him before and had come out of it unscathed, having enjoyed every minute of it, but . . .

"Maruma, look at me." It was the first time ever he had called her by name.

Their eyes met, and she thought she saw lightening flashes criss-crossing between them.

He thought the same too, or willed it, and in one bound, he was by her side and the next, carried her into his bedroom. Her cry rent the air as he threw her on the bamboo bed. He tore at his *ugbolo* with feverish, erratic fingers—but he could not undo it!

Her next cry cut across his be-fogged brain like a whiplash. She had called on the protection of Ajala and she must, therefore, remain inviolate or he would be damned. He wrung his hands in fury, cursing silently the day he was born and his inherent fear of this goddess whom he served and was bonded to serve to the end. With glazed eyes, he watched her get off the bed and walk through the low door to freedom. His bird had flown again, after having walked into his den. Cursed be her *chi*!

And as Maruma stepped into the hot sun she began to shiver as one suffering from the ague.

* * * *

His son had rushed into the hut that evening holding his stomach and through the fingers, he could see red seeping through, leaving a well-emblazoned trail. His heart sank when he knew instinctively what it was.

"Nwobi, what happened? Who did that to you? Tell me, tell me!"

The boy collapsed on the *ngidi* moaning, his handsome face a picture of pain and wonder. "Maruma, Maruma stabbed me, stabbed me in the stomach." He fainted.

Maruma, that she-devil, thought the Second Priest as he dressed his son's wound. Thanks to Ajala, it was not a very deep one, but still an ugly sight. Nwobi must have jumped back as she struck since his flesh had a "torn" look.

"Oh, Ajala, what shall we do to this vixen before she destroys all our young men?"

With his knowledge of the herbs, the Second Priest brought his son back to the land of the living in four days—one Ibo week—and during that period he often wished he was not Ajala's Priest so that he could take vengeance on Maruma, though she was the Chief's daughter, and like everyone in the village, Ajala's child.

The shepherd could not scatter his flock—if he did, he would be many more times damned!

And what was more, no one should ever know that his son had been worsted in a fight with a girl!

It took another three days before the Second Priest could get his son to tell him how it had all happened. Had the boy's mother been alive, he would have known sooner, but then her death made it possible for him to prepare for the Priesthood.

Nwobi had recounted the events in his sing-song high tone.

Three days before the incident, Maruma had asked him to escort her to the farm to pull up some cassava tubers. He had accepted with alacrity, for even though he was three years older, she could twist him round her finger. So much did he love her!

The day was hovering between the end of the afternoon and the beginning of the evening when they set out to the cassava farms two miles away. Maruma led, in her loping gait, her body swaying and undulating in a way all her own, and her graceful long neck straight, carrying the head on which balanced an elongated rectangular basket.

"Why do you have to get this cassava tonight?" Nwobi had asked diffidently.

"Because I couldn't do it earlier, and besides we're having many guests on *Nkwo* day."

"What of your other sisters? Surely, they could have escorted you."

"How can the blind lead the blind? They're afraid of the dark as much as I. But with you here . . ."

Pulling up the cassava tubers was easy as they had been planted on slightly sandy soil and soon their basket was full.

In a nearby stream, they washed and chopped the cassava into six-inch lengths and immersed them in a big pot full of water berthed at the edge. By the time they finished they were hot and dirty.

"Let's have a dip before we go," suggested Maruma. They waded to the bathing area down-stream. "Do you know that my pots of cassava ferment faster then all those here? Mine take only two days whilst the others take from three onwards."

"It seems you have the devil heating the bottom of your pots."

"Maybe. Father says the devil loves beautiful women!"

They did not dally at the stream, but it became completely dark before they were half way home.

"Nwobi, may I hold your hand. I can't see well in the dark." In this way they

proceeded another hundred yards. "Why don't we wait till the moon comes up?"

"What will your mother say when we come home very late?"

"I'm too old to be lost or kidnapped!"

She put down the basket and he, the little hoe and matchet and they sat close together by the edge of the path. As time passed, she leaned on him more and more, her arms encircling his waist. Once, perhaps to kill an ant, she slapped her right thigh hard and whilst replacing her hand round his waist, she touched the stirring life. She did not seem shocked but rather fascinated by it, for pushing aside his *ugbolo*, his only article of clothing, she touched it many more times, wonderingly, like a child given a new toy. Sometimes she enclosed it softly in her palm, feeling the urgency, the tautness and the throb of life.

And oh, how hard he tried to get into her! But when he seemed to succeed, she would cry out in pain, withdrawing as if he were a leper, and so he contented himself with touching until his dam burst . . .

He did not see her, even though he constantly patrolled the approaches to her home throughout the next day till the day of the incident. He had been looking for the holes dug by the *ewoi* (big rat) when on parting a shrub . . . She was a few feet away, her back towards him. She was trying to break a small coil of brass bangle and was so engrossed in it—he could see the straining muscles of her back—she had not heard him approach.

He did not disturb her, else she might break the perfect picture she created with the setting sun flooding her naked back with golden tears, and making her beads glint.

She must have succeeded, and with legs placed wide apart, she bent down and began digging up the earth with the broken bangle.

He could stand by no longer, and was soon trying to thrust himself into her, but she was swifter. With a little cry, she swivelled round and . . . The pain . . . the pain and the blood . . .

"The she-devil!" muttered the Second Priest, his lined face a picture of hatred and anger.

"No, father, she isn't! She is an *Angel*. It was my fault . . ."

That was eight years ago, and Nwobi was fifteen then.

* * * *

The news had spread like an epidemic.

The First Priest was sick, sick on to death. Not even his fellow-priests, nor the doctors could tell what was wrong with him, except that the symptoms were high fever, coughing and lack of appetite. There was no close relative to nurse him, either. He had taken to the Priesthood at a very young age, and did not marry, even though he was the only surviving male child of his household. Many times, people had advised him to leave the Priesthood and get married but he had refused.

"I was called by Ajala to serve her!" he always answered. "Perhaps if I'm devoted to her, completely and without guile, I may be able to expiate the sins of my family and stop the curse on them spreading to their daughters and their children."

But now it seemed his services to Ajala were coming to an end.

"Ovuegbe," greeted Maruma one afternoon.

"My child," said the First Priest in a barely audible whisper. He was lying on his back and looked very emaciated; one could almost smell death in his smoke-filled room.

"I've come to nurse you back to health."

He managed a thin, wry smile, "My child . . . you talk as if you're Ajala herself.

Those who can, have tried and failed. I'm resigned to death. Already I can hear the knocking on the wall."

She sat down on the edge of the *ngidi*. "Please don't say that." She brushed away the tears that filled her eyes. "I can't let you die. You're the only person I've got since father died."

The Priest's long silence frightened Maruma. She was about to panic, when he started one of his coughing spasms that often left him exhausted and breathless. After he was recovered he said:

"Don t bother, my child. Your intention is noble. But it's too late."

"Even if it is, please promise you won't give up hope of being well again. Just promise me that and I'll be satisfied."

His reply took a long time in coming and when it did, she had to bend forward to hear, "Nobody likes to die, my child," and he went off into a coma.

She immediately set to work cleaning the house. She washed the cooking pots, and clay plates, swept the compound that was beginning to resemble the abode of a dead man—littered with fallen leaves and refuse of many days. The firewood and water would last her for that day.

From the moment she had entered the First Priest's house, Maruma felt she knew what was really wrong with him, because her father had suffered the same illness at regular intervals, and had allowed only her to prepare his medicine. After restoking the fire in the room where he lay, thus eliminating most of the smoke, she went out in search of herbs. With the optimism of youth, she cut several handfuls of lemon grass, leaves of lime including a few branches, dug up the yellow roots of *ukpologwu* and picked the kidney-shaped leaves of the *ejeje* shrub. Reaching home, she kindled a fire in the kitchen, and began to boil all that she had collected in a huge wide-mouthed pot. Next, she peeled yams with which to prepare a hot palm oil broth, and as it was getting dark, lit a palm-husk candle.

The First Priest had come out of his coma by the time she finished cooking the medicine and the broth.

"How do you feel, First Priest?" she asked sitting down on the edge of his bed.

He did not answer but moved his head slowly from side to side.

"Will you be able to stand up?"

Again he moved his head.

Maruma went back to the kitchen and brought out the steaming pot of medicine, placing it as close as possible to the edge of the sick man's bed. She had decided to treat him where he was. From the wooden box on the alcove, she took out a thick cloth that looked like a bed-spread. Gently she helped the First Priest to sit up in such a way that the pot of medicine was between his legs and then she covered him and the pot with the cloth. She removed the cloth a few minutes later when First Priest started gasping for air, and noted with satisfaction his sweat-covered body. She rubbed him down with lukewarm water, fed him some spoonfuls of the broth she had prepared and put him to bed, covering him with every available mat and cloth. For the first time since his illness, that First Priest slept through the night like one drugged.

Maruma, continued her treatment for another two days making sure, however, that the First Priest drank a potion of the medicine, after she had rubbed him down.

On the morning of the third day, he woke up earlier than she. When she heard her name called in a sonorous voice that reminded her of the echoes of the mother of drums, Maruma was startled. Slowly she sat up, her face a mixture of happiness and relief.

"So you haven't gone yet? the First Priest asked.
She shook her head. She was unable to speak.

"How long have you been here?"

"Three days"—her lips formed the words.

"What of your mother? Didn't she look for you? Oh, never mind. But why do you bother yourself with an old man like me?"

And she began to cry, all her pent up feelings of relief, happiness, irritation and fatigue finding expression at last in a welter of tears.

Six months later, Maruma's husband of one month, Nwaobi, died suddenly after a few hours illness. The rumour was that she poisoned him, but none could prove it. When, however, she went mad a few weeks afterwards, the Second and Third Priests said Ajala had punished her for killing her husband. She was immediately ostracized and a hut built for her at the edge of the bad bush. She lingered on in her madness and at the age of twenty, fell off a coconut tree and died.

* * * *

"I have heard the voice of Ajala," chanted the Third Priest

In a dreadful crescendo, the acolytes burst into their wild song of the judgment; a song that could be heard miles away, and that warned the villagers of the presence of the great goddess in her shrine.

"I too have heard her command!" The Second Priest could not surpress his joy—last, at last . . .

"Speak, Third Priest." There was deep sorrow in the First Priest's voice as he added, "And may the goddess hold you to ransom if you speak with a false tongue."

"You cannot scare me, First Priest. I heard the voice of our *mother* loud and clear and her message is unmistakable. She said, 'Tell my First Priest I am displeased with his judgement for he has let himself be swayed by sentiments. It is true, this dead daughter of mine saved his life, but then a woman has more than one nature. It is the sum total of her natures that determines whether she is good or bad and to know her natures you have to see her in four dimensions. I have thus listened to the four winds from the four directions; the winds that saw all her movements during her lifetime and I hereby pass judgement. My dead daughter was a bad woman! I therefore command that she be thrown into the bad bush, and a black goat sacrificed to cleanse the people who will take her there. I also command that on the pain of death, none of my children now and in generations to come be given her name nor told of her.' Thus did Ajala command, First Priest."

"You have heard rightly, Third Priest. For I, too, heard the same. May you now seal the judgement, First Priest."

"So be it then, even though I do not think our merciful mother would have passed such judgement on a poor girl who suffered greatly. Third Priest, heat the seal of judgement."

The Third Priest gathered dry leaves and a few sticks and soon made a fire in the stone hearth twenty yards from the sacrificial stone. The youngest acolyte, (there were 13 of them) handed him the brass seal of judgement, shaped in the form of *infinity* with a wooden handle attached to the centre, which he heated until it was hot to the touch. He was about to pick it up when he heard a rumbling noise from above. He straightened up, peering into the thick canopy of leaves but he could detect nothing.

Meanwhile, the chanting had ceased, and there was a hush and a chill in the air, and the moon seemed to have lost much of its cold lustre.

The rumbling noise increased in volume, and the First Priest, his voice sounding like a god's, said, "What is delaying you, Third Priest? Shall we not seal the judgement you said Ajala passed through you?"

But the Third Priest seemed not to hear. He was intent on the commotion that seemed to be coming from the very heavens. He stood there petrified, his feet bound to the earth with cords of iron.

Then with a roar and a crash, a huge dead tree fell on him, crushing him into the earth.

"... and may the goddess hold you to ransom if you speak with a false tongue."

THREE POEMS

by JOSEPH MIEZAN BOGNINI

When you want to sleep at night

When you went to sleep at night
One should have stopped you.

You wrapped yourself in a coat of blood.
Was that the wrath of your god?

You had reddened my path
The day was dying
The earth spoke its last prayer
The foolish birds relaxed
And cursed you without distrust.

You wrapped yourself in a coat of blood.

The shadows drifted disorderly
Across the cloudless sky.

The noisy world grew silent.

A sudden noise
burst the night
and destroyed my twosome world.

Protected by your power
I enjoyed the satisfaction of being conquered.

At the same moment I became cold
Like a cenotaph.

Must I die of hope or of wrath?

Song of the sun

I am the sun
As soon as the day awakes
I sing of man's earth
Bright with coloured arrows
Many centuries long.

I see the years pass by, the moons, the days,
Men born naked in countless rhythms
Dancing the fire dance in the evening.

I discover miracles around my bed of milk,
Garlands of singing roses, naked women,
The greyed ones hunt for happiness.
Harmonies of the day, harmonies of the night,
Gleaming pearls, fluorescent shrubs.

I am the sun
I am dancing across man's earth
When day hurries along.

I see the butterfly
Fluttering over the arch of wild flowers,
It seeks the thousand year old scent
Of which it lives.

Heaven and stars weaken each other, they quarrel,
And the terrible child grumbles and threatens,
I see man naked in countless rites,
Dancing the fire dance in embryonic nights.
The work is busy on ancestral sites
In the rhythm of progress,
As yet a vision.

The songs are gentle on the steep hills,
The fields are ploughed, the coming harvest
Promises rich fruit.

I am the sun.
I am filtering the blue wave
That rolls silently into the unknown,
And trees, bent on their rigid bodies,
Look into the future with misgiving.

The old man, who sits on the threshold,
Complains of the coming dawn,
And with rhythmic steps he is counting the days
That remain for him to live.

And I, I am the sun,
And I weep over man's earth,
As soon the day dies,
Bright with coloured arrows,
Many centuries long.

My days overgrown by coffee blossoms

My days overgrown by coffee blossoms,
My childhood has lost its meaning.

The hatred one has eaten
Can never be destroyed.

Misfortune, I am misfortune,
And my shadow has betrayed me;
Suffering, I am suffering,
Inexperienced at the breast of mankind.

I wish you were music
Rocking the thirsty hearts from afar.

You will carry me away one day
Wrapped into white robes
Into another world.

I have become a grain of sand
Drifting along trembling beaches.

You will bring me asylum
That knows the pain of this night.

You changed your face,
I took you by the hand

And we spent happy days.

A BEAUTIFUL WEDDING

by MOHAMMED DIB

Three announcers went from house to house and a public bell ringer went through the town to proclaim the wedding.

Aini and her three children Aouicha, Omar and Meriem were to spend the night with Aunt Hasma. The boy refused at first to do so. How much had been spoken about this wedding! In Omar's imagination this belonged to those events of which everybody talked wildly but which never took place. It seemed too big and beautiful a plan.

And now Aouicha returned from over there with a list of all the dishes that were being prepared. Aini and the little ones who were listening to her could hardly believe their ears. Aouicha swore to it; after all she knew the sort of thing that was being offered at distinguished weddings!

But that they were among the invitees themselves confused them completely. The meaning of this wedding was suddenly driven home to them.

All four of them were silent for a moment. Even Aouicha looked surprised. "That is not all", said Aini suddenly.

For a few moments she too had been enraptured by this dream: vehemently she removed the luminous vision.

"That is not all, my children. Listen well to what your mother is telling you; try of the dishes that will be offered to you there, but only take a little. Do you understand? Only with the finger tips. I shall be watching you."

The children seemed sad. They looked at their mother critically.

Aini whispered in an angry tone: "I do not want people to say that my children are starving... that we go to this wedding because of the food. Even if we are poor we must keep up our dignity."

Omar thought: "For people like us life means eating. And the pleasure of life is the pleasure of eating." His mother's words were humming in his head.

"A moderate pride is necessary in a life like ours," she used to say. "Even if one is only a cobbler or a weaver one has to carry one's head high as if one were descended from the Rothschilds."

At all important ceremonies at weddings and religious feasts the children must always be present. In our town it is unimaginable that the children will not take an important part when anything is happening. At the entrance to the quarter the little street was barred by a group of boys and girls. Some of them were wearing festive clothes; these were as unusual as green trees in winter. The others were like Omar and had decorated themselves in their own fashion.

They were chasing each other, shrieking as loud as they could. The smallest ones were crying.

It was really the unusual event that one expected, that one looked forward to. There was an intoxicating activity, an atmosphere of joy.

The guests were arriving, and assembled at the inner part of the house. The announcement of a wedding is always an exciting event for the women. Whenever a woman has been invited to a wedding, she asks permission from her husband to take part. Immediately the head of the family hides himself behind a threatening silence. But finally he gives in. In fact he cannot really refuse this. Happier than ever, the woman dresses up in her most beautiful finery.

It happens, and not infrequently, that more guests arrive than were expected according to the invitations.

The first guests filled a room, and new ones joined them continuously lining up along the walls. They were all devouring the bride with their eyes. She was sitting on a chair in a ceremonious pose. The gold veil that covered her face completely did not move. Custom did not permit her to speak. But it might happen, that she moved just a little bit. In this case she was expected to regain her complete immobility quickly.

Whatever the character of a bride, on her wedding she shows nothing of it. The bride one saw here was unattainable. Tradition was much too strong—it was of impressive grandeur—for the bride even to move an eyelid. The guests were touched by this spectacle.

In this moment the bride concentrated on herself all the serenity that was in the air. Everybody talked in a low voice, although this was a great effort for the women. Gradually the conversation became livelier; a subdued murmur rose from one end of the wide room to the other. The women were filled with gentle seriousness and graceful reverence.

"Do not forget, my dear," said one of the women to another, "that men of today like to have a wife who knows how to dress and who can bear them company."

The answer came promptly.

"Her dowry is so large that she can adorn herself for the next ten years." And she added proudly: "You will see this dowry immediately."

Another one, apparently one of the husband's relatives, said contemptuously: "It will be like any other dowry."

The other replied, red and trembling: "No, my little one, it is not like all the others. All who have seen it stood there open-mouthed. Everybody knows what we spent on it. . ."

An old grandmother tried to appease them: "This is a holy day. . .let there be peace in this house. . ."

These words seemed to soothe the opposing views and the discussion ended.

Then the children arrived. They pushed themselves into the house by pinching arms and calves of those who stood in their way. They arrived almost creeping and lined

up in front of the bride. Her splendour fascinated them. Omar wanted to fill his heart with this image. She was covered with silvery and shiny cloth that reached down to her feet. Calm and erect she sat on her chair without a tremble. Only her breath moved her breast. A pointed hood, gold-embroidered and studded with glistening sequins, rose above her forehead. The veil that covered her face was fastened to the point of the hood and fell down to her shoulders. Before this faceless idol Omar was seized with strange excitement.

The face was shown only to certain women. And a female relative had to be there to unveil it. The bride remained immobile, as if she had fallen into a deep sleep. When the veil was lifted, her motionless face and her lowered eyelids appeared illuminated by shimmering silk and precious stones. Mother of pearl and rose colour lay on her brow, her lips, her cheeks. The white of her arms, that one could observe at ease, was glimmering beneath her clothes like snow. Her ringed hands rested on her knees and showed a network painted with henna that reached up to the elbows. The palms of her hands and her fingernails were dyed. How pure and indifferent her attitude! One could have thought that she took no interest in the splendour that was displayed on her, around her and for her.

Suddenly excitement arose.

"Turn them out, those rascals!"

The children had to leave the room. The women left their places and scolded the children and slapped faces or punched their ribs until they had all gone. Screaming much louder than the slaps warranted, they left in tremendous confusion, curses on their lips. . . . .

They spread out on the court yard. But other women were expecting them there, and chased them away.

The children amused themselves by chasing each other in the general confusion. In the meantime the guests were streaming in. The noise, the crowd, the varied dresses, the confusion of colours, were quite intoxicating; and nobody really knew what wild, bubbling fair was beginning to unfold.

A girl proposed: "Let's play wedding day!"

The boys remained indifferent; so the girls repeated: "We'll play wedding day!" They were all shouting: "To the wedding, to the wedding!"

They were surrounding the boys, who, pressed from all sides, finally gave in.

Omar showed his aunt's room. He knew how to get there. He climbed up the stairs to the first story, and gave a sign to those who followed. He pushed up the hook of the shutter; then he climbed up and jumped into the room, followed by the rest.

When they were all there, they were hiding under the huge bed of aunt Hasna, an incredibly high bed from old times; the children did not touch it with their heads. They formed a circle. Yasmina was chosen to be the bride. She accepted her role, without saying a word. Her tender, oval face looked serious. She had long, smooth hair, and green eyes. The bridegroom was a curly-haired, lively boy. The girl sat down quietly in front of him, and waited. The children asked her to shut her eyes. A veil, which they had taken from aunt Hasna's cupboard, was spread over her. Then they were all looking at each other. At last the bridegroom took a decision. He wetted his finger with spittle and touched Yasmina's body.

There was a confusion of voices in the house. Odours of stew and fried meat rose from the ground floor. When the youngsters noticed these smells, they could not contain themselves any longer, and they all jumped out of the window again.

The *meidas*, small rou nd tables had been set up in the yard. The guests helped themselves to large pieces of mutton that were swimming in saffron sauce. Oh, all that meat! In addition, cuscus was served, decorated with dates and sliced eggs. Aunt Hasna had prepared the feast well.

Some women were ea ting with their ten fingers. The red of their lips was melting in the fat that covered their mouths. But the elegant ladies next to them behaved like tailor's dummies.

The children were mixing freely with all the groups, snatching what they could get, remains of meat and bread. They stepped aside a little and swallowed the remains which they had pinched as quickly as possible. They were surrounded by fluttering doves that were trying to pick the crumbs.

Aunt Hasna, leaning forward, had her eyes everywhere. With her severe voice she shouted orders to the cooks and then she welcomed the arriving women. Her broad hips were adorned with a *foutah*—a piece of silk that is worn like an apron over the dress—with coloured ribbons. A wide tunic that was covered in flowers gave her a dignified appearance. She did not miss a single word that was spoken in her surrounding. She answered; then she laughed fully, rejoiced in the compliments and laughed again. Her eyes narrowed and became narrow slits in her fleshy face—then they vanished completely. She was overwhelmed with happiness. She ruled over all these women. In her, a flame was burning, erect and lucid, which seemed to dissolve the contours of her heavy body.

Omar felt she was observing him. In the same moment his aunt's soft hand had seized him by the arm and had pulled him out of the cluster of boys that surrounded him.

"Go and sit with your mother," she whispered to him. "She is over there."

She pointed over to Aini with her finger. "Go, before all the food has been eaten."

Nimbly the boy wound his way between the guests who sat glued to the *meidas*.

"So there you are," Aini said, when she saw him. She considered it correct to adopt a strict tone in front of the other women. "Sit down here!"

She moved a little to the side and made room for him between herself and a strange woman. She was a small woman who swallowed morsel after morsel with bent head. She seemed completely isolated from her turbulent surroundings. Omar was watching her. With dreadful munching noises she was swallowing a piece of meat.

"One could almost think that certain women have nothing to eat at home," a neighbour was crying. "Bah!"

Either the other one had not heard this allusion, or else she pretended to be deaf. She did not notice the remark. Without saying a word, she continued to dig around in common dish with thumb, index finger and middle finger. The woman who had addressed her thus had a beautiful, clean-cut face that looked superior and imposing; surely she was the wife of a merchant or carpet weaver. Aini said nothing. All the same she gave her neighbour some stealthy looks and suddenly anger was reflected in her eyes.

She turned to her son: "Eat now!" she commanded. She broke her piece of bread and passed a part over to him; then she watched him with wrinkled brow.

The boy moved his hand towards the dish and dipped his bread into it without enthusiasm. A moment later he stopped; his throat seemed tightened, he could not eat any more.

Aini too was eating, as if she were performing a duty.

Not far away, on a neighbouring table, Aouisga and Meriem were chewing every bite with great difficulty.

"Aren't you hungry?" Aini asked her son?

The woman with the distinguished face interfered: "This child has not eaten at all."

"Yes, he has, little sister," Aini excused him.

"Go and play, my child", she said with gentle and firm voice.

The boy looked at the bread that had been left on the *meidas* with a kind of fascination. Then he went away. He could not have expressed what went on in his head. The feeling of which he became aware with intolerable clarity was a painful surprise. It filled him like burning. The question rose in him: "Why am I deprived of this bread?"— Soon followed by a second one: "Who deprives me of this bread?" This milky white bread kneaded from white flour and these cakes which the maids were just passing around—his aunt never had to go without them.

It appeared that all the children of the town had found out about the ceremony. They appeared in large gangs. Shy, and quite black, they carefully approached the tables and sniffed. People threw them a bone or a piece of bread and drove them away with a slap. They fled to other groups.

Three of them stood there for a long time rigid and immobile; their noses in the air, they were breathing in the smells. Their feverish eyes were fixed on the guests who could not finish eating, and they followed every movement. When something was given to them, the strongest of the three seized it. The other two continued to observe the greedily eating women.

The frightening noise grew from minute to minute. Calls, shouts, screaming orders, a thousand conversations, the wailing of the tired-out cooks and the barking of dogs— all these sounds mingled in the air. This lasted only a minute. The crowd of the hungry was pushed back to the gate, which was bolted and carefully guarded by two negro women. But in the meantime the children had undertaken a reckless raid. Pieces of meat disappeared like lightening, greedy hands seized quarter loaves of bread. Beautifully decorated plates were destroyed with a single swoop of a hand. Handfuls of raisins disappeared... aunt Hasna was fussing about, as if she no longer knew what to do. And once again the vigilant negro women at the gate were overcome in a furious attack, and the army of cripples, beggars and homeless burst open the gates that stood between them and the feasting guests. All these people were on the move; threatening, showing teeth and claws, they had surrounded the entrance and were now stampeding the wedding feast. Nobody knew what was going on. Within seconds the house was shaking with confusion. Omar was pushed roughly into a corner. Noise and confusion grew and reached their climax. The guests were bewildered and shouted madly. Meanwhile the hungry demons spread over the courtyard, the rooms, the kitchen, mounted the galleries of the first floor and took possession of the terrace. The people of the house rushed at them in order drive them back. There was a general confusion. The miserable screaming of babies was heard above all the noise.

It took a long time before order was restored.

It was a long time before calm finally returned. And now, in an atmosphere that was breathing peace once more a short rhythm sounded from a little drum. The feast began. The guests rushing around, the chatter ceased, and while the drums sounded more festively, the women formed a circle that filled the whole courtyard.

Singers raised their voices; one after the other everyone sang in her own manner.

Aicha my lady,
Oh my darling
Aicha my lady,
Daughter of Bouziane...

The drum beats and the songs which developed freely without any logical sequence became monotonous after a while.

"Zohra, get up! By God, you must dance. You will show all these women."

It was aunt Hasna who was calling out in a thunderous voice. A young girl, half annoyed, half furious, received the looks that supported this request. The women in the audience were all beautifully decked out in wide muslin robes and fiery coloured brocade kaftan. Precious stones were sparkling on their bosoms. Gold-embroidered head-ties covered their hair.

"Give me the pleasure", Aunt Hasna cried again. "Go, little dove. . .show them!"

Other women were also begging, and finally the dancer agreed and got up. With lowered eyelids and pouting mouth she moved towards the centre of the courtyard of which a large section had been cleared. She raised her strong round arms and with both hands she held a green silk cloth before her face. A smile moved over her lips. The luscious young beauty moved with a hardly visible gliding of the feet, while her arms were swaying.

But the bride was deserted. A few relatives surrounded her in the back room where she sat on her throne of humour. During the wholetime, while everybody was enjoyinig himself she had to remain quiet and rigid, her face covered with the impenetrable veil of the married woman.

Outside the dancer was still moving erect. Her eyes smiled faintly, her half open lips trembled. Aunt Hasna shook her head and shouted: "What posture you have, little mother! A real princess, God is my witness!"

Now Omar did not think of anything, did not remember his condition as a hungry animal. Moved by the sight he forgot all dishes; he did not think of his pain which had become blurred and far away.

And so he was happy, he too. Somehow he was proud. Life does not only mean eating, and the happiness of life is not only the happiness of eating.

NATIVITY POEMS

by POL N. NDU

afa
(before Oracle)

here again, worshipper,
I bend low and whisper:

when rain was gone
and sun over-spent hours
in violet evenings
hoes hung brown on low eaves;

now pilgrim birds troop across the dimmed horizon,
bereaved kites abandon smoky fields
into tunes of frustrated loneliness

tell me, my sky-god,
what holds back the rain

essence

four rays meet:
in a circle;
and the circle, a spark—
that breaks
fluid crawling the furrows of four lines
into extra ripples
and extra cycles

those eyes speak infinite light,
fathomless love and flowing pity:
invincible quantum of unhatched glory
leaping suddenly into strange mutilation,
smearing sweet myrrh
on fragmented shells and limbs
dipped in oil and grease

the stainless brand
hall-marking eternity,
here

incubation

(at noon)
maid met at cross-roads,
ignorant play-mate on noon-sand,
do not shy away,
show me your face
down to bosom
imprint on hot sand
for ever

bare-place your hands here
my spirit chamber
message my frame
from black balls
deep water-blood
in tears

unlatch
let me in again

out from fire-wood forest
into strange sandy open
on your trail:
wonder-bird
here where all roads meet
stretching beyond the reach of light
into a penumbra
where land and sky
drink the sea

let us be born again:
these roads from here
never will meet, till here;

receding
to drink the sea
with land and sky
and us

being re-born
that we give birth,
and see
behind the darkness of the west
the approach of light from the east

let us draw
on hot sand,
incubation

incarnation
(at mid-night)

cotyledon broken
invisible
mat-spread by night
under germ-elbow
up-sat crunching its source
over-leaping into the track,
christlike

udude
(at cock-crow)

grave number twenty-four
red axe forged from last burials
of twenty-three corpses in me:
Okpoko

horn-man call,
nude queens low in chant
far from lay-men
far from grasshoppers
trembling at your charged incantations:
Mmanwu

transmitting dead-land rumbles
in diction computed
at first cock-crow:
Udude

raw-material un-human
in invincible cocoon
explaining miracle photogropic:
burst-balloon

time-keeper of innumerable sperms
frantic in vibration
to chaotic chemistry:
I win!

the purest victory of all. . . . .
victory of vision
    of visitation
    of creation
perfect without contribution,
new-born fire-intricate
delicate because sharp
fierce in steadiness

I yearn

THE SEA THAT BURST OUT ROARING

by HERBERT L. SHORE

—for Rico Lebrun

It was a time to be remembered. The shops were shut, the windows barred and shuttered, not by order of the prefect of police, nor the mayor, nor even the governor this time, but by the shopkeepers themselves. Closed. Not a flag in the city—not one, anywhere. The tall pole in front of the village hall was stripped and bare. The post office flag was not there.

The men came back in small groups, the way the Frenchmen go to Mass on Sunday morning. Where did they come from? How? Clouds were moving softly through the sky, and beneath them, groups of men were moving swiftly all along the village streets.

The first shots were fired somewhere on the other side of the village, somewhere in a twisting narrow street of dirt and stones and desert sand. The first shots were fired, and a small group broke away from the men in the street and started running. Leaflets went whirling through the air like a flurry of leaves in the wind. Suddenly a flag unfurled, and sunbeams darted toward it.

"The men have come back!" someone cried. "The men have returned!"

Leila ran with the others, ran until she saw the flag and the hands that held it. On one of the hands, two fingers were missing. It was Azid—Azid come home. She was drawn out, like the low wailing note of a desert song at dusk.

There were more shots, more of them, more rapidly.

"The men. The men," someone said beside her.

At the sight of Azid, and of the bodies tumbling down to the dry, dry earth, she was filled with joy and fear together. They passed a cakeshop that had once smelled sweet of almonds and vanilla. Now it smelled of blood.

They picked up the first ones who fell and unknown hands bandaged the wounds of unknown wounded. The invalids were running, even the lame. They went limping into the streets in the same rhythm, swept along by the flood. All of them were there, those

who had fathers to avenge, sisters and mothers to avenge, wives and the lost tenderness of first love, those who had children with bent bones and swollen bellies, and young girls with tender hearts. They were all there, and Azid, her love, was there, weighed down under his flag.

The shooting was heavier and more staccato in its sound. The men cried something—a sound—a shout. Was it liberty they cried?

The crowds dispersed, dissolved, the men scattered, separated, but linked by threads, invisible, powerful bonds, how many?. . .at the same hour, in different parts of the land. . . in other lands, perhaps.

Leila got away through twisting little streets. The streets were her friends that day, the passers-by, her brothers. The gates of the morgue made a grinding noise to let the bodies in. These were the first dead of the resistance. The others had died of starving and of dirt, but these. . .these were new and bleeding. She passed a *colon* walking his three dogs, marching, it seemed, he in front, they behind, and her eyes were filled with bitter death. The grave is a pit which never fills, they say. It always grows deeper.

At the falling of night, Azid came, and she hardly knew him. At a distance that morning, he had looked better. Now he seemed changed. His teeth were missing.

"Shut the door," he said. "You are still my wife?"

"Oh yes," she said, "yes, yes, yes."

They loved in the night, after three years now, as if it were the first time again. Azid was wounded. A bullet had gone through him and through his flag.

"I am proud of you," he told her. "You have kept your word."

He took her in his arms and his wound bled. The bandage, the rag around it, grew red. He lay in her arms exhausted, and stayed there till the dawn. Even when it was all over, it could not be forgotten.

Listen. . listen. . to that dialogue of night and shadows. Pulses beat faster, hearts grow warmer, windows open, and the village shudders like the leaves of a tree struck by a sudden wind. Listen . . listen. . . Leila smiled.

The weather changed with the seasons. Fruits no longer rotted on the boughs; they were gathered. People did not die of hunger in the streets, they died of something else. The beggars vanished. Only a priest in a torn *soutane* still whined for charity. In houses too small and clustered even for bedding to be brought out into the sun, an army was swarming. Behind their windows, how many mysteries? How many secrets in the packets that came out of them to be scattered about Algerian nights?—those nights with agony in them, so much agony that they were empty. Through how many unknown streets did Leila scamper?

"Stones, little stones," she said, "how many times in a day do I walk over you?" And she bent down to caress the street.

The houses, the shops, the butcher's and the place of the weaver of cloth, now served as stores for arms. In front of the doors, the women sat, without a care in the world it seemed. They plied their needlework, looked after their children, rolled the dough for bread, and hidden behind them all the while were the bullets and the guns and the men. The walls spoke of blood and hope and courage.

They died with bare feet. They were being shot down on the pavement, stuck against a wall, shot in the gullies and the ravines, tied fast to twisted trees and set afire, with their bowels torn out and thrown to the dogs. They lay there in the roads, washed by the sands of the desert and the wind.

In a few years it will be over, it will be complete, and we, we won't be there any longer, we are born today. We die today of struggle, of misery, poverty and hatred, as others have died of cholera and plague before the serum was discovered. We are guinea pigs. Accept us, Lord. . . .receive our souls. . . . .

The window panes above Leila's bed changed colour. She felt cold and pulled the covers up. Day was coming. Azid had slipped off to the mountains once more, once more into the darkness without a cloak, without a robe.

Somewhere a woman was dreaming.

"Achie, come! Help me, Achie!"

If love could save a being from death, Leila thought, no one would die tomorrow.

The village was astir, rearing like a restive horse, when she heard the cry.

"Quick! Quick! Hide yourselves!"

No one had time. In that half-darkness they could hardly see.

"Get rid of the things," someone called. "They surround the house."

The women went to see and were struck by bayonets. Children were torn from their fathers, and the men were dragged off. In the deep shadows, she could not make the faces out, she could only hear the deep groans. All the men were kept upon their knees till daylight came. When the rays of the sun showed themselves fully, a man was brought among them, his face covered with a black hood. Only his eyes could be seen. With his bent and shaking finger, he pointed out the guilty ones.

The hood moved on and pointed as he went. The machine guns came alive and blood spurted. Those who remained were led away, off toward the west with the sun. No one ever saw them again or heard from them or of them. The mothers went running after them through the dry dust-blown streets.

When they were gone, flames spurted up from burning homes. Women and children rushed about with bowls of water, trying to put the fires out. An old woman, when she saw the red flame coil out from her door like a snake, pulled up her skirts and ran. The others called out to her,

"Fatima, mother, don't go! Save your house!"

The flames died away when all had been consumed, and old folk gathered in the square. On this day, sorrow came with the sun. . . .Leila wept, not knowing what to say to them. She had lost nothing, and she was ashamed of it.

"May the plague fall on those who have done this."

"Barricade the doors. Don't let them come back," one of the mothers said.

"If they come," another cried, "what can they find now?. . .All these years you have nursed him, and many a white sleepless night he has given you, and it has taken only a moment to snatch him away."

An old, old woman sobbed, "Where can we mourn him now? Where can we find his grave?. . . . You give him bread and courage, and sometimes you have nothing—nothing in the kneading trough and nothing in your heart."

The door burst open and another woman entered, her hair and clothes dishevelled, her palms bloody.

"Here is the blood of my Jallah," she murmured. "I took it up, mixed with the sand and the dirt from the place where he fell. I want to live on it."

She licked her hands. Then all the women fell to their knees, bowed low toward the earth, and prayed.

Leila slept at home that night. That night they came for her. When they took her

off, she closed her eyes. Where was Azid now, where in the mountains in the darkness? Where will he be when he hears the news? Who will say to him, "Azid, they took your wife and killed her. She is no longer living....."

At the first station, they broke her arm, and she saw a woman lying at the edge of death, lying on the ground with her hands tied behind her back, eaten up with flea bites. At the second station, the soldiers took her, the *paras*, and she saw another woman, wounded in the throat by a knife cut, unable to groan, able only to make little meows like a newborn kitten. The *paras* kicked her as they passed. She was still there when Leila left.

At the last station, in the camp where they finally put her, she found a woman kneeling on a bundle, and when she stopped beside her, the woman rose and said, "My baby is dead inside this little wrap. My name is Marianne. Strange, isn't it, that I should be named this way? My mother was from France."

In the darkened room, the *para* stood above Leila, a paper in his hand.

"Sign," he said to her.

"I won't."

"Sign and you can go."

"No, thank you."

"You do not want to leave here, eh?"

"No, I do not want to leave. I want to stay with all the others."

"Then I will kill you," the *para* said.

"That won't change anything."

When she opened her eyes, she had been beaten on the broken arm, and more. She had been beaten and bruised and used and tortured. And she knew now that it is not true that you become tired of life when you have suffered too much. It is not true. The price that you have paid is so big that you love life all the more.

Daylight came. The jest was over. The door opened gratingly. The guards were there. The *paras* pushed them from their cells and into the courtyard where the sunshine struck them in the face. They stood in lines and waited. Other women came and walked up to swell their ranks.

Leila let her thoughts move at their own pace like the hands of a watch. For the last time, she looked on this yard. Each stone spoke of death; each step evoked blood. Here it was that the blind and half-wit beggar had fallen and cried, "Pity! Have pity!" Leila thought she saw the bloodstains on the stones. The calling of the roll began.

"Let me warm myself a moment in the sun," someone cried. Then not a breath was heard.

Marianne was called, and Leila next. They stepped out from the others, and those few steps separated them from the world of the living and led them into the home of the dead. Malika, the next one called, climbed into the wagon with her daughter. The small one with the very shrill voice climbed in with her sister.

They went off together, all of them together in the wagon. Sunshine played on the road they took. A man wrote something on a scrap of paper and threw it out behind to those who were along the road. They saw an old woman, far off, bending down to pick it up. Malika threw a fistful of grain. Where it came from, no one knew. The wind lifted the seeds, then let them fall to earth again. A young girl threw out her wedding band. A woman, who had nothing else, threw a strip from her robe. These messages went dancing into the sun of day. The wagon went rolling on, and left the living world behind.

They came upon some cypress trees, cypresses from France, and suddenly everything was still. They reached the field, and when the wagon stopped, they climbed down again to the earth. Arrows pointed out the way. They saw the wall confronting them. The stench of the ditch took Leila's breath away. It came from the fragments of blood and brain that rotted there, from those who had been to the wall before them. Tomorrow, her own smell would be mixed with the others. It would rise up from the earth with all the others into the desert sun.

The men who killed Leila were *para* strangers from another land. Were they men whose hair had never once been stroked by women or by children when they lay in pain? Those who waited to carry off her corpse were men of her own country, aliens in their own land, with cold blood, without heart or lungs, without anything of the living man.

Her group went forward and arranged themselves along the wall. Leila was half-naked, and the beauty spot showed dark upon her breast. Azid had touched it first. Death touched it last. The fire of two machine guns swept across her from one side and then the other. She flew up from the earth and vanished into the sky like a dove struck in mid flight.

Somewhere far away a bell rang and people gathered. Between the mosque and the shop the soothing balms were sold, a certain Leila had once been born. At that very moment, she left the world, afraid for the last time.

Once she had played at hiding her doll away from the boys. "Careful," she had whispered, "if they find us, they will shoot us bang in the heart."

That very night, before the lamps were out, in the foot-hills of the Atlas Mountains, an old woman in the shadows began to tell the story.

"All that blood," she said, "as if a river had gone astray, like a sea that burst out roaring, O my children. . ."

WEST INDIES LTD

By Nicolas Guillen

I

West Indies! Coconuts, tobacco and alcohol. . . .
Here is a dark and smiling people,
conservative and liberal,
men of cattle and sugar,
where money sometimes flows in rivers
but where life is always hard.

Here the sun scorches everything
from the skull to the roses.
Beneath our dazzling white drill
we still carry a loin-cloth;
A people simple and gentle, children of slaves
and of that uncivil thief
so mixed in his origins
who is the name of Spain
gave us to the indies with a gracious gesture.

Here we have whites and negroes, chinese and mulattos.
For we are dealing with the cheapest of colours,
so that through all our treaties and contracts
the colours run freely and not one is stable,
(he who thinks otherwise, let him take one step and speak.)

We have all that here, and political parties,
and orators who say: "In these critical times. . . ."
We have banks and bankers,
law makers and brokers,
lawyers and journalists,
doctors and porters.

What do we lack, then?
If there is anything, we will go and get it.
West Indies! Coconuts, tobacco and alcohol.
Here is a dark and smiling people.

Oh insular land!
Oh narrow land!
Wasn't it made for the shadow
of a single palm tree?
Land on the route of the "Orinoco"
and all the cruising tourists,
full of people but without any artists
and not one madman;
Ports where all who return from Tahiti,
from Afghanistan or from Seoul,
come to commune with the blue sky
and sip a glass of Bacardi;
ports where an English is spoken
which begins with *yes* and ends with *yes*,
(English of touts with four feet).
West Indies! Coconuts, tobacco and alcohol. .
Here is a dark and smiling people.

I laugh at you, noble of the Antilles,
monkey who goes leaping from branch to branch,
tumbler who fears to put his foot in it
and constantly does, right up to the knee!
I laugh at you, white man with green veins
—however you try to hide them—

I laugh because you speak of pure aristocracies,
of flourishing factories and brimming coffers!
I laugh at you also, sedulous negro,
who gaze wide-eyed at the engine of riches,
and who are ashamed of your black skin
when you have such a hard fist!
I laugh at all of you: at the politician and the drunk,
at the priest and his altar-boy,
the President and the pumpman.
I laugh at all of you, at the whole world.
At the whole world which is so moved by four marionettes,
so puffed up behind its shrieking mottoes,
like four savages at the foot of a palm tree.

2

Five minutes interval. The fanfare of Juan the Barber

sounds once

—Colonels of terra-cotta
weathervane politicians
coffee with bread and butter—
Let the horn sound!

The bureaucracy has agreed
to offer itself for the Nation
at two hundred dollars a month—
Let the horn sound!

The old leaders were smiling
and later spoke from the verandahs.
Sugar! Sugar! Sugar!
—Let the horn sound!

3

The long canes tremble
fearful of the knife.
Sun burns and air oppresses.
The master's cries
crack hard and dry as whips.
Over the masses
of the dark labourers
rises a voice that sings
breaks out a voice that sings
a voice swelling with anger,
a real and ancient voice,
a modern and barbarous voice:

—*Cut down the heads like canes,*
chas, chas, chas!
Burn both canes and heads,
chas, chas, chas!
let smoke mount to the clouds,
When the day comes, when the day comes!

Here is my knife with its blade,
chas, chas, chas!
Here is my hand with its knife,
chas, chas, chas!
And the master is beside me,
chas, chas, chas!
Cut down the heads like canes,
Burn both canes and heads,
let smoke mount to the clouds. . .
When the day comes!

And this elastic song, in the evening
of sugar and pain,
trembles, glitters and burns
against the hollow breast of the day.

4

Hunger moves under the arches
swollen with yellow heads
and with phantom bodies;
it squats upon the benches
in the municipal parks,
or swarms in the bright sunlight and
in the bright moonlight,
seeks the forbidden liquor
that makes it blind and senseless,
liquor which is not sold
in any decent tavern.
Hunger of the Antilles,
sorrow of the simple West Indies!
Nights peopled with harlots,
bars peopled with sailors;
crossroads of a hundred routes
for bandits and buccaneers.
Hide-outs for sellers of morphine,
of heroin and cocaine.

Cabarets for deluding
boredom with a cordial,
with a bottle of champagne
which gives men hope of curing
with its alembic of joy
their sentimental syphilis.

Longing to pierce the future
and suck from its secret entrails
a real formula
by which to live.
Rage of respectable pirates
who, like Sores and "The Olones",
when misery stands before them
vent their vexation in kicks.
Dramatic blindness of the troops
whose rifles are always loaded
to scatter all who hiss in mockery
whenever the soup is thin or the bread is hard!

5

Five minutes interval. The fanfare of Juan the Barber sounds once

In order to make a living
work and sweat;
In order to make a living
work and sweat:
rather than bending your back,
just bend your neck.

Out of the canes flows sugar,
sugar for coffee;
out of the canes flows sugar,
sugar for coffee:
everything that it sweetens
tastes to me like gall.

I have nowhere to lie at night,
no woman to desire;
I have nowhere to lie at night,
no woman to desire:
the dogs all bark behind me,
none gives me room at his fire.

Men, while they are men,
must always carry a knife;
men, while they are men,
must always carry a knife:
I was a man and I had one,
but I left it in the prison.

If I should die at this moment,
If I should die at this moment,
If I should die at this moment, mother,
What joy it would bring me!

O, I'll give you, give you,
Yes, I'll give you, give you,
O, I'll give you
Freedom!

6

West Indies! West Indies! West Indies!
This is a hairy people,
coppery, many-headed, where life crawls
with dried mud cracking on its skin.
Here is the prison
where each man's feet are chained.
This is the grotesque home of *companies* and *trusts*.
Here is the lake of asphalt and the mines of iron,
the coffee plantations,
the *docks*, the *ferry boats*, the *ten cents*—
This is a people of *all right*
where everything goes badly;
This is a people of *very well*
where everyone is ill.

Here are the servants of Mr. Babbit
who send their sons to West Point for their education.
Here are those who yell: *hello, baby*
and smoke *Chesterfield* and *Lucky Strike*.
Here are the dancers of *fox-trots;*
the *boys* of the *lazz-band*
and the vacationers of Miami and Palm Beach.
Here are those who order *bread and butter*
and *coffee and milk*.

Here are the ridiculous syphilitic young,
smokers of opium and marijuana,
flaunting in public view their spirochetes
and buying a new suit every week.
Here are the best people of Port au Prince,
the pure bloods of Kingston, the *high life* of Havana—
But others also who row through the tears,
dramatic oarsmen, dramatic oarsmen!
Others also
who work with a bunch of lightning

the hard stone which tightens little by little
to the fist of a titan. Those who ignite the red
spark over the dry fields.
Those who cry, "We are ready!" and stir an echo
from other voices, "We are ready!" Those moving in savage tumult
who feel within their blood the syllables of insult.

What shall we do with them,
working amidst a bunch of lightning?
Here are those who work shoulder to shoulder
risking everything, and giving everything
with their generous hands;
here are those who feel themselves brothers
of the negro, who doubled over the dark trench
dissolves in pure sweat;
and of the white, who knows that flesh is clay
made sick by the lash, and sicker still
by the boot, for now the voice
is rising that is like a brutal thunder in the throat.

Here are those who dream awake,
those who struggle in the depths of the mine
and hear the voice which bears
the living and the dead.
Those, the enlightened ones,
the unknown rejected ones,
the humiliated ones,
the disinherited,
the damned,
the ragged,
chained
and frozen once,
those who cry before the pistol, "brother soldiers!"
and lie riddled
with a red thread at their purple lips!
(March forward in tumult!
Wave the barbar banners,
And set fire to the banners
Above the tumult!)

7

Five minutes interval. The fanfare of Juan the Barber

sounds once

—They'll kill me, if I don't work,
and if I work, they'll kill me;
always they kill me, kill me,
always kill me.

Yesterday I saw a man gazing,
gazing at the sunrise;
yesterday I saw a man gazing,
gazing at the sunrise:
the man looked very solemn
because he could not see.
Ay,
the blind live and see nothing
when the sun is rising,
when the sun is rising,
when the sun is rising!

Yesterday I saw a child playing
at killing another child;
yesterday I saw a child playing
at killing another child;
such children often resemble
the labouring men.
When they grow up who'll tell them
that men are not children?
not children,
not children,
not children!

They'll kill me, if I don't work,
and if I work, they'll kill me:
always they kill me, kill me,
always kill me!

8

A leaping fire cuts into the night
with its blades. The innocent palms
talk in their yellow voices
of necklaces, silks and earrings.
A crouching negro roasts his coffee.
The slavehouse is burning.
The winds shout in freedom.
A cruiser of the American Union
passes. Later, another cruiser,
fouling the candid water with their ambitious kneels,
offspring of old Drake, the buccaneer.
Slowly a hand rises from the rock
and closes itself into a vengeful fist.
Bright, bright and vivid
the sound of hope bursts over land and ocean.
The sun speaks of forests, full of green seeds. . . .
West Indies, in English. In Castilian,
the Antilles.

Translated by Gerald Moore

THE DESCENDANTS

by OUSMANE SOUCE

On the opposite bank one could see the President's palace towering above the white houses, the tall palm trees of N'Dar-Toute and the minaret of a mosque.

It was a peaceful sight, and Karim loved to survey his native town in the afternoon, when the sun was high in the sky.

Saint-Louis du Senegal, an ancient French city, had set the tone in Senegal during the 19th century with its elegance and its manners.

Nowadays Saint-Louis has been surpassed by young flourishing towns like Dakar. But the city has retained its oriental splendour and pompous ceremonies which betray the Arabic influence.

Karim was a young man of twenty-two years. He was tall, slender and strong; his skin was brown like tobacco, and his hair chestnut coloured. His teeth gleamed like mother of pearl and adorned his smile.

Because of his perfect manners, he was accepted by the elders as a serious, diligent young man. He was good-tempered and good-humoured and always helpful. But when girls were around he was a bit of a braggart.

He had attended a French school, and after his military service, he had joined a commercial house. The adding up of long columns of figures soon tired him out. He much preferred to manipulate the huge account books. That always looked impressive, when young ladies were passing outside, smiling sweetly.

One Saturday afternoon a whole bunch of girls passed by. They stopped, leant on the low window sill and shouted in unison: "Karim, Karim!"

And then followed the usual meaningless chatter of young people in love.

"Karim, heaven't you any refreshments for us?" said the boldest of them.

"Had I known you were coming, I would have prepared delicious things for you."

"Well, we'll believe you."

"But surely, you could produce some Cola nuts," insisted another one.

"But of course," replied Karim, and gave them a hundred Francs.

"Thank you, Karim, you are unique in the whole of Saint-Louis!"

During the whole scene, one of the young girls had stood aside. Her skin was bronze-coloured, she wore a blue muslin dress. Her hair gleamed like metal and her almond-shaped eyes were deep black.

Karim was watching her secretly, quite bewitched by her beauty. Already he was wondering how he could conquer her.

When his pretty visitors left, he moved the pencil through his hair—lost in thought. Then he got up, leant out of the window, and called Fatu, the eldest, to come back.

"What again, Karim?"

"Come a little closer, Fatu."

She came up to the window.

"Who is that dark-haired girl in the blue muslin dress?"

"Marième", Fatu said, smiling.

"And where does she live?"

"In the north end of the town. Next door to us."

"Has she got a boy friend?"

"Yes, surely. But they quarrelled again on Sunday. I think they will split up."

"All the better. Listen, Fatu, you must do me a favour. Go to her, and tell her that I love her, and that I shall visit her tonight. Fatu, you must help me. Tell Marième about me, and put me in a favourable light."

"Of course. You can rely on me. And you will surely be successful! But if I can offer some advice: be generous tonight! Show her that you don't belong to those young men who can hardly afford a cigarette."

"Oh, but that's understood. I will throw money about, like king Maissa Tenda!" Fatu left.

Karim continued to dream. Finally he looked at the clock:

"Four o'clock! For a whole hour, I have to hang around here."

Automatically he put his hand in his pocket and brought out his purse.

"Three hundred Francs!"

That was all he had left of his salary. And today was only the fifth! And what about the bill from Bertin & Co. that had come in the morning?

Oh well, let it wait till next month. All that was unimportant now. Right now, only Marième existed. He simply had to conquer her, at all costs.

Karim started. Happily he counted the five strokes of the clock. He carefully put his ledgers aside, put the fez on his head and left for home. He lived in the southern part of town.

On his way he bought some white slippers in a Moroccan bazaar. Happy and excited, he arrived at home. Immediately he changed. He chose a pair of wide cotton trousers, Algerian style, a white silk shirt and a richly embroidered bubu. Then he slipped into his white shoes and enjoyed the reflection of his white clothes in the blue-black henna with which he had painted his feet.

After he had combed carefully and sprinkled himself with heavy scent, he put the purse, cigarettes and handkerchief into the only pocket of his trousers.

"Aren't you staying for supper?" his young sister asked him.

"No, Khagy. I am not hungry. Tell mother not to wait."

Then he called on his best friends, Mussa, Aliune and Samba. They were to follow him to Marième.

"My brothers," he said, "today I must win a great victory. Today you prove that you are indeed my brothers."

"But you know, Karim: for your sake we let ourselves be hacked in pieces; we walk through fire!"

Happily bragging they reached Marième's house. Aliune knocked.

"Come in!"

Marième sat on her couch. She wore a blouse with half-long, puffy sleeves, and her silky skin gleamed through the embroidery. Numerous gold armlets adorned her thin wrists, earrings dangled near her gently inclined neck, and a *Louis d'Or* was hanging from her black plaits onto the forehead. Her wrapper was of handwoven *Wolof* material. Karim sat beside her. His friends sat in the chairs along the walls.

Karim looked around the room. There was a cupboard with mirrors and large photographs of relatives and friends hung on the walls. Little objects were placed everywhere on coloured cloths—an ostrich egg, a delicate calabash. The electric light that hung from the ceiling gave a bright light.

Silently the Senegalese men sat on their chairs. Their bubus, as white as the brightest moon and heavy with folds, gave them a majestic look.

Mussa spoke first:

"Why so silent, sister Marième?"

But the young lady was shy in the presence of so many splendidly dressed men and she was dizzy with all their perfume. She could not utter a sound. She replied with a soft smile. . . .

Without knocking, young girls entered the room. They were friends of Marième, who had asked them to receive the visitors.

"What is your name, sister?" Semba asked the girl sitting beside him.

"Rokhaja."

"Rokhaja, do you know the young men who are assembled here?"

"I don't, my brother."

"We are *Samba Lingueres*."

"That may be so. But *what* is a Samba Lingueres?"

"A *Samba Linguere* is a man who in ancient times confronted any kind of enemy. The singers praised his fame for he gave away all his possessions and distributed them among the poor. He loved honour above all, and he struck down anyone who crossed him. Nowadays a *Samba Linguere* is a man who can face any situation and lives up to any challenge. Our friend Karim, who is wooing Marième today, is such a *Samba Linguere*. He is worthy to be her friend. He will prove it to you." Then he turned to Marième herself. "What do you say to that?"

"I am sure you are talking the truth. Everything you say sounds very convincing."

Karim trembled with joy. Semba gave him a knowing look, which he answered with a wink.

"Call musicians!" Rokhaja said to Aliune. "They shall entertain us."

Senegalese singers and musicians greeted the guests.

"Salem aleikum, Guer-Gni?"

"Aleikum salem."

They settled down on the mats that covered the floor. The guitar player tuned his instrument and began to play the song of Sundjata.

The conversation stopped. Soft tones sounded in rhythmic succession—it was the accompaniment to King Sundjata's war song—a noble, heroic and sad music, that transferred the listeners back into the times of proud African kings, to whom 'victory' alone was the highest honour.

The singers murmured words to the music. Pensive and silent, the young people listened.

Karim put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a hundred francs note and placed it before the guitar player. The guitar player took it and thanked him:

"Oh Karim, descendant of Kuma Borso, who died a hero's death under the large tree of Salum. Oh Karim, you are among the most noble, pride of your lineage! Marième, none other can be worthy to be your lover."

"Truly, it is so," the singers shouted in chorus.

And now they in turn began to praise Karim, lest the guitar player alone should be rewarded. The guitar player tried to continue, but the chorus of singers drowned his soft music. Their song praised the ancestors of Karim, and reported the heroic deeds that had brought them fame and glory. The young man trembled with courage, he was determined to be a hero himself; if at this moment, enemies had appeared with lances, swords and daneguns, he would have thrust himself on them in order to conquer or die, like his ancestors whose courage was just being praised—

Karim gave the singers a hundred francs and all his friends added more money.

"Bravo, bravo," the musicians shouted.

"These are brave heroes, Mariéme, accept the offer of their friendship. You will never regret it."

"Shall we go?" Karim asked his escorts.

They agreed.

He let a little while pass, before he put on his slippers and was the last to rise. Mariéme accompanied him to the door. When they had embraced in front of the door, the lovers said *goodnight*.

Mariéme returned to her girl friends, who received her laughing.

"Truly Mariéme, you have found a real Samba Linguere! He has given the players two hundred francs, and his friends did no less nobly."

"He is magnificent" said Mariéme.

THREE POEMS

by A. B. SPELLMAN

nolde's light

these things that don't
move we call lifeless
the park
trees, seats, one
person, lamps in
fog hold a dead fluorescent
light, & all of them
those familiar so placed
green endless bench,
drunk pollak, in the dead
light the only grass for miles
abounds, makes a greylit tension
with drunks & bricks. drunks
benches grass light & houses.
i'm kicking them all &
they aren't moving over.

the good life left

On renting apartments in N.Y.

the man said 'i'll call
you back' meaning
'wait for nothing'
& i waited.

hope like sick women
bleeding dry

sat with northrop
frye of all people reading
'if we call someone medieval
or middle aged we mean, he is old fashioned'

god bless you, n.f.
'imagination' to 'hysteria'
from 'freedom' to 'language'
'reporters' to 'understanding'

save you eyeless voice
that didn't call
('social mechanism working'
n.f.? 'three levels)
of the mind?')

bring you back, dead
lumumba, banished bob
williams, lost father, lost
sun, stolen wealth, great
lemon mountain of 'fay appreciation.'

switch your
milk my pee, art for
billy goat balls, shake it up,
throw it in the corner & tell it
'be something', & when it hits air

you can watch it turn black.

point

i thought, i am talking to you
from a close box,
my voice, held
in,
breaks
against the backs of
my eyes.
can you hear me? my mind's
effect?
ear to my ear, for what
moves inside,
& shatters each word
on the back of an eye.

AFRICAN WRITERS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by O. R. DATHORNE

Africans were not unusual in eighteenth century England; indeed there were so many of them who had come up via the West Indies, that they were given the name of "St. Giles Black Birds", since they congregated around St. Giles Circus. Most of them were employed in the households of prominent people and were simply chattels; three managed to become more than this and wrote and published during their lifetime.

Little, in his *Negro in Britain*, quotes a letter that the Duchess of Devonshire sent to her mother in which she referred to her servant as "a cheap servant" whom she "will make a Christian. . .and a good boy." This attitude, partly a mixture of ideological paternalism and domestic necessity, was the basic actuality of what was called humanitarianism:

> In turning to the eighteenth century we discover that one of the broader aspects of the thought of this period was that of humanitarianism. In a sense it was merely one of the aspects of the romanticism of the period; and its over-all aim was to make the best of all possible worlds in which to live.[2]

This accounts in large measure for the concept of the century—they could see the African as partly savage and partly noble. The Africans who wrote also saw themselves in just this same way.

Among the better known servants who lived during this period were Soubise and Francis Barber. Soubise was apparently something of a fop. Henry Angelo wrote of him.

> Fancying he was admired by the ladies, he boasted much of his amours and his epistolary correspondence.[3]

It was the intention of Soubise's employer to send him to University but he apparently proved to be too superior and they changed their minds. Soubise then went to teach fencing in India and he died there. Francis Barber, on the other hand, was Dr Johnson's servant. He came to England in 1750.[4] Johnson sent him to school and taught him Latin, and in a letter dated 25th September, 1770 he wrote to Francis Barber:

> I am very well satisfied with your progress, if you can really perform the exercises which you are set. . . Let me know what English books you read for your entertainment. You can never be wise unless you love reading.[5]

The more liberal at the time would have liked to believe that the African, if given the chance, would be able to become a cultured man. There were a few who believed that he was even capable of writing; some, however, doubted this, and around Francis Williams, an African who had been educated at Cambridge and who had returned to Jamaica, this argument raged. Hume thought:

> In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments.[6]

Edward Long, on the other hand, conceded that he did write and "was fond of a species of composition in Latin"[7] but added this warning about an example of his verse that Long quoted:

> To consider the merits of this specimen impartially we must endeavour to forget in the first place that the writer was a Negroe; for if we regard it as an extraordinary production, merely because it came from a Negroe, we admit at once the inequality of genius which has been before supposed and admire it only as a rare phenomenon.[8]

It is against this background that the literary contributions of Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cogoano and Culadah Equiano can best be understood.[9] They were all West Africans who had been enslaved and who had only managed to get to England as servants. That they survived is a testament to their fortitude. That they could write at all proves considerable ability.

Sancho was the first to be published. His *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* was published in 1782, two years after he died. In the Introduction we are told something of Sancho's biography. He was born in 1729 on a slave ship; his mother died soon after and his father committed suicide. He was baptised at Cartagenia and given the name Ignatius, Sancho being added afterwards. At the age of two he came from the West Indies to England and was given to two sisters. The Duke of Montagu liked him and used to give him books; when he died, Sancho became a butler in the Duchess's household until her death. After this, we are told, he lived a wild life; then he returned to Montague House but illness forced him to retire in 1773. By then he had married and he started a small grocery store in Westminster. After his death one of his six children carried on the business and, indeed, edited the fifth edition of his letters in 1803.

He was well known in polite and literary circles. He was an acquaintance of Garrick's as we can tell from his correspondence, and wrote to, and admired Sterne. From his letters one can glimpse the personal nature of the man—his sense of humour, his love for his family, his concern with the predicament of his fellow Africans. One sees also something of his raw love of life and his conceit.

Slavery is only one of the concerns in his letters; in a letter to Sterne he thanked him for condemning slavery in one of his sermons and thought "that subject handled in your striking manner would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many."[10] In another letter to a friend he condemns the "most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes."[11] But he did not sentimentalise his African past, as some of his contemporaries did. He wrote about the "horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty kings—encouraged by their Christian customers."[12] He could frequently write in a detached way about another African and an acquaintance; so, in a letter, he warns a friend in India about Soubise's coming:

If he should chance to fall in your way, do not fail to give the rattle-pate what wholesome advice you can; but remember, I do strictly caution you against lending him money upon any account, for he has everything but—principle.[13]

Occasionally, as in a letter to Soubise, he becomes sanctimonious, and sometimes one wonders if he did not completely forget that he was an African. He recommends a Mr. B as:

a merry, chirping, white tooth'd . . .and light little fellow; with a woolley pate—and face as dark as your humble. . . . .I like the rogue's looks or a similarity of colour should not have induced me to recommend him.[14]

Sancho showed himself interested in the political matters of his day. He did not like the American war and wrote frequently to the press about it. Under the name of "Africanus" he wrote to the *General Advertiser* outlining at times various improbable schemes. He was obviously well-known and was caricatured in the anonymous *Memoir and Opinions of Mr. Blenfield* (1790). Little adds that Sancho wrote verse and music and that some of his poetry was published in 1803. He also mentions that Sancho wrote two stage pieces for the theatre.[15]

Less the artist but the greater documentarian was Ottobah Cugoano whose *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* was published in 1787. His book is partly biographical and partly propagandistic. It tells the story of how he was captured and sold into slavery. He was taken to England from the West Indies; there he applied himself "to learn reading and writing, which soon became my recreation, pleasure and delight."[16] His later description of the rigours of his capture and the middle passage is suspect, if only because he admits that he was only two when it happened, and one wonders to what extent he was dependent on another source for his information:

I saw many of my miserable countrymen chained two and two, some hand-cuffed, and some with their hands tied behind.[17]

His injunctions frequently have the heavy sententiousness of biblical exhortations, as for instance when he is denouncing the slave-trade:

It is surely to the great shame and scandal of Christianity among all the Heathen nations that those robbers, plunderers, destroyers and enslavers of men should call themselves Christians, and exercise their power under any Christian government and authority. I would have my countrymen understand that the destroyers and enslavers of men can be no Christians; for Christianity is the system of benignity and love, and all its votaries are devoted to honesty, justice, meekness, peace and goodness to all men.[18]

This method of writing frequently causes him to attitudinise and in his description of his misery at being captured he combines a personal predicament and an externalised woe:

All my help was cries and tears and these could not avail; nor suffered long till one succeeding woe and dread swelled up another. Brought from a state of innocence and freedom, and in a barbarous and cruel manner, conveyed to a state of horror and slavery. This abandoned situation may be easier conceived than described.[19]

Like Sancho he too makes the point about the chiefs being bad:

Though the common people are free, they often suffer by the villainy of their different chieftains and by the wars and feuds which happen among them.[20]

But, unlike Sancho, his desire to strike attitudes often makes him seem anti-European. He advances this theory about the origins of the English:

> Many of the Canaanites who fled away in the time of Joshua, became mingled with the different nations, and some historians think some of them came to England as far back as that time.[21]

But occasionally he can achieve something of the private warmth of Sancho, as in his discription of his capture while out hunting birds and the confusion that followed. The language here while still having a biblical ring about it, nevertheless expresses bewilderment:

> Next morning there came three other men, whose language differed from ours, and spoke to some of those who watched us all the night, but he that pretended to be our friend with the great man, and some others, were gone away.[22]

Indeed the whole style of the book varies so much between the "experienced accounts" of the author and his exhortations against the slave trade, that one is tempted to suggest that the simpler, more actualistic accounts are probably his and the long diatribes against slavery the work of probably some well-intentioned hack, or if his own, heavily dependent on some secondary material. Indeed Cugoano does mention Ramsay's "An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of the African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies", Clarkson's "Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species" and an *Historical Account of Guinea*. In addition he makes frequent references to and quotations from the Bible and much of his imagery owes its origin to the Bible. In fact he admits that his account is partly experiential and partly derivative:

> What I intended to advance against the evil,criminal and wicked traffic of enslaving men are only some thoughts and sentiments which occur to me, as being obvious from the scriptures of divine truth, or such arguments as are chiefly deduced from thence, with other such observations as I have been able to collect.[23]

Equiano on the other hand draws more on his own recollected experiences. This was in itself an achievement, for most of the anti-slavery, as well as the pro-slavery propaganda of the time was written by Englishmen, and this is also true of the expression of the anti-slavery campaign in imaginative literature. Day's "Dying Negro" is a good example here; the dying Negro makes a long impassioned speech in which he says:

> And thou, whose impious avarice and pride
> Thy God's blest symbol to my brows deny'd,
> Forbade me of the rights of man to claim
> Or share with thee a Christian's hallowed name,
> Thou, too, farewell!—for not beyond the grave,
> Thy power extends, nor is my dust thy slave. [24]

As we have seen with Cugoano, sentimentalising of the African predicament was all in order; it was the greater craftsman who sought to get away from this, even though it might make him into an unpopular writer.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Ouladah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa was published in 1789. It was a very popular book and by 1794 had had eight English editions and one American. Equiano was forty-four when the book was published and was obviously caught up in the romanticising of the African; he even quotes from Day's "Dying Negro". Equiano traced his life back to the days of his childhood. He was not sold into slavery until he was twelve, after which he was taken to the West Indies and later became a servant in London. Like Cugoano he too refused to eat for several days after his capture and narrowly missed death in the Bahamas. At one time he was stranded

in the Arctic circle during an expedition to seek a North East passage to India. In 1787 he was appointed a "Commissary of provisions and Stores for the Black Poor going to Sierra Leone"—a testimony to his worth as a citizen.

He shows a more universal human compassion than either Sancho or Cugoano. During the voyage of the middle passage he describes how a white sailor:

> was flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute.[25]

He is not free from idealising his African past, and emancipationist though he was, he could still write that West Indian planters preferred the Ibos as they were full of "hardiness, intelligence, integrity and zeal".[26] But like both of the others he criticises the Africans who sold their tribesmen into slavery and exchanged "the price of their fellow creature's liberty with as little reluctance as the enlightened merchant".[27] But he is without the censorious self-righteousness of Cugoano and writes respectfully of indigenous African religious rites, even though he was a Christian. He can write with a touching and humane tenderness, as for instance when he relates the story of how he was lost in the forest when trying to escape from his enslavers:

> I heard frequent rustlings among the leaves and being pretty sure they were snakes, I expected every instant to be stung by them.—This increased my anguish, and the horror of the situation became now quite unsupportable. I at length quitted the thicket, very faint and hungry, for I had not eaten or drunk anything all the day; and crept to my master's kitchen, from whence I set out at first, and laid myself down in the ashes with an unconscious wish for death to relieve me from all my pains.[28]

Frequently he can write with an irritating sense of patronage, as when he describes the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight as "very civil",[29] but he was obviously a man who, in spite of his education away from his own culture, still managed to maintain a fierce energetic pride in his race:

> Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilised, and even barbarous.[30]

In his account he writes with ease and dignity. His religion never obtrudes, although he must have been very Christian, for he even wanted to become an ordained minister of the Church of England and to go to Africa as a missionary. (He tells us however that the Bishop of London refused "from certain scruples of delicacy"[31]). Perhaps it was this essential humanity that endeared him to John Wesley, and Bready gives the account of how on his death bed Wesley asked two friends to read aloud to him from Equiano's book.[32] What frequently makes the style so easy is the sense of humour, absent in Cugoano and less *bose* in Sancho. For instance he laughs at his own unsophisticated gullibility when he first sees a watch in his master's house in Virginia:

> I was quite surprised at the noise it made and was afraid it would tell the gentleman anything I might do amiss.[33]

On the ship when he first sees white people he speaks to his companions:

> I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces and long hair. They told me I was not.[34]

This is a sophisticated way of telling the traveller's tales of cannibal orgies from a different point of view, and one feels that he was sufficiently integrated into English society to be able to take an occasional swipe at it. The *Gentleman's Magazine* of April 1792 reported his marriage:

> at Soham, co. Cambridge, Gustavus Vassa, the African, well known in England as the champion and advocate for procuring the suppression of the slave trade, to Miss Cullen, daughter of Mr. C of Ely, in same country.[35]

By education, adoption and marriage he was of England, so when he writes, tongue in cheek, that by fourteen or fifteen he had seen so much terror that he "was in that respect at least, almost an Englishman",[36] he is stating more than half the truth.

All three of these writers were to a great extent absorbed in eighteenth century English society. This, paradoxically, helped to make them more completely themselves, for it was a century that was concerned with the great humanitarian fervour for emancipation. But because their society encouraged them to extend themselves in this public way—to proclaim their most private tensions—one must ask just how genuine their responses were to the matters, which, though very close to them, nevertheless required certain kinds of stock responses. One must therefore be wary of ascribing too much to them as individuals; they had to react in a certain way to these issues and this tended to mould their thought and to colour their language. Any knowing hack could have attempted to imitate them or indeed to re-cast or simply write whole passages. Consequently the edition of Sancho's letters two years after his death, the long anti-slavery diatribes in Cugoano, and some of the more splendiferous effusions of Equiano and Cugoano, where they seem to have grown completely outside their skins, make one doubt their authorship at times, and at other times feel that perhaps they had attained an alarming degree of liberal emancipation. But their heavy adherence to be Bible, their weighty sermonising, and their care with the language, give us no reason to doubt that their writing was to a large extent genuine. They were expressing the thought and attitudes of liberal Englishmen which they had fully adopted. Consequently they managed to create an interesting ancestor to the *Kunstlerroman:* not only giving an embryo life of the artist, but also exploring the significance of their own development within a foreign culture. In a very special way, they were privileged insiders who shared all of the licence but none of the prejudices of outsiders; this is why their work is a valid commentary on the entire cycle of eighteenth-century enquiry and resolution.

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REVIEWS

ICHEKE AND OTHER POEMS by Glory O. Nwanodi, (Mbari Publications, 1964) 30 pp, 6/-

Icheke and other poems is Mr. Nwanodi's first collection of published poems. It comprises "Intimacy" which is made up of "Prologue", "Poesie" and "Birth at Twenty-six"; "New Days" which consists of "Moonlight Play", "Religion", "Her Mother", "Getting Married"; "Shifting Scenes" which consists of "Ogbudu", "Plating", "Resume"; miscellaneous and occasional poems such as "Native", "Night Talk", "Enugu to Milliken Hill" (reminiscent of Wordsworth's *Upon Westminster Bridge*), "On Reading 'Heavensgate' by Chris Okigbo"; and "*Icheke*" which is the longest single poem, divided into seven cantos, in the collection.

Mr. Nwanodi's poems are rooted and steeped in the culture, beliefs, traditions and rituals which he knows only too well. His imagery, rhythm and themes—where the latter are discernible—stem from the same source. These traditions and rituals are responsible for the pervading bardic, if orchestral strain, which lend the adequate bucolic flavour to the life his poetry seeks to capture in the face of modern society. Unfortunately these beliefs are also responsible for the too personal and abstruse symbolism that obtrudes in some of the poems.

"Intimacy" is an exordium: liturgical and dedicatory a self-discovery and fulfilment of a determination to write poetry, an ecstatic rapture:

> the door I touched
> was paned with gold
> that I might stand
> and gaze
> and gaze at large
> motionless . . .

"Birth at Twenty-six" gives an inkling of the idea of rebirth which is mostly deployed in subsequent poems. "Intimacy" is one of the finest group of poems in the collection. Its suppliant yet exultant and jubilant tone is conveyed through the rhythm of the poems that make up this group. It is possible to trace a certain development or link, however tenuous, in statement and treatment of theme from "New Days" through "Shifting Scenes"—suggestive titles in themselves—and culminating in "Icheke." In "New Days", the theme that dominates the other two long poems is first rooted: the theme of cultural conflict and alienation as religion and modernity invade the staid sacrificial preserves of the ancients. This is reiterated in "Shifting Scenes" with a *résumé* which contains the crux of the imagery of these poems. The old and the new are not really at cross purposes:

> The yam tuber mauled
> rots and decays
> only to revive—
> furies and leaves—
> with fresh tubers
> that shall feed us

There is a new birth springing from death—a Hegelian view point. This looks forward to "Icheke":

> A tune arose—
> that we have not left our fathers
> we that bend and unite
> sow and care like others. . . . .

"Icheke" which is the most exhaustive treatment of this theme is, unfortunately, not as successful as the preceding groups of poems. The second stanza of the second canto seems particularly unsatisfactory. It is not poetry, it is an ill-managed itemising, with the surprising imagery of 'peeled off our Italian sandals', to emphasize the incongruity of the old and the new. Also disturbing is the same transliteration of 'we held hearts with lips'. Throughout this poem one gets the impression that the symbolism is over

involved and a bit too elaborate. Nevertheless in "Icheke" more than in any other poem in the collection we get a straight confrontation of the occidental with the native, a conflict between the pagan ritualistic assiduity of Aka and the shepherds, and the blithe complacent merriment of 'we' and 'our'. What follows is ostracism:

Then he looked at us
And muttered curses on us
Their outcast sheep. . . . .

or

they spat on our terylene
and called us outcasts.

But there is a riposte. Their attitude was not after all a profanation of ancient ways and rites. There is a resolution, the reader is given an intimation of a supercession by modernity:

Sacrifices are offered
to find the gods guilty
and we are mere beings
and the scenes shift
while the palm fruits
fall to the earth
kissing our fingers
oiling our lips

The oracles have been silenced of Milton's *Nativity Ode*.

"Hill Horns" and "*Nsukka*", "Echoes of the gone" and "*On Reading 'Heavensgate' by Chris Okigbo*" are interesting poems, lucid and lyrical. Of particular interest is the cynical humour of the latter. "*Enchantment*" seems to me a failure. It is shallow and unsatisfying, a too obvious attempt to poeticise by mere metrical arrangements and forced symbolism what is obviously prosaic.

In *Icheke and other poems*, Mr Nwanodi attempts to find a common ground for cultures which always seem to conflict. It is not merely that ancient rites and traditions are superceded by modern ways; something new seems to emerge from the interfusion of both. This twist saves these poems from being repetitions of the hackneyed theme of cultural-conflict.

Theo Vincent.

DANDA by Nkem Nwankwo (Deutsch 1964) 205 pp—18/-

Danda is a novel in the picaresque tradition. Its hero's dance, conversion, illness, marriage, all happen to him on his light swift journey through life. Because Nwankwo, I suspect, is really a short story writer, the incidents never link nor do they assume some important finality at the end; they remain episodic and never grow into an important statement.

In the novel Danda dances and grows; as the hero, he is the means of a lighthearted exposition on the pros and cons of Christianity. For whereas the *statement* of the novel never expands—the hero does—from clown to creature (giving the writer an opportunity to write with pathos), from humorist to the humane (giving the writer the chance to broaden the definition of his character).

I was not overfond of the 'notes' at the back, slightly pretentious, like Eliot's. The sooner we face it that something new is being done in African Literature, the sooner will readers assemble the necessary equipment, both for intelligent comment and relevant analysis. The Ibo words, the translations of proverbs, the speech syntax (functioning without distorting English or without isolating that necessary authorial identification). Often this causes a certain kind of poetry—"scorch season" and "your word is bent".

To a great extent the novel is over-centred around Danda. I do not think that Danda has the tough fibre of credibility to sustain him throughout the whole novel. Consequently there is only one level on which the novel can be read—Danda's level. This seems a pity since Nwankwo's world in *Danda* is relatively free from the stringent pedestrian demands of the old versus new school, patented by Achebe. His world is a less 'responsible' one; he is not the licensed tribal artist and the amusing scenes about Danda's conversion are reminiscent of Beti.

For me the climax of the novel was unconvincing. There was not enough of a dramatic context to establish the kind of vigour that Nwankwo tried to create, but the symbolism of the bird that seemed to say "lizard there is death—death—death" did two things; it operated in the conventional way that a symbol does—that is linking itself to a signifance outside of its immediate context—and it also con-

tributed to the delicate manoeuvre that Nwankwo attempted—steering his world into a half-real, half-spiritual limbo—a compromise between the European's tyranny over matter and the African's humility within magic.

O. R. Dathorne.

MODERN AFRICAN STORIES ed Ellis Ayitey Komey and Ezekiel Mphahlele (Faber and Faber, 1964) 227 pp—18/-

In imaginative literature in English, West Africa has produced a cultural protest, East Africa a political protest and South Africa a racial protest. Any collection should, in some measure, reflect these *genres*. This the present one does, more successfully than any of its predecessors. But any collection that purports to be *Modern African Stories* cannot confine itself to literature in English alone, as this does. It should include, in translation, writing from French and Portuguese Africa as well as the vernacular. Perhaps the worst thing that one can do is to equate the vernacular with the archaic; indeed East Africa and Southern Africa, which are usually scantily represented in anthologies, have more flourishing recent vernacular literatures than West Africa, which is always over-represented.

Apart from extracts from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Alfred Hutchinson's *Road to Ghana* (which does not really read like a short story at all) and Tutuola's *Feather Woman of the Jungle*, the other contributions (there are twenty-five in all) are appearing in hard covers for the first time. The stories are varied in content and presentation—there are the light humorous sallies of Adelaide Casely-Hayford's "Mista Courifer", the horror of William Conton, the urban amoralism of Ekwensi, the pathetic terror of La Guma's "Coffee for the Road", the muted statement of Eldred Jone's "A Man Can Try", the jazzy detachment of Motsisi, the savage frustration of Mphahlele, the domestic concern of Abiseh Nicol's "The Judge's Son" and the declamatory note of Grace Ogot's "The Rain Came".

There is a good introduction where the editors distinguish between West Africans who look back with "sober retrospect", Kenyans who "explore the strange twists of irony that we experience in the fatalism of Africa" and South Africans who find that "the socio-political life presents the kind of challenge, that produces writers." Two interesting points are made, which are certainly worth exploring further, that "writing in black Africa first entered the field of cultural activity as a response to the white man" and that the African writer is "doing violence to standard English". These are, of course, two sides of the same coin—the cultural reaction is the matter, the language reaction, the manner. From this the synthesis—the unification of the disparate strands of what we at present call with some trepidation, African Literature; a collection such as this codifies and collates.

O. R. Dathorne.

AMERICA THEIR AMERICA by J. P. Clark (Deutsch, 1964) 222pp—25/-
AN AREA OF DARKNESS by V. S. Naipaul (Deutsch, 1964) 281pp—25/-

Once upon a time two people decided to travel—Mr. Clark went to America and Mr. Naipaul went to India. America was not what Mr. Clark wanted it to be; India was not what Mr. Naipaul wanted it to be. Mr. Clark left America, Mr. Naipaul left India.

It is against this fairy-tale background of expectancy and disappointment that these two books can best be understood. They are the lively accounts of two people making a song and dance about something that is really intrinsically at odds within themselves. Naipaul, the bewildered, anonymous man:

> In Trinidad to be an Indian was to be distinctive. To be anything there was to be distinctive; difference was each man's attribute. To be an Indian in England was distinctive; in Egypt it was more so. Now in Bombay I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing. It was like being denied part of my reality.

The logic convinces, but the facts are all wrong. No Indian in Trinidad is distinctive, unless he kills his wife or becomes a minister. In England an Indian is a black man—in 1964 nobody notices them. The quandary is a personal one; Naipaul cheats because he tries to externalise the internal.

Clark, on the other hand, internalises the externally obvious. Of course coloured people in America are having a tough time—at least ninety-nine percent of the literate world know this. Small point therefore in this kind of dialogue:

"Are there many cloured people in New Brunswick?" I asked.

"Oh, quite a number."

"And how are they?"

What is the answer to that question? They send their regards and invite you to the next lunch-counter demonstration, taking place at one sharp tomorrow? A foolish question deserves a foolish answer and that is exactly what our traveller got.

But Clark's book, like Naipaul's, is not without its charm. The 'poetry' apart, the writing has a staccato nervousness about it that freqnently explodes into a broad laugh, even at the writer himself. Naipaul's is without humour; he obviously takes himself and his predicament seriously. He writes in a heightened language, very different from his usual flat satiric pattern and this causes his repetitive *scheisse-motiv* to jar slightly. But the humour comes to his rescue occasionally:

> Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly, beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the hills; they defecate on the river banks; they defecate on the streets.

Clark establishes his *geschlechtsverkehr-motiv* in the first half of Chapter One. He listens to a story from a girl about how a man pays her two hundred dollars for "initiating two dumb kids". She continues:

> "Oh, as he collected his kids to go back to his ranch, or some place, he stopped and whispered into my ear something to the effect that tomorrow would be Daddy's own day."
>
> "A very practical man," I said and switched off the bed-lamp.

It is the humour that redeems the attitudinising.

In both of these books the authors are anxious to do a kind of sociological strip-tease—Naipaul is anxious to tell any Indian who would care to listen that he is really British and Clark is anxious to tell any American who would not care to listen just how black he is. It is the poor American women that come off worse in both books—in Naipaul they go around the world exacting a personal repayment for a national generosity", in Clark they set about in a "determined manner. . . .making themselves look unattractive and in fact much like the males." Almost enough to make sensitive people cross!

O. R. Dathorne.

"WE CALLED THEM SAVAGES"

Wir Nannten Sie Wilde **an anthology by**

Janheinz Jahn. Erenwirth Verlag, Munchen 1964

This is an anthology of European travellers' accounts of the non-European world. In fact, however, it is an anthology of European race prejudice. Mr. Jahn's clever selection shows the development and growth of this prejudice. The most fascinating section of the book contains nine accounts of encounters with Hottentots. The first, by Vasco da Gama, dates from 1497. Vasco da Gama's sentiment on meeting these strange people was mainly curiosity. He wanted to find out what these people might possess to trade with. But there was no abusive language in the account, no ridicule whatsoever. The meeting seems to have been very friendly: the Hottentots brought out flutes to sing and dance for their visitors. The Portuguese in turn brought out their trumpets to entertain the Hottentots. One hundred and fifty years later the German traveller Siegmund Wurffbain fills his account with descriptions of the disgusting habits and customs of the Hottentots. As he stayed only three days on the coast it seems unlikely that he could have seen much of them anyway. The following travellers rely more and more on hearsay and fantastic sailors' stories. In 1659 the Swiss traveller Herport for the first time describes the Hottentots as "savages." In 1672 Jacob Saar describes them as "almost inhuman." In 1680 Johann Christian Hoffmann thinks that the Hottentots are "huge monkeys rather than proper human beings." A century later it is common for travellers to refer to them as people "more savage than the most savage beasts." Thus we are able, in this fascinating anthology, to see how the European myth of the *savage* develops and grows. How the original delight of the traveller in the miraculous strangeness and beauty of foreign worlds is gradually perverted into contempt for inferior human beings.

Mr. Jahn, who introduces all the extracts with brief comments blames Christianity and the missionary spirit for the change of attitude. One tends to believe him, when one reads the account of Antonio Pigafetta, of how the Spanish traveller Magellan tried to baptise the entire population of a South Sea island in 1521. This must have been the first large scale attempt of converting a foreign nation and it is both moving and terrifying to read. Magellan was well meaning but incredibly naive. His total failure to understand or appreciate the culture of the people he was dealing with finally brought disaster on his own head: The extraordinary happenings took place on the island of Matan, which belongs to the Philippines. Magellan forced the local king to give him a trade monopoly on the island and he insisted that the entire population of the island be baptised. Hundreds of men women and children were indeed baptised by the Portuguese sailors. They were given new names and the naked were given clothes. The whole act of "conversion" took only seven days from the first landing on the island and Magellan was too naive to realise that the king of Matan was merely trying to make use of him against his rival kings on neighbouring islands. In fact, a fortnight later he invaded a neighbouring island with fortynine Portuguese soldiers in order to "suppress the rebels." He lost his life and Antonio Pigaffetta, his chronicler, was among the few who managed to escape.

The Spanish, of course, were rather less naive in Mexico and Peru, where the lust for gold mingled with the Christian desire to convert the natives. The accounts of how Cortez and Pizzarro dealt with the Indians make one's blood curdle.

However, Jahn's book also takes us into the latest phase of the European encounter with the outside world. Only in the twentieth century have men arisen who attempt to understand and interpret other cultures. Father Placide Tempels and others are quoted in this section.

Altogether this is a fascinating and instructive book, which one would like to see in English soon.

U.B.

THE SCHOLAR MAN by O. R. Dathorne Cassel, London 64.

Recently I met a West Indian writer in London who happened to be one of Dathorne's oldest friends. Not knowing of their relationship I asked him, whether he knew Dathorne. "Unfortunately," he replied, "he is the most irritating man I know." I am afraid that after reading "The Scholar Man" a lot of other people will find Dathorne the most irritating man they know, for in this novel, which is placed in a West African University, *any resemblance to fiction is purely accidental*, and I should not be surprised, if quite a number of people would recognise their own particular brand of folly in the book. For Dathorne is a fellow who gets irritated with others pretty quickly himself, and he is a man wo does not suffer fools gladly. In this novel, *The Scholar Man*, he gets some of the irritation off his chest.

The book is about the "search for identity" of a West Indian University lecturer. Like most of his fellow countrymen, he feels more at home in England than in the West Indies, but at the same time he hopes that in Africa he may discover his true roots, his real self. The theme is familiar, of course, from Denis Williams' "Other Leopards," but the treatment of the theme could hardly be more different in the two books. Denis Williams' book is terribly metaphysical and soul searching and serious. The book is so tense that it jags up the language—the book jerks along in nervous spurts and it gets entangled and twisted up in its own symbolism towards the end. A great novel in many ways—but hard going. Dathorne's novel is far more direct and straightforward. Its language flows along easily, but it is a great improvement on the relative flatness of the language of his earlier book "Dumplings in the Soup." In "The Scholar Man" the language is witty and alive and occasionally—as in the Prologue,—Dathorne proves that he is a pretty accomplished prose writer.

The book describes the relationships of Adam, the West Indian hero, with the people he meets in and around the University: European colleagues, African students, odd people he encounters in nightclubs and so on. In a way he finds it easier to get along with the Europeans, though he despises them, and though he makes greater efforts with the Africans.

Dathorne's description of the characters in the book is eccentric: he gets irritated with his characters quickly, passes quick judgments, and slashes out with the razor of satire. What he describes may only be part of the truth—but it is one part of the truth that is worth isolating from time to time. For Dathorne is honest rather than malicious and for all the banter and humour in the book, Adam is a tragic hero after all. For to him Africa did not hold its promise, it did not become a revelation, nor even a second home. Adam's failure is reminiscent in a way of Richard Wright's failure in Ghana which he described in his travel book "Black Power." Both suffer the same type of tragedy: they both go on the wild goose chase for identity, they both find themselves strangers where they thought they ought to feel at home. But "The Scholar Man" is a far more acceptable book than "Black Power", because Dathorne does not take himself as seriously as Richard Wright. He includes himself in the satire and he does not—like Richard Wright—confuse frankness with plain rudeness. Dathorne's book may be bizarre—he has people making love at the bottom of a swimming pool for example—but this is much preferable to the humourless earnestness of Richard Wright who is constantly driven by the desire to "improve" what he sees and who feels "hurt" when people do not accept his advice. Dathorne does not want to improve or change anybody. He is—thank God—not a man with a mission. He tries to sort out his own life—and fails. But he is not so self-centred that he could not enjoy himself in the process as well.

O.A.

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