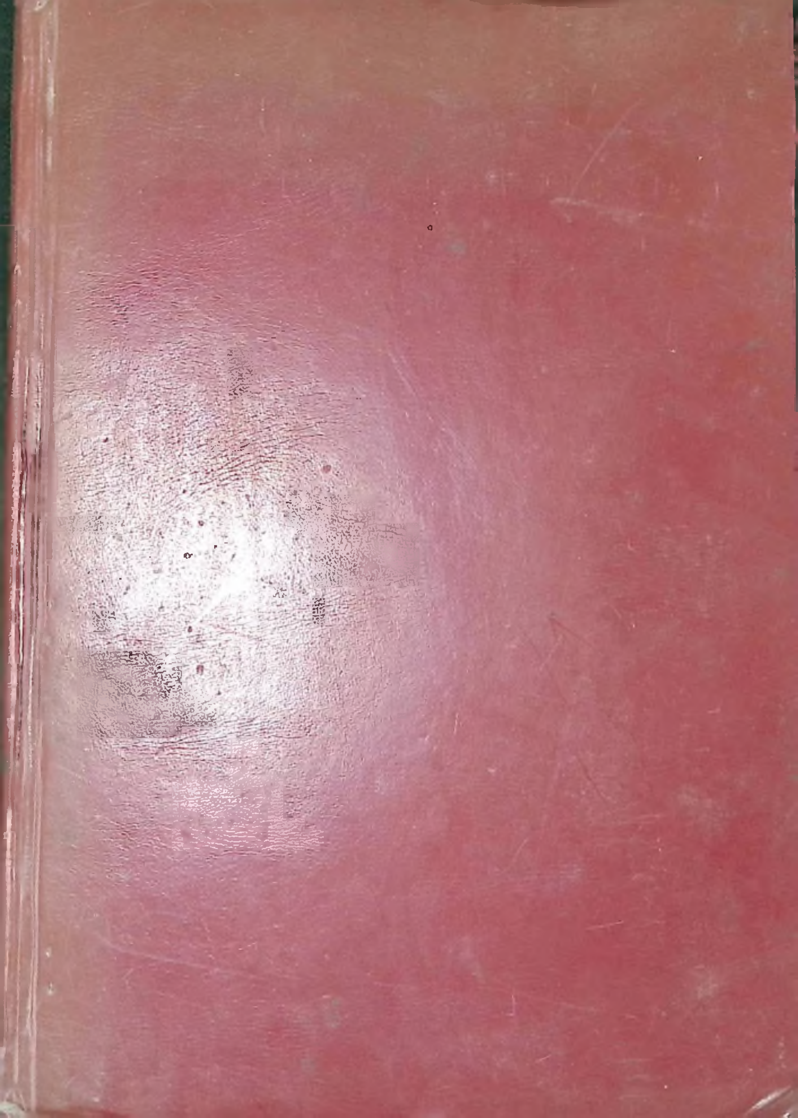

OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING

Vol. 1 No. 3

Edited by Chinua Ac

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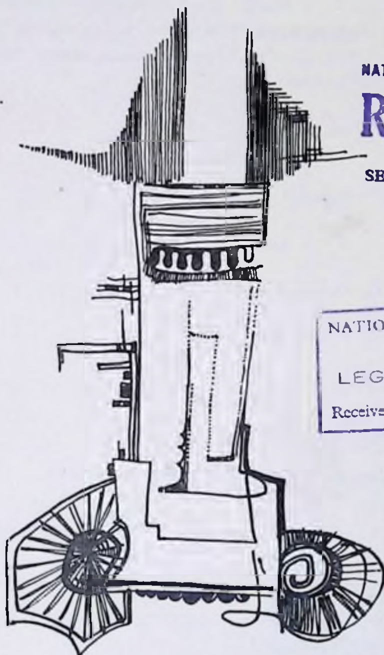

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Bread

Slowly the white dream wrestles to life
hands shaping the salt and the foreign cornfields
the cold flesh kneaded by fingers
is ready for the charcoal, for the black wife

of heat, the years of green sleeping in the volcano.
the dream becomes tougher, settling into its shape
like a bullfrog, sun rises and electrons
touch it. walls melt into brown, moving to crisp and crackle

breathing edge of the knife of the oven.
noise of the shop, noise of the farmer, market.
on this slab of lord, on this table with its oil-skin cloth
on this altar of the bone, this sacrifice

of isaac: warm dead, warm merchandise, more than worn merchandise
life
itself, the dream of the soil itself
flesh of the god you break, peace to your lips, strife

of the multitudes who howl all day for its saviour
who need its crumbs as fish, flickering in their element
of dumbness need a wide glassy wisdom
to keep their groans alive

and this loaf here, life
now halted, more and more water add-
itive, the dream less clear, the soil more distant
its prayer of table, bless of lips, more hard to reach with pennies

the knife
that should have cut it, the hands that should have broken open its
victory of crusts
at your throat: balaam watching with red leak-
ing eyes: the rats

finding only this young empty husk
sharp-
ening their rachets: your wifc
going out on the streets, searching searching

her feet tapping, the lights of the motor-
cars watching watching round-
ing the shape of her girdle, her back

rolled into night into night without morning
rolled into dead into dead without dream
rolled into life into life without bread

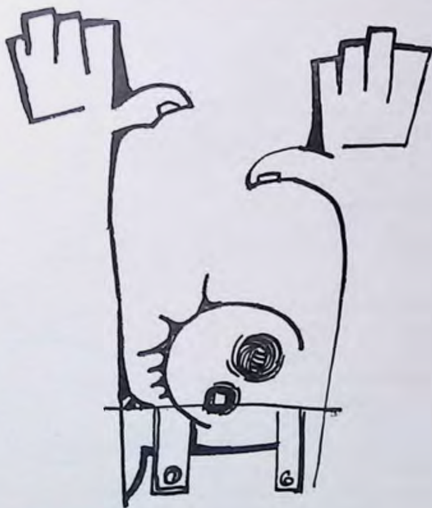
Labourer

Look at his hands
cactus cracked, pricked
worn smooth by the hoe
limestone soil's colour;
he has lost three fingers
of his left hand falling
asleep at the mill;
the black crushing grin
of the iron tooth'd rachets
grinding the guinep hill cane
have eaten him lame
and no one is to blame

the crunched bone was juicy
to the iron, there was no difference
between his knuckle joints
and ratoon shoots: the soil
receives the liquor with cool flutes
three fingers are not even worth
a stick of cane; the blood
mix does not show, the star-
gaze crystal sugar shines
no brighter for the cripple blow

and nothing more to show
for thirty year's spine
curving labour in clear
rain, glass-eyed, coming off the sea
fattening up the mud
in the valleys, cours-
ing down hillsides, causing the toil of the deep,
well-laid roots, gripping soil,
to come steadily loose, junction and joint
between shoot and its flower to be made nonsense of

and the shame, the shame, the shame-
lessness of it all, the name-
less days in the burnt cane-
fields without love; crack of its
loud trash, spinn-
ing ashes, wrack of salt odour that will
not free his throat, the cutlass fall-
ing, falling, sweat, grit
between fingers, chigga
hatching its sweet nest of pain in his toe
and now this and now this
an old man, prickled
to sleep by the weather, his labour,
losing his hands . . . . .



THE PRESENT IS A DANGEROUS PLACE TO LIVE

I. In the Mourning

And at the door of the eye
is the still voice of the land.
My father before my father
knew the uses of fire
My father before my father,
with his multiple godhead,
sat on his circular stool
after the day was done. At times even
between the rednesses of two suns,
knowing that time was not born yesterday.
The circle continues
Time will always be
in spite of minutes that know no life.
Lives change in life
At times even rot
or be trampled underfoot
as the back of a slave.
There are cycles in the circle
I may even moan my deadness
or mourn your death,
in this sterile moment asking:
Where is the life we came to live?
Time will always be
Pastpresentfuture is always now
Where then is the life we came to live?

II. Beware Of Dreams

The present is a dangerous place
to live. There were dreams once,
riding past and future alike; we
embraced the dream, drunk past
any look at the present in the face.

There were dreams once
and the illusion led
to the present.
There were dreams once,
gold or red
green & black
but the present is here
like me and you. And is articulate.
And knows no peace; neither do you
nor me if we are friends
enough to have known the dream

III. Without Shadow

I live here now
among my silences,
without life, an artifact
with as much use as a fart.

I live here now
silent. And the silence
does not have the peace
of understanding wrung from the past.

I live here now
without a shadow, but not even
dead since the dead are a vector
on the cycle of all that lives

Beware of dreams
they will so readily send
your eye shattering against nightmare
any time as any place you are alone.
You will moan your impotence or mourn
the quick rotting of the seed
that could have been your life,
silently. Now shuttered, you may run deep
enough into knowledge to understand this decay.
But your bony fingers remain so weak
they cannot seize even a moment.

IV. Mirrors, Without Song

Do not tell me, my brother, to reach
out and touch my soul. My soul is
inside and thin
and knows your death too

Does it matter then how
often my teeth are seen
when I laugh less and less?

Morning does not wake up
with my eye out the window
moaning, or mourning,
a thing or day gone to waste

I die in the world
and live my deadness
in my head, laughing
less and less.

Do you see now
another day, like a slave,
shows its face to be nothing,
nothing but a mirror of the death of another?

When I laugh, my brother, less and less
do not tell me to reach
out and touch my soul. My
soul is inside and thin
and knows your death too.

SUGAR BABY—a short story

I caught the fierce expression on his face in the brief impulsive moment that strange act, and I understood. I don't mean the symbolism such as was; that to me, was pretty superficial and obvious. No. It was rather deadly earnestness.

It lasted no more than a second or two. Just as long as it took to thr his hand into his sugar-bowl, grasp a handful and fling it out of the windo his squarish jaw set viciously. Then it crumbled again in the gentle solv of a vague smile.

"Ah-ah: why?" asked one of the other two present, or perhaps bo taken aback and completely mystified.

"Only to show sugar that today I am greater than he, that the day h arrived when I can afford sugar and, if it pleases me, throw sugar away

They roared with laughter then. Cletus joined them but laughing or moderately. Then I joined too, meagrely.

"You are a funny one, Cletus," said Umera, his huge trunk shaking w mirth and his eyes glistening.

Soon we were drinking Cletus' tea and munching chunks of bre smeared thickly with margarine.

"Yes," said Umera's friend whose name I didn't catch, "may bul crack sugar's head!"

"Amen."

"One day soon it will be butter's turn," said Umera. "Please excu my bad habit." He had soaked a wedge of bread in his tea and carried dripping into his enormous mouth, his head thrown back. "That's ho I learnt to eat bread," he contrived out of a full, soggy mouth. He to another piece—quite small this time—and threw it out of the windo "Go and meet sugar, and bullet crack both your heads!"

"Amen!"

"Tell them about me and sugar, Mike, tell them," said Cletus to me

Well, I told them there was nothing really to tell except that my frien Cletus had what the English would call a sweet tooth. But of course th English, a very moderate race, couldn't possibly have a name for anythin like Cletus and his complete denture of thirty-two sweet teeth.

It was an old joke of mine but Umera and his friend didn't know it and so graced it with more uproarious laughter. Which was good becaus

I didn't want to tell any of the real stories Cletus was urging. And fortunately too Umera and his friend were bursting to tell more and more of their own hardship stories, for most of us had become like a bunch of old hypochondriac women vying to recount the most lurid details of their special infirmities.

And I found it all pathetic and painful. I never possessed some people's ability (Cletus' for example) to turn everything to good account. Pain lasts far longer on me than on him even when—strange to say—it is his own pain. It wouldn't have occurred to me, not in a thousand years, to enact that farcical celebration of victory over sugar. Simply watching it I felt bad. It was like a man standing you a drink because some fellow who once seduced his wife had just died, according to the morning's papers. The drink would stick in my throat because my pity and my contempt would fall on the celebrator and my admiration on the gallant man who once so justly cuckolded him.

For Cletus sugar is not simply sugar. It is what makes life bearable. We lived and worked together in the last eighteen months of the war and so I was pretty close to his agony, to his many defeats. I never could understand nor fully sympathise with his addiction. As long as I had my one gari meal in the afternoon I neither asked for breakfast nor dinner. At first I had suffered from the lack of meat or fish, and worst of all of salt, in the soup but by the second year of the war I was noticing it less and less. But Cletus got more obssessively hinged to his sugar and tea every single day of deprivation, a dangerous case of an appetite growing on what it did not feed on. How he acquired such an alien taste in the first place I have not even bothered to investigate; it probably began in lonely winter days and nights in the black belt of Ladbroke Grove.

Other tea and coffee drinkers if they still found any to drink at all had learnt long ago to take it black and bitter. Then some unrecognized genius had lightened their burden further with the discovery that the blackest coffee taken along with coconut lost a good deal of its bitter edge. And so a new, sustaining *petit dejeuner* was born. But Cletus like a doomed man must have the proper thing or else nothing at all. Did I say I lost patience with him? Well, sometimes. In more charitable and more thoughtful moments I felt sorry for him rather than anger, for could one honestly say that an addiction to sugar was any more irrational than all the other many addictions going at the time? No. And it constituted no threat to any body else, which you couldn't say for all those others.

One day he came home in very high spirits. Some one recently return
from abroad had sold him two dozen tablets of an artificial sweetener f
three pounds. He went straight to the kitchen to boil water. Then he broug
out from some secure corner of his bag his old tin of instant coffee—he n
longer had tea—which had now gone solid. "Nothing wrong with it
he assured me again and again though I hadn't even said a word. "It's t
humidity; the taste is quite unimpaired." He broke off two small rock-li
pieces with a knife and made two cups of coffee. Then he sat back with
song in his face.

I could barely stand the taste of the sweetener. It larded every sip with
lingering cloyiness and siphoned unsuspected wells of saliva into the mou
We drank in silence. Then suddenly Cletus jumped up and rushed outsi
to give way to a rasping paroxysm of vomitting. I stopped then trying
drink what was left in my cup.

I told him sorry when he came back in. He didn't say a word. He we
straight to his room and fetched a cup of water and went out again to rin
his mouth. After a few gargles he tipped the remaining water into a cupp
hand and washed down his face. I said sorry again and he nodded.

Later he came where I sat. "Do you care for these?" He held out t
little tablets with palpable disgust. Strange how even one attack of vomitti
could so utterly reduce a man. "No, not really. But keep them. I'm su
we won't need to go far to find friends who do."

He either was not listening or else he simply could not bring hims
to live with the things another minute. He made his third trip outside a
threw them into the same wild plot of weeds which had just received
vomit.

He must have worked himself to such a pitch of expectation over t
wretched sugar-substitute that he now plummetted headlong into n
nervous collapse. For the next two days he kept to his bed neither showing
in the morning at the Directorate where we worked nor going in the even
as was his custom to see his girl-friend, Mercy.

On the third day I really lost patience with him and told him a few ha
things about fighting a war of survival, calling to my aid more or less
rhetoric for which his radio scripts were famous. "Fuck your war! Fu
your survival!" he shouted at me. All the same he got better soon afterwa
and suitably shamefaced. Then I relented somewhat myself and beg
privately to make inquiries about sugar on his behalf.

Another friend at the Directorate told me about a certain Father Dohe
who lived ten miles away and controlled Caritas relief stores for the ent

district. A well-known and knowing Roman Catholic, my friend, he warned me that Father Doherty though a good and generous man was apt to be somewhat unpredictable and had become particularly so lately since a shrapnel hit him in the head at the airport.

Cletus and I made the journey on the following Saturday and found Father Doherty in reasonably good mood for a man who had just spent six nights running at the airport unloading relief planes in pitch darkness and under fairly constant air bombardment, getting home at seven every morning to sleep for two hours. He waved our praises aside saying he only did it on alternate weeks. "After tonight I can have my beauty-sleep for seven whole days."

His sitting-room reeked of stock-fish, powdered milk and powdered egg-yolk and other relief odours which together can make the air of a place uninhalable. Father Doherty rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand and said what could he do for us. But before either of us could begin he got up sleepily and reached for a big thermos flask atop an empty book-case harbouring just one tiny crucifix, and asked if we cared for coffee. We said yes thinking that in this very home and citadel of Caritas whose very air reeked solid relief one could be sure that coffee would mean with sugar and milk. And I thought too that we were doing excellently with Father Doherty and set it down to our earlier politic admiration of his dedication and courage in the service of our people, for although he had seemed to wave it aside with his hand judicious praise (if not flattery) was still a weapon which even saints might be vulnerable to. He disappeared into a room and brought back three mean-looking fading-blue plastic cups and poured the coffee, a little on his little finger first, into the cups apologising for the incompetence of his old flask.

I began politely to swallow mine and watched Cletus with the corner of my eye. He took a little bird-like sip and held it in his mouth.

Now, what could he do for us, asked Father Doherty again covering three quarters of an enormous yawn with the back of his hand. I spoke up first. I had problem with hay-fever and would like some antihistamine tablets if he had any in stock. Certainly, he said, most certainly. "I have the very thing for you. Father Joseph has the same complaint, so I always keep some". He disappeared again and I could hear him saying: "Hay-fever, hay-fever, hay-fever" like a man looking for a title in a well-stocked bookshelf, and then: "There we are!". Soon he emerged with a small bottle. "Everything here is in German", he said, studying the label with a squint. "Do you read German?"

"No."

"Nor do I. Try taking one thrice daily and see how you feel."

"Thank you, Father."

"Next!" he said, jovially.

His short absence to get the tablets had enabled Cletus to transfer mo of the coffee from his cup to his mouth and, moving smartly to the lo window behind him and putting out his neck, disgorge it quickly outsid

"Name your wish. Joost wun wish, remember," said Father Dohert now really gay.

"Father," said Cletus almost solemnly, "I need a little sugar."

I had been worrying since we got here how he was going to put th request across, what form of words he would use. Now it came out so pu and so simple like naked truth from the soul. I admired him for that perfo mance for I knew I could never have managed it. Perhaps Father Doher himself had unconsciously assisted by lending the circumstance, albe jovially, a stark mythological simplicity. If so he now demolished it just a quickly and thoroughly as a capricious child might kick back into sand th magic castle he had just created. He seized Cletus by the scruff of his nec and shouting wretch! wretch! shoved him outside. Then he went for m but I had already found and taken another exit. He raved and swore an stamped like a truly demented man. He prayed God to remember th outrage against His Holy Ghost on Judgement Day. Sugar! Sugar!! Sugar! he screamed in hoarse crescendo. Sugar when thousands of God's innocen perished daily for lack of a glass of milk! Worked up now beyond enduranc by his own words he rushed out and made for us. And there was nothin for it but run, his holy imprecations ringing in our ears.

We spent a miserable, tongue-tied hour at the road junction trying t catch a lift back to Amafo. In the end we walked the ten miles again bu now in the withering heat and fear of mid-day air-raid . . . . . .

That was one story that Cletus presumably wanted me to tell to celebrat our first tea party. How could I? I couldn't see it as victory in retrospect only as defeat. And there were many, the worst yet to come.

Not long after our encounter with Father Doherty I was selected by the Foreign Affairs people "to go on a mission." Although it was a kind of poor man's mission lasting just a week and taking me no further than the off-shore Portuguese island of Sao Tome I was nevertheless overjoyed because abroad was still abroad and I had never stepped out of Biafra since the war began—a fact calculated to dismiss one outright in the opinion of his fellows as a man of no consequence, but more important, which meant

"...he rushed out and made for us. And there was nothing for it but run..."

that one never had a chance to bask in the glory of coming back with th
little amenities that had suddenly become marks of rank and good livi
like bath soap, a towel, razor blades, etc.

On the last day before my journey close friends and friends not so clo
mere acquaintances and even complete strangers and near-enemies ca
to tell me their wishes. It had become a ritual, almost a festival who
ancient significance was now buried deep in folk memory. Some lucky fell
was going on a mission to an almost mythical world long withdrawn beyo
normal human reach where goods abounded still and life was safe. A
everyone came to make their wishes. And to every request the lucky o
answered: "I will try, you know the problem . . . . ."

"O yes I know, but just try . . . . . ." No real hope, no obligation
commitment.

Occasionally, however, a firm and serious order was made when o
of the happier people came. For this words were superfluous. Just a slip
paper with "foreign exchange" pinned to it. Some wanted salt which wa
entirely out because of the weight. Many wanted an underwear for them
selves or their girls and some wretch even ordered contraceptives whic
I told him I assumed was for office (as against family) planning, to the grea
amusement of my crowd. I bustled in and out of my room gaily with m
note-paper saying: Joost wun wish!

Yes, near-enemies came too. Like our big man across the road, a one-
time protestant clergyman they said, now unfrocked, a pompous ass if eve
there was one, who had early in the war wangled himself into the vena
position of controlling and dispensing scarce materials imported by th
government, especially women's fabrics. He came like a Nichodemus as
was about to turn in. I wouldn't have thought he knew the likes of us existed
But there he came nodding in his walk like an emir on horse-back an
trailing the aroma of his Erinmore tobacco. He wondered if I could bu
him two bottles of a special pomade for dying grey hair and held out a
five-dollar bill. This was the wretch who once asked my girl-friend when
she went to file an application to buy a bra to spend a weekend with him in
some remote village!

By forgoing lunch daily in Sao Tome I was able at the end of the week
to save up from my miserable allowance enough foreign exchange to buy
myself a few things including those antihistamine tablets (for I had aban-
doned in our hasty retreat the bottle that Father Doherty gave me). For
Cletus—and this gave me the greatest happiness of all—I bought a tin of
Lipton's tea and two half-pound packets of sugar. Imagine then my horri-

fied fury when one of the packets was stolen on my arrival home at the airport while (my eyes turned momentarily away from my baggage) I was put through make-believe immigration. Perhaps if that packet had not been stolen Cletus might have been spared the most humiliating defeat that sugar was yet to inflict on him.

Mercy came to see him (and me) the day I returned from Sao Tome. I had a tablet of Lux soap for her and a small tube of hand cream. She was ecstatic.

"Would you like some tea?" asked Cletus.

"Oh yes," she said in her soft, purring voice. "Do you have tea? Great! And sugar too! Great! Great! I must take some."

I wasn't watching but I think she thrust her hand into the opened packet of sugar and grabbed a handful and was about to put it into her handbag. Cletus dropped the kettle of hot water he was bringing in and pounced on her. *That* I saw clearly. For a brief while she must have thought it was some kind of grotesque joke. I knew it wasn't and in that moment I came very near to loathing him. He seized her hand containing the sugar and began to prize it open, his teeth clenched.

"Stop it Cletus!" I said.

"Stop, my arse," he said. "I am sick and tired of all these grab-grab girls."

"Leave me alone," she cried, sudden tears of anger and shame now running down her face. Somehow she succeeded in wrenching her hand free. Then she stepped back and threw the sugar into his face, snatched her handbag and ran away, crying. He picked up the sugar, about half-a-dozen cubes.

"Sam!" shouted Cletus across to his house-boy. "Put some more water on the fire". And then turning to me he said again, his eyes glazed in crazy reminiscence: "Mike, you must tell them the battle I waged with sugar."

"He was called Sugar-Baby at School," I said, dodging again.

"Oh Mike, you're no bloody good with stories. I wonder who ever recommended you for the Propaganda Directorate." The other two laughed. Beads of perspiration trembled on his forehead. He was desperate. He was on heat begging, pleading, touting for the sumptuous agony of flagellation.

"And he lost his girl-friend," I said turning brutal. "Yes, he lost a nice, decent girl because he wouldn't part with half a dozen cubes of the sugar I bought him."

"You know that's not fair," he said turning on me sharply. "Nice girl indeed! Mercy was just a shameless grabber like all the rest of them."

"Like all the rest of us. What interests me, Cletus, is that you did find out all those months you went with her and slept with her until I broug you a packet of sugar. Then your eyes were opened."

"We know *you* brought it, Mike. You've told us before. But tha not the point . . . . ."

"What then is the point?" Then I realized how foolish it was and ho easy, even now, to slip back into those sudden irrational acrimonies of o recent desperate days when an angry word dropping in unannounced wou start a fierce war like the passage of Esun between two peace-loving friend So I steered myself to a retrieving joke, retrieving albeit with a razor edg

"When Cletus is ready to marry," I said, "they will have to devise special marriage vow for him. With all my wordly goods (except my Ta and Lyle) I thee honour. Father Doherty if they ever let him back in th country will no doubt understand."

Umera and his friend laughed again.

AUGUST '67

A glass god shatters itself
against the black laughter
of heavy rain-clouds, to no effect.

Ominous shards fall, father
the huge doubts in depths

Appallingly tossed
disconsolate feathers of wind-hounded hawks
dip down towards earth, the turbid earth
of flagging diffidence
And faith is moving camp—

we are moving camp
to the stuttering irony
of the twice-occupied

we are moving camp,
piqued against the panic-studded thoroughfares
of self-defensive untruths.

I WANT TO SCREAM

I feel the need to scream on paper.
The [illegible]
of my will to survive.

[illegible]
[illegible]

I feel the need to scream
my [illegible]
till [illegible] in my veins
till the [illegible]
the pollens of another sagehood.

I feel the need to scream
the hard-[illegible] nightmares of men
hiding behind ancestral masks,
masks of illusions
carved out of the will to escape,
if only for a day,
the saw-blade bite of reality.

SCREAM!—I want to scream
my refusal to let the acid infamy
of these days trample under
my faith in the Coming Footfalls.

And earth,
in the blackness of incinerating screams
glut my cup with the pollens of uplifting sagehood.

SLEEP OF INNOCENCE
(On being shaken to the roots
(by the drone of a jet-bomber
(in Benin, 1968.)

Another hawk tears through the womb
of the night—

gruesome go-crash
of a million souls
in the speech of automaton,
the thrust of a monster-thought
strangling your sleep;

Comes oppressive silence
convulsing the selves in wild sensations
of prostrate-innocence, guilt.

Mooning love, do not wake
in this filthied hour of soot;
don't stir to share in the burdening swoop
of insomnia raping my being;
—let me alone in my choking helpless rage
WEEP MY LAND.

YOU COME TO ME

you come to me
during the cool hours
of the day bringing
the sun; if you come
at midnight, or at two
in the morning, you come
always bringing the sun;
the taste of your sweetness
permeates my lips and my hair
with the lingering sweetness of Harlem
with the lingering sweetness of Africa
with the lingering sweetness of freedom;
woman, eye want to see
your breast brown and bared,
your nippled eyes staring,
aroused-hard and lovely;
woman, eye want to see
the windows of your suffering
washed clean of this terrible pain
we endure together;
woman, eye want to see
your song filled with joy,
feel the beauty of your laughter;
woman, black beautiful woman,
eye want to see
your black graceful body
covered with the sweat of our love
with your dancers steps to music
moving rhythmically, panther like
across the african veldt;
woman, eye want to see you
naked, always in your natural beauty;
woman, eye want to see you
proud; in your native land

LET TIME GO

let time go there
where tears hang
heavy, like stones
in the valley,
hang heavy like blood
drops from the heart.
like blinding fog
that settles down
in the deep places,
the subterranean places,
in the graveyards
of our lives,
let time disappear
like the burning eye
beyond the distance,
and come back beautiful
like the royal robe
draped over summer,
let time fly,
in reversed consummation,
into deeper meanings
of why it all happened
in the first place,
let time fly deeper
into pure meaning
of itself, and extract
juju miracles that smile
upon this world

ELLIPSE

the birds singing joy
within the green zones
within the timeless zones
the feathers beating joy
from the fluted flights of motion
the world bleeding wars
within the death bones
within the human bones
the flesh drumming wars
from the flaming grip of earth
inside the words without meaning
between the womb and point
of departure, the elliptical seed
of creation fusing, between
confusing pulls of motion hanging
between loves and undeniable hatreds
suspended between nowhere
and everywhere
between what eye am
and what eye ought to be
the heart bleeding music
outside the pain tones
outside the drum-drum tones
the blood singing music
from the swinging branches of tom-tom
the sky breeding distance
within the unknown
within the magical unknown
our shadows falling down the distance
to kiss the temples of our mothers

ART AND ARTIFICE IN OKARA'S *THE VOICE*

by E. N. Obiechina

Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* was released by Andre Deutsch in 1964. Its reception was instantly favourable though the enthusiasm of reviewers was always hedged with certain reservations about the problem of its experiments with language. Everyone, of course, has tended to agree that the novel has an importance totally out of proportion to its small size. My concern here is to examine in some detail some of the 'technical' procedures adopted by Okara which have given this short novel its considerable weight and power.

Perhaps, I should begin by stating some of my conclusions before going into more detailed discussion. *The Voice* has such moral earnestness and is so deeply concerned with social corruption that it is difficult for anyone to read it without responding in some measure to its serious preoccupations: its approach to the moral problems is so pervasive, so intensive and so passionate that it cannot but arrest the attention of the sensitive reader. Its use of a heavy, solemn, moralizing tone and a highly inflected and symbolical language to explore what is essentially a moral universe dominated by the evils of dictatorship and materialism is one of the author's major strategic successes. Okara's use of a rigid close-drawn structure also proves ideally suited to moral exploration. The total effect of the novel is in the nature of the reader's having been conducted through a nightmare into the horrors of a lunatic asylum. This effect, in my view, is largely a result of Okara's deliberately chosen and doggedly pursued artistic and technical strategies.

The plot of *The Voice* is very slight. The hero, Okolo (which in Ijaw means "the voice") after having studied and lived abroad returns home to the village of Amatu. He is appalled by the moral decay which he finds everywhere and more particularly by a persuasive and all-pervading materialism which corrupts the souls of the people both within the village and in the neighbouring town, Sologa of the Big One, and which destroys the people's moral vision of life. Okolo feels called upon to draw attention to his people's moral predicament by going around and asking them if they have got 'It' and thereby stimulating moral revival in their lives. He assumes for himself the mantle of reformer, prophet and messiah, but like all such moral revolutionaries, he antagonizes the corrupt establishment and is quite predictably crushed, just when his message is beginning to take root.

There is hardly any doubt as to the tradition to which Okara's belongs. The moral campaign which the hero mounts right from the beg ing, the morally-dominated atmosphere and the inside details of the point irrevocably not only to an obvious analogy but to a close pattern on the passion story of the Gospels. In his excellent study, *The Nove and the Passion Story*, F. W. Dillistone writes about such novels:

> 'The . . . . possibility open to the novelist is to write about his contemporary world openly and frankly but with the essential pattern of the Passion narrative forming the inner framework of his own story. It is, of course, impossible for him to do this unless he believes that the successive stages in the recorded life of Jesus do correspond to the general sequence of events which may be traced in the career of every heroic figure who carries out a mission of redemption for his fellow men. Such a mission may be performed by an individual seeking consciously to follow in the steps of the Christ and to fashion his life after the pattern displayed in the Gospels. But not necessarily so. In dedicating himself to the service of his fellows he may almost unconsciously find himself caught up into a sequence of temporary acceptance, growing opposition, rejection, suffering, dereliction, vindication, strangely similar to that which marked the career of Jesus of Nazareth himself.'[1]

Though *The Voice* is not as closely patterned on Christ's life as say Ka zantzaki's *Christ Recrucified* yet there is enough of the Passion story in it t justify attention being drawn to the fact. Okolo carries on his moral campaig from a position of moral superiority—he possesses *It* while the people who he sets out to convert do not possess *It*. He is single-mindedly devoted t his mission in spite of the obvious personal risks involved. His complet commitment to his messianic mission actually contrasts with the differen kind of commitment evident in the artist who "puts his shadow into creatin faces out of wood"[2]—a kind of creative virtue which though commendabl in itself is too subjectively-centred to have a wide cleansing impact on th moral environment.

Okolo, like Christ, is the man who cares where everyone else is conten to let things slide. In a world in which everyone else is a comedian (to us Graham Green's famous differentiation) he is the only tragedian. He ha the awareness of the extent of moral ruin which has overtaken his society and he is prepared to risk life and security to assault the forces of darkness One of Okolo's main targets of attack, like Christ's, is the establishmen

which is not only corrupt in itself but corrupts the rest of the people. Chief Izongo and the Elders of Amatu may be paralleled to the Scribes and Pharisees; the white colonialist in charge of the Big One's security service and who imprisons Okolo in Sologa to Pontius Pilate. We even have the equivalent of Nichodemus in the Elder Tebeowei who comes to Okolo at night, not to learn more about his message of course but to persuade him of the futility of his effort. Okolo's collaborators and converts, the outcast Tuere and the cripple, Ukule, could be likened to Christ's humble disciples. Most of the evils denounced by Christ are also the evils deplored by Okolo in the village of Amatu and the town, Sologa of the Big One—an establishment which corrupts the ordinary people by its concupiscence and self-love as well as a general moral laxity distinguished by too much love for material security and too little concern with social morality.

All the main stages in the Passion story are present in Okolo's life—notice that the actual drama of Okolo's moral campaign is very short-lived. As with he story of Christ, the most formative period of the hero's life remains inexplicably shrouded in obscurity. Like Christ also Okolo goes through the stages identified by Dillistone—temporary acceptance (because people are beginning to listen to his moral promptings, the autocrats had to move quickly against him), suffering (Okolo has a good deal of this both in the village and in the town), dereliction (the very limit is marked by Okolo's death by drowning, tied with the unfortunate Tuere in a rudderless canoe which drifts from one bank of the river to the other like 'debris carried by the current' until drawn into a whirlpool), and vindication: there is more than an ordinary hint that Okolo's mission will triumph over the forces of human tyranny. Ukule the cripple assures Okolo before he is led away that "Your spoken words will not die". But even before this time, a convert to Okolo's view-point has said with emphasis:

> "Nobody withstands the power of the spoken word. Okolo has spoken. I will speak when the time is correct and others will follow and our spoken words will gather power like the power of a hurricane and Izongo will sway and fall like sugar cane".[3]

The story leaves no doubt but that the cause for which Okolo dies will in the end triumph, just as the cause for which the Christ was crucified has since triumphed.

This patterning on the Passion story is interesting but what is even more impressive is the means whereby Okara creates for us an overwhelming vision of evil and corruption, the vision of a wholly corrupt environment

within which everyday activities are distorted into a dreamlike nightmare only comparable to life in a lunatic asylum.

Here is an extract from the incident of Okolo's first arrest:

'Okolo seeing the messengers, recognized them and questioned them. But the men, in spite of their grim faces, opened not their mouths. The remaining crowd hushed. The silence passed silence. The three messengers faced Okolo, opening not their mouths. A man from the back of the crowd pushed his way to the messengers. The four of them put their heads together while with their eyes they looked at Okolo. They put their heads together for a while and walked towards Okolo, as if stalking an animal. And Okolo stood looking. They moved nearer. Okolo stood. They moved nearer and suddenly, pounced on Okolo. Okolo and the men fell to the ground. Hands clawed at him, a thousand hands, the hands of the world. Okolo twisted, struggled and kicked with all his shadow, with all his life, and, to his astonishment, he saw himself standing free. He ran. Running feet followed. He ran. A million pursuing feet thundered after him. He ran past his house without knowing and ran into another. A woman giving suck to her baby screamed. Out Okolo sprang and ran. The running feet came nearer, the caring-nothing feet of the world. Okolo turned a corner and nearly ran into a boy and girl standing with hands holding each other. They did not look at him. He turned a corner. A dog barked at him. Okolo ran. He was now at the ending of the town. Only one hut was left and beyond it the mystery of the forest. Okolo ran and as he ran past, a voice held him.

"Come in" it said, "Come in quickly".

In Okolo went, instinctively and in the gloom, stood panting.'[4]

And here is a description of Okolo's first night in Sologa of the Big One:

'Through the black black night Okolo walked, stumbled, walked. His inside was a room with chairs, cushions, papers scattered all over the floor by thieves. Okolo walked, stumbled, walked. His eyes shut and opened, shut and opened, expecting to see a light in each opening, but none he saw in the black black night.

At last the black black night like the back of a cooking pot entered his inside and grabbing his thoughts, threw them out into

the blacker than black night. And Okolo walked, stumbled, walked with an inside empty of thoughts except the black black night.

When Okolo came to know himself, he was lying on a floor, on a cold floor lying. He opened his eyes to see but nothing he saw, nothing he saw. For the darkness was evil darkness and the outside night was black black night. Okolo lay still in the darkness enclosed by darkness, and he his thoughts picked in his inside. Then his picked thoughts his eyes opened but his vision only met a rock-like darkness. The picked thoughts then drew his legs but his legs did not come. They were as heavy as a canoe full of sand. His thoughts in his inside began to fly in his inside darkness like frightened birds hither, thither, homeless . . . Then the flying thoughts drew his hands but the hands did not belong to him, it seemed. So Okolo on the cold cold floor lay with his body as soft as an over-pounded foofoo. So Okolo lay with his eyes open wide in the rock-like darkness staring, staring.

Okolo for years and years lay on the cold cold floor at the rock-like darkness staring. Then suddenly he saw a light. He drew his hands and his hands came. He stood up with his eyes on the light and walked towards the light. As he moved towards the light, the light also moved back. He moved faster and the light also moved faster. Okolo ran and the light also ran. Okolo ran, the light ran. Okolo ran and hit a wall with his head. Okolo looked and the light was no more. He then stretched his hands forth and touched the wall. His fingers felt dents and holes. Okolo walked sideways like a crab with his fingers on the wall, feeling dents and holes, dents and holes in the rock-like darkness until his feet struck an object. As Okolo stopped and felt the object his body became cold. His heart-beat echoed in the rocklike darkness and his head expanded. Still, he felt along the object until his fingers went into two holes. As his fingers went into the holes he quickly withdrew them and ran. He ran and fell, ran and fell over other objects. He ran and knocked against the wall and fell. Still he ran, then suddenly stopped. He saw a light in front of him. He moved gently crouching forward like a hunter stalking game. Then when he nearly reached the light, he rushed forward.'[5]

Those two passages have been selected because they illustrate the quality, range and variety of Okara's art. In fact, what is most striking about it is the careful, deliberate manner in which Okara works the different rhetorical

devices into a sustained and singularly successful medium to convey the peculiar experience which we find in *The Voice*. Okara's art would reward some study because Okara is easily the most "artificial" of all West African writers. We use the word "artificial" in connection with Okara's style in the word's old and modern connotations of having "constructive skill" or art and as the opposite to "natural".[6]

The most outstanding feature of Okara's art is his reiterative rhetoric, his repetition of single words, phrases, sentences, images or symbols to produce diverse emphatic effect. Notice for example the effect suggested in the first passage by the repetition of 'Okolo stood' and 'They moved nearer'. It is as if Okolo is fixed on the spot under a hypnotic spell while his sinister adversaries make their sharp, furtive moves, full of menace and danger to the hero. The metaphor already suggested in 'as if stalking an animal' is fully justified by what happens. In the very next lines the sinister nightmarish quality of the episode is reinforced by vividly described physical activities. The assailants 'pounce' on Okolo and a struggle ensues.

"Nightmare" is the only word which adequately describes the physical sensation of 'a thousand hands' and 'the hands of the world' which claw at Okolo as he 'twisted', 'struggled', and 'kicked' at his four adversaries. To Okolo, the hands of four men in that brief and silent struggle produce the sensation of 'a thousand hands'— the reader feels this sensation just as he feels the sensation of being pursued by a million 'thundering' feet in the dark silent night. The reader feels these sensations because the drama is so vivid, so concrete that he has become Okolo, sees things through Okolo's haunted eyes, experiences the thrill of horror which Okolo experiences when the four silent men suddenly pounce on him and when the whole crowd begin pursuing him in the dark.

The reiteration of the action in short dramatic sentences like 'Okolo ran' reinforced by clearly hyperbolic statements like 'a million pursuing feet' give rise to a terrifying concrete physical sensation which is felt in the very marrow. Notice also Okara's method of giving concreteness to the action by the repetition of the proper name rather than the personal pronoun— 'Okolo stood', 'Okolo Twisted', 'Out Okolo sprang', 'Okolo turned a corner', 'Okolo ran'.

The use of reiteration to give concreteness of physical sensation to situation is even more developed in the second passage. Here, the reiteration of 'black' is to give to the darkness of the night a near-tactile quality in expressions like 'black black night', 'black black night like the back of a cooking pot', 'the blacker than black night'.

The sinister nature of the darkness is very much heightened by its being raised to a physical sensation. In fact the symbol of 'darkness' is so pervasive not only in this passage but also in the rest of the narrative that the atmosphere of the story could be said to be completely dominated by it. Light appears intermittently and merely helps to emphasize the darkness, not to dispel it.

The reiterative image of darkness in this passage is particularly effective, especially as it is further reinforced by Okara's invocation of the horrific in terms of the human sensations—eyes trying to pierce an impenetrable darkness, hands and feet that refuse to move in one moment and then shoot out in a single automatic movement in the next, the groping of the fingers into dents and holes, the crab-like movement, the head knocking on the wall, the body becoming cold, the heart-beat echoing, the head expanding, the running and falling, etc., all these physical actions and sensations which are given great vividness assume a dreamlike nightmarish quality because they take place in the dark.

Now, this evocation of horror and nightmare would have been a point of weakness in Okara's art, mere sensation-mongering, if it had been indulged in for its own sake. But it is not. It provides superb background to the serious moral issues with which Okara is dealing in the novel. This is not a normal world but one which has been terribly distorted by evil and corruption. The very prospect of living within it assumes an aspect of physical danger and spiritual terror, especially for the only man who is courageous enough to challenge its standards of morality, its rotten values, as well as the invidious forces which dominate it.

Of course the story is a parable with the universal theme of man's indomitable struggle against the evils of spiritual oppression and social corruption as the blurb says but we can only wring out the limit of its rich moral significance by apprehending it on the two levels of particularity and generality and on the literal and symbolical levels, because each level tends to reinforce the other. For this realization of his theme of 'good versus evil', Okara has had to build up the physical aspect of his environment, a horrific and nightmarish environment, with which we feel, through physical sensations, the oppressive presence of evil as well as the heroic suffering and torment of soul implicit in the hero's moral campaign against it. Thus the theme has both universal significance as well as a contemporary application: the novel's setting is both the world and an African country in which the dictators have set up police states and destroyed their people's liberties. Okara's reiterative rhetoric makes the realization of the actual physical implications

of the moral problem and the representation of the moral situation throug physical action and physical sensations reasonably easy. But there is mo to it.

Okara brings his poetical gifts to bear on his choice of images and symbol He uses metaphors, similes and other figures of speech to give concreten and body to the heavily oppressive moral environment which he builds up By such devices even the most abstract notions are reduced to physic realities. Okara is in this sense, more than any other West African noveli a materialist, because he attempts to reduce actions, feelings, and sensatio to material or physical realities. This tendency in Okara's technique cou be regarded as a process of 'reification'; the process of giving the quality o 'thingness' to mental and abstract constructs. Okara for example describ Okolo's confusion of mind in the dark room by likening it to 'a room wi chairs, cushions, papers scattered all over the floor by thieves', Okolo 'thoughts in his inside began to fly in his inside darkness like frighten birds hither, thither, homeless'. There is an example of the use of synecdoc to give concreteness to the squalid moral outlook which exists in the town o Sologa:

> 'So Okolo walked in Sologa of the Big One passing frustrated eyes, ground-looking eyes, harlot's eyes, despairing eyes, nothing-caring eyes, dust-filled eyes, aping eyes . . . . .'[7]

Only by evolving a consistent style with its own inner logic can Okara ma 'eyes' do duty for him in this bold unconventional manner.

The process of reification in *The Voice* is greatly enhanced by the rhyth of Okara's prose, the rhythm of words spun under the immediate pressu of what is being done, felt or suffered. This when accompanied by Okara reiterative rhetoric can enhance dramatic immediacy as well as fixing impr ssion in a concrete and vivid way. The tremendous power of the seco passage is the result of Okara's ability to capture the rhythm of action a of physical sensation through common everyday words which thus acqui sensuous and sinister overtones—words like 'dents', 'holes', 'the thin What gives ordinary innocent words like these their quality of creepi terror is the context in which they occur and the way they are woven in the hero's movements in the dark. When the hero's fingers, for instan enter into the 'two holes' and he immediately withdraws them, we feel witho really knowing why that we are in a room where there are human skeleto and with the hero we are chilled and experience the sensation of horror a revulsion. Perhaps the term which adequately describes Okara's abil to produce physical sensations and attendant emotions by manipulati

words, actions and rhythm of language is T.S. Eliot's famous phrase, "Objective Correlative".[8] The accumulation of physical sensations and emotions have the effect of fixing our moral reaction to the issues which the writer has so clearly stripped bare before the reader. .

The main impulse within *The Voice* seems to derive from the oral tradition, especially the folktale. Okara's rhetoric, more especially his deliberate repetitions, his metaphoric and hyperbolic elaborations and his colloquial rhythm, belong essentially to the oral tradition. The ghoulish and the nightmarish which are so well developed in *The Voice* are the regular features of the folktale. Okara's interest in the Ijaw oral tradition goes much further than any other novelist's interest in the oral tradition, for Okara, of all the writers, attempts to reproduce not only literal meanings from the vernacular (such as is evident in expressions like 'Okolo had no chest', 'he had no shadow',[6] all his inside', 'with all his shadow'), but also actual syntactical forms in sentences like: 'Who are you people be?' "If you are coming-in people be, then come in". Even the process of reification already noted may have been derived by Okara from the vernacular since it is quite well-developed in the West African languages.

It has been suggested that Okara wrote the story first in "ordinary English" and then as an experiment translated it into "this medium".[9] This may well be so but it is equally true that Okara's experiment with language and imagery in *The Voice* was clearly foreshadowed in his poetry. We find in *The Mystic DRUM*, for instance, expressions like 'in my inside', 'with their shadows', 'the eye of the sky' and this sustained image:

> 'and smoke issued from her nose
> and her lips parted in her smile
> turned cavity belching darkness'[10]

which may have prepared the way for the dominant symbol of darkness in *The Voice*. Another poem, *Adhiambo*, suggests the theme of *The Voice*. The opening lines read:

> 'I hear many voices
> like it's said a madman hears;
> I hear trees talking
> like it's said a medicine man hears
> Maybe I'm a madman,
> I'm a medicine man.
> Maybe I'm mad,
> for the voices are luring me,
> urging me from the midnight

noon and the silence of my desk
to walk on wave crests across a sea'[11]

The hero of *The Voice* is also a visionary and is said by the people to a mad man. What is being hinted at here is that *The Voice* is perhaps t sublimation in prose fiction of Okara's poetical visions of his mission throu literary creativeness, to reform and purify society. The poet-reformer w bring out of his creative imagination the full image of the appalling corru tion of society so that all those who see this image will be shocked into mood of moral revival. Thus, the real key to why Okolo is so passive moral reformer, a Christlike rather than a Promethean hero, may actuall lie in the fact that Okara conceived him essentially as a poet-reformer an not as a political revolutionary, as a man who appeals to the soul and th finer faculties and emotions of people rather than one who storms thei emotions into revolutionary violence. Okara gives us in a very vivid way terrifying picture of society completely corrupted by totalitarianism an extreme materialism but Okara's moral position remains vague, veiled ir elusive poetic suggestion. The *It* is the quality of moral excellence which the autocrats have emasculated in their subjects:

'For him it has no name. Names bring divisions and divisions strife. So let it be without a name; let it be nameless . . . . .'[12]

The novel is sometimes criticized for taking a too rigid moral position. But this criticism is hardly fair at all. As a parabolic tale whose effect depends on a certain rigidity of moral positions, the novel may be excused for adopting a one-sided moral outlook which bears out the theme of the tale. It would be false to compare its moral rigidity with, say, the moral complexity of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* since they are different types of novels and differently conceived works. It is a work that seems to stand away and apart from other works.

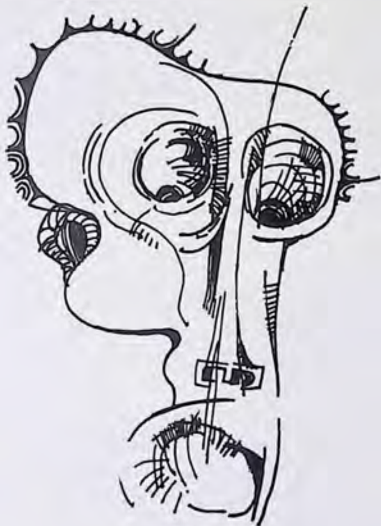
* * *

The conclusion which one can reasonably reach in this short discussion is that the view often held that the artistic intentions of a work are usually destroyed by too obvious manifestation of artifice may not be true in all circumstances. Where artifice serves the interest of the author well, as in *The Voice*, it can be a positive force for strengthening insight, as well as a definitive quality of the artistic pattern of a work. Thus, it is quite clear that the successful realization of the picture of political oppression and social corruption in *The Voice* has been made possible by deliberately fashioned

devices of language and symbolism, and by a consistent patterning on a well-known, emotion-packed mythus. The experiments with language prove immensely useful for moral exploration while the patterning of the inner movement of the novel's action on the Christ story and the reiteration of the symbol of darkness help to build up the emotional atmosphere of the novel and to give it power and significance.

NOTES

1. Dillistone, F. W. *The Novelist and the Passion Story* London, 1960, pp. 19-20.
2. Okara, Gabriel: *The Voice*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1964.
3. Okara: Op. cit., p. 110.
4. Okara: Op. cit., pp. 15-16.
5. Okara: Op. cit., pp. 84-86.
6. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.
7. Okara: Op. cit., p. 90.
8. *Eliot. T. S.: Selected Prose* (ed. John Hayward), London, 1953, pp. 107-8.
9. *African Literature and the Universities* (ed. Gerald Moore), Ibadan, 1965, p. 106.
10. Moore, Gerald and Beier, Ulli: *Modern Poetry from Africa*, London, 1963, pp. 95-96.
11. Moore and Beier: Op. cit., p. 96.
12. Okara: Op. cit., p. 136.



PSYCHEDELIC HAZE (for FIFI)

Blue is the colour of Love
Love is the colour of Blue
Blue is love
Love is blue
Love-blue, blue-love . . . . .

Jingles and rattlers howled:
Stir dull sensibilities
pound stale mortar
With sensitol gossamer
Sip the dew drops
in the potsherd . . . . .
Love-blue, blue-lower.

Puke more popgun and words
Aphonic and hollow,
Spew cold sweat
Into the psychedelic haze
Of sizzling body fume
And burnt-out tune

And Moses went down
Howling—
Love is Blue, Blue is Love.

Nathan Nkala

MOVING TRAIN

Must we for ever stare through space
Wave a million byes,
Tremble with the deep perception
Of our new-found contact?

I saw the faithful watchman
Frozen at his post
His eyes cluttered with unspoken avowals
His soul drawn into the gyroscopic dance
Of the moving train

And the dancer cried,
Cried and waited:

Parting leaves
Such dog-nose wetness on the cheeks,
Leaves an airless cheerless void
In my one-room heart.

And the dancer went down,
An unmarked luggage tag
Floating out of the window.

Nathan Nkala

GROPING (For REKA II)

I heard the foot fall
of the dancers
approaching land's end
feet groping down
the spiral rungs
of the past historic

approaching road's end,
the present continuous
of the newfound beacon.

I heard the dancer
at the pulse choke of time
I heard . . . . .

Listen! Listen to
the deafening silence
of a soul
lost in the web.

THE TOAD IS LIKE US

The toad is like us
Fat at the haunches
It gives the impression
Of weak goggle eyes.

The toad is like us
slow at decision
It panics and pants
In its own element.

Wide of girth
Small of hind
Bandy-legged
The toad is like us.

Sweaty
The toad is like us
Wide of mouth
Kwashiorkor.

"He simply requested the mermaid to give us another child"

Maxwell Nkem Nwagboso

THE MERMAID—a short story

"Now tell me what happened," she said.
"Is Alfred asleep yet, do you know?" he replied, sighing.
"Yes I think so," she said.

Alfred, lying on his small mat on the floor between the two bamboo beds on which the man and his wife lay, opened his eyes, peering quietly at his father on his right. The room was dark and he could only make out dim outlines of his father smoking a pipe in the darkness.

"Well," his father said wearily, "the *dibia* and I went down to the bank of the Niger at midnight. The goat which he had asked me to tie to a boat was there. He slaughtered it and sprinkled some of its blood into the water. Then he took the money from me, buried it in the sand and began to invoke the mermaid—"

"What exactly did he say?" the woman asked.

"He simply requested the mermaid to give us another child."

"I see, go ahead."

"Soon after his invocation, something stirred in the water and the mermaid's head and bare breasts emerged—"

"Something really appeared?" the woman asked in shocked amazement.

"Yes, something emerged. I so shivered with fear that I passed hot urine inside my shorts." The woman laughed nervously. "But when the mermaid began to speak I knew that the whole thing was a trick."

"Was a what?" The woman sat up.

"It was a trick, Ada," her husband said. "She was nothing near a mermaid. She was just one of those free women who hunt for men at Fegge."

"Merciful God, how did you know?"

"I had met her before I married you. I recognised her unusual voice. In those days men used to go to her just to hear her voice. As soon as I heard it I recognised it immediately. It was a moon-lit night and I was able to make out her familiar face in the water."

"Oh God, Emeka, what did you do then?"

"I dived into the river, chasing her about until I caught her and dragged her to the bank. By then the *dibia* had fled. The carcass of the goat was gone and so was the money buried in the sand."

"You mean the *dibia* escaped with all that money!"

"Yes, Ada. He escaped with the money and my fattest goat and I don't

even know where he lives. We met always in the harlot's place."

"Which harlot?"

"The one who posed as the mermaid."

"Before you married me?"

"When I was looking for a *dibia* to solve our problem people directed m to her place and the *dibia* and I always met there."

"So you could hold the woman, couldn't you?"

"No. She denied that she knew any *dibia*. Said she was just bathi in the river!"

She sagged back onto her bed. "The trouble now," she sobbed, " where Alfred's school fee is going to come from."

Alfred listened hard.

"I don't know," his father said wearily.

"But we must do something," she said. "He is our only son, after all

"That's what makes it harder to bear," the man said, sighing deepl

"It not only makes it harder to bear, it makes it imperative for us to d something."

"Yes, but we must face facts. There is no money and you know i I am not going to steal. Alfred will have to learn my trade."

She cleaned away the tears on her cheeks with the back of her han

"Poor Alf," she muttered.

"Go ahead and say it," the man said irritably. "Go right ahead an tell me that I have ruined our only child."

"You know I don't mean it that way," she said chokingly. "It's on that I had expected he was going to be educated enough to work in an office

Alfred threw an angry glance in his mother's direction. He doesn't lik school. The teacher flogs you mercilessly when you fail to recite som rubbish correctly. Mother likes him to go to school to be flogged becaus she likes to flog him herself.

"Well," his father said, "it doesn't seem to be the will of God that h should finish school. Perhaps it is his destiny."

"No, it is not his destiny," his mother said firmly.

Alfred returned his gaze to his father, wishing he could know the *dibi* so he could befriend him. But now his mother began to sniff quietly.

Father said: "All right Ada, since you feel this way about it, Alfred wi continue in school. I will sell two of the goats, unslaughtered, tomorrow

"Oh Emeka," the woman said, enraptured; "I am proud of you."

Tears stood in Alfred's eyes now. He doesn't like school. He doesn want any office work when he grows up. All he wants is to be a butcher lik

Father. He likes the way Father ropes a goat, slits its throat, and burns off its hair. He likes the smell of singeing goat hair. He likes the expert way Father cuts up the animal afterwards. And what is more, he likes goat—meat. To get plenty of it one has to be a butcher. Now Mother has spoilt it all with her trouble-making!

The man reached out his hand and balanced his pipe on the sill of the low window of the hut. Alfred's eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, followed his father's hand.

"Ada?" his father said.

"Yes, Emeka?"

"Come over here."

She said nothing.

Good, Alfred thought, Father will beat you up now for making trouble.

"Ada?" Father repeated.

"What is it Emeka?"

"I said come over here."

"Oh Emeka I don't feel up to it. But if we must then you come over."

Bad news for you Mother, Alfred thought, watching his father; bad news for you! He has you now beneath him and that will teach you not to make trouble. Alfred waited for Mother to cry out but all the crying he could hear was the one done by the bed. Mother must be dead, he thought, frightened now. Oh she is dead! Father has beaten her to death!

"Father! father!" he shrieked; "stop, Mother is dead! Stop! She is dead!"

"My God Ada," Father said, sighing and struggling out of the bed; "I thought you said the boy was asleep?"

"Oh, I thought he was, Emeka. Alfred! Four strokes for you in the morning!"

DIBIA

The neck of a toad
the entrails of a spider
the tongue of a vulture
    fume in a liquid collation
    of life and death
the pot-bellied man sits by
a sage in a blind search
taking a look into the future
    into the future of mankind

transparent man-god
man-spirit
    moving between two worlds
    in a silent divination
cowries in hands
ready to cast the lots
of stern faced mortals
waiting to know
waiting to learn. . . . . .

the dibia sits by cross-legged
before the gods
    seeing but not saying
    not daring to ordain . . . . .

where have we gone wrong?
sometimes the gods are difficult to please.

NIGHTMARE

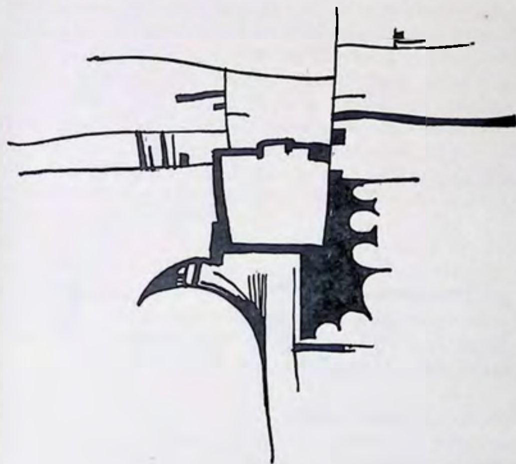
I recall
the thunders thundering away
in the rough darkness of the night.
I saw
slim lightnings twining
through the thick coat of darkness.
There I was with you
lying quietly until the
heart was near bursting,
the head overswollen and
the eyes battered
terrified before you—
horrible image of fear
that pivots around me,
moving too slow or too fast
to be grasped and fixed
by a dazed mind.
Everywhere there was confusion;
there was so little order in
the heavens and on earth:
thundering noises above
with splattering ocean of fire below
and I between!
Do you still wonder I didn't smile?

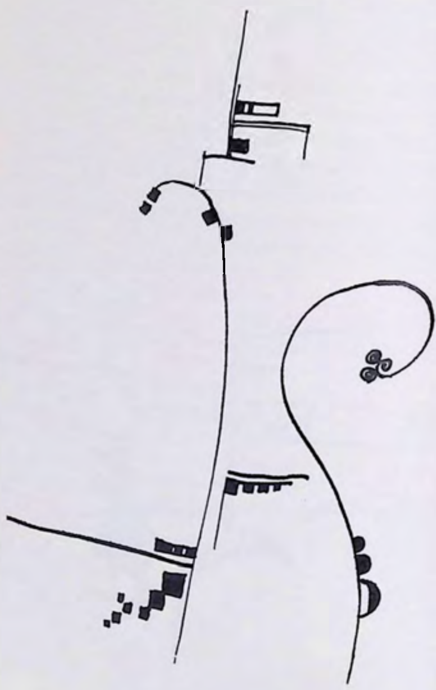
KANO GIRL

I have my one room in tomato light,
my half wall long radiogramme, my brass
posted bed, dressrails, jelly-like
stacked scent jars, colognes, creams.
Foreign's free. A square yard's enough
floor to put on a narrow dress.
The taxi sags over road lumps, dust
funnelling up its beams, my earrings
rocking inside, past a muslim girl
shuddering a calabash up onto her
crown of rags. In Central Hotel
bulbs drip through the leaves. Shorn
like a collaborator I walk
with as still a wig as a mannequin
wrenching cotton creased across
laps that then push it slowly smooth
with the performance of life along
these ownerless malt coloured limbs.
Chicken grease quivers along knuckles.
Bones hinge and creak apart.
From where I sit I can fix a man's
position with the whites of my eyes.
One click in the carpark brings on
my dawdle towards the silhouette
of a head turned against the driver's seat
so that the hotel lights shine veined through its ears.

SABONGARI MARKET

The meat trader picks out my mini-gear
in the crowds and the corrugated,
and my long silver leg and slaps flies
like sequins off his steaks; they wobble
like bottoms. My pearl nails close
on one and hold it up as by a throat.
Shillings trickle from my fingertips.
Welcome madam: a beggar with twig legs
and the sandals on his hands lifts a
leper fist in salute of my dark glasses
as I near the car, carrying my bag
like a European, my head as still as
a model's, my smile only a mouth.





IN A FREE STATE

by

V. S. Naipaul

(*Published by Andre Deutsch*, 1971)

During the Fifties it was considered rather bad form, in literary circles, to approach an 'underdeveloped country' in a spirit of sophisticated humour; and it was therefore perhaps unfortunate for V. S. Naipaul that his first three books happened to be social comedies set in Trinidad. Well-meaning British reviewers—whether in sheer ignorance of the background, or else unconsciously reflecting the prevalent attitudes of neo-colonialist embarrassment—responded to *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *Miguel Street* in dismayed tones of patronising rebuke. They would have preferred a simple study in compassion where a clear distinction is made between the oppressors and the oppressed, or a 'charming' exercise in the *faux-naif*, or a steamily incoherent drama of miscegenation and primitive brutality. The West Indian public, with a refinement of irony, expressed a similar reaction—thus proving that the recent confusions of neo-colonialist liberalism had already travelled as far as the original imperialist settlers and taken roots as deep. In 1958 the *Times Literary Supplement* published an article by Naipaul in which he mischievously transposed some of the sillier remarks made about his early novels in order to reveal the gratuitous insult hidden within them: 'Imagine a critic in Trinidad writing of *Vile Bodies:* "Mr Evelyn Waugh's whole purpose is to show how funny English people are. He looks down his nose at the land of his birth. We hope that in future he writes of his native land with warm affection."'

With his fourth book, however, he gave people what they expected—and a good deal more. Conceived and executed within the great tradition of the humanist novel, *A House for Mr Biswas* is as subtle and comprehensive an analysis of the colonial situation as anything in imaginative literature. It has been widely admired and—more important—understood. When it came out, Naipaul was still under 30. He went on writing—and again he was in difficulties.

A novel set in London was automatically assumed to contain inaccuracies: the English could not recognise themselves in Mr Stone and the Knights Companion, for the same reason that a voice played back on a tape-

recorder sounds at first distorted to the speaker who is now a listener to
The Middle Passage and *An Area of Darkness*, non-fiction books about t
West Indies and India respectively, gave offence: these are tender area
where criticism is expected to be tempered with tact, even if the critic
himself a West Indian of Indian descent. (Indeed, criticism from a tot
stranger is more readily accepted—yet a further paradox inherent in th
neo-colonialist relation, based as it is on a cynical and sadomasochist
collaboration between sentimental guilt, on the one hand, and righteo
resentment on the other.)

From this point on, a note of despair is sounded with increasing intensi
throughout Naipaul's work (except in the collection of stories, *A Flag o
the Island*): he seems to have become painfully aware of some fault in th
system of communication between himself and his invisible audience which-
as in a nightmare—grew more pronounced while his literary reputatio
grew more firmly established. Many writers complain, in private, of th
loneliness of their trade: something related to this agony—a sense of plac
lessness—is the central theme of his novel, *The Mimic Men*, and is implic
in his history of Trinidad, *The Loss Of El Dorado*. In the latter, a deep
emotional involvement in the squalid tale of exploitation combines with
chill, elegant constraint in the telling to produce a shocking effect whic
triumphantly matches the subject.

Returning to fiction with *In a Free State*, he amplifies the note of despair-
but at the same time resolves it by applying its resonance to a range bot
further from his personal experience, and wider in the technical sense, tha
anything he has previously achieved. The detached delight in characte
of his early books was succeeded by an obsession with the lost individua
here both are brilliantly harmonised in a series of episodes through whic
moral and political generalities are particularised and illuminated. It i
now whole groups of people (racial, national) who are seen as lost; but th
fact that a social group consists of a number of individuals remains para
mount. The ambiguity of the specific instances serves to strengthen the forc
of the generalities they embody: for such generalities require a full acknow
ledgement of the complexity of human experience.

An initially baffling prologue, written in dairy form and set on board
Greek steamer crossing to Alexandria, establishes themes which are elabo
rated later in the book. The important 'displaced persons' motif appear
in a low but ominous key, on the first page. A party of Egyptian Greek
are returning home, uncertain of their reception. 'The invaders had le
Egypt; after many humiliations Egypt was free; and these Greeks, the poo

ones, who by simple skills had made themselves only just less poor than Egyptians, were the casualties of that freedom.' The narrator observes, and clinically records, an arbitrary case of casual, calculated cruelty. The victim is an English tramp; his persecutors are two Lebanese, an Egyptian and an Austrian. The other passengers watch and, like the narrator, do nothing. They are not exactly indifferent, but cruelty has become a common-place, even to the victim.

The bulk of the book consists of three *tours de force*. 'One out of Many' is told in the first person by an Indian servant whose employer, a diplomat, takes him to Washington. In Bombay, Santosh had a position in the world, albeit a humble one. America offers him the opportunity to improve his circumstances—but the capital and its people make no sense to him. His misinterpretations of this alien society are desperately funny and desperately sad. During his muddled attempts to reject it, by escape and concealment, he does succeed, however pathetically, in asserting his own independent personality; and when at length his uprooted position becomes unbearable and he settles for limited security and American citizenship, he knows that he is accepting a future of permanent solitude. 'All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over.'

'Tell me who to kill' takes the reader further into the heart of darkness: the transition is like turning from a story by Chekhov to a chapter by Dostoevsky. Here the narrator is the elder of two West Indian brothers disastrously adrift in London. He tries to work so that Dayo, considered the promising member of the family, can 'pursue his studies,' and become a rich professional man. Again, he misinterprets his surroundings, as well as his brother's capabilities and his own nature; again, his confusions are both funny and sad; but in this case the desperation has an undercurrent of violence. Enveloped as he is by an atmosphere of hate, his love for his brother becomes an explosive force which destroys itself in disgrace and disillusion.

These short, concentrated narratives have a shocking effect; but the shock, given the subject-matter, is in some degree expected. The reader's guard is down, however, when he proceeds to the long third section (which gives the book its title) and finds a polite retreat into the third person and a formal change of pace: here Naipaul delivers, in the most gentlemanly manner, a blow beneath the belt. The displaced persons are English whites in black Africa. A fastidious homo-sexual and a sharp but essentially prosaic matron share a long car drive from one end of a recently independent country

to the other, while a military coup (left-wing, overthrowing a heredit ruler) is in progress. Their conversation, which is designed to conceal th thoughts, exposes something deeper: seldom has dialogue been used w such a deadly subtlety. Bobby and Linda are neither wicked white settl nor blundering do-gooders: they are ordinary middle-class people, *moye sensuels*, mildly cynical, conventionally liberal and extremely self-centre The anomalies of the African 'free state' are filtered through their blunt but prickly perceptions as their journey and the crisis involves them (thou that is scarcely the *mot juste*) in a series of non-adventures. These have quality of muffled menace, a sort of sinister flatness. Somewhere in t country something horrible is happening; but there is not much point discussing it. As Bobby says to Linda: 'What does it matter what you thin He will stay on under the new regime; she will move south with her husban

The epilogue reverts to Egypt and the diary form. Again, the narrat witnesses an act of unprovoked cruelty. This time, Egyptians are the victim and this time he voices a protest. Again, he observes a floating mass of alien Germans (who ignore the incident), Italians (who photograph it), Chine (distributing gifts to the natives). 'Now another, more remote empire w announcing itself. A medal, a postcard; and all that was asked in retu was anger and a sense of injustice.' The book is itself an expression of ang and of a sense of injustice; but it has made the unpalatable point that the feelings are self-perpetuating, endlessly shifting from one minority to anothe and as these shifts become increasingly complex the world can only retre into callous indifference.

It remains to be said that I consider Naipaul the finest living noveli writing in English, and this his most important work since *Mr Biswa* His consummate technical mastery of narrative, dialogue and character sation (seen at its most dazzling in the African episode) enables him t pinpoint an elusive complexity of meaning through a prose style of luci purity. These gifts are reinforced by a rare, tough moral honesty that establ shes *In a Free State* as an original, unsettling work of art.

FRANCIS WYNDHA

BOUND TO VIOLENCE

— Yambo Ouologuem
(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)
Translated from French by Ralph Manheim
pp 182 Price $5.95

African creative fiction is today haunted by a spectre more sinister than any that had threatened it in the past. This spectre is the foreign 'rave' reviewer and sensational blurb-writer who will not let the African writer do his work with frankness without pouncing on his book and smothering it with misguided, and sometimes mischievous praise, and provoking against the writer and his work the critical back-lash of African commentators. This state of affairs is increasingly placing the outspoken African writer in an altogether invidious position in which he is open to the accusation that he is using his medium to 'do down' his continent and provide ammunition for the racial detractors of his people.

Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* is a most recent illustration of the danger about which I speak. Here is a competently written novel, in fact, one of the best contributions by an African writer to contemporary prose fiction. But so much ignorant, mischievous and fulsome praise has been heaped on it, and so much anti-African propaganda made out of it on both sides of the Atlantic, that the reaction of African readers has been to treat it with suspicion and veiled hostility.

And well might African readers of this novel show resentment for the use to which the racists of America and Europe are putting the book, especially their use of it as a perfect exhibit to support the Euro-American myth that the African continent is the home of primeval barbarism. Not even the better informed literary journals of France and the United States of America have been able to resist the temptation to use the novel as a pretext to restate well-worn, and largely discredited, racial prejudices.

Why, one may well ask, is there this indecent insistence on the Africanness of this novel? Africa there certainly is in the novel, but so also are Arabia and the Orient, France and Europe. To ignore this fact is to do less than justice to the novel and to pander to age-old mythifications. In truth, if one were clinically to disentangle the various elements in the world of the novel—that is, granted that this disentangling were to serve any useful purpose—one could not fail to recognize in the quality of the novel's violence and eroti-

cism elements of Zolan naturalism, the perversities of Le Marquis de S
and the literature of cruelty, and the existential violence of Jean-Paul Sa
as well, no doubt, as the type of feudal-medieval cruelties widely celebra
in Arab-Oriental chronicles. One would also notice in the author's use
imagery and peculiarities of language a certain kinship with the Fre
imagistic school of poetry and the lush oriental lyricism such as one enco
ters in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

> 'The silence sleeps, dreaming of the sky
> where the clouds envy the moon' (p. 105)

certainly belongs to this latter tradition.

Again, if one takes the long opening sentence of Section Two of
novel which begins with

> 'How in the profound displeasure, with perfumed mouth and eloquence on his tongue, Saif ben Isaac al-Heit endeavoured to mobilize the energies of the fanatical people against the invader. . . . .'

one is bound to notice that the writing belongs essentially to a literary tra
tion. The length and complexity of sentence clearly show that an autl
is at work who is using the facilities of alphabetic writing to great effe
Even though the narrative posture is that of a recorder of dynastic histo
the vast complexity of the sentence structures as well as the complexit
of the inner movements and shifting nuances of language suggest firm
and decisively that the author's organizational outlook is preeminen
modern and up-to-date. The world of Arab court historians and troul
dours is brought alive and seen, not through oral traditional eye, but w
an eye conditioned with the logic and sensibilities of modern alphabe
writing.

The main strength of this novel therefore rests in the successful fusic
by the author, of a number of traditions and the distilling out of a variety
cultural and linguistic peculiarities a communication medium adequa
to the kind of experience with which the novel deals. That this experien
is not authenticated 'African' is made absolutely clear by the author. T
'Africa' that we are shown is 'bastardized', first, by Arab conquest ar
domination and then, more recently, by European (French) conquest ar
domination:

> 'Amidst all this turmoil, this dissolute life with its general bastardization, its vice and corruption, the Arab conquest, which had come several centuries earlier, settled over the land like a she-dog baring

her white fangs in raucous laughter: more and more often, unfreed slaves and subjugated tribes were herded off to Mecca, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Red Sea, and America at prices as ridiculous as the flea-bitten dignity of the niggertrash' (p. 18).

Very early in the novel, we find the following passage:

> 'In that age of feudalism, large communities of slaves celebrated the justice of their over-lords by forced labour and by looking on inert as multitudes of their brothers, smeared with the blood of butchered children and of disemboweled expectant mothers, were immured alive . . . . . That is what happened at Tillaberi-Bentia, at Granta, at Grosso, at Gagol-Gosso and in many places mentioned in the *Tarik al-Sudan* of the Arab historians' (p. 4).

The story opens in medieval Nakem, an empire in western Sudan (probably Mali), bordering the Sahara Desert and watered by the River Niger, referred to here as Yame. This empire is ruled from the Middle Ages by a moslem dynasty, part Arab, part Jewish, the Saifs. The life of this empire is explored in terms of its feudal brutality, blood lust and sadism and the well-tried techniques of feudal oppression through religion, manipulation of supernatural beliefs and magic, and the underhand methods of stealthy poisonings and assassinations. The story traces how this medieval Arab empire has maintained its power and political strangle-hold on African tribes, the 'niggertrash', up to and even beyond the establishment of French colonial empire.

The awareness in the plot of a series of definable movements and currents of historical events over several centuries give the novel a distinctly historical quality while the clearly developed ideological position taken by the author in the exploration of historical matter makes the work a typically political novel. The method of narration, controlled by the nature of material, sways between the epical in the early part dealing with the early history of the Saifs and the mock-heroic in that transitional period covered by the French colonization when the oppressive descendants of the rulers of the Nakem Empire assume the mask of progressive nationalists and defenders of native rights. The third section of the novel which attempts to tear off the mask to reveal the true nature of the rule of the Saifs is handled more or less realistically and is manageably centred on the hero of the story (if one may even call him that), Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi, an offspring of slaves in the household of the Saif, educated in mission school and Paris and made as a

kind of peace offering by Saif to the new colonizing power and its pa
drive to spread white civilization. Like the French colonial adminis
Kassoumi, this 'black pearl of French culture', is to become a dupe
cunning Saif and a representative of his interests in the French parli

While it must be admitted that this novel surprises and fascinates
skill in technical manipulation which has made it possible for the
to condense the history of many centuries into a tightly packed short
it must be recognized also that its most abiding interest remains the
and expressiveness of Ouologuem's language, especially the poetic
evocative energy which he has successfully infused into it throughout th
novel. The opening of the novel is, from this point of view, inimitabl

> 'Our eyes drink the brightness of the sun and, overcome, marvel a their tears. *Mashallah! wa bismillah!* . . . . . To recount the blood adventure of the niggertrash—shame to the worthless paupers!— there would be no need to go back beyond the present century but the true history of the Blacks begins much earlier, with the Saifs, in the year 1202 of our era, in the African Empire of Nakem south of Fezzan, long after the conquests of Okba ben Nafi al-Fitri.'

This high, epical style of the griot, punctuated with pious prayers wicked imprecations, is frequently switched on and off at will and altern with a low style the tone of which is often bitingly satirical, mockin irreverent, as in the following passage:

> 'In anticipation of the great and not too distant day when a world would dawn in which a serf would be the equal of a king, the niggertrash—dogs that bite, leash them tight!—accepted whatever came their way. Forgive us, O Lord. Amba, koubo oumo agoum'. (p. 22).

Or this shattering picture of rootlessness presented by the slave-boy who been transformed into an educated 'Frenchman':

> And so, taking refuge beneath the dead tree of academic complacency, a mage of knowledge without hearth or home, living amidst the dead carcasses of words, Raymond Kassoumi, after a period of apery in which he took on the accent of a Paris wise guy, gave himself up to literary drivel, turning his learning into a demagogic ventriloquism and sinking under its weight.' (p. 137).

Or even this impressive vignette of total despair and discomfiture which stands out in broad relief against a background of faded dreams and drowned hopes:

> '. . . . . He (Kassoumi) rose from his wicker chair, sat on his bed, and spent hours and days thinking about his misery. It was not so much anxiety as a nervous, physical need to nibble at himself, to kneel down to his narcissism, to glut and intoxicate himself with his despair . . . . .' (p. 148).

But by far the most important test for the novel, and one on which it stands or falls down, is how successfully it is seen to prove its central thesis that violence, systematically applied and ruthlessly supported by an undeviating will to power, is capable of sustaining political power and domination almost indefinitely. The matter is succinctly expressed by the Christian missionary, Henry, in that long chess game with Saif that concludes the novel:

> 'The crux of the matter is that violence, vibrant in its unconditional submission to the will to power, becomes a prophetic illumination, a manner of questioning and answering, a dialogue, a tension, an oscillation, which from murder to murder makes the possibilities respond to each other, complete or contradict each other.' (p. 173).

The surface layer of this thesis must be seen as largely proven by the details of the story as the 'niggertrash' is trodden down and totally subdued through the mighty Saif's meticulously organized cruelty,' and by Saif's Macchiavellian elimination of one French colonial governor after another without being found out. The violence we have here has nothing to do with that other kind of purposeless outburst which is often equated with a state of incivility and barbarism. Every single act of violence undertaken by the Saif or by his hatchetmen with his prompting is a deliberate act, a deliberate policy, geared towards the furtherance of a specific political objective or the breaking down of a specifically obstructive will. The quality and subtlety of it raises the act to an artistic undertaking which adds an extra dimension of narrative realization to the novel. And to further elucidate his point by contrast, the author gives us numerous examples of ugly, uncharted violence, like the murder of Awa by her angry lover, Sankolo, which clearly bespeak of a crude and perverted use of the same instrument which has been so refined in more sophisticated hands.

In an interview given at the conference of African Studies Association in Montreal in October, 1969, Ouologuem explained his central intention

in this novel by drawing a clear distinction between violence and barb
"Violence, to be efficient," he said, "must be presented as a kind of po
propaganda—a barbarism stripped of all its repulsive and shocking as
Violence is closely akin to drama." And then a little later, "when I u
word prehistory I mean that there is something one doesn't under
a certain brutality, in barbarism; in violence there is a sophistication, a r
ment. It is as if barbarism has a brutal, rough style, while violence
style which shows the mark of a leader, a mastermind. Barbarism is
or less collective, violence always needs a guide, a leader, an ideolo
support it. Barbarism does not have an ideology."

This opinion, even though delivered in what one suspects to be a
of solemnity, is really not saying anything new. The principle that po
power is, in the long run, sustained by force or by the possibility of the t
of coercive violence, is well known to anyone who understands the dyn
of power. What is important here, however, is that Ouologuem has ach
in fair measure a successful application of the broad principle to his n
An alien, domination clique which has imposed its will on millions of p
who cannot possibly partake of its destiny, in spite of its presumptions t
contrary, cannot validate its position on any other grounds than that
capable of holding them down by force and coercion. Any other strata
can only be of secondary and supporting interest to this major pro
domination through violence.

One can therefore sympathize with the author's withering scorn
modern-day European and American romanticists, the 'Shrobeniusolo
who idealize the bloody feudal empires of the African Middle Ages. W
Shrobenius, the German anthropologist, assesses the Nakem empire
its past in the following terms:

> "These people are disciplined and civilized to the marrow! On all sides wide, tranquil avenues where we breathe the grandeur, the human genius of a people . . . . . It was only when white imperialism infiltrated the country with its colonial violence and materialism that this highly civilized people fell abruptly into a state of savagery, that accusations of cannibalism, of primitivism, were raised when on the contrary—witness the splendour of its art—the true face of Africa is the grandiose empires of the Middle Ages, a society marked by wisdom, beauty, prosperity, order, non-violence, and humanism, and it is here that we must seek the true cradle of Egyptian civilization"

we are left with no choice but to agree with the author that, in the light of what we know already about the reign of the Saifs, that such new-fangled nterpreters of the continent are not to be trusted. And that whatever lesson s inspired for the African continent through such obvious falsification of historical experience cannot but hurt the people in the long run. Escape o romantic fantasy is no way for a continent to grow up by coming to terms with the past of its history. The existence of the Saifs must be recognized is part of the historical burden of the continent. The exorcism of every esidue of that existence would thereafter become part of the serious dialectal effort of every modern African state in its march towards the modern stage and the liberation of its peoples.

My one serious criticism of this novel is that it is too rigidly tied to its deological sign-posts. Having safely reached its last sign-post, it is bewildered o discover that the way still lies ahead, that the journey still continues, hat the process of historical development is still taking place under our very yes. Having therefore got to this last sign-post, the author is so bewildered hat he can do no better than stand about biting his nails. To project the uture of African history in terms of a continuation of tyrannical rulers like aif and to predict that such rulers will be

> "for ever reborn to history beneath the hot ashes of more than thirty African republics" (pp. 181-182)

to be altogether guilty of the misreading of the signs which so conspicuously re appearing on the African horizon. This misreading of the signs was arlier evident in the story when Raymond—Spartacus, the real hope for he emancipation of the down-trodden 'niggertrash', is made into something f a caricature. Part of this sodden pessimism of the author's, which prevented his following the dialectal lead so well established earlier in the novel its logical conclusion, was a playing down of the power of modern education for dispersing the gloom of feudal darkness. The tyrannical forces f feudalism are undermined, weakened and broken up when assaulted y the counter-vailing forces of modern education which heighten human trinsicality and therefore generate the confidence necessary for resisting ıman oppression.

The novel, in spite of its oddly over-projected pessimism, seems to me ne of the most important things that have happened in the broad field of frican literature.

THE NAKED GODS

Chukwuemeka Ike
Harvill Press, 1970

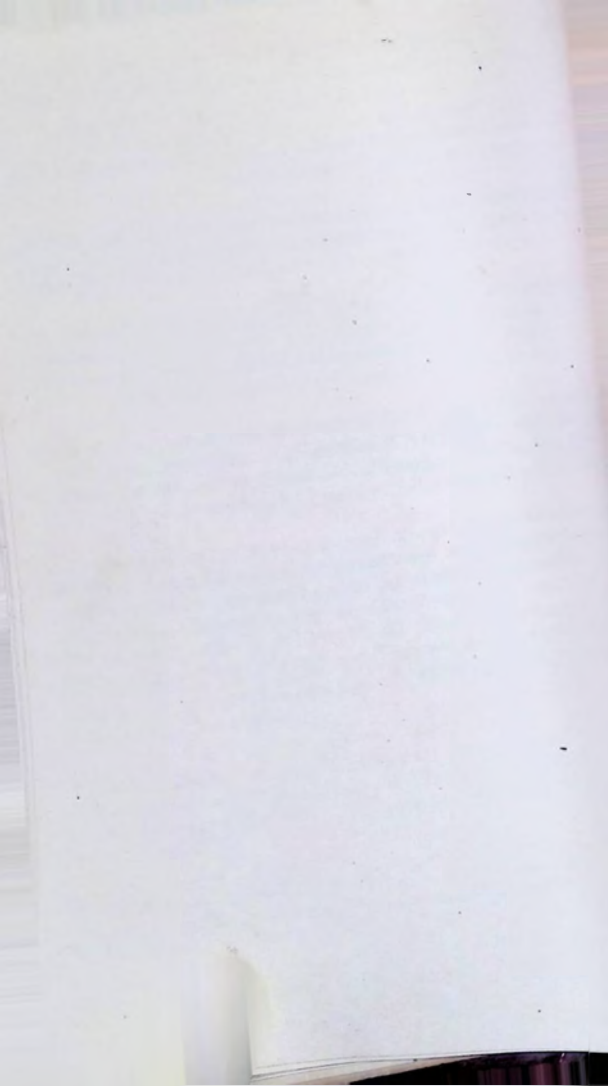
Chukwuemeka's Ike's satires upon African university life are unre
in their exposure of pomposity, ambition, national pride and politica
gue. He never draws our attention to the fact that precious little te
or learning can get done in institutions where the entire academi
seem to be intent only on becoming Vice-Chancellor, stopping so
else doing so, getting into bed with each others' wives or putting j
their professional competitors. Let us hope that his picture is dar
by his own delighted interest in intrigue, which leads him to selec
those characters or episodes which will best serve his purpose. Oth
our hearts can only bleed for the students, who seem beneath the le
everyone's concern.

The naked gods of his title are the academic 'masters' of Songhai U
sity, a new institution in a newly independent country. The Ame
are determined to dominate the development of the university through
control of the post of Vice-Chancellor and their big financial stake; b
British are well posted to oppose them through the Registrar and th
that the most senior African academic is British-trained. Everythi
set for a remorseless struggle between the two national factions, supp
fairly consistently by 'their own' Africans on the staff. But the br
thickened by the addition of local chiefs who want to establish their per
influence on the campus, politicians who want places reserved for
protegees, and sexual intrigues which extend from a nympho Regis
wife to the girls of the nearby villages.

Mr. Ike presides with glee over a fast-moving plot which culmi
in a riot and the sudden removal of the Vice-Chancellor on orders st
from Washington. He has a nice eye for the complementary forms of co
cension practised by his expatriates: the ritual bonhommie of the Ame
balanced by the English tendency to take refuge in 'good chaps' ider
by their ties and blazers. The strength of this book is that all the int
have a familiar ring, without its being a mere *roman a clef*. Anyone acq

ted with the chief academic scandals of Nigerian universities in the past twenty years will recognise many of them here, but the mixture and the relish are Mr. Ike's own.

GERALD MOORE



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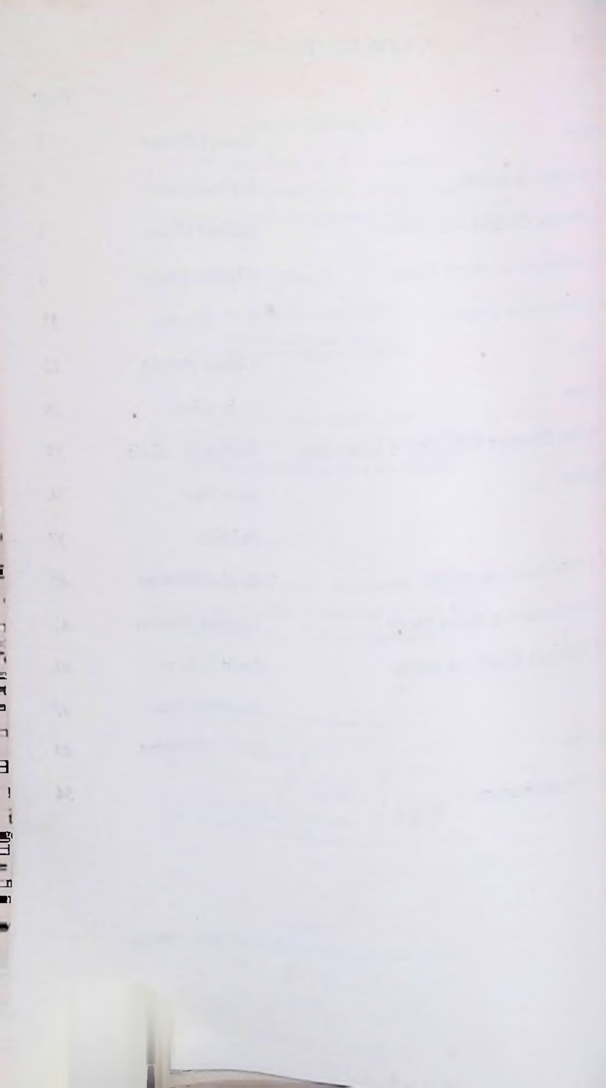

POEMS

I

It is the human form
that you see mutilated
before your eyes:
it is time for you to rise.

The instruments of terror
that are wielded
to lop, amputate, deform—
their circle narrows to where you stand.

Who can escape the spittle and the dung
and whose nerves are not part
of the fine human mesh?
It is time for you to agonize.

And of all treasured and essential freedoms
what is more integral than will?
But because the ship sinks while you dance
I must command your choice for you:
It is prison you must choose.

(January 20, 1970).

II

Landscape of my young world!
Land of soft hills and huts
of aloes and grey-green dreaming firs;
these are the images to lacerate,
against which I glass myself in distance
or a rebellious walling of reserve.
Heartbreaking hillsides and green slopes!
There is no armour to exclude your poignancy,
no blunting, and for me no ease.

(February 5, 1970)

SUDDENLY THE AIR CRACKS

Suddenly the air cracks
with striking cracking rockets
guffaw of boffors stuttering LMGs
jets diving shooting glasses dropping
breaking from lips people diving
under beds nothing bullets flashing fire
striking writhing bodies and walls —

Suddenly there's silence —
and a thick black smoke
rises sadly into the sky as the jets
fly away in gruesome glee —

Then a babel of emotions, voices
mothers fathers calling children
and others joking shouting "where's your bunker?"
laughing teasing across streets
And then they gaze in groups without sadness
at the sad smoke curling skywards —

Again suddenly, the air cracks
above rooftops cracking striking
rockets guffawing boffors stuttering LMGs
ack ack flacks diving jets
diving men women dragging children
seeking shelter not there breathless
hugging gutters walls houses
crumbling rumbling thunder
bombs hearts thumping heads low
under beds moving wordless lips —

Then suddenly there's silence —
and the town heaves a deep sigh
as the jets again fly away and the guns
one by one fall silent and the gunners
dazed gaze at the empty sky, helpless —

And then voices shouting calling
voices, admiring jets' dive
pilots' bravery blaming gunners
praising gunners laughing people
wiping sweat and dust from hair
neck and shirt with trembling hands.

Things soon simmer to normal
hum and rhythm as danger passes
and the streets are peopled
with strolling men and women
boys and girls on various errands
walking talking laughing smiling —
and children running with arms
stretched out in front playing
at diving jets zoom past
unsmiling bombing rocketing shooting
with mouths between startled feet.

This also passes as dusk descends
and a friendly crescent moon
appears where the jets were.
Then simmering silence—the day passes —
And the curling black smoke,
the sadless hearts and the mangled
bodies stacked in the morgue
become memorials of this day.

* * *

VENGEFUL CREDITOR

"Madame, this way," sang the alert, high-wigged salesgirl m
of a row of cash machines in the supermarket. Mrs Emenike
full-stacked trolley ever so lightly to the girl.

"Madame, you were coming to me," complained the cheated
next machine.

"Ah, sorry my dear. Next time."

"Good afternoon madame," sang the sweet-voiced girl already u
madame's purchases on to her counter.

"Cash or account, madame?"

"Cash."

She punched the prices as fast as lightning and announced the
Nine pounds fifteen and six. Mrs Emenike opened her hand-bag, broug
from it a wallet, unzipped it and held out two clean and crisp five-
notes. The girl punched again and the machine released a tray of
She put madame's money away and gave her her change and a foot
receipt. Mrs Emenike glanced at the bottom of the long strip of p
where the polite machine had registered her total spending with the
THANK YOU. COME AGAIN, and nodded.

It was at this point that the first hitch occurred. There seemed
nobody around to load madame's purchases into a carton and take
to her car outside.

"Where are these boys?" said the girl almost in distress. "Sorry mad
Many of our carriers have gone away because of this free primary . . . Jo
she called out as she caught sight of one of the remaining few, "com
pack madame's things!"

John was a limping 40-year-old boy sweating profusely even in
air-conditioned comfort of the supermarket. As he put the things int
empty carton he grumbled aloud.

"I don talk say make una tell Manager make e go fin' more people fo
monkey work."

"You never hear say everybody don go to free primary?" asked
wigged girl, jovially.

"Alright-o. But I no go kill myself for sake of free primary."

Out in the car-park he stowed the carton away in the boot of Mrs E
nike's grey Mercedes and then straightened up to wait while she opened
handbag and then her wallet and stirred a lot of coins there with one fi

until she found a three-penny piece, pulled it out between two fingers and dropped it into his palm. He hesitated for a while and then limped away without saying a word.

Mrs Emenike never cared for these old men running little boys' errands. No matter what you gave them they never seemed satisfied. Look at this grumbling cripple. How much did he expect to be given for carrying a tiny carton a few yards? That was what free primary education had brought. t had brought even worse to the homes. Mrs Emenike had lost three servants ncluding her baby-nurse since the beginning of the school year. The baby-nurse problem was of course the worst. What was a working woman with a even-month old baby supposed to do?

However the problem did not last. After only a term of free education he government withdrew the scheme for fear of going bankrupt. It would eem that on the advice of its experts the Education Ministry had planned nitially for eight hundred thousand children. In the event one million and half turned up on the first day of school. Where did all the rest come from? Had the experts misled the government? The Chief Statistician interviewed n the radio, said it was nonsense to talk about a miscalculation. The trouble as simply that children from neighbouring states had been brought in in housands and registered dishonestly by unscrupulous people, a clear case of abotage.

Whatever the reason the government cancelled the scheme. The "New ge" wrote an editorial praising the Prime Minister for his statesmanship nd courage but pointing out that the whole dismal affair could have been voided if the government had listened in the first place to the warning of any knowledgeable and responsible citizens. Which was true enough, r these citizens had written on the pages of the "New Age" to express their oubt and reservation about free education. The newspaper, on throwing en its pages to a thorough airing of views on the matter, had pointed out at it did so in the national cause and, mounting an old hobby-horse, allenged those of its critics who would see no merit whatever in a news-per owned by foreign capital to come forward and demonstrate an equal a higher order of national commitment and patriotism, a challenge that ne of those critics took up. The offer of space by the "New Age" was taken eagerly and in the course of ten days at the rate of two or even three icles a day a large number of responsible citizens —lawyers, doctors, erchants, engineers, salesmen, insurance brokers, university lecturers, etc— d written in criticism of the scheme. No one was against education for the ls, they said, but free education was premature. Someone said that not

even the United States of America in all its wealth and power had intro[illegible] it yet, how much less . . .

Mr Emenike read the various contributions with boyish excite[illegible] "I wish civil servants were free to write to the papers," he told his [illegible] least on three occasions during those ten days.

"This is not bad but he should have mentioned that this country has [illegible] tremendous strides in education since independence because parents [illegible] the value of education and will make any sacrifice to find school fees for [illegible] children. We are not a nation of Oliver Twists."

His wife was not really interested in all the argument at that stage be[illegible] somehow it all seemed to hang in the air. She had some vague, per[illegible] doubts about free education, that was all.

"Have you looked at the paper? Mike has written on this thing," [illegible] her husband on another occasion.

"Who is Mike?"

"Mike Ogudu."

"Oh, what does he say?"

"I haven't read it yet . . . Oh yes, you can trust Mike to call a sp[illegible] spade. See how he begins: Free primary education is tantamount to [illegible] communism? . . . That's not quite true but that's Mike all over. He t[illegible] someone might come up to nationalize his shipping line. He is so scar[illegible] communism."

"But who wants communism here?"

"Nobody. That's what I told him the other evening at the Club [illegible] he is so scared. You know one thing? Too much money is bad-o."

The discussion in the Emenike family remained at this intellectual [illegible] until one day their "Small Boy", a very bright lad of twelve helping o[illegible] Cook and understudying the Steward, announced he must go home t[illegible] his sick father.

"How did you know your father was sick?" asked Madame.

"My broder come tell me."

"When did your brother come?"

"Yesterday for evening time."

"Why didn't you bring him to see me?"

"I no no say Madame go wan see am."

"Why you no talk since yesterday?" asked Mr Emenike looking up f[illegible] his newspaper.

"At first I tink say I no go go home. But today one mind tell me [illegible] make you go see-am-o; perhaps e de sick too much. So derefore . . ."

"How did you know your father was sick"

"All right. You can go but make sure you are back by tomorrow noon. Otherwise . . ."

"I must return back by morning time sef."

He didn't come back. Mrs Emenike was particularly angry because lies. She didn't like being outwitted by servants. Look at that li imagining himself clever. She should have suspected something from th he had been carrying on of late. Now he had gone with a full month which he should lose in lieu of notice. It went to show that kindness to people did not pay in the least.

A week later the gardener gave notice. He didn't try to hide any His elder brother had sent him a message to return to their villag register for free education. Mr Emenike tried to laugh him out ridiculous piece of village ignorance.

"Free primary education is for children. Nobody is going to ad old man like you. How old are you?"

"I am fifteen years of old, sir."

"You are three," sneered Mrs Emenike. "Come and suck breast."

"You are not fifteen," said Mr. Emenike. "You are at least twen no headmaster will admit you into a primary school. If you want to try, by all means do. But don't come back here when you've go failed."

"I no go fail, ọga" said the gardener. "One man for our village w pass my fader sef done register everything finish. He just go for Ma Court and pay dem five shilling and dey swear-am for Court juju wey kill porson; e no fit kill rat sef."

"Well it's entirely up to you. Your work here has been good bu

"Mark, what is all that long talk for? He wants to go, let him go"

"Madame, no be say I wan go like dat. But my senior brodder . .

"We have heard. You can go now."

"But I no de go today. I wan give one week notice. And I fit find gardner for Madame."

"Don't worry about notice or gardener. Just go away."

"I fit get my pay now or I go come back for afternoon time?"

"What pay?"

"Madame, for dis ten days I don work for dis mont."

"Don't annoy me any further. Just go away."

But real annoyance was yet to come for Mrs Emenike. Abig baby-nurse, came up to her two mornings later as she was getting re work and dumped the baby in her lap and took off. Abigail of all

_fter all she had done for her. Abigail who came to her full of craw-craw, -ho used rags for sanitary towel, who was so ignorant she gave baby a full owl of water to stop it crying and dropped some through its nose. Now _bigail was a lady; she could sew and bake, wear a bra and clean pants, ut on powder and perfumes and stretch her hair; and she was ready to go.

From that day Mrs Emenike hated the words "free primary" which had ıddenly become part of everyday language, especially in the villages where ıey called it free primadu. She was particularly angry when people made okes about it and had a strong urge to hit them on the head for a lack of eeling and good taste. And she hated the Americans and the embassies out particularly the Americans) who threw their money around and enticed ıe few remaining servants away from Africans. This began when she learnt ıter that her gardener had not gone to school at all but to a Ford Foundation ıan who had offered him seven pounds, bought him a bicycle and a Singer ewing machine for his wife.

"Why do they do it?" she asked. She didn't really want or need an answer ut her husband gave one all the same.

"Because," said he, "back home in America they couldn't possibly fford a servant. So when they come out here and find them so cheap they o crazy. That's why."

Three months later free primary ended and school fees were brought back. he government was persuaded by then that its "piece of hare-brained ocialism" as the "New Age" called it was unworkable in African conditions. his was a jibe at the Minister of Education who was notorious for his leftist ympathies and was perpetually at war with the formidable Minister of inance.

"We cannot go through with this scheme unless we are prepared to npose new taxes," said the Finance Minister at a Cabinet meeting.

"Well then, let's impose the taxes," said the Minister of Education, hich provoked derisive laughter from all his colleagues and even Permanent ecretaries like Mr Emenike who were in attendance and who in strict rotocol should not participate in debate or laughter.

"We can't," said the Finance Minister indulgently with laughter still in is mouth. "I know my right honourable friend here doesn't worry whether r not this government lasts its full term, but some of us others do. At least want to be here long enough to retire my election debts . . ."

This was greeted with hilarious laughter and cries of Hear! Hear!! In ebating skill Education was no match for Finance. In fact Finance had no qual in the entire Cabinet, the Prime Minister included.

"Let us make no mistake about it," he continued with a face and to[illegible] serious, "if any one is so foolish as to impose new taxes now on our suffering masses . . ."

"I thought we didn't have masses in Africa," interrupted the Mi[illegible] Education starting a meagre laughter that was taken up in good sp[illegible] one or two others.

"I am sorry to trespass in my right honourable friend's ter[illegible] communist slogans are so infectious. But as I was saying we shou[illegible] talk lightly about new taxes unless we are prepared to bring the Army [illegible] quell tax riots. One simple fact of life which we have come to learn [illegible] painfully and reluctantly—and I'm not so sure even now that we ha[illegible] learnt it—is that people do riot against taxes but not against schoo[illegible] The reason is simple. Everybody, even a motor-park tout, knows school fees are for. He can see his child going to school in the mornin[illegible] coming back in the afternoon. But you go and tell him about [illegible] taxation and he immediately thinks that government is stealing his [illegible] from him. One other point. If a man doesn't want to pay school f[illegible] doesn't have to. After all this is a democratic society. The worst th[illegible] happen is that his child stays at home which he probably doesn't mind [illegible] But taxes are different; everybody must pay whether they want to or [illegible] The difference is pretty sharp. That's why mobs riot."

A few people said Hear! Hear!! Others just let out exhalatio[illegible] relief or agreement. Mr Emenike who had an unrestrainable adm[illegible] for the Finance Minister and had been nodding like a lizard throug[illegible] speech shouted his Hear! Hear!! too loud and got a scorching look [illegible] the Prime Minister.

A few desultory speeches followed and the government took its de[illegible] not to abolish free primary education but to suspend it until all the re[illegible] factors had been thoroughly examined.

One little girl of ten named Veronica was broken-hearted. She had to love school as an escape from the drabness and arduous demands of [illegible] Her mother, a near-destitute widow who spent all hours of the day [illegible] farm and, on market-days, in the market, left Vero to carry the bur[illegible] caring for the younger children. Actually only the youngest age [illegible] needed much looking after. The other two aged seven and four be[illegible] enough to fend for themselves, picking palm-kernels and catching [illegible] hoppers to eat, were no problem at all to Vero. But Mary was di[illegible] She cried a lot even after she had been fed her mid-morning foo-foo an[illegible] saved for her (with a little addition of water to the soup) from br[illegible]

which was itself a diluted leftover from last night's supper. Mary could not manage palm-kernels on her own account yet so Vero half-chewed them first before passing them on to her. But even after the food and the kernels and grasshoppers and the bowls of water Mary was rarely satisfied even though her belly would be big and tight like a drum and shine like a mirror.

Their widowed mother, Martha, was a hard-luck woman. She had had an auspicious beginning long, long ago as a pioneer pupil at St Monica's, then newly founded by white women missionaries to train the future wives of local evangelists. Most of her schoolmates of those days had married young teachers and were now wives of pastors and one or two even of bishops. But Martha, encouraged by her teacher, Miss Robinson, had married a young carpenter trained by white artisan-missionaries at the Onitsha Industrial Mission, a trade school founded in the fervent belief that if the black man was to be redeemed he needed to learn the Bible alongside manual skills. (Miss Robinson was very keen on the Industrial Mission whose Principal she herself later married). But in spite of the bright hopes of those early evangelical days carpentry never developed very much in the way teaching and clerical jobs were to develop. So when Martha's husband died (or as those missionary artisans who taught him long ago might have put it—when he was called to higher service in the heavenly mansions by Him Who was Himself once a Carpenter on earth) he left her in complete ruin. It had been a bad-luck marriage from start. To begin with she had had to wait twenty whole years after their marriage for her first child to be born so that now she was virtually an old woman with little children to care for and little strength left for her task. Not that she was bitter about that. She was simply too overjoyed that God in His mercy had lifted her curse of barrenness to feel a need to grumble. What she nearly did grumble about was the disease that struck her husband and paralysed his right arm for five years before his death. It was a trial too heavy and unfair.

Soon after Vero withdrew from school Mr Mark Emenike, the big government man of their village who lived in the capital, called on Martha. His Mercedes 220 pulled up on the side of the main road and he walked the 500 yards or so of a narrow unmotorable path to the widow's hut. Martha was perplexed at the visit of such a great man and as she bustled about for kolanut she kept wondering. Soon the great man himself in the hurried style of modern people cleared up the mystery.

"We have been looking for a girl to take care of our new baby and today someone told me to inquire about your girl . . ."

At first Martha was reluctant but when the great man offered her

five pounds for the girl's service in the first year—plus feedin clothing and other things—she began to soften.

"Of course it is not money I am concerned about," she said "but w my daughter will be well cared for."

"You don't have to worry about that, Ma. She will be treated ju one of our own children. My wife is a Social Welfare Officer and she k what it means to care for children. Your daughter will be happy in our I can tell you that. All she will be required to do is carry the little bab give it its milk while my wife is away at the office and the older child school."

"Vero and her sister Joy were also at school last term," said M without knowing why she said it.

"Yes, I know. That thing the government did is bad, very bad. B belief is that a child who will be somebody will be somebody whether to school or not. It is all written here, in the palm of the hand."

Martha gazed steadily at the floor and then spoke without raisin eyes. "When I married I said to myself: My daughters will do bette I did. I read Standard Three in those days and I said they will all College. Now they will not have even the little I had thirty years ago. I think of it my heart wants to burst."

"Ma, don't let it trouble you too much. As I said before, what a of us is going to be is all written here, no matter the difficulties."

"Yes. I pray God that what is written for these children will be than what He wrote for me and my husband."

"Amin! . . . And as for this girl-if she is obedient and good in my what stops my wife and me sending her to school when the baby is big e to go about on his own? Nothing. And she is still a small girl. How she?"

"She is ten."

"You see. She is only a baby. There is plenty of time for her to school."

He knew that the part about sending her to school was only a man speaking. And Martha knew too. But Vero who had been listeni everything from a dark corner of the adjoining room did not. She ac worked out in her mind the time it would take the baby to go about o own and it came out quite short. So she went happily to live in the c in a great man's family and look after a baby who would soon be big en to go about on his own and then she would have a chance to go to sc

Vero was a good girl and very sharp. Mr Emenike and his wife were

"Ma, don't let it trouble you too much"

pleased with her. She had the sense of a girl twice her age and was ama quick to learn.

Mrs Emenike who had almost turned sour over her recent diffic getting good servants was now her old self again. She could now about the fiasco of free-primadu. She told her friends that now she go anywhere and stay as long as she liked without worrying about her man. She was so happy with Vero's work and manners that she affectio nicknamed her "Little Madame." The nightmare of the months foll Abigail's departure was mercifully at an end. She had sought high an for another baby-nurse and just couldn't find one. One rather ove young lady had presented herself and asked for seven pounds a m But it wasn't just the money. It was her general air—a kind of la exchange attitude which knew all the rights in the labour code incl the right presumably to have abortions in your servants' quarters and have a go at your husband. Not that Mark was that way but the gi wasn't right. After her no other person had turned up until now.

Every morning as the older Emenike children—three girls and a were leaving for school in their father's Mercedes or their mother's little Fiat, Vero would bring the baby out to the steps to say bye-bye. She their fine dresses and shoes—she'd never worn any shoes in her life what she envied them most was simply the going away every mo going away from home, from familiar things and tasks. In the first m this envy was very, very mild. It lay beneath the joy of the big going from the village, from her mother's drab hut, from eating palm-kerne twisted the intestines at mid-day, from bitter-leaf soup without fish. going away was something enormous. But as the months passed the h grew for these other little daily departures in fine dresses and shoe sandwiches and biscuits wrapped in beautiful paper napkins in dainty school bags. One morning as the Fiat took the children away and Goddy began to cry on Vero's back a song sprang into her mind to him:

> Little noisy motor car
> If you're going to the school
> Please carry me
> Pee—pee—pee!—poh—poh—poh!

All morning she sang her little song and was pleased with it. Mr Emenike dropped the other children home at one o'clock and to again Vero taught them her new song. They all liked it and for d

supplanted Bah Bah Black Sheep and Simple Simon and the other songs they brought home from school.

"The girl is a genius," said Mr Emenike when the new song finally got to him. His wife who heard it first had nearly died from laughter. She had called Vero and said to her, "So you make fun of my car, naughty girl." Vero was happy because she saw not anger but laughter in the woman's eyes.

"She is a genius," said her husband. "And she hasn't been to school."

"And besides she knows you ought to buy me a new car."

"Never mind, dear. Another year and you can have that sports car."

"Na so."

"So you don't believe me? Just you wait and see."

More weeks and months passed and little Goddy was beginning to say a few words but still no one spoke about Vero's going to school. She decided it was Goddy's fault, that he wasn't growing fast enough. And he was becoming rather too fond of riding on her back even though he could walk perfectly well. In fact his favourite words were "Cayi me." Vero made a song about that too and it showed her mounting impatience:

Carry you! carry you!
Every time I carry you!
If you no wan grow again
I mus leave you and go school
Because Vero e don tire!
Tire, tire e don tire!

She sang it all morning until the other children returned from school and then she stopped. She only sang this one when she was alone with Goddy.

One afternoon Mrs Emenike returned from work and noticed a redness on Vero's lips.

"Come here," she said, thinking of her expensive lipstick. "What is that?"

It turned out, however, not to be lipstick at all, only her husband's red ink. She couldn't help a smile then.

"And look at her finger-nails! And toes too!! So, Little Madame, that's what you do when we go out and leave you at home to mind the baby? You dump him somewhere and begin to paint yourself. Don't ever let met catch you with that kind of nonsense again. Do you hear?" It occurred to her to strengthen her warning somehow if only to neutralize the smile she had smiled at the beginning.

"Do you know that red ink is poisonous? You want to kill yourself?

Well, little lady you have to wait till you leave my house and return
mother."

That did it, she thought in glowing self-satisfaction. She could
Vero was suitably frightened. Throughout the rest of that aftern
walked about like a shadow.

When Mr Emenike came home she told him the story as he a
lunch. And she called Vero for him to see.

"Show him your fingernails," she said. "And your toes Little Ma

"I see," he said, waving Vero away. "She is learning fast. Do yo
the proverb which says that when mother cow chews giant grass h
calves watch her mouth?"

"Who is a cow? You rhinoceros!"

"It's only a proverb, my dear."

A week or so later Mrs Emenike, just home from work, notic
the dress she had put on the baby in the morning had been chang
something much too warm.

"What happened to the dress I put on him?"

"He fell down and soiled it. So I changed him," said Vero. But th
something very strange in her manner. Mrs Emenike's first thought
the child must have had a bad fall.

"Where did he fall?" she asked in alarm. "Where did he hit
ground? Bring him to me! What is all this? Blood? No? Wh
My God has killed me! Go and bring me the dress. At once!"

"I washed it," said Vero beginning to cry, a thing she had neve
before. Mrs Emenike rushed out to the line and brought down th
dress and the white vest, both heavily stained red!

She seized Vero and beat her in a mad frenzy with both hands. Th
got a whip and broke it all on her until her face and arms ran with
Only then did Vero admit making the child drink a bottle of red in
Emenike collapsed into a chair and began to cry.

Mr Emenike did not wait to have lunch. They bundled Vero
Mercedes and drove her the forty miles to her mother in the village.
wanted to go alone but his wife insisted on coming, and taking the ba
He stopped on the main road as usual. But he didn't go in with
He just opened the door of the car, pulled her out and his wife thr
little bundle of clothes after her. And they drove away again.

Martha returned from the farm tired and grimy. Her children rush
to meet her and to tell her that Vero was back and was crying in the

om. She practically dropped her basket and went to see; but she couldn't ake any sense of her story.

"You gave the baby red ink? Why? So that you can go to school? ow? Come on. Let's go to their place. Perhaps they will stay in the village ernight. Or else they will have told somebody there what happened. don't understand your story. Perhaps you stole something. Not so?"

"Please Mama, don't take me back there. They will kill me."

"Come on, since you won't tell me what you did."

She seized her wrist and dragged her outside. Then in the open she saw the congealed blood on whip marks all over her head, face, neck and arms. e swallowed hard.

"Who did this?"

"My madame."

"And what did you say you did? You must tell me."

"I gave the baby red ink."

"All right. Then let's go."

Vero began to wail louder. Martha seized her by the wrist again and they off. She neither changed her work clothes nor even washed her face and nds. Every woman—and sometimes the men too—they passed on the way eamed on seeing Vero's whip marks and wanted to know who did it. artha's reply to all was "I don't know yet. I am going to find out."

She was lucky. Mr Emenike's big car was there, so they had not returned the capital. She knocked at their front door and walked in. Mrs Emenike s sitting there in the parlour giving bottled food to the baby but she ored the visitors completely, neither saying a word to them nor even king in their direction. It was her husband who descended the stairs ttle later who told the story. As soon as the meaning dawned on Martha— t the red ink was given to the baby *to drink* and that the motive was to ompass its death—she screamed, with two fingers plugging her ears, t she wanted to hear no more. At the same time she rushed outside, a twig off a flowering shrub and by clamping her thumb and forefinger one end and running them firmly along its full length stripped it of its es in one quick movement. Armed with the whip she rushed back to the se crying "I have heard an abomination!" Vero was now screaming and ning round the room.

"Don't touch her here in my house," said Mrs Emenike cold and stern n oracle, noticing her visitors for the first time. "Take her away from at once. You want to show me your shock. Well, I don't want to see.

Go and show your anger in your own house. Your daughter did n
murder here in my house."

This stung Martha deep in her spirit and froze her in mid-stride. Sl
rooted to the spot, her whip hand lifeless by her side. "My daught
said, finally addressing the younger woman, "as you see me her
poor and wretched but I am not a murderer. If my daughter Ve
become a murderer God knows she cannot say she learnt from me.

"Perhaps it's from me she learnt," said Mrs Emenike show
faultless teeth in a terrible false smile, "or maybe she snatched it from
That's right, she snatched it from the air. Look, woman, take your d
and leave my house."

"Vero, let's go. Come let's go!"

"Yes, please go!"

Mr Emenike who had been trying vainly to find an opening f
clearly needed male intervention now spoke.

"It is the work of the devil," he said. "I have always known th
craze for education in this country will one day ruin all of us. No
children will commit murder in order to go to school."

This clumsy effort to mollify all sides at once stung Martha even
As she jerked Vero homewards by the hand she clutched her unused
in her other hand. At first she rained abuses on the girl, called her a
child that entered her mother's womb by the back of the house.

"O God, what have I done?" Her tears began to flow now. "If I had
with other women of my age that girl that calls me murderer might hav
no older than my daughter. And now she spits in my face. That's wh
have brought me to," she said to the crown of Vero's head, and jerk
along more violently.

"I will kill you today. Let's get home first."

Then a strange revolt, vague, undirected began to well up at first
inside her. "And that thing that calls himself a man talks to me abo
craze for education. All his children go to school, even the one that
two years; but that is no craze. Rich people have no craze. It is only
the children of poor widows like me want to go with the rest that it be
a craze. What is this life? To God, what is it? And now my child
she must kill the baby she is hired to tend before she can get a chance
put such an abomination into her belly? God, you know I did not."

She threw away the whip and with her freed hand wiped her tears

T. C. Nwosu

AND THEY ARRIVE

floods of our blood, our bonfires
drifting in the dark, line shadows
falling on scorched grass, like stream
ebbing out its vital force, spirited
ones, shambles on the willing earth;

and they arrive
in shroudless mats
and rags and tatters
like apparitions of our death
and they arrive
in helpless groans
and tears and pain

the adumbrations of our night,
our doors hinged with ferocious
muscles, our reddened brows left
on other eyes, our fairest link
with the comfort of cannon fire;

who would say there's no god
in these flames spurting from lamps of clay?
these limbs threshing on the sod?
who would dare to bare
their door, their unspoken word?

Scream scream you eyes
that mark the bound between earth and sky
while the storm gathers on our brows
so that the heavens may dry
their eyes before the earth cries!

* * *

QUESTION

Angled sunbeam lowered
like Jacob's ladder through
sky's peep-hole pierced in the roof
to my silent floor and bared feet.
Are these your creatures
these crowding specks
stomping your lighted corridor
to a remote sun, like doped
acrobatic angels gyrating
at needlepoint to divert a high
unamused god? Or am I
sole stranger in a twilight room
I called my own overrun
and possessed long ago by myriads more
as yet invisible in all
this surrounding penumbra?

* * *

NON-commitment

Hurrah! to them who do nothing
see nothing feel nothing whose
hearts are fitted with prudence
like a diaphragm across
womb's beckoning doorway to bar
the scandal of seminal rage. I'm
told the owl too wears wisdom
in a ring of defence round
each vulnerable eye securing it fast
against the darts of sight. Long ago
in the Middle East Pontius Pilate
openly washed involvement off his
white hands and became famous. (Of all
the Roman officials before him and after
who else is talked about
every Sunday in the Apostles' Creed?) And
talking of apostles that other fellow
Judas wasn't such a fool
either; though much maligned by
succeeding generations the fact remains
he alone in that motley crowd
had sense enough to tell a doomed
movement when he saw one
and get out quick, a nice little
packet bulging his coat-pocket
into the bargain—sensible fellow.

* * *

VULTURES

In the greyness
and drizzle of one despondent
dawn unstirred by harbingers
of sunbreak a vulture
perching high on broken
bone of a dead tree
nestled close to his
mate his smooth
bashed-in head, a pebble
on a stem rooted in
a dump of gross
feathers, inclined affectionately
to hers. Yesterday they picked
the eyes of a swollen
corpse in a water-logged
trench and ate the
things in its bowel. Full
gorged they chose their roost
keeping the hollowed remnant
in easy range of cold
telescopic eyes . . . . .
Strange
indeed how love in other
ways so particular
will pick a corner
in that charnel-house
tidy it and lie there
coiled up—perhaps even
fall asleep—her face
turned to the wall!

. . . Thus the Commandant at Belsen
Camp going home for
the day with fumes of
human roast clinging
rebelliously to his hairy

nostrils will stop
at the wayside sweet-shop
and pick up a chocolate
for his tender offspring
waiting at home for Daddy's
return . . .
                                        Praise bounteous
providence if you will
that grants even an ogre
a tiny glow-worm
tenderness encapsulated
in icy caverns of a cruel
heart or else despair
for in the very germ
of that kindred love is
lodged the perpetuity
of evil.

THE HOME OF IMAGES

I shall return to the home of images;
I shall go back to the city of ruins;
I shall return to honour the Oba,
his court and his all;
I shall return
the lone light in the city of the night—
sad, solemn, solitary star in dark domain;
there shall I be
image of time in timeless sphere.
Life longs for life for light,
and I long to flame yellow in my desolate grey:
I shall learn to live and be lost
I shall learn to be lonely, to be forgotten—
to die and remain granite-grey.
I shall return to the graven people;
I shall go back to the city of darkness;
I must know how to feel lost,
how to live lonely among grey granite people;
I shall return to the home of images—
the home of long forgotten folk.

MOON DANCE

Deep in the moonlit glade
under the sombre shadow of the forest within me,
Oyoyo, in all her glory, in all her grace,
weaves her pattern of rhythmic steps—
her moon-maid dance.
Or is it dance for the yet unborn!
I see her in my forest, free from nature's rules,
dancing to the tune of unmade music,
but, the no-music resounds, masters me—
grave echo of no-world.
Oyoyo, I am sure she is
Oyoyo in the seventh moon dance of life in death
in carefree clearing of my moon forest.
Can she return,
return from the glade of death?
Can she dance ceaseless in my dream glade
far away from her seven graves?

ar below
ant water way—
in their timeless sphere—
ive race,
of sad immortal people keep
romise to one eternal queen,
wata.
rved them well—
ought them wealth and fame—
ed them well,
ved all worldly goods and flitting fame;
ed them more
ld their souls or souls they loved
rchased lavish favours here on earth,
er, the one and selfish queen,
ata.

* * *

A BULL FOR THE DISTRICT OFFICER

n Umungodo clan (Awka Division), the dead are so present that the daily lives of the living are deeply affected by mysterious happenings. Ancient events do not just survive as legends; they are occasionally reenacted in a way that totally baffles the modern scientific mind. So it happened the day Mr Solomon Ogu, the new District Officer, came to open the Umungodo Health Centre. That was in October 1958.

Throughout Awka Division, a harrowing reputation hangs over the Umungodo clan. The twelve villages of this clan are strung along the belt of thick forest flanking the banks of the Mamu River. Although the clan is today linked to the seat of government administration by a "native authority" road, together with a County Council ferry service it lives in virtual isolation; no Divisional Officer has set foot there since Solomon Ogu had his encounter with the bull.

Whenever the elders of Umungodo wake up in the morning, the first thing they do is to wash their hands and face in clean water. Thereafter, they break a kolanut and pour a libation of day old palm wine, invoking the spirits of their ancestors to remain vigilant before and behind them to ward off the 'unseen presences" of the land. These spirits ruled the lives of the people more than any king could. The fear of them enforced among the people a deep respect for their deities. And Ajana was the highest deity in Umungodo.

But in 1958, Mr Solomon Ogu, the new black District Officer, did not know of these forces. The government had just issued a new rural development programme, to which he found his administration very deeply committed. And he found the Umungodo Health Project a step in the right direction.

Some time before that fateful visit in 1958, some stories had been reaching him at Headquarters. They seemed incomprehensible to him. First, it was the League of Umungodo Women leading a delegation to his office to complain against the ravages wrought on their cassava farms by the wild bulls which, they said, were sacred to Ajana, the high Earth Deity. No one in Umungodo knew what to do to the bulls without incurring the wrath of Ajana. They appealed to the Divisional Officer to save them from this menace.

Mr Ogu delivered an extempore sermon on the need for greater faith in the "living" God than in Ajana, and advised the women to organise their men

to apply to the government for a permit to shoot the wild bulls. I satisfied, but the women were disappointed. No man in Umungodo dare raise his gun against the bulls of Ajana.

Again there was the case of Uduma Omekokwulu whose body was b to police headquarters by a band of frightened villagers. Their sto meaningless; Uduma stabbed a bull for smashing up his wine-tapping and on his way to climb the first palm he was matcheted to death eyewitnesses said they saw knives raining on Uduma but did not s hands wielding them. Of course, the Police disbelieved them and s all of them. It was the Ulo-nabo, then the ruling age grade in Um who appealed to the Divisional Officer for their release.

The District Officer was getting increasingly worried at what the Su tendent of Police called "these funny tales of our people." He began into his mind's memory the outline of a powerful speech he would on the occasion of his first visit to the clan. When W. H. F. Ross th whiteman to rule the Division handed over to Mr Ogu, he had, in a paragraph of the Handing-Over Notes entitled "General Observati singled out the Umungodo clan as one of the few places Mr Ogu must n precipitate in pushing through with the new government rural develo programme.

"Why?" asked Mr Ogu when they were discussing the *Notes*.

"Well, em, you see," explained the white man, "the forces th their lives are stronger than the forces behind your government. O government, for that matter. You may wish to refer to Paragraph X of my Intelligence Reports on the clan."

Mr Ogu waved the white man's warning aside as one of those patern posturings of the colonial regime. Many white administrators had th of inverted possessiveness about some clans or tribes. Umungodo cou be different from any other place. He felt vindicated when in October he received an invitation to open a Health Centre built entirely by communal effort of the Umungodo clan. He was jubilant. "Didn't you?" he told himself again and again.

In his working diary he carefully noted the day. And the bones o speech in his mind started acquiring flesh.

* * *

The League of Umungodo Women held an emergency meeting to hear the report of the delegation to the District Officer. They were furious at the meaninglessness of the D.O.'s advice. So they made their plans, and decided to use the occasion of the opening of the Health Centre to carry them out. A gang of stalwarts were hired from the neighbouring Otanzu clan to apprehend one of the bulls. It was to be one of the items to be presented to the District Officer. Let him eat the bull of Ajana and live, they said.

The District Officer was met at Mamu beach by a boisterous crowd. The air was a festive one. Several groups of dancers were there and crowds of people lined the route from the beach to the Health Centre, some nine hundred yards inland. He was welcomed at the beach by all Umungodo dignitaries leading among whom was Mazi Akunwata, the newly crowned Ngodo of Umungodo. On reaching the Health Centre itself, the District Officer was impressed by the sight of so many people milling around the open grounds of the Health Centre. After an inspection tour of the buildings, he was led to a raised dais under a shade built of fresh palm fronds. Someone pushed into his hands a "Programme" of the day's proceedings. After the "Welcome address" came "the presentation of Kola to the D..O", then would come Izaga Masquerade dance, Ijele Masquerade dance . . . etc, all before the "Reply by the D.O." Mr Ogu sighed under his breath.

The Master of Ceremony was none other than the inimitable Stephen Akweke, the no-leave-no-transfer Headmaster of the Umungodo C.M.S. Central School. He was known to his fellow teachers as "Erudite", and, to write the welcome address he did conduct, he said, a special research into his dictionary. To the Umungodo people he was known as a man who used English words that filled the mouth. And Mazi Akunwata, the Ngodo of Umungodo who sat beside the D.O. fanning away the evil forces around him with a huge vulture-wing fan was bursting with pride and self-congratulation at his choice of Stephen to read the welcome address.

But the D.O. was bored by the long address. In fact he was almost dozing off when Stephen Akweke at last laboured to the end of the address. Stephen waved a finger to the gift-bearers waiting for the cue under the oil bean tree a little distance away. Four stout musclemen heaved the long baskets of choice yams onto their heads, each basket crowned with a fiery-feathered cockerel. Then two other stalwarts untied the rope with which the bull was tethered to the oil bean tree.

'The air was a festive one'

And it happened! The bull *stood* on its two hind legs, stood perfectly erect like a human being, pored the ground with one of the two legs, balancing its body on one leg. Then it came down on all four, and as it did so, it cleft the air with one metallic roar that shook the earth. It roared a second time, poring the ground with its foreleg and backing a few paces. And then in one swift charge, it dashed towards the dais and overturned it. Without a pause it charged through the crowd in a beeline and vanished into the clump of bushes behind the Health Centre, the bushes contiguous with Ajana grove. Vanished without any trace, leaving behind a mess of mangled bones and furniture, a wake of howling, whimpering humanity!

All this happened in one breathless moment in which no one seemed to have moved at all as if the entire gathering had been held under a most powerful mesmeric force. For what looked like an eternity after it had vanished, the quick seemed more dead than the dead. Mazi Akunwata was perhaps first among those in the beeline to recover his senses. As he scrambled up from the wreckage of furniture, bamboo poles and palm fronds, he heard cries of pain from his side. It was the District Officer. His tibia was broken, his swollen leg still twisted around a piece of broken furniture . . . . .

Today Mr Ogu, retired from the Civil Service, is a permanent invalid having lost that leg by amputation. Before the war he owned a chain of department stores at Onitsha which he acquired through a judicious investment of his gratuity. But that is all gone now. He just limps about on one leg nowadays, his artificial limb having been broken in a scramble for air cover during the war. If you meet him he will promptly tell you how he lost that leg to the mad bull of Umungodo. Not during the war, oh no.

FEAR

last night I heard—it was not in a dream—
the sound of hollow drums and harsh trumpets
as if a village was marching to a graveyard
last night when I pasted my ear to the wind
and tasted the spice of eternity on my lips,
I had really turned my mind away into fear.
The night grew colder and colder beneath
the blankets and I knew love is always
a thing of wounds, of hurts and smarts,
and so in the sound of hollow drums and harsh flutes
we trudge on through silence to eternity.

Only the thunder will revive the drums and flutes
we travellers love so much when they arrive
to warn us, when they whirl from behind
that beautiful shining orphan mountain.
Oh, do not mind this song of flutes and drums
think only of the little stars strung round cradles
think only of the light whose crest we must reach
in the blind rage of the spark divine, think of it,
and night sounds shall be only the anger chained
within our breasts, dark like the deep grave
where souls are pasted to eternity and know not any fear.

* * *

NEW ORDER

meteors draw to a close a certain fame
i draw a name to a certain close
nor downgrade the leprous scar
burning on each coffined soul.

but a coffin is limited, unlike
night where the soul never burns out
only retreats, recedes, recalesces
and soundings of its new tunes seep up.

i do not downgrade dark cavernous
wounds, or any wounds, for the star
will repeat its fall, return to its sphere
though many weary years carry its light.
which is why i keep asking what night
is, what meteors choose day rather than
nightfall, what fame did not rise
by a fall, what triumph did not stand

by colossal failure in frail limited
woodwork such as is the casing earth
or the brittle, crumbled ancestor hearth
or the steel leprous technology of foreign

legions. meteors endure in time. night is time.
and here i draw to a close, rubbing
my scar, which is a cavernous wound,
the beginning and the end of fame and death.

* * *

EARTH TO EARTH

As if men hung here unblown,
Their mildewed buds of love like pollen
Late caught, damp in a swollen
Drop of rain; or, like the hot
Tear that chills a fevered pit
After heads into bodies are suckt

Like urine into parched earth
Or ancestral wine into scorched hearth,
And wear ashes and shrivelled petals,

Comes this season of the cassia flower,
And pent passion peers through the bower:
Comes this season, and all labour is fallen
All earthen pitcher as china broken.

Wooing was our labour then,
A trouble-wrapped chrysalis
Grown in the pause taken
Between that visit and this.

The ripest moment is saddest encounter
Performed without banter
In memory of other seasons
Of a lived love now still.

We let this one die;
We let cobwebs sweep
A skein over her face —

On a morning, dewdrops
Are tossed, earth to earth,
Like a veil and a shroud
Over ground imprinted by wooing feet.

* * *

GOLGOTHA REVISITED

Let us pull ourselves together
each to each, here,
as brothers with brother, pooled.
Take past events as the
repentant woman's past
always forgotten and always retold.

Take our flesh lost
with the traditional christian resignation,
stored in God's vast vault.
Take these sacked cities
as thy-kingdom-gone:
bull's horn broken
in hot red-riddle.

Homeless bones await your hoes
and payment of the fare
for this trip, round from where you are,
to here, where you are,
your new-built city in brick
with its power sump
the supreme executive trick.

We are married here,
staring skulls amid burnt bricks,
in the plain of all past-present-future pain—
the magnificent mangle
and battery mast.

So,
what printers mint
from what thinkers eke
out are dirges, lip-deep sobs
on the shattering of the barest crop of skulls
at Golgotha.

*   *   *

SMOULDER! BROTHER! SMOULDER!

Brothers, smokers, or wrecks
in the jet-black limousine,
sharp as arrow,
fast as storm,
in a heap of ruin.

They clutch,
foaming in the smoking wreckage,
crushed limbs
and fractured plates
and broken breasts and shattered bones:

bones, and limbs, and plates
are the same, after-all:
cartilages and sockets
disjoined at the joint,
even before the attack of harmattan

Look!
at your blood ablaze in the shred of plates
when the rain soaks,
and the sun plies
and the wind blows
and the child cries

if the pain soothes
the ruins will live
in mounds of the crust
dug in disgust, dug in distrust.

* * *

CLEANSING

I arose from my kneeling
and watched the fierce fight
between
darkness and dawn.

That face had appeared before,
angel-borne in lightning-mirror:
glimpse of corridors of years.
They pierced me through
like the steel-stroke
on the giant bell
gone, gone into dim yesteryears

When we gazed into lazy oil-light,
tending innocence and weakness
with so much life in the eyes,
so much heat in the throbbing tom-tom
seated in the bones

Shall we ever join hands again,
as in the deserted sands of distant moon-nights
dancing the merry-go-round carried in the waves?

Before then,
cleanse me O Lord!
let me through your gold-gate into the fathomed vault
to dwell with other treasures
forever
a shattering of the clay-up holding an only-day-oil
digging the bowels of the earth
forever.

I see song in the movement of their lips,
figures soutaned in black veil, in dumb procession, long
grief bent, raucous, tortuous, ranting:
Asperges

* * *

SONG OF A MADMAN

However fast the yam runs the goat will eat him.
However fast the goat runs the tiger will eat him.
However fast the tiger runs the man will eat him,
However fast the man runs the earth will eat him,
However fast the earth runs something will eat him.
However fast something runs *something bigger* will eat
So, that's how it is, *something bigger* will eat him.

* * *

MINUS EVERYTHING

The boy waited till the lorry in which they were travelling stopped properly in the Market Square.

"Papa, we have reached," he said and slipped his hand into his father's. "Let us get down."

"Is this the Education Office?" he asked.

"No, papa, this is not the Education Office. It is the motor park."

"What are we to do now?"

"We will use a taxi . . . . let's go. Be careful, people are many." He guided his father expertly.

Sharp smells hit his nose and the din was deafening. Lorries were grinding their engines and horns were tooting. Motor park touts were yelling names of distant towns.

"Umuahia . . . Lagos . . . Oturkpo . . Nsukka."

The boy pulled him up and said, "Here is a taxi. There is nobody in two seats."

The woman in a shining headtie was sitting in front next to the taxi driver. She glanced at the two new entrants and suddenly stared hard at the impenetrably dark glasses worn by the older man. The boy saw her eyes fill with pity. The occupant in the back seat was too busy reading his *Observer* to notice who had come into the taxi.

He let out a cry suddenly as he felt the weight of the man against him.

"Can't you see? You're crushing my suit!"

"Sorry!" said the other.

The woman seated in front chided the suit man.

"Can't you see yourself? or don't you know a blind man when you see one?" She turned to the boy.

"Take care," she said.

The boy nodded. He adjusted his father's position carefully and the taxi moved. It turned a roundabout, coasted uphill and entered a grove of trees near the office buildings. The suit man stepped down, fished in his pocket and produced his fare. The taxi drove on.

"They are like that," the woman hissed. "Conceited fools. I bet he knew nothing about the war."

The boy said nothing. The man smiled. The smile lighted up his dark face. The taxi driver spoke up.

"If he had carried a gun and dodged bullets he would know that life is

nothing. I have seen men die like—like goats in the slaughter house. I now be rude and conceited? He has seen nothing—nothing!"

The boy's father said, "You are right. If he had lost everything he not behave like that. As I am today, I am Minus Everything."

"Oh dear," said the woman.

"Three years ago, only three years ago, I was a young man."

"You are still young."

"Yes, but I feel old without my eyes. Shell blast. I was in hospit months. They invalided me from the Force. Property? I lost ever That's war."

He touched the boy's head tenderly. "This is all I have—this bo raim. Without him, I am Minus Everything."

"Papa we are nearly there."

Osuakwu did not complete his story. He put his hands into his to pay the fare and the driver said, "Never mind."

"Thank you, but I am no beggar. Please take my fare."

"No . . . . it's all a help . . . "

The taxi driver waited patiently till they had got down. At that in young man and a woman came in carrying their shopping. The taxi mov

"We will go and register," said the boy's father. "And on M you will start school."

"Yes papa . . . Papa! . . . look at a new bus passing on the road. the bus they say will take school children . . . . . and—and, Papa will buy me reading books and—and, a ball . . . We are there."

The crowd was noisy and thick and groups of parents were standing filling forms.

Ephraim sat his father on a seat and went to ask for forms . . . .

They got back to the village. The mechanics were still working o vehicle which had been jacked up for three years.

"A little more," they said when he asked how they were progr

"It's useless telling me a little more. I have gone on my journe returned."

"Motor can never be useless, anytime it's ready. We are trying."

He smiled. Useless was scarcely the word. If only the mechanics what they were talking. But how were they to know that he had no If he could resurrect that car with the help of friends it might ear something to feed on, to pay the boy's fees.

The owner of the car, his immediate brother, was killed in an air

'Their room was bare......'

What had he done? Registered Ephraim at school. That meant l now be alone. Well, the boy had his own life to lead. Better to younger generation a chance.

Their room was bare and completely without furniture, a bald floor and naked walls.

He felt the floor with his feet till he came to the mat.

"Make some food," he said to the boy.

"It is good, papa. I am coming."

Night came. They spread their mats. In a moment the boy was

Osuakwu stared long at the ceiling which flickered in the cand The village was quiet. Tomorrow would be another day. The mecha brought the encouraging news. The car might move tomorrow.

Sleep stole down on him with a dark mantle that shrouded eve

At first when the sounds came he felt he was dreaming. He stir the candle had burnt out but the boy was already awake. He hear thing like iron tinkering on iron. It was coming from outside, perha the car. He had been asleep and yet not asleep. He opened his eyes.

"What is it?"

The boy came and whispered. "Thieves. They are armed. I can s by moonlight."

"Is it the car?"

"Yes papa."

"Then leave them. Life is everything. Let them go with the car

He heard the boy move and thought he had gone into the next roo

"Where are you going?"

"I'm coming papa."

"Come back at once. They will shoot you."

"They won't shoot me."

"Don't go anywhere son . . . come back!"

But the boy was out. He sat up. He heard the roar of the car, gu a cry of pain. He ran out calling the boy, no reply.

In a short moment everyone is awake and about. No one has se boy. "He is gone," said a villager.

"Ephraim! Ephraim!"

"The car is gone . . . ."

"That's nothing. God! What am I going to do?" cried Osuakwu.

For about one week they heard nothing. Police came from the Military police came from the barracks. They asked questions. The notes. Everyone agreed that highway robbers were terrible, ruthle

heartless. And they left him to brood. It began to dawn on him that he had lost Ephraim.

"I am now really Minus Everything."

One afternoon, he heard a car park in front of his house.

"Osuakwu, you in?"

"Yes." He moved to the door.

The policemen identified themselves as coming from the town.

"We have caught the thieves."

"Well done. And my boy?"

"We saw him too. But . . . . ."

Osuakwu called out, "Ephraim!" But there was no reply.

"Did you not bring him with you, did you? or is he in hospital?"

"We brought him with us."

"Then—why is he not answering?"

"He cannot answer. We are deeply sorry."

Osuakwu began to cry.

A neighbour came near and told him that an ambulance had arrived and was driving towards his hut. He listened.

"A minute, I think somebody is coming down this way. It is a military policeman, and—and a nurse in a white overall." Osuakwu listened.

The military police said, "I heard of your loss. I am on the way to the hospital with the ambulance. We have the body of the thieves . . . The car was destroyed."

The group went towards the ambulance. A man went to the military police and whispered something.

The military police raised his eyebrows.

"Is that so?"

"Yes," the informant said. "During the war."

"Pity."

He waved his arm and reentered the ambulance.

A man in a white suit with a stethoscope round his neck was sitting in front as they drove away.

A fortnight had passed and in the market place Osuakwu sat on the body of a burnt out car. In his hands he had a battered instrument which looked like a radio and he was busy tuning it. A group of boys came near and jeered at him.

He was tuning it and applying his ear to the instrument and shaking it. Some said he was mad, others whispered 'Minus Everything.'

HEAPS OF HUMAN DUST

Screaming group of maidens
along the streets
where the sand is wet
    and red
under heaps of human dust
after the torrential waves
of red-hot lead . . .
        Our spirits hum a dirge
over these silenced heaps of
dust . . .
    They have signed the Big Books
and fertilized the land
with their blood
leaving their fractured walls
to those chapters
that will remind the young ones
of this day . . .
They have left those rumpled heaps
to scavengers
and flown on eagle-wings
to the limits of the sky.

EVACUATION

Vision of light
on a day born red,
and clawed fire-thorns
clutching at sky-roots;
thoughts desiccated
flying in flakes
round the borders of sour mind
to drench the rays of desire
flaming like red fire:

Ram in fire sweat
behind cold wool at dawn;
toad in lone race
at hot mid-day;
and the crow of hen
at midnight confirms
man's suspicion of redemption.

* * *

IVORY — HOLES

The ivory-holes are full of
marshed frowns
dulling the cool reflection
of naked thoughts:

When through the silvery ruins
of expectant rains
scatter the fibrous feelers
of the blind wind,
let not the nursing hen
look for roost
in the soot-dressed kitchen
that has always known
but roasted chicken.

* * *

THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN

Ayi Kwei Armah
Heinemann Educational Books, 1968

his novel is sure to engross the attention of readers in a way no other :cent work of fiction in Africa has done. Its central theme, social corruption, of course a familiar one with African writers. What is likely to attract the :tention of readers to this work is the variety of technical approaches lopted by the author in dealing with the well worn theme, especially his aving imposed on his matter a consistent pattern of symbols and images hich insinuate into the consciousness a physical confrontation with the fact corruption.

> 'His mouth had the rich stench of rotten menstrual blood. The man held his breath until the new smell had gone down in the mixture with the liquid atmosphere of the Party man's farts filling the room. At the same time Koomson's insides gave a growl longer than usual, an inner fart of personal, corrupt thunder which in its fullness sounded as if it had rolled down all the way from the eating throat thundering through the belly and the guts, to end in further silen; pollution of the air already thick with flatulent fear.'

The style is deliberate, cumulative and successfully contrived to heighten e feeling of disgust and revulsion. Its invocation of disgust and nausea ongly recalls Swift and as in Swift's satire the moral, physiological and mospheric states are studiously fused to produce a unified and powerful oral suggestion. In this brief passage, Koomson's corruption is no longer simple, abstract moral issue. It is corruption given body, a physical enomenon which is the more oppressive because the more concrete d all-pervasive. This close assimilation of the moral state to the ysiological and the atmospheric is maintained throughout the novel d must be seen to give it its strong parabolic quality.

It is as a parable that we are likely to see the novel at best advantage. e thinness of its plot, its rigid moral positions, its symbolical and metaphor-l elaborations are all typical of the parabolic narrative; and so are its t, symbolic characters some of whom do not even bear proper names. e good man clinging precariously to his moral integrity in a corrupt and rupting world, the disillusioned and bitterly cynical outsider, the corrupt

struggles for: to be nearer the white man. All the shouting aga[illegible] the white man was not hate. It was love. Twisted, but love all [illegible] same. Just look around you and you will see it even now. Espec[illegible] now."

' "I have looked, Teacher," said the man. "I only wish I coul[illegible] with your contempt for what goes on. But I do not know whe[illegible] envy that makes me hate what I see. I am not even sure that I [illegible] Teacher."

' "It should depend on what a person wants himself, no?"

' "But, Teacher, what can I want? How can I look at Oyo a[illegible] say I hate long shiny cars? How can I come back to the childr[illegible] and despise international schools? And then Koomson com[illegible] and the family sees Jesus Christ in him. How can I ever feel [illegible] a human being?"

' "Yes. Life gets very hard when veranda boys are building pala[illegible] in a matter of months. If you come near people here they will a[illegible] you, what about you? Where is your house? Where have you [illegible] your car? What do you bring in your hands for the loved one[illegible] Nothing? Then let us keep quiet and not get close to people. Peop[illegible] will make you very sad that you do not have a house to ma[illegible] onlookers stumble with looking, or a car to make every walk[illegible] know that a big man and his concubine have just passed. Let u[illegible] keep quiet and watch." '

This is an apologia for pessimism and withdrawal from particip[illegible] In a certain overripe, "deja vu" kind of way reminiscent of certain Eur[illegible] writers this is in itself perhaps a manner of a choice. It is a choice [illegible] completely out of things, to turn one's face to the wall. But this is [illegible] characteristically narcissistic pose. The face that is turned to the wall [illegible] really asleep but trapped in the vainglorious contemplation of the rig[illegible] self.

As for the dragging in of Nkrumah and some of the pointed criti[illegible] against this regime, one must regard them as a result of an error of judg[illegible] on the part of the novelist. The whole thing is capable of stoking up so[illegible] unnecessary controversy. The events surrounding Nkrumah's reig[illegible] overthrow in Ghana are too complex and open to diverse interpret[illegible] to be safely handled in this kind of fiction. On the level of parable, it [illegible] pass but on the particularized level of fact, it raises numerous we[illegible] questions which, given the limitations of the fictional medium, cann[illegible] easily or adequately dealt with. Maybe Armah has not heard of the [illegible]

'neocolonialism" or how it operates on the African man and on the African political destiny. Maybe he underrates what has been called "the colonialism of the mind." Nkrumah was far from an angel but he did at least project certain ideas of African liberation which deserved to be given serious consideration by those who plan for the emancipation of the continent. The journey to socialism is full of false starts and unexpected cul-de-sacs. Yet, one needs to be sufficiently mature to recognize that those who are most anxious to pull African leaders of Nkrumah's persuasion down are not necessarily the most sincerely interested in the salvation of the African. On the contrary, they may in fact be playing the devil's game for him.

In spite of the many reservations one has about this novel, one must accept that it is an important contribution to the ever-growing body of African fiction, both from the point of view of its experiments with technique and its author's facility in the use of language and images to produce striking effects. Even its pessimism is somewhat redeemed by the message of hope symbolized by the beautiful, lone flower and the inscription which gives the novel its title. The beautiful ones may not have been born yet, but they will be born. The beautiful flower is both a symbol of hope and a prophesy.

E. N. Obiechina

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He held exhibitions of his paintings in Nigeria, Canada and He won the All Africa Student Art Contest in 1964 and over and certificates in Nigeria's Festivals of the Arts between 1963 an

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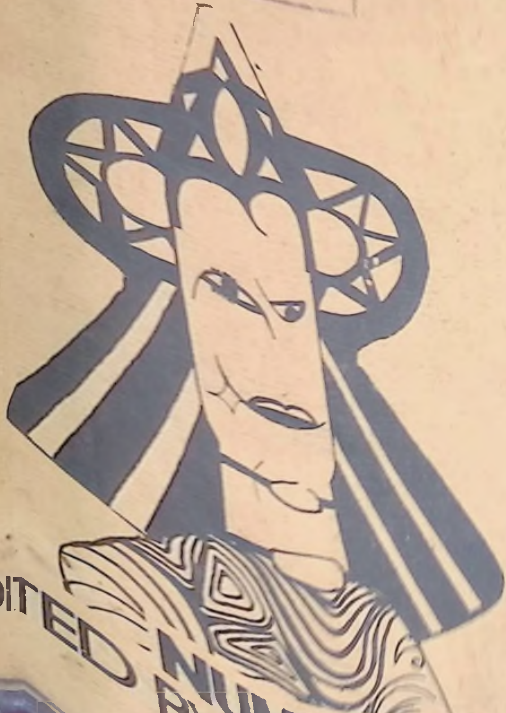

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Number 4. December 1973

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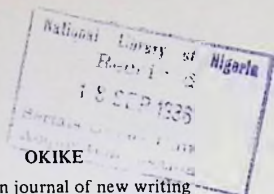
OKIKE has not appeared regularly in the last one year. The problems that [illegible] are now happily over and with [illegible] issue the magazine will be published [illegible]



OKIKE

An African journal of new writing

Edited by Chinua Achebe

December 1973

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NUMBER FOUR DECEMBER 1973

Modern Poetry from Africa is poetry written b
poetry dominated by modern European sens
African Poetry, on the other hand, is poe
Africans, and, above all else, dominated by a sen
from the African tradition. And to get a flavor o
we might consult Beier's *Yoruba Poetry*, his *Afric*
Andrezjewski and Lewis's *Somali Poetry*. In
translations of traditional African poetry. The
works, whether handed down from antiquity or
collected in the past century, distinctly convey th
African voice. And even these English translations
convince us that the mark of un-Africanness is
language, but rather the form, the attitude and the
that go into the treatment of a poem.

Lest the language or the sheer talent of the poet c
issue of sensibility, I shall use poems written in Eng
distinguished African poet to illustrate the vast
between Modern Poetry in Africa and Modern Afric
Okigbo's poem "Watermaid," a section of his
"Heavensgate," begins as follows:

> Eyes open on the sea,
> eyes open, of the prodigal;
> upward to heaven shoot
> where stars will fall from.

But by the time Okigbo gets to his "Path of Thunder"
the anemic modernity of his early "Heavensgate" is ab
One result is his "Elegy for Slit-drum." And it begins

> Condolences . . . from our swollen lips laden with
> condo
>
> The mythmaker accompanies us
> The rattles are here with us
>
> Condolences from our split-tongue of the slit drum
> condolences
>
> one tongue full of fire
> one tongue full of stone —

condolences from the twin-lips of our drum parted in
condolences

e tired syntactic jugglery of "Watermaid" is gone. Vanished! d in its place? Stirring sequences of rhythmic lament; the vncrier's clear and unambiguous declaratives, each short line complete and telling expression, firm in tone, ending on a ghlighting stress; each stanza of short lines followed by one ng line, an echoing variation anchored on the rhythms of *ndolences*. And to anyone familiar with the recurring chorus es of African folk tales, children's stories and songs of mentation, familiar with the rhythmic phrasings of *Ikoro* umming, the basic African influences on "Elegy" are not ysterious. (To determine the tradition to which "Elegy" rtly belongs one should re-examine various popular recordings the '50s and early '60s in which deceased notables were mented. *Onwu Nwapa* and *Odoemezina* are two Igbo laments iat come to my mind right away. The declarative lines, the ne-or-more-line refrains are all there in these Igbo songs of mentation). One could use Okigbo's "Elegy" at a wake, the iort declarative lines going to a lead singer, the long Condolences" lines going to the assembled mourners! Here is a owerful use of traditional form in a non-traditional poem in nglish: an enrichment as well as an extention of African poetry n English by elements from the African traditional.

In considering Okigbo's "Hurrah for Thunder," another oem in his "Path of Thunder" sequence, the juvenescent nfluence is even more readily presentable. From "Hurrah for hunder" we have:

> Whatever happened to the elephant –
> Hurrah for thunder –
>
> The elephant, tetrarch of the jungle:
> With a wave of the hand
> He could pull four trees to the ground;
> His four mortar legs pounded the earth:
> Wherever they treaded,
> The grass was forbidden to be there.

Now compare that with the following lines fro[m the]
oriki "Erin":

Elephant, a spirit in the bush.
With his single hand
He can pull two palm trees to the ground.
If he had two hands
He would tear the heavens like an old rag.
. . . . .
With his four mortar legs
He tramples down the grass.
Wherever he walks,
The grass is forbidden to stand up again.

— Tr. by Ulli Beier & Gb[adamosi]
Taken from *300 Years of Black [Poetry]*
Edited by Lomax and Abdul.Fi

The blurb on the back cover of the Africana ed[ition of] *Labyrinths* says that Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" sequ[ence of] poems "shows a new fierceness which held the pro[mise of] remarkable development." That is an unavoidable impres[sion]. [I] have pointed out some of the African sources of this o[utburst] of new poetic power. This triumphant juvenescence is [not a] mere matter of rhythms. (It is that too!) It is not a mere [matter] of formal imitations and direct borrowings and adaptations. It is far more a matter of his having aba[ndoned] what Leroi Jones called the "meta-language and [the] ornament of contemporary academic British poetry." ([LeRoi] Jones, in *Home*). Okigbo abandons it for a language of A[frica]; he accepts an African poetic landscape with its particulars; he accepts an African poetic landscape with its particulars—a landscape of elephants, beggars, calab[ashes], and fauna—a landscape of elephants, beggars, calab[ashes], serpents, pumpkins, baskets, towncriers, iron bells, slit d[rums], iron masks, hares, snakes, squirrels; a landscape that is no l[onger] used as an exoticism for background effect, no longer us[ed as] exotic references sprinkled among anemic images. [A] landscape which has been moved to the dramatic centre [of the] poetry; a landscape portrayed with native eyes to [whom] aeroplanes naturally appear as iron birds; a landscape in [which]

e animals behave as they might behave in African folk-lore, of imals presented through native African eyes. And "native" is ot a pejorative! And this juvenescence is clearly a result of his onsciously working within African traditions and of his ringing to his work valuable lessons he had learned from other raditions, Western Modernism not excluded. Whereas in Heavensgate" we find . . . a Modern European poem made xotic, and find in "Hurrah . . . " an apprentice poem whose raditional models show too clearly through gaps in the stitches, n "Elegy . . . " we find a poem which, though written in English, owes nothing to modern European sensibility; a poem it the third transmuted corner of a cultural triangle at whose other corners stand the African Traditional and the Modern European sensibilities; but still a poem whose African lineage is beyond dispute.

This distinction between Modern African Poetry and Modern Poetry in Africa, based as it is on continuities or discontinuities with the poetic traditions of Africa's indigenous cultures, is a paradigm of the distinction between African Modernity and Modernity in Africa, (i.e. Western Bourgeois Modernity in Africa). A Modern African Culture, whatever else it is, must be a continuation of Old African Culture. Whatever else it includes, it must include seminal and controlling elements from the Old African tradition, elements that determine its tone, hold it together and give it a stamp of distinctiveness. The problem of an African Modernity is the obverse side of the problem of African traditions. Those who deny to African traditions–and traditional Africa–a controlling place in their consciousness have no alternative but to formulate African Modernity in Western Bourgeois terms.

Echeruo's discussion of Nigerian poetry is a case worth considering. He is a modern-minded Nigerian, a poet as well as a critic. He discussed the problems of Nigerian poetry in a paper he read at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1966; a paper which was published in *Nigeria Magazine#89* and has been acclaimed in African and Africanist literary circles. In this paper "Traditional and Borrowed Elements in Nigerian Poetry," he contends that

> "one of the problems facing the Nigerian writer today in transferring from indigenous to modern poetry is that of

the over-explicit nature of traditi
of encouraging a more subtle co
flection and resolution."

ends that both modern European
shun explicit moral tags, "prefer
setting and reflecting into one s
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e said to be faced with Echeruo's
an writer—such as Okigbo at the en
ng from "modern poetry" to the trad
i.e. if he is a poet). His problems are t
pposite direction from that claimed f
problems then is Echeruo concerned
those of any Nigerian writer who s
ious tradition and write modern Eur
rds, the problems of a would-be "m
d-be modern European poet, who h
it up in the African tradition and
dicap"; the problems of the writ
ho wants to abandon his tradition
ibalizing" African writer.
f the expressions "modern Eur
i Nigerian poetry" is cause for a
lded as if they denoted two an
But what really is this "modern Ni
iodern European poetry, alias m
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erians who are disciples of mod
rom the way Echeruo denotes them
that they shun the same things be
gh independent and different. Whi
act one, the Nigerian, shuns whate

is said to shun, not because it is "modern" in some culturally neutral way, but just because the other, the European mentor, shuns those things. The impression that they are two different but equal things, two things which by virtue of some common modernity share some common attitudes—that impression vanishes! The derivativeness and dependency of the Nigerian imitation now stands out to be dealt with. And once we have stripped modernity of its cultural commitment to the West, once modernity ceases to be an alias for Western Modernity, it becomes much easier to attack the substantive issue raised by Echeruo's claims.

Is there anything modern, in a culturally neutral non-Western sense, about a "subtle complicating of narration, reflection and resolution?" But first, let us detour and understand what Western Modernity is all about. A good reference for that would be *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts*, edited by Irving Howe. In his introduction to this anthology—an anthology in which outstanding Western critics and writers tell us what Modernity (or Modernism) is in the literature and arts of the West,—Howe lists some of the attributes of modernism. Now Howe, writing as he is for members of his Western culture, does not bother to say: the idea of the Modern in the Literature and the Arts *of the West*. But any non-Westerner who wants to keep his own cultural perspectives straight must supply for himself the appropriate modifiers. And in my recapitulation of what he has to say I shall supply such modifiers whenever necessary.

Among the reasons why modernism emerged are:

1. The Avant-Garde came into being as a special caste in Western society, a caste at its margins, a caste alienated from it and its traditions.
2. This Avant-Garde criticised the classical Western idea of esthetic order and either abandoned or radically modified it. In the process naturalism was out and
3. Nature ceased to be a central subject and setting for Western literature. Also,
4. in contradistinction to the classical western hero, a whole new sense of character, structure and the role of the protagonist or hero appeared in the Western novel.

And foremost among the literary attitudes and values which

emerged triumphant from all this are:

5. Perversity—which is to say: surprise, excite terror, affront
6. Primitivism—which is to say: a fascination Western tradition has been considered prim or atavistic (e.g. Negro art!)
7. Nihilism—which is to say: a breakdown and a of belief in traditional values as guide t together with a feeling that human ex meaningless.

These became dominant motifs and central preoccu modern Western literature. And the kind of literature attitudes brought into being, the modern or modernist of the West, is almost always difficult to comprehend a sign of its modernity," Howe assures us.

That a literature of this kind should become domina West at the time when it did can be accounted for by closely into Western literary and social history. Then specific burden of tradition that Western modernism against in its revolt. But however familiar we may be that; however familiar we may be with that tradition o the various modernist revolts against it (Symbolism, D Surrealism, Futurism, etc.) they are not part of *our* h They do not belong to *our* past. The individual African may school himself into all that knowledge (just li Western contemporary), but the fact remains that (quite his Western contemporary) none of that revolt affect went directly into the constitution of our culture. But culture? The African or the European? And this rais question: who do our writers work for? Who are their aud their listeners, the responding part of their cultural comm The Europeans—and the Europeanized—or the Africans? community and tradition do they elect to function in? Ar Africans or Europeans? Or more exactly, are they Af influenced by Europe, or are they Black Europeans influ by Africa? Which do they prefer to be? We must stop th that the past trajectory of Western history, literar otherwise, is our own. We may have been hit over the he the West; but that does not make us Westerners—at leas yet.

It should be obvious by now that the attributes Echeruo considers "modern" are merely attributes of "modern Western literature"; are culturally determined by the history of the Western tradition, and cannot be regarded as modern in any culturally neutral non-Western sense. Since their taste was cultivated on that modern Western tradition, our Nigerian "modernists" derive their attitude to explicitness and complex obscurantism wholly from the West. By becoming "modern" in the way of the West, any Nigerian or African writer would be inheriting the distinctly Western, as against the distinctly African, tradition. Since African society is far different today from Western society in its hallmarks, attitudes, and crises, in its sense of problems and fulfilments; since our crisis of values consists in our having to make hasty choices while reeling from confusing blows from the West, blows that are dislodging us from the equilibrium of our traditions, would our communicators of values not be avoiding their responsibility to *our* community if they, rather than be clear and accessible, preferred to emulate the Western fashion and be perversely difficult and irrelevant? Let us assume (and is that an unwarranted assumption?) that these African poets are writing primarily for us Africans. Then, as regards most of the works of those "Western modernist" poets who happen to be African, I must join Ama Ata Aidoo in saying:

> "We are waiting around for answers and praying that those who can see things will sometimes speak in accents which the few of us who read English can understand. For we are tired of betrayals, broken promises and forever remaining in the dark."

Ama Ata Aidoo entered this plea while reviewing Wole Soyinka's *Idanre* in *West Africa* #2641. But that plea could have been, and still could be, entered with equal aptness in reviews of the many more Western modernist poets among us.

Another reviewer of *Idanre* remarks in *Nigeria Magazine* that Soyinka is in that work "at once snobbishly detached from and convulsively involved with the goings on around him,"—as perhaps befits any disciple of Western modernism. He says the work is difficult, obscure and (perhaps therefore?) a work of

genius! —a remark that might be expected fro
unsure of his African responsibilities when fa
glamour of Western modernist attitudes. (Which
that Soyinka does not have genius—whatever that i
drama! Excellent and compelling. Look at his
before he abandoned the transparency and
"Telephone Conversation" and chose to wallo
obscurities! It is just that "genius" is not a word I li
is too damned up-cloud elitist for me. It sticks in my
for me is craft, not a romantic wet-dream!) Whereas
is a hallmark of African poetry, the obscurity we fin
of our poets, the obscurity they impose upon their
of that creed that demands a "subtle complicating of
reflection and resolution," this obscurity is a badge o
modernism. And while talking about explicitness, cl
obscurity let me, in passing, note that there is a di
between an obscurity, explicitness or clarity of surf
those of depth. And I am talking of the former
distinction lies, perhaps, the root of Echeruo's error.
quote Pound against Echeruo. Pound warns:

> "Obscurities *not inherent in* the matter, obscuritie
> not to the thing but to the wording, are a botch.
> work lives not by them but despite them." (Italics
>
> (In the essay "Early Translators of Homer." See *Li*
> *Essays of Pound* p. 268)

And the vice of Western modernist poetry that Echeruo b
cultivate is precisely this obscurity of surfaces. Joyce m
virtue of that vice; he pulled it off. How many others ha
can?

Let it be noted then that when Echeruo encourages
complicate and obscure our diction he is advising us to ab
the African tradition for the Western, and for what is not
the best in that Western tradition. He is advising us to dese
cultural responsibility to speak intelligibly to our communi
in African culture and to instead speak to the communican
Western culture. Echeruo again decries explicitness whe
puts down the " 'responsible' moral tag." His exampl
this—"Fate is a fully determined thing,"—is from an Old En

poem, called "The Wanderer." The effect of Echeruo's razor, were it to cut into Nassir's poetry, would be to rob his fine stanzas of their last lines:

> The male lion is on the path listen, O babbler
> do not criticize me secretly while ostensibly supporting me
> it is better to master yourself so restrain yourself
> such behavior is like finishing up the firewood a bone is
> not cookable.
>
> Reflect and take measure of the world though you talk nonsense
> don't do what is meaningless these things are not proper
> for a man
> don't shame yourself I give you what is true
> though you put wood on the fire a bone is not cookable.
>
> – From "A Bone is not Cookable"
> Tr. by Lyndon Harries from Nassir's Swahili.

But, of course, Echeruo's modernist temper would frown on this kind of writing altogether. Well, well, what shall Africa not hear from her learned children!

The Western Modernists among us are firmly in the Western camp. They show little interest in the African poetic traditions; they disdain them, and make little effort to learn from them. If they have their way we must desert our habits and surrender ourselves at the altar of the West, there to be killed, skinned and repackaged under Western labels! To Echeruo and other African critics of his persuasion (and they abound in our universities and on our magazines–Echeruo is just a good example of a very bad thing!) I say: the problem of the Modern African Writer, trained as he usually is in the Western Modernist attitudes, is to reconnect with, to transfer back into, not transfer out of, his indigenous tradition. His problem is to understand his tradition, learn from it in humility, in order to become a true participant in African Culture; his task is to imitate the Nassirs, p'Biteks and Okigbos of the continent and so cease to be a modern Western writer who happens to be born African.

Nassir has not left home: p'Bitek has never wandered off a

prodigal. Okigbo did. But after Pound and Mallarme,
Cowley and Tagore had left their imprints on his
staggered towards home. And on the eve of his home
asked: "And how does one say NO in thunder?" (La
Silent Sisters). And reaching home he sat at the fe
Orikis, humbly sat and closely listened, and practised
heard. When he got home he did not treat what was
curios; he did not treat them as exotica fit only to be
in after the fashion of the ethnologist. He treated the
we should—as his mentors, as ancestral guides who w
his feet to wander no more; as the dibia who would c
his long demonic "pursuit of the white elephant," t
which had taken him through "Heavensgate,"
"Limits," and through "Distances." He treate
embodiments of an African tradition as the masters fro
he would learn how to say NO in thunder to those te
from another culture. He listened, he practised, and he
again. And he became a true native, a true son; and he
his kind and spoke in his voice of thunder.

If the careers of Nassir and p'Bitek have nothing to
cultural exiles, Okigbo's certainly does. For he had be
them; had been foremost among them; yet he fou
home to his cradle. But if it is already too late fo
wander back home, let our prodigals stop masquer
them declare themselves for what they are—modern
West, not modernists of Africa. Let them acknow
they are and cease and desist from influencing and
and our posterity in the wrong directions. If and
Okigbo, they return home, we shall gladly cel
homecoming. For we cannot reject our prodigals i
home.

K. Curtis Lyle

Two Poems

SUDDENLY

would you have
the heart grow right
you must take
a little trouble
– Jalaluddin Rumi

the end of the world
is like any other event
to me

you burn off my wings
and I recur as a buffalo,
a butterfly,
you cut out my heart
and suddenly you feel me come back
as the new double pulse
of your love,
immanent impulse,
a series of twisted hands
for you to heal,
a sequence of bleeding arrowheads
for you to arrest
and then harvest

the end of the world
is like any other day
to me

I'm not afraid to die, nor
to spill my blood, in fact
I would welcome it like a fire in the loins
of the earth
when my work is finished
but,
the end of the world
is just like any other time to me

and
this time has status
only when measured by me,
it only gets high when rated
for me

whether some rippling wetness,
whether a wave or a bird in the dus
like a flying boat at the tips of the
of my body

enameled spoons
the hands like hewn oak water bucket
dipping the south wind.
a pool of stunning light.
an ocean trembling
for luminous paths.
a sudden and coterminal stillness
hurtling my life
into the permanent soul
of plants

eyes like black windows. meadows
in Brazil or Benin.
bellowing teeth
in a mouth like invisible frost shaped
against that hollow organ

in Benin or Belem
its a simple arrangement
of power and similar fluids

so whether in the birds of Belem
returning
to the mute black fish
of Bengal
the end of the world
is like any other thing to me

listen to me bending
and I will wade through you massive and breath
like a flurry,
as the first movements of birds whistling
comes forward with difficulty
opposing the wind
listen to me
like the passage of currents
and I will change you into heat

but calmly

but calmly
listen to me
like the sun's rays
come down speeding into your body
and I will listen to you
raising dead breasts
through the carbon of beautiful cities
listen to me investing twelve tones' intelligence
and I will listen to you
dancing inside of me like my bowels,
a double loop of recurring thread, moisture and w[illegible]
bleeding in a bamboo skirt

inside of me you are a pool
of braided comets
inside of you
I become the low pressure center
of some immense hurricane

listen to me
suddenly
electric herald of coming good
and I will listen to you
like some lustrous cinder detoured
through silver stoned luminous holes
listen to me,
the photosynthetic cell

and I will listen to you,
the opposed lime tree, warp and woof,
an exalted tranquility
listen to me weaving
and I will listen to you

you are half man
and I am half fish

you are molten
but I am marked and wooded
like a man
uncertain of his dignity
crying some brittle authority
motionless and dumb
into a river's bank

I am David
and you are Dagon

I am light
but you are fire like thirteen flowing clefts
of fine metal
your weight, an obscure and narrow path
with steep sides

you are precise
and I am dark, but then,
I am opposed to darkness, because
it makes me nervous, so now,
you are what you say
but I am how you say it, now
you are what you do
but I am how you do it, now
you are what you are
but I am always moving through it,
and now
you may diffuse the world
but I will whirl myself into it,
regardless of the risk

listen to me
as my light creates your eye
and I will listen to your love
create my heart

uincy Troupe

'oems

IGBOBI NIGHT: For Ron & Ellen

Dark fall
african masks
martell bottle
shadows
the wall spider
in the corner
of the cognac
bottle a lone candle
burns on the table
invisible sounds
hum from Imagbon
street climbs through
the open window
& love in
the heart will last
beyond distance
beyond time
beyond separation
of the grave

GHANAIAN SONG

After rain
dark trees &
ghost shadows
sit upon
shoulders of
grey mist

John Munonye

Silent Child

With silent anger, Oji contemplated the hand which h udara fruit up, out of reach. That fruit was certainly his. didn't know how to shout; he was quiet by nature–whi why many people called him the silent child, whereas Ch tongue was a rattle itself. Chioma had continued to insis the fruit belonged to him, and had even nearly succeed convincing the man when, on further thought, he ruled they should compete for it–compete for a fruit that was hi

"Up, higher, jump!" the man again commanded.

Oji tensed, jumped. But the hand rose higher still.

The fruit was big and luscious, probably spotted black The tree was the kind-hearted-mother type whose n enclosed in the fruits, was desired by all, old or young, and e by things that flew in the air, which in their orgy of longing feasting, usually, while perched on the branches, discharged matter that spotted the fruits. And because the tree was ve popular, everybody tried to get there earlier than others.

Today Oji and Chioma had gone out soon after cockcro The moon was shining. Everywhere was cool and bright. Insec were crying and a lone cock was still crowing at a distance, a voice, that of the crier, was announcing to the entire villa the loss of a big he-goat; otherwise, all was quiet when the tw boys left the house. In another five minutes, they were close the tree. Oji was bending down to pick the fruit when Chio dived, his mouth wide open already. He it was who first saw he declared; and he had even touched it with his foot; and on. He now tried to wrench it out of Oji's hand. It was the that the man appeared.

"Up, higher, jump!"

Chioma's turn. Chioma mustered all the energy in him an jumped. He landed on the hard ground with a thud. His bi rotund navel bounced.

"Up, higher, jump!" His legs wide apart, the man stood stil holding the fruit up as before.

Oji leapt wildly up–high enough to grasp the man's wrist th time. But he took care of him by merely twisting the wrist. O

dropped on the ground almost noiselessly.

Unlike his rival, Oji was slim; and he looked sickly and grim, even though he had never really been seriously ill. It was said, especially by his indifferent foster-father, that since his birth, seven years ago, same day and nearly same hour as Chioma, he had not had the appetite for a full meal but rather lived on fruits, which was why he looked so thin and frail. Biting his lip and panting, he gazed at the stranger, this self-appointed arbiter, while the latter stood his ground and stared back gravely: it seemed in fact he was trying to overawe them both and make away with the fruit.

When he first arrived at the scene, they had welcomed him, and later on gladly handed the fruit over to him, an elder, for arbitration. For the dispute had been developing steadily into a fight, with Oji holding the fruit stubbornly and Chioma shouting and trying to extract it from his hand. Chioma's voice rose over all the sounds of the early morning. Then, the man suddenly appeared. He was dressed in khaki shirt and shorts, like one of those people, the agricultural superintendents, who travelled on their bicycles each morning to the distant plantation at Ewe where, it was said, they grew palm and coconut trees. Perhaps he was one. But where was his bicycle? Oji now looked him over once again, from the feet upwards, with a mixture of respect and disgust.

The moon, bursting through a thick cloud in a final sally before dawn, cast its light point-blank on the man's face. Ugly! Oji thought, shrinking back: flat and flabby face; light-skinned, perhaps with a squint too; yet neatly dressed even at such an early hour.

"Who next?" and the man coughed. "Come on, whose turn?" He gave them a brief lecture: " . . . Four consecutive leaps each this time . . . Up, higher, jump!"

Chioma jumped and missed, four times, and stood aside; and he began to stroke his stomach, around the navel, clearly suppressing a pain. Then, before the man called, Oji took a furious leap. But the man, still very much alert, merely allowed Oji's fingers to touch the fruit. Bitterly disappointed, Oji sat down, thus forfeiting the three remaining leaps.

"Give it to me; it's mine!" he demanded after an interval.

"It's mine!" Chioma dashed forward.

The man swung his hand out of reach, deftly.

The dispute went on. Neither of them jumped for some ti

" . . . It's mine."

"It isn't."

"It is."

"It isn't."

"Jump for it," the man urged.

They continued to argue . . .

"Wait a moment then," said he at last. "See!"

They watched him cup his hands, with the fruit between, and broke it into two. He gave one half, to each. "Neither of you deserves to have the whole," he declared.

Oji was busy studying his own share and did not know when the man left. One half to each! That would have been bad enough: his own fruit . . . And then, to add to it all, his was the smaller half: with only two out of the five seeds. That was the case everywhere, every time; people were always prejudiced in Chioma's favour.

"See, mine is bigger," Chioma now boasted. "That shows that I jumped higher than you."

Pouting, Oji threw his share into the bush, using his left hand out of contempt. He wiped the hand on his bare buttocks.

* * *

In the solitude of a glade, he sat on the ground, all alone, later on in the day, drawing fantastic shapes and patterns on the sand with his fingers. A nut dropped from a palm-tree close by. He picked it up. It was big and succulent. The umbilical cord holding it in position between the spikelets had been cut by incipient decay; all the same, it was still sufficiently fresh to eat. Perhaps the man was right, Oji reflected as he ate the nut. Chioma had leapt very high at one time—so high indeed that he nearly succeeded in grasping the man's hand and the man had to let out a snort, as of admiration. In his own case, he had been so angry that he could not make a calculated leap.

Perhaps not; perhaps it was just the usual prejudice. They would always decide in Chioma's favour—Chioma who, according to the world, was more lively and more cheerful, and friendly, and cooperative, and full of smiles, the implication

being that Oji was none of these. It was Chioma's mother who praised Chioma most. Had he his own mother, she too would have been singing his praises, in the same way.

She had died at childbirth—his own birth. So the story went. And because of that, people called him an evil child, their point being that he had demanded his mother's life as the price for his coming out into the world. Nobody really loved or cared for him. Nobody, except Ugo, one of his father's surviving wives; and, later, Enyinna, a remote aunt on his mother's side. Ugo soon realised what risk she ran in the society in offering shelter to him, the child who had taken his mother's life, and so dismissed him from her house. It was then that Enyinna took him on. He was barely five years old at the time. He would always remember his happy days in Enyinna's house. Enyinna had indeed treated him like a dear child, her only child, in every respect. But that happiness was short-lived: she suddenly died.

He could still see her dead body with his mind's eyes: tall, shrivelled, still, yet seeming to smile, seeming to want to open her mouth and call his name as before with a fond twist of the voice. It was while they were burying the body, close to the entrance door, that he left the compound, never to return; and he moved over, on his own accord, to stay with Chioma's father who, they had told him, came from the same mother's womb with his late father.

That was two years ago. He had endured a lot in silence in Chioma's mother's house; he had had to bear all the jeers and taunts from both old and young. They said he wetted the bed, and fouled the air, and other things. As if such things were unknown in this world until Oji was born! Just a few days before, Chioma's mother had struck him full in the face and called him an evil one and then invited him to watch Chioma and see how good children were supposed to behave, and then had topped it up by withholding his breakfast. His offence was that he got up from sleep later than the fowls in the pen. He retaliated of course, as he nearly always did. On that occasion, he broke the big earthen pot in which she had been storing some precious dried vegetables against the months of famine. And he also twisted her son Ibera's ear . . .

Up, higher, jump! That could happen again—who knows? If it did, he must beat Chioma this time—and beat him decisively

too. In that case, he had better begin now to practise. Ta his thoughts seriously, Oji looked right and left; then, he st up and turned round. Nobody was in sight. And there were human voices, except those from the house. Chioma was sing while some younger ones did the chorus, to the rhythm o drum they were beating. They were all happy. Nobody rea took much notice of his absence any more than of his presen

He swept aside the dry leaves which lay close to his fe "Up, higher . . ." He aimed at the sky with his skull. His bod now elongated, bumped and bounced as he landed and went u again.

"Higher, higher!" He reached out his hands, to th overhanging branch. And then! . . . At long last, he had touched that branch . . . He had touched it again . . . several times. He had discovered the secret; he could shoot himself up better if he kept cool and held himself together, tilting to one side and nearly bearing himself on one leg.

Panting but smiling, he sat down to rest. Before his mind's eyes stood the man with the fruit, tall, bald-headed, imposing, light-skinned, white-clad today, and grinning without cause. The unjust man! You are disgusting—you! You, you, you decide unjustly . . .

But again, he began blaming himself. Why didn't he attack the man for withholding what was his by right? He should have shrieked his protest and then thrown handfuls of sand into the man's face; or he could have fallen on him and struck his groins, after which he would have gone into a race . . . into the bush . . . on and on . . . into swampy grounds . . . The man is still pursuing—hot and relentless; and Chioma is laughing . . . The man has raised his leg; he is about to kick me with his boots. Dodge; Oji dodge! Chioma shouts, sympathetically. Then, I dodge; then, I run into a cluster of trees from where, unseen, I pour out the foulest abuse on the man and his sense of justice.

* * *

An all-night moon sent its rays piercing through into the room. The children button-holed each other hurriedly and mechanically, then rose in silence.

They left the house noiselessly, bearing themselves on the balls of the feet, towards the udara tree which, more than any other object, linked their hearts. It was necessary that they get there ahead of other children in the neighbourhood, and a single sound, like of the crushing of dry leaves under their feet, could betray them. They also kept to the fringe of the road where they could be shaded from the light of the moon by overhanging tree branches. Ten minutes later, they were only a few feet to the tree.

Two fruits dropped almost simultaneously . . .

"How many now?" asked Chioma after some time.

"Five."

"The same number with me. You're trying today . . . "

"Six. No, seven; I've just picked one more," Oji definitely sounded triumphant.

"Do you press them between your hands to test for ripeness?"

He ignored the question. They continued to search. They swept the grass away with their hands or turned the fallen leaves with their feet.

"Another, making eight."

"And another for me too . . . "

As soon as dawn came, they began to examine the fruits they had picked in the moonlight. They discovered that some still had pale-green patches, instead of the completely yellow and somewhat soft rind which was the sign of ripeness. The result was that they each had only three fruits that were really ripe.

"Yo-oh! You were almost jeering at me as we searched." Chioma split one of the ripe fruits between his hands. Sucking with his mouth, he drained off the juice that was escaping from the crack before he finally tore the pod up, into two. "Look at this one–it has a lot of flesh inside it," he boasted, and then went on to rhapsodize: "My sweet fruit, you are two in one! And you have real milk in you."

"You're lucky," Oji answered him.

"Thanks to daylight. You would have been boasting by now that you picked more fruits than Chioma. You can never never beat Chioma in anything in this world, I'm telling you. Not while there is daylight." One more seed, with a thick, sugary lining, went into his mouth.

"You're so happy because we are equal, isn't it?"

"Equal? But my own fruits are bigger in size than yo
See."

Oji did not look, and did not even seem to have heard.

"Do you remember what happened last time?" the ot
asked with contempt.

"What happened?"

"You don't remember? I'm sure you do. You said the fru
was yours. And indeed it was." He sniggered. "Yet the ma
divided it between the two of us. And he gave me the bigge
share."

Oji stared at him for a brief while.

"I jumped higher than you—that's why the man gave me the
bigger share." He laughed out.

"So you think you jump better than I do?" Oji asked him
after some interval.

Chioma advanced to within a foot. "Sure!" He slapped Oji on
the cheek, lightly. The latter bent down but just missed his leg.
He ran away smiling, intending it all as a joke. He ran straight
into the house, which was his best sanctuary.

* * *

They were together again at mid-day and seemed to have
forgotten everything about the earlier incident. Chioma's
mother had sent Oji to the stream with a fairly big water pot
and Chioma had volunteered to go with him provided he would
not carry even a cup himself, and she had given her approval. It
was always like that, Oji had complained, but only to himself.
Not even a cup on Chioma's head! Why should he not smash
that pot and face the consequences—face her cane and her
mouth? The last time he did a thing like that, barely two
months ago, she had finished a length of stick on his back and
called him all sorts of names, asking him, seriously, as she
performed, whether he had no tears in him. Today, she had
promised to roast him alive if he should return late, not to talk
of returning without water or without the pot itself. Why
doesn't she first roast her own son; then, after that, her mother,
and her mother's mother; and her father's father; and finally
herself?

"Oji, let's rest here and let us play," Chioma proposed.

Rest and play! thought he. And then your mother would roast me alive on our return, and she would not say one unkind word to you. It was always Oji, Oji, Oji!

"What do you say?"

"What kind of play?" he now wondered, with interest.

"Any."

"I won't play."

The afternoon was hot and the sand burnt the feet. They walked by the edge of the road which was lined with oilbean trees.

"Play? No," Oji said reflectively. "Unless—"

"What?"

"Jumping."

"What type of jumping?"

"Up, Higher, Jump—the one the man did for us?"

He hesitated. "Would you like that?"

"Yes, I would."

"But there is no udara fruit."

"We can just be reaching out our hands for a tree branch."

"Then let's go inside the bush."

"Not now."

"Why not? Are you afraid that I'll beat you again?"

"I'm not afraid."

"You are, you are, my very delicate child."

He quickened his steps. "When we get home."

"What will happen?"

"We can then go out to play and jump, and find out who is delicate," Oji proposed with inward bitterness.

* * *

They would not go into the bush for the competition. That was the way of monkeys, and of madmen with long hair. Instead, they went to a disused square, some distance from the house. It was evening and a market day. Nobody was around, and an eerie sensation possessed the place.

Once, not long ago, the clearing had been large enough to take two score men at a time; but now, the bush had invaded it leaving only a small, and sandy, open space. A thick rope-like

creeper hung perpendicular over the centre of the space. He
the children of the neighbourhood had often met to pl
Monkey Chase, one boy pursuing the rest on the tree branche
Oji never did well in this game—he was easily caught and the
turning pursuer, took too long to make a catch. And so th
playmates, at Chioma's instance, had nicknamed him the sic
monkey. Then one day, they denied him a share of the fruit
they had gathered on the trees, after they had established a new
rule that sick monkeys should not feed. That day, he had gone
home most sorrowful, nearly sick. It was on that same day, later
in the evening, that Chioma's mother asked him when exactly
he intended to die and disappear from her view—just because he
had reminded her it was Chioma's turn to go for firewood! He
had made no reply, except to set fire to her maize store the
next morning. They had never found out, and would never find
out, what really happened.

"Let's begin," said he, looking grave and malicious. "What's
the stake?"

"Anything," Chioma sounded indifferent and even reluctant.
The navel was a nuisance, he thought; it might begin to gripe.
"Anything you like," he repeated mechanically.

"We'll see who will outlast the other: he will be free to exact
any fee he likes." Allowing the other no interval for further
deliberation, he called "Up, higher, jump!" and began leaping
up, eyeing him provokingly. And indeed, moments later,
Chioma joined in.

They reached out their hands as they leapt. There was no
rhythm or delight in their movements. Oji wore a steady frown,
even when he opened his mouth to call, while Chioma's face
was utterly expressionless.

They sat down to rest after some time.

"I touched it four times," Oji panted.

"And I three times." His voice was sinking and he just
managed to finish the sentence. And he carried the lower part
of his stomach in his hand as he spoke . . .

"We have had enough rest; let's now continue."

"You begin."

"We'll begin together."

They began.

"Who are these?" a voice called.

They were both startled. Ah! It was he—the man—again. They halted.

"Are you not the same boys whom I saw yesterday morning?" the man asked. Just then, a dog came out from the bush and began sniffing round the square.

"Yes," Oji replied. "Today we are jumping to know who is the stronger."

"True?" He turned to Chioma who gave a stiff nod, of affirmation.

"It's true," Oji went on with unusual eloquence and aggression—so anxious was he that this man should not thwart the cause of justice again, today. "Watch us!"

"Go on; let me see you." He moved aside.

They got set to jump. Then the dog, a small mangy, grisly animal, began going round a second time on its mysterious errand, smelling the ground and sniffing now and again.

"Up, higher, jump!"

They jumped and jumped while, hands akimbo, the man watched, and the dog kept circling the space. Still the two children jumped, panting, sweating, with that mechanical strength and rhythm which come from total abstraction, each struggling to outlast the other in this breath-consuming competition.

But their heights had begun to diminish. And the dog began to bark, just as if, with some extra sense, it had detected a presence they could not see and was announcing it to the human race. It barked louder and wilder, looking at the ground sniffing with a fierce disgust.

"Go on; Up, higher, up!" the man urged. "Sing that too as you jump."

In their exhaustion, they picked up the song. As they panted it out, they wasted their breath all the more.

Suddenly, Chioma held his navel in his hand, groaned. The gripe, his great enemy, had caught him, almost paralysing his body. But this was a serious competition. He must try again . . .

"*My height will be greater than yours*. Sing so now as you jump," the man ordered.

Oji rallied, sang, and leapt. Chioma snorted, poised; he tried to leap, but could not. He dropped down instead; and he threw his limbs apart.

"I have won and my witness is here." Almost hysterical, Oji shovelled a good quantity of dry, brown sand into the face of the vanquished opponent. Then, he stamped his foot hard on his stomach. He did this several times.

A long, broken, shrill cry came from the sprawling body. They both drew back momentarily.

"You're killing, or have killed, him! No!" and the man walked away, quickening his steps as he went, leaving Oji trembling as he gazed at Chioma's body.

The question which many people asked afterwards was how it had come about that Oji, the silent child, should have been responsible for what happened.

Ossie O. Enekwe

To a Friend Made and Lost in War

TO A FRIEND MADE AND LOST IN WAR

God had saved you
at Ihiala, Ozubulu
and Eluama where you lay
on the tracks of enemy guns.
But a hungry driver
and a tired truck
hauled you into a ditch
in a thick bush.
Blood oozed from your nose,
mouth and ears;
and at a village hospital
where they nursed you,
"God may get tired
of saving me," you said
to me, a smile on your lips.

Two days later,
Soviet bomber rockets
burst your belly
and tore your intestine
on the white sheet
of the hospital bed.
Slowly your life spread
purple about you.
They bore you weeping
to another place
and tried to stitch you,
to keep your soul
from escaping in the purple flow.
But you had too many hoies.

So you died among strangers.
We could not find you.

We came too late to the morgue,
and too late to see you buried.
We could not tell
from the many mounds
which was yours,
since the grave diggers
had left for the weekend,
after a tiring week.
They must have let you drop
like cargo in the hold of a ship.
We could tell how tired
they must have been
from the half-covered pits.

We could not have
dug you out for a better pit.
We only wanted to identify your portion
and stand over you awhile,
at least to prove to you
that you had friends.

Chinweizu

Four Poems

TO AN OBSCURANTIST POET

Self-struck
Cloud headed poet:
What is all this
Mental calisthenics on the page?
        And poetry is not mental indigestion.

And why these barren
Artistic austerities
That take the vigor out of the manner
The heart out of the matter
And leave a lean frame
Of limping obscurities?
        And poetry is not mental indigestion.

"And God said, Let there be light:
        and there was light."
Who strains to understand that?
And is it not
Of the enduring best?

O maker of contorted aridities
Bring memorable speech
Back to our tongues
        For poetry is not mental indigestion.

THEY DO NOT LIKE ANGER

They do not like anger:
——————understandably.
It upsets the table, sets the wineglasses jumping,
fingers poking into eyes. shouts reverberating across the chasm of
a quarrel, insults flying out from cravats, venom
shooting from foaming hearts
in tailcoats and tophats.
They do not like anger:
——————understandably.

They do not like disorder:
——————understandably.
It rips televised bullets into quiet suburb couches and,
during a general strike, it conjures off taxis from
impatient streets, strands elegant travellers in airport
waiting-rooms, dirties their collars with sweat; it
makes a stinking mess of things, delays transactions,
swindles, deals, wipes out securities, and brings ants
and dust clambering over the beams of decaying estates.
They do not like disorder:
——————understandably.

They do not like passion:
——————understandably.
It makes bank clerks embezzle to support their vain women;
it makes frustrated, lust-crazed wives burst from
saranwraps of propriety to run off with street-corner
adulterers; it makes maids seduce the sons of the house
and thereafter forget their place and get uppity; it makes
their only daughter dash out across dense woods in
blinding rain and lashing storm to run off with some nigger.
They do not like passion:
——————understandably.

They like their loves tame and tepid, stately and sedate,
like weak tea sipped from heirloom china on a penthouse
porch in the mild hour of sunset;

They like their order, calm as gravestones, under which
maggots burrow and devour the eyes of living cadavers;

They like their equanimity in ghost-rooms of papers, banknotes,
bills of lading, where anger is referred to lawyers for
vengeance by due process and proper smiles.

But what do we care for their order
their equanimity
their law
their castrated clinical passions
their money-hedged loves . . . .
we who own nothing
and ever shall own nothing
except our stinking bones
and perhaps not even that?
For poverty is our cold suit,
a skin we cannot shed or cleanse;
poverty is our coffin
that refuses to be nailed shut,
a pain no anesthetic can blot out,
not even death.
We do not need to raise our heads to see
those hungry ghosts
weeping with the winds,
howling from the far side of the grave
where agonies of old hungers that buried them
still machinegun their bellies.

And their grief
shoots a drop of anger
from my heart.

NERUDA'S BOOKS

Burn all his books;
Cut off all tongues that speak up for life;
Sew up all lips . . .
　　But all shall be in vain.
His words can't be entombed:
They are the rain, the sun, and the wind
That worm a wide pass
From a granite mountain.
　　Ask the Inquisition.

TO THE ACCLAIMED MASTER OF EMPTY CRAFT

I've read all the rave reviews.
They say no other poet
Ever wrote so well so young.
Which is sadly true.
You write so well about nothing!
I do hope when you've lived a little
You'll still write so very well
But about something.

Anele O. Ebizie

Death At Dawn

I was going to die the next day! It was not just a suspicion or a fearful probability but a confirmed and unalterable fact. And there was nothing I could do about it.

My mind was a medley of flitting and confusing recollections. Out of these, one swam into clarity for some seconds. A musty room with guttering candles reeking with cheap incense and the huge bearded Aladura prophet whose presence dominated the small room. It had been in my more adventurous early teens and I had gone at the instigation of a friend to ask the Aladura if he could tell me the exact day I would die. Right then I fancied I was hearing his rumbling reply, "You shall know, my son, you shall know . . . "

And it seemed my wish had been granted, in fact more than granted for I knew the exact hour and minute.

I was to be executed by a firing squad for armed robbery!

Unless–unless what? Last minute pardon by the governor? I gave a sick laugh at that. I had once prided myself on being an optimist and you can't remain an optimist to the last minute in your death cell. What more my Dad had "seen" every sort of person that was supposed to be "seen" and petitions had been written to practically every official in the country by every conceivable type of individual or group on my behalf. But now this was the last night. Or was it already dawn? I continued pacing round my narrow windowless cell with its perpetually burning electric bulb. All sorts of wild fancies and fantasies flitted through my brain—there was nothing I did not consider; an earthquake to crumble the confining walls, another military takeover, a third world war, even rescue by beings from outer space! As my imagination mounted my pacing got more agitated until I was practically running round the cell in circles. Panting heavily I came to a sudden stop near the door, then with a low half moan half cry I threw myself at it.

I think I must have gone completely berserk for I pushed and shook and kicked the door, all the time screaming and screaming. Then I dashed at each wall in turn pounding and

scratching, my screams rising higher until the echoes reverberated filling the room as if a thousand tortured demons were there with me yelling out their agony.

Then utterly spent I collapsed on the only piece of furniture there and cried helplessly and hopelessly. I cried as I used to cry when I was small; calling on my mother, father and departed ancestors. I cried and cried until I could cry no more and the tears dried up of their own accord.

On a sudden whim I knelt down on the cracked cement floor and started praying. I prayed as I had never prayed before. First to the benevolent God I had been taught about in Sunday school, then to the native gods of my people. The gods of the streams and rivers, the bushes and the market places. I called on them all making wild appeals and promises.

I got up slowly and sat down on the bench again. I started feeling for the first time the pains from my self-inflicted bruises and abrasions. I looked at my fingers and they were all bloody.

I got strangely calmer and calmer. "Why not be philosophical about the whole thing," I told myself.

Snatches of Shakespeare went through my mind "... The valiant never taste of death but once ... most strange that men should fear seeing that death, a necessary end will come when it will come."

But I could not help thinking bitterly that Shakespeare was never in a cell awaiting execution within the next few hours or minutes for a crime he did not commit.

I tried to check the resurging bitterness and resentment. Even if I dashed myself against the floor, I reasoned, or even chewed up my fingers would that prevent my being shot stone dead at dawn?

But all the same I could not check the rising flood of if-I-had-knowns. I placed my head in my hands and as dispassionately as I could, tried to trace the course of events that had brought me to my present predicament.

Actually the imminent death I faced could be attributed to the fact that I had taken an unfair share of the tea at table on one fateful night a few months ago. Consequently I'd had to get up very late that same night or rather early the next morning to go and empty my over-filled bladder. It was while I was on my way back to the house (our toilet being detached from the main

house) that I realised something was up. There were some voices giving commands in guttural tones that I knew did not belong to any of the other tenants. I stepped back from the door which I had just been about to open and peered cautiously through a crack in it. From the dim moonlight filtering in through some now open windows I could make out some masked figures rummaging through boxes and wardrobes while two stood guard over the rest of the occupants of the hall who were all lying face down in the centre of the room.

I withdrew further into the shadows to do some swift thinking. I discarded the idea of going to wake up people in other houses because I felt that would just be making them cannon fodder for the robbers–it being an age when honest men are prohibited from carrying any weapons for self defence. The nearest police station was up to half a mile away. I knew everything would certainly have been over before I reached there. I took another quick peep and saw one of the robbers striding towards the door, quickly I faded into shadows again as he threw the door fully open and looked around.

I knew time was running out and I continued racking my brain. Then I had it: the idea that came to me did not seem strange or foolhardy at that time–a quixotic disposition brought about by reading one thriller too many, I can assure you, can make one do a lot of foolhardy things. Well, having just finished reading 'Teach Yourself Self-Defence,' I reasoned that I could adequately tackle the last man out as they left and then putting on his dress I would follow them into their vehicle, and then follow them to their hideout. As I elaborated on the plan I gave myself a mental pat on the back. Once at their hideout I would either "stick them up" in classical style, and then tie them up or sneak away from there and go and reveal all to the police. Then would come the kudos, my picture in papers perhaps. Better still I could imagine myself surrounded by an adoring audience of girls while spinning out the tale in the mos casual way.

My imagination had already started to run riot when tl came trooping out, all six of them. As I had hoped the last carrying out a sort of rear guard action and was quite so distance behind the others. As he turned to dash after them . leapt on him.

The hold I got on him was what the self defence book called a "half-Nelson" and was supposed to have the victim helpless. But either I had it all wrong or the book was wrong because my victim with an angry oath was already freeing himself. Luckily (or unluckily) for me we both tripped and as we fell his head hit the edge of a step with a crack and he went limp. I looked up but the others had already turned a corner. Quickly I stripped him and hastily put on his none too clean dress, collected his gun and tied on his more grimy cloth mask on my face then I dashed off after the others.

I made my way into the darkest corner of the vehicle, which I guessed was a Ford Transit van, with a wildly beating heart. No particular attention had been paid to me so far apart from a cursory 'Na wetin hold you' when I had first caught up with them. That might be attributed to the fact that the victims had started shouting and an almost panicky rush had been made for the getaway vehicle with a few shots fired into the air for good measure.

The vehicle sped on through the predawn stillness. The brigands were jabbering away in high spirits and I listened carefully and soon made out our destination and all their aliases.

Trouble started brewing when the name 'Bolinkana' was mentioned and then called several times before I realised I was supposed to be 'Bolinkana.' Two of them started coming towards my end of the van with a torch.

I tensed and then slowly started getting up. However a shout came from the driver followed by a screech of shredding rubber as he applied the brakes hard. There was a crash into some things that sounded like empty drums followed by the sound of splintering wood then a complete stop. Silence broken only by the sound of tinkling glass reigned for a few seconds before firing broke out outside.

The robbers scrambled for the exits firing as well but I threw myself flat on the floor of the van. I guessed it must be a police ambush and that my troubles were about to be over. But how wrong I was!

The firing, interspersed by screams and curses petered out after several minutes. I crept to the door and cautiously peeped out. Two of my companions of a few minutes back had made it

only as far as the edge of the bushes. Further up the road I could make out another two surrounded by uniformed men. One must have got away.

I jumped down from the van and started walking towards the group with hands stuck deep into my pockets whistling softly. I was still some yards from them when a warning shout came from somewhere to my right. All the men spun around in my direction and for one brief moment stood perfectly still.

I raised one hand casually, "No need to fear, officers, I am not. . . ." I stopped abruptly. It was my turn to be petrified as one of the uniformed men raised his rifle and cocked it. There was only a dull click, as recovering, I threw myself on the ground.

"Now don't be a dommed fool," I shouted almost angrily as another, now with rifle butt upraised charged at me.

"Oh, no, don't, please, for heavens sake I am not one of them!" I shouted desperately raising my hands to ward off the descending blow. But it was quite a futile effort because the next moment my head seemed to split into bits; there was a flash of deepest red dissolving into kaleidoscopic patterns then terminating in an impenetrable blackness.

When I came around I thought I was in hell, but as awareness returned fully I realised it was a sort of cell of indescribable filth. In fact, despite the tendency of my mind to push into its deeper recesses the horrors of those first three days in custody, yet I cannot forget the 'special treatment' I got. I gathered one of the policemen had died during the ambush so what I was subjected to by his colleagues would have left some 'third degree' experts green with envy. On the few occasions I tried to tell my story I either got back handers or boots to the face depending on which was nearer to which. Though thoroughly miserable by then I didn't have any doubts about my freedom once I could talk to any 'reasonable' person or at the worst when I presented my case in court.

My Dad had traced me by the third day. After hearing story he went off saying he was going to 'see' the concerned and I would be out in a jiffy. For all his however I only got transferred to a room with a bed, meals a day and no more third degree. I felt the first anxiety as he told me he would have to go down to the

city and get the best lawyer they had. That he could not get free by 'seeing' people was more than serious considering th he had, for example, wangled me a scholarship to a forei university just by 'seeing' the people concerned.

The lawyer he got though gave me back some of m confidence. Though he told me initially that his belief of m story was "neither here nor there," he assured me my case was simple one compared to others he had won in the past. He enumerated these at length.

I never got to know his name but I called him Baldie Chaplin (not to his face) because of his almost egg bald head and Chaplin-like moustache. In court. though, he was referred to by members of the tribunal as "learned eminent counsel," with the positions of the two adjectives varied on occasions. How learned and eminent he was only struck home when I gathered that for approximately every time he opened his mouth it cost us a pound.

After the first session though Chaplin must have realised he was working outside his usual metier: witnesses for the defence and things like that were not needed by the tribunal and fortunately or unfortunately he was not allowed to open his mouth much. I could actually gather the drift of things from when he stopped addressing the panel as "esteemed and most honorable members of the tribunal." Their spokesman in turn first dropped eminent then learned and by the third session he was given six months for contempt of court. At the fifth session no lawyer was allowed to come and represent me again. My Mum and the children also either could not be present or were barred. My Dad tried unsuccessfully to smile reassuringly at me, but I suppose he knew that I knew the case was getting hopeless. How hopeless I didn't guess until the session started with the sixth member of the tribunal, an officer in one of the forces addressed me directly.

"Where you born?" he demanded. I answered him, startled.

"You don steal before?"

I replied in the negative, my heart starting to beat faster.

"How you come follow these people," indicating my erstwhile companions, "go steal for the place where you dey stay?"

I started retelling my story for about the twentieth time but I

only got out the first sentence before he jumped up from his seat.

"Quiet!," he roared, "the car where you begin enter, na your mama car?"

"I don't see how its being my . . . " I started almost angrily.

"Quiet!" he shouted again, "you no know say many days na for thief one day na for owner."

"Hear, hear," I muttered, still capable of some dark humour. By now he had thrust his face a foot or so from mine. "You think say," he continued sneeringly, "all this money where your papa they take call bukuru lawyer and ride different kind motor we know no where he get am?"

I don't know why, it must have been the strain, but I suddenly laughed. He drew back his swagger stick and hit me across the face.

"You be shot!" he pronounced and went back to his seat.

* * * *

I lifted up my head at the sound of approaching footsteps. My hopes soared momentarily, maybe something had happened—a reprieve maybe. But it was only the officer in charge coming to ask me what I would like for my last breakfast. At this I broke down again. I pleaded incoherently with him to spare me. I went on my knees and clung to his legs.

"Oh, officer wetin I don do, you no say I no fit steal, oh you say make day shoot me!" I cried in absolute agony as the guards dragged me away from his legs.

"Chai, officer just look at me, look at me you say make dey kill me!"

He was quite a young man, he stood irresolutely then left abruptly. As the rest of the guards left I saw through the door that dawn was fast approaching!

My tears abated after some time. I sat staring at the door through which they would come for me. In the distance, a cock crowed. I put my head on my drawn up knees and cried brokenly, despairingly.

"Why should I die?" I shouted in increasing octaves. "Oh God, what have I done to deserve this, what have I done to you!"

But the questions echoed and re-echoed unanswered.

To die at this particular time when I had the best prospects the world? So I would never again enjoy the everyday things watching the sunset in the evenings, going swimming with friends in the river, a stroll in the moonlight or even the scent of the countryside after the first downpour of the rainy season. What of the tortures my family must be undergoing at losing an only son. I thought of the baby. So I wouldn't be able to carry her through the garden and the fields sharing her absolute rapture at the sight of a flower or a butterfly, clapping her pudgy hands with glee. Or the smile that always lit up her baby face whenever I went to carry her out of the bed in the mornings. Would she know she wouldn't be seeing big brother again?

I was sufficiently calm when they finally came for me because I was bent on not affording the crowd a spectacle if I could help it. My resolutions were nearly upset on the ride to the execution ground by the conversation of the driver's mate which I could not help overhearing.

"Yes na so these rich business men they get all their money. They will send their children to lead armed gangs and grab the little we get. Aha, at least they don catch this one."

At this I tried to make one last plea with the other two fellows I was about to be shot with.

"You all know for God's sake that I was never one of your gang. Why can't you tell them so and spare me this death ..."

"Ha-ha-ha," one of them laughed nastily, "you dey talk say you bin enter our motor make you help police catch us. Oya now na we and you go die. Na only you life dey sweet?"

"Chukunna," I continued, pleading, "make una remember say na God we dey go meet for up."

We were already at the execution ground. I faltered for a moment as I saw the thousands who had come to watch our death. Their emotion was terrible; at the sight of us they started screaming for our blood.

The guards had to club a way through the milling crowd before we could get to the stakes. The three of us had so far remained relatively calm and the crowd was already getting disappointed at the lack of outbursts. The pressmen were however having a field day, photographing from every angle.

"Have you anything to say," one of them came up to me. I started because I knew him quite well. My hopes started rising–maybe they were planning something for me–a last minute rescue bid maybe.

"Don't be afraid," he added under his breath and went on to the others.

They started tying me up. For the first time I looked fully around me: To my left was the V.I.P. stand roofed over with palm fronds, containing top brass, pot bellied business men and bewigged ladies in lace with rings sparkling on all ten fingers. Some yards in front some six soldiers stood at ease with their rifles. A path was being cleared through the crowd again and I could make out two figures in white approaching. The priests had arrived!

The tension was building up unbearably. Already the person on my right had started shouting his innocence denouncing everybody from the administrator down.

The priests were taking their time with each person. The sun was getting higher and the crowd wilder. My two partners were both crying now and shouting their innocence. An army officer had arrived and the soldiers were taking up kneeling positions. To my left even the V.I.P.s had jumped up from their padded seats to join in the frenzied shouts of "shoot, shoot." I felt an uncontrollable desire to join in and start yelling anything but I held myself in check.

"Repent of your sins."

"But Reverend you know I am completely innocent," I said painfully a lump rising in my throat.

"Only God knows," I continued desperately as he appeared to be listening. "Okay, ask this man," I added on impulse indicating the man on my left.

"Yes he no be one of us oh, make una no shoot 'am–o . . . he no be one of us–. O . . . o, Oh Chey, God forgive me."

"You will not die, my son," the Reverend said quietly and the two left.

"I won't die," I clung to the words desperately, even as they went towards the V.I.P. stand and not to the men who were about to shoot me.

"Firing positions take!" shouted the officer. I looked up and

gasped. I suppose my imagination must have become qui overwrought because the faces of the soldiers under the helmets had some resemblances to those of some of my clos friends at school. And the officer, dammit! He looked exactl like my Mathematics Master and he appeared to be smiling!

"Fire!"

I didn't feel any pains at all, only the sound filled my ears but slowly I pitched forward free of the ropes that held me...

"Aha, please stop I'll be getting off here!" He got out and banged the door. "Thanks for the lift."

"No, I never told you it was a free lift, but hold it man," I couldn't restrain myself, "what happened next?"

He stuck his head through the window smiling broadly. "Well, let's strike a deal, you agree it was a free lift and then I'll tell how at the last . . . " he paused, "well, is it a deal?"

I swallowed hard. Five shillings or my insatiable curiosity. I closed my eyes.

"Okay, I give in, what happened."

"Nothing so dramatic really," he paused again and carefully drew his head out of the window, "when I opened my eyes it was dark all around me. I was perspiring all over and felt one or two bruises at my hip where I had hit the floor. You see," he added stepping back, "My bed is quite a high one!" '

"Bye," he continued blandly as I engaged the car in gear. "make sure you don't have a dream as nasty as that tonight."

"I just hope that next time it will be the real thing for you." I spat out through clenched jaws before I drove off.

Chinua Achebe

Flying

FLYING

something in altitude
kindles power-thirst; mere
horse-height suffices
the emir bestowing off
prodigious folds of a rich
turban onto crawling peasants
in the dust rare imperceptible
nods wrapped in princely boredom

I too have known
a parching of that primordial
palate, an urging to reflex
life of a long recessive
appetite. Though strapped
and manacled that day
I commanded from pinnacle
of a three-tiered world
a peephole fit for a proud
deranged god; a magic rug of rushing
clouds rubbed its white softness
like practised *houri* fingers
on my sole and through filters
of its gauzy fabric revealed the wonders
of a metropolis magicstruck to fairyland proportions

by different adjustments
of vision I caused the clouds
to float over a stilled
landscape over towers and masts
and smoke-plumed chimneys
or turned the very earth unleashed
from itself a roaming fugitive
beneath a constant sky

then a sudden brightness came
over the world a rare winter's
smile it was and printed on my cloud
carpet a black cross set in an orb
of rainbows. To that splendid
nativity who came—who should come—
but grey unsporting Reason faithless
offering a bald refractory name?
But oh, what beauty! what
speed! a phantom chariot
in panic flight from our royal
proclamation of the rites
of day! And riding out our phantasy
that day we slaked a huge-grown
vestigial greed poison-barbed
by ages of dormancy till the eyes exhausted
returned again to rest on that puny
legend of the life jacket stowed
away quite forgotten under our seat . . .

now I think I know
why gods are so partial
to mountains and spires, to proud
iroko trees and thorn-guarded
holy bombax, why petty household
divinities will sooner perch
precariously on rude boards
strung from brittle rafters of thatched
huts than sit squarely
on safe earth.

Ifeanyi Menkiti

Three Poems

WHEN WILL HE EVER LEARN?

Will the gentleman next door
draw down his shutters
before commencing to kiss
and et cetera his wife?
Will he?

Perhaps I should close my eyes
like a good lad.

THE TRANSFORMATION

Europeans with their civilization;
Africans confirmed in lechery,
lacking civilization.
Then came Freud and said
"Fellow Europeans, copulation
might not be that bad after all."

And now they talk of their new morality
and of the positive assertion of drives
but give no credit to the savages.
Have we not invented lechery?

Europe indeed is changing
America following fast behind–

When all of us shall become confirmed lechers,
the black and the white together,
one riffraff of passion.

THE DRUNKEN PRIEST

Flower of the Church
triumphant in Africa
thriving on alcohol

Ezekiel Mphahlele

From the Black American World

It should not be amiss to start this series with my impressions of the general situation of the black American. Although Afro-American intellectuals have tried since the turn of the century to reach out to Africa, there is little evidence that independent Africa has had either the energy or the psychological need to come across, to study the Afro-American. Blacks in this country have of course tried to project themselves outward because they have felt a desperate need to compensate for their own situation of loss. Africans cherish an ancient cultural heritage on their own soil, whereas the blacks here have always been searching for a base. In order to assert a genuine and credible claim to American citizenship and civil rights they had at the same time to ruthlessly break off from their African origins. Either way they were going to pay a heavy price.

As the educational systems in independent Africa become progressively freed from the English tradition, and as the English syllabus in turn breaks out of its Oxbridge shackles, one hopes that the history and literature of the Afro-American will be studied more systematically. Why especially so? Because I reckon if Africans can cultivate a special interest in, say, the British constitutional history or any other aspect of European history, I do not see why they cannot interest themselves in the African diaspora. There is such a thing as a European consciousness which readily links up in the European diaspora at a certain level that is spiritually meaningful to the Caucasian. Why should it not be the case in the black world?

More exactly, why should the dialogue *not* continue and deepen? In 1788 Paul Cuffee, together with a group of Afro-Americans of Newport, Rhode Island, proposed a scheme to the Free African Society of Philadelphia for the emigration of blacks to Africa. He managed to carry a few to Sierra Leon
The scheme inspired the formation of the Am
Colonization Society in 1817, dedicated to sending free
to Liberia. After the Civil War, Afro-American leaders b
oppose this back-to-Africa movement. Instead, they set

create links with Africa through education, religious and other bodies.

Then there was W.E. Burghardt DuBois who died in Ghana at 90 while he was working on the *Encyclopaedia Africana*. The late Dr. Ralph Bunch of the United Nations studied in Togo and Cameroun. The Pan-Negro conferences of London and Lisbon with which DuBois was to be actively associated–1900, 1911, 1919, 1923, 1927–were further evidence of the desire to understand Africa more. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement for Colored People) financed the 1919 congress and backed the two subsequent ones. DuBois and NAACP helped sharpen the black American's anti-colonial and Pan-African sensibilities. Through the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Carter Woodson, the historian, urged the Afro-American to interest himself in and be proud of his African origins.

When, during the depression years, 1929-1933, the NAACP concentrated its attention on the Afro-American domestic struggle, the main leadership fell in the hands of the Council on African Affairs, led by Paul Robeson, world-famous bass singer, and DuBois, among others. Then there was the fiery Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement of the early 1920's. Although his mission was bound to fail, his persuasive rhetoric of black pride advanced the interest in Africa in general and black nationalism in particular. Harlem was becoming more and more conscious of itself as an ethnic entity poised between America and Africa, not daring to undermine either affiliation. The name "African" became more commonly acceptable than "Negro" for churches and other organizations. Edward Blyden's inaugural speech as president of Liberia College (5 Jan. 1881) was printed in 1920 and distributed in Harlem. *The Crisis*, organ of the NAACP, devoted so much space to African affairs between 1911 and 1945 that the educated Afro-American knew more about the geography, history and the art of Africa than the average educated white man.

The now defunct American Society of African Culture did a lot to inform black Americans about Africa. AMSAC was an affiliate of the Paris-based Society of African Culture. (Presence Africaine)

Individual civil rights leaders like the late Malcolm X, James

Farmer, James Baker, musicians and writers have visited African countries. In each case there must have been something psychologically deeper than curiosity, a feeling they would not have if they were visiting part of the white world. James Baldwin expresses vividly another dimension of the encounter with Africa. In 1961 he visited Israel, from where he contemplated his planned visit to Africa. He knew in his bones somehow, he reports, what awaited him. He was afraid. "I am playing it my own way, edging myself into it: it would be nice to be able to dream about Africa, but once I have been there I will not be able to dream anymore." Baldwin contended that black Americans did not identify with Africa until the latter became identified with power. This is of course only partly true, in the light of what I have just said about the varying degrees of identification since the turn of the century. Certainly there are more and more black Americans who are showing concern about Africa today: the independence of African states gives them a self-pride they never experienced in colonial times. Also they support the Africans living under the heel of white racism in Southern Africa. Dockworkers recently refused to offload Rhodesian chrome on the east coast.

I am talking here primarily about black Americans who are most sharply aware of Africa because they can read and write about Africa or because, as workers, they can be influenced and informed by the committed and enlightened. Time will tell how far on the vertical, horizontal and time scales this desire to reach out to Africa will go; how Africa will respond outside of protocol; what the imperatives and actualities will turn out to be in the game of getting to know one another across the Atlantic. The black worlds do not really know each other. Come to think of it, how much do we Africans ourselves know one another? The Pan-African attitude towards Southern Africa so far amounts to a mere gesture: African leaders who meet in Addis Ababa do not really know the Southern African black or white. Because independent Africa does not yet appreciate importance of mass media and the classroom as pote vehicles of information about one another across the conti We wait till the student is in university, there, hopefull specialize in African affairs.

But back to the black American world. It speaks with man

and diverse voices. And yet when any leader speaks for his organization you feel he makes sense. On the other hand, put these views together and you are bewildered by contradictions. People will tell you that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, under the influence of the late Martin Luther King's non-violence politics is working at grassroots (in the non-pejorative sense in which we use the term in Africa); that it is changing the traditional image of the church as a custodian of a subservient doctrine; that the movement needs to address itself to the basic wants of the people—bread, decent shelter, schooling, the vote. Then up comes the Black Panther. It tells the people they will have to shoot their way to freedom and wrench justice from the whites. The police clamp heavily down on the movement, and some of its leaders flee abroad. Then Huey Newton, one of the Panther's top leaders, makes a dramatic about turn and tells the people that they should go to church; he regrets his organization's mistake of rejecting the basic institutions of the community. Now Panthers are to be found working in community projects.

The Black Muslims want out. They want their own land, carved out somewhere out of the American south. A place where the blacks, presumably with a Muslim bias, can live and develop their own economic, political and other institutions. When they speak to black problems and black pride the Muslims make sense. When they say whites should give them money to establish a black state in America, one wonders . . . When you are used to seeing vendors of religious pamphlets—those austere and severe clothes, those agonized faces they wear or that conventional smile, those god-stricken eyes—and you see the ostentatious slick suits Muslims wear who sell Muhammad's literature, you wonder . . . But you also get the message: the outward trappings of economic independence the Muslims preach. But prosperity for whom? How do they reconcile individual ambition with communal goals? There is nothing austere about Elijah Muhammad or about heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali, who has a Cadillac, a Rolls Royce, a few Ford cars, and now a sports car worth $22,000.

The African People's Congress also wants out. They have declared themselves an "African Republic." The NAACP, whose organ *The Crisis* was edited by W.E.B. DuBois in its early days,

was founded in 1910. It contested bills which Southern whites were introducing into Congress to suppress the blacks. It investigated lynchings and recorded them for publicity. Soon it was evident that the NAACP could not take in the problems of housing, employment, industrial education, family welfare. The National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (now simply called the Urban League) emerged, which brought together existing bodies concerned with urban problems. Agitation was to be the NAACP's way, and persuasion the Urban League's, which utilized white philanthropy. Because of its basic humanitarian appeal, whites were readier to support it materially. The NAACP, for its part, moved into the arena of constitutional rights, wresting what legal rights for blacks it could through one court case or commission after another. This and publicity remain its main functions. Given the historical and present-day realities, NAACP and Urban League make sense, although those who call themselves militants consider them outdated, too dependent on the Establishment, too committed to integration, too middle-class in attitude, to be revolutionary.

The Congress of Racial Equality recently reformulated its goals and declared it was for separation between black and white in practically every sphere of life. There has been the controversy of school busing as a method of desegregation. The Federal government, the custodian of the right to equal education and equal opportunities for education, has had to cope with intransigent states that do not want school busing. The dishonesty and half-truths and lies that whip around between white spokesmen and the electorate and the Federal government sicken one as an observer. Some whites resent school busing because their children have to sit next to a "nigger"; because if *their* children are bussed to another school to balance up numbers, the pupils do not return home until late afternoon; some whites resent it for the same reasons, but try t make it appear as if they were concerned for the black chi who is being uprooted from his neighborhood; or, like Preside Nixon, say that the ghetto schools should be improved in tern of equipment, facilities, classroom space and staffing, instead o letting the black child go to white schools that are much better all round. He proposed a petty sum of money for Congress to

vote for these improvements.

Some black people argue that school busing is the only way you are ever going to confront the suburban white with a situation he can no longer delay—that of having his child thrown into the company of blacks: a real exercise in co-existence. They also argue that social ideas always outstrip actualities, so it is going to be a long time before the governments put money into the improvement of ghetto schools, if even they do get round to doing it one day. Meantime, is the black child to be subjected to such degrading schooling conditions that are his lot today? As people take so long to change their attitudes, you've got to legislate at least to prevent them from discriminating against other people. Some blacks again regret that although children should be bused to better schools, it does not answer the questions: What kind of white teachers are they going to? How is the child to outlive the content of education that glorifies the white man's interpretation of society? In 1971 the first Black People's Convention of its kind that met in Gary, Indiana, decided against busing. Among other things the feeling was that the child who remains in a black neighbourhood school is at least protected against a hostile white environment out there; that black communities should rather work toward improving themselves, consolidating local power so that the schools will express their ethnic aspirations, than lose the child to the never-never zone that is controlled by whites. What is quite clear in the final analysis is that at no point in this whole painful debate does one get the feeling that the government ever sought the consensus of black opinion on the issue of desegregation in the beginning. The Supreme Court ruled against school segregation in 1954, and that was enough for the bureaucrats and autocrats. *They* knew what the letter of the law was and damn the spirit of it. *They* knew what to do *for* the blacks and went ahead with busing. The Nixon group also purports to know what is good for the blacks and whips out its own blueprints.

Integration and separation. Lerone Bennett Jr., the Afro-American historian, does not see the choice between integration and separation as relevant at this time. That is, integration and its antithesis at the national level. He wrote in

Ebony (Aug. 1970): "The proposition is liberation by any means necessary. Not liberation by any means except violence or non-violence; not liberation in this place and no other . . . not liberation by any means except integration, or liberation by any means except separation." Bennett observed that most people confuse desegregation and integration, integration and assimilation, segregation and separation. These words, he said, were generally used in terms of the interests and assumptions of white people. You integrated with whites, you assimilated white values, you did these in the presence of whites. The standard of reference is white.

Contrary to the popular notion that integration means the elimination of blackness, Bennett stressed that although integration may or may not lead to assimilation, assimilation did not necessarily mean the disappearance of a minority. "If the minority represents a larger majority (i.e. the world, which is much larger than the white population) and if it is the soil of a seed vital to the movement of the world, then assimilation can mean the disappearance of a majority in a particular area." Liberationists, he said, recognize that blacks must assimilate and not be assimilated, "not because they are blacks but because they stand as witnesses for man and representations of the majority of the peoples of the world." Integration is not disappearance, Bennett further explained, nor does it necessarily have to bring people physically together. Desegregation is not integration, but a prerequisite for it. Integration, correctly used, is more than "doing with" and "being in the presence of"; it is *being with* and refers not to physical proximity but to the quality and the meaning of togetherness." For integration to attain its ideal, whites must realize that they too have to abandon their exclusive institutions and enter black ones. In other words, they must be prepared to lose something of their distinctive selves. Integration has to be a two-way movement.

Separation is not segregation. You choose separation but segregation is forced upon you. Separation may be achieved by creating an autonomous exclusively black state, or separate groups may maintain communal forms of existence within a multi-ethnic state. In the latter, which acknowledges pluralism, integration and separation can still live together. Because

integration cannot be a unilateral movement of blacks into a white world. The decision is in the hands of whites. The only Americans so far who ever believed in integration have been blacks. Until the whites decide to give up their exclusive position, Bennett insists, "blacks must organize and use their group strength to wrest control of every organization and institution within its reach. Which is what the Jews, the Irish, the Poles, the Italians did while blacks were trying to integrate." Bennett quoted from a review by Robert Chrisman in *The Black Scholar* who said that integration and separation were largely emotional responses to white oppression: "Both integration and separation are proposals for dealing with a racist society . . . Neither truly challenges the racist structure of American society, instead, each accommodates it in different ways. White America pushed segregation during Washington's time and integration during the Martin Luther King period, both for the same purpose—the control of a black population." Both integration and separation, then, remain on the level defined by whites. The liberationists on the other hand, insist that blacks should cease to be preoccupied with whites. The white man may assist liberation "by contributing information, sweat, arms, money, blood. But he is not free to lead that struggle or to define it. Finally, before blacks can integrate with whites (in the healthiest sense of the word) they must integrate with themselves."

Lerone Bennett makes more sense to me than any of the protagonists of traditional integration or separation ever have. The dialectic is at some level tied up with cultural dualism. The blacks are something of a nation that has at certain levels resisted assimilation without even organizing directly against it. They have their music, their speech idioms, their spiritual and historical heritage. At the same time they are Americans. Those who go to Africa often tell me that they only realized how truly American they are when they came in contact with Africans. Their commitment is very American; that is, they have to win or lose on American soil. The power they seek can only be defined by their Americanism.

Always in situations of political conflict people call one another names. Labels are handed out and stuck on liberally. Among black Americans, labels like "Uncle Tom" (the

subservient nigger), "Negro," "middle class" have become words of abuse, and a rhetoric of militancy. In reality it depends on which side of the counter you are. Like the phrase "common man." You could be boss at one time and place, selling something to the common man who comes to buy or solicit; at another time and place *you* could become a customer and regard yourself as the common man. The black revolution in this country is led by the middle class whether or not they like to call themselves that. Tick off the names that loom large on the pages of black history over the last fifty years: Marcus Garvey; W.E.B. DuBois; Paul Robeson; Roy Wilkins (NAACP); the late Whitney Young (Urban League); Stokely Carmichael (now in Africa); Eldridge Cleaver (now in Africa); Rap Brown; the late Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. All middle class. The students who like to equate everything that is reactionary or that shows a sense of caution with a middle-class mind are themselves on the road to that status. As students, particularly at university, they are privileged; it is after all not everybody who has the money and the capacity to go to university.

Inequalities are inherent to a capitalist society. A significant segment of the youth in America, black and white, feel guilty of being children of privilege. They do well to try to jolt the middle class out of its complacency, to demolish its value system which includes respectability, title to immovable property, several inhibitions and taboos concerning sex and marital relations, obsession with one's children's success and private interests, and the let's-do-it-together habit of mind in parent-child relations. I think Americans spend too much time with their children, are too solicitous of them, constantly want to know if their children are not bored—*what do you want us to do this afternoon, honey*? As if they feared something lurking there in some corner of the child's personality, waiting to be unleashed upon the family at the first idle moment. Indeed the child often does turn round as he grows up and tramples upon his parents, fights them all the way, hurts them, and forages on their affection even while he resents it.

These are values that need to be challenged. But th middle-class status cannot of itself be screwy, any more than can be avoided, given the type of education a society operate. and the economic and political expectations that such

education sets up. On the other hand you could attain a midd status as a means rather than an end. Otherwise it does not s easy on one's shoulders and one's head can't stay together.

The Uncle Tom label says less about a personality than it i credited with in the black American situation. It seems to me that an Uncle Tom should really refer to a man who is set upon a course that will systematically aid the oppressor in his own community, either for financial gain or out of a congenital sense of inferiority or both. Outside this category, the significance of the term grows more and more relative until it is meaningless and merely vituperative. Think of the number of times when we yield an inch here to the thrust of authority, a yard there, a mile here, and so on, in the often brave, often humiliating game of survival.

The literature and life I shall be writing about should therefore be considered in the light of these tensions. Poets and dramatists in particular have consciously been striving to resolve the tensions, to harmonize the many voices one hears on the black front. Some of the black poets of this part of the century speak like prophets who admonish, harangue, counsel, exhort, console, inspire self-pride and sense of survival. Others record and explore the black experience. The creative imagination is alive to conflict and diversity, but it can also perceive organic wholes. The artist feels beyond social realities even while they constitute his raw material.

In the arena of social thought and debate and organization are also leaders who, like the artist, perceive organic wholes. Like Dick Gregory, the stage and radio humorist. Public speaking and civil rights now claim most of his time. He has become a mystic too, after the fashion of Gandhi. Like all other mystics, he is full of contradictions. Gregory thinks the system puts people in this or that bag when in fact they are talking about the same thing: the Black Panthers, Urban League, NAACP, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King. One organization can do without the other but the masses can't do without either one of them. He is against violence, but says non-violence should go beyond the United States constitution. "Non-violence gets into universal order." He is also a vegetarian. He recently fasted and dropped in weight from 170 to 98 lbs., drinking only fruit

juices and water. He fasted because he's dedicated to non-violence: "You fast to create a rallying point where all the honest, ethical forces can gather . . . You purify your body, and your body tunes in." If your body is in order, he says, you can tune in to any message that's negative to you. Gregory believes that because he is morally strong now, it will be impossible for anyone to kill him: "the stronger the man the closer the assassin." Whoever wants to kill a strong man will have to come close. The central contradiction about a mystic is that he sees things together that are in conflict; he can create an illusion and try to make it work. This is a violent country, and no administration in the world functions from a spiritual base. It's plain brutal politics. Politics have no respect for mystics. Whether or not the assassin has to come closer, he will still blow out the strong man's brains and plead insanity or serve life imprisonment.

These are some of the tensions.

Jayne Cortez

Two Poems

BACK HOME IN BENIN CITY

Here in my lateness
in nerves of my sweetness
churning in the fact of
my flooded sadness
hour to hour
I am arriving at the fork of my blues
standing on ramps of torn mouths
sometimes confused
sometimes free
the heat of my soul at the entrance
of my mistreated heart
bound and gagged between torsos of studded knives
and lizard tails
stroking sperm compositions
in ear shots of oil red altars
the smell of iron bells
afternoon street of dying dogs
sacred shells and dodo leaves
the air fonky and soft
the music up and low down
the homeland poised between lungs
tense in the memory of fever
hot in the chest of a returnee

SCREAMS

I wanna take him in my arms
wrap him between my thighs
seize command of his body and
seal it with this love of mine
Yes I am the fine new bad mouth queen of
trumpet screams woman
free the life juice in my eyes and
let the long years ride my rolls
cause I got a man who cries when
the sun goes down
cries when the sun goes down

John Pauker

In Solitary

In the extremity of anguish,
Lonely in solitary confinement,
Men have been known to perform
Prodigious feats of memory
Through sheer concentration of will.

They relieve the mind.

Grozny, after seven years in Lubianka,
Had memorized every name and address
In an old directory of Moscow,
The only book he had.

It relieved his mind.

That was a feat which Svetlov,
Who prosecuted Grozny, could perform
With no effort whatever. Svetlov
Was singular in that he
Had a photographic memory.
Svetlov scoffed at the performance
As a mere mental trick. He valued
Other powers. Perforce, however,
He retained entire volumes in his mind,

Including the old directory of Moscow.

Each does what he can:
Svetlov, training the floodlight
On Grozny's face with no effort whatever . . .
Grozny, single-mindedly blinking
Over the pages of an old directory . . .

It is not especially to Grozny's credit,
Not especially, that his feat was the result

Of singular, almost superhuman effort.
Each does what he can.
Nor is Svetlov's performance the less
Because it cost less effort.
We are talking in terms of cost and credit.
Men are called to account, they
Give a good account of themselves, or not,
And their singularities are taken into account,
Or not.

Now you have memorized this poem,
Has it relieved your anguish?

Grozny resisted
The imposition of ideas
Upon his mind
Even when cornered.

Similarly Svetlov,
Who was assigned to prosecute the matter.
It was his sole concern.

Grozny was determined to resist
Until he had no choice,
The deprivation of which
Was his sole concern
Even after being cornered.

Svetlov, after capturing Grozny
Amid a blaze of floodlights,
Was determined
To deprive his prey of choice
When cornered.

You and Grozny and Svetlov, picked at random
Out of an old directory of effort . . .

Each does what he can.
Each does prodigious feats.

Now you have resisted
The imposition of ideas when cornered,
Does it concern your anguish,
Or not?

Svetlov enjoyed his greatest triumph
When Grozny confessed.
Grozny confessed out of a sense of charity
Toward Svetlov. The latter
Believed he and truth had triumphed through the power
Of psychological means,

A prodigious effort.

Grozny,
After an extremity of concentration in Lubianka,
Had arrived as he thought at the charity of will,
Or the will to charity

With no effort whatever.

Svetlov believed it was charitable toward Grozny
To relieve his mind, while Grozny
Believed it a kindness to confess to Svetlov.

Picture the scene. There is a photograph
Of just that moment in your secret archive,
Brilliantly etched under the floodlights
In your own directory of anguish:

Svetlov enjoying a moment of greatest elation
And all the world all clear and all its motives
Manifest
And all his effort justified when Grozny
Succumbed to superior power and truth prevailed

And Grozny, feeling superior to Svetlov,
The power of charity having induced elation
Under the floodlights,
A psychological state and for Grozny a triumph

After which Grozny too experienced elation–

What is the truth of it?
Svetlov believing in power and
Thinking his triumph a true one?
Grozny, believing in charity and
Telling a lie?

Grozny's confession, being false, hurt no one.
Now you have heard him confess,
Can you say the same
Truly?

Picture the scene: amid a ruffle of snaredrums
In a closed courtyard, at the last moment
Svetlov's eye caught Grozny's and he thought

He saw himself reflected in that floodlight
Before the blindfold and the trap descended
And another account closed to his cost and credit.

After the hanging Svetlov envied Grozny
Who, having confessed, was purged of evil while
For Svetlov evil went on and his work was
Root it out,

A solitary value.

His triumph forever caught
Under that closed lid, a picture
Of concern:

He thought of Grozny, lying
At rest in his coffin.
The State had provided the coffin. Svetlov, the rest

Except Grozny's lie, which lay under contribution
Both Svetlov and the State.
So farewell, Grozny . . .

And farewell, Svetlov, training his memory on
A photographic performance or trick of effort . . .
The snaredrums, the trap, the truth. And so on

To you. Farewell.
Now can you find yourself
Of no account whatever
In this old directory of mental Lubianka,
Singular, superhuman,
Blinking?

Root it out,
The charity of anguish,

The work of evil, contribution, will,
Determination, choice, the hurt of memory
And the memory of hurt,

Root them out equally
Of the old directory
Of drumhead terms . . .
Snare and ruffle of
A mere mental trick,

A prodigious address:

Relieve your mind
Without any concern whatever
For solitary feats
Through sheer concentration
On a secret floodlight
Picked at random:

Now you have the power.
Is it especially
Singular,
Or not

At the last anguish of moment?

Ossie O. Enekwe

The Last Battle

It was about 7:30 p.m. in Uzolla sector.

Noise of battle completely swallowed the whole front. The battle line was one vast furnace as Federal and Secessionist guns roared and thundered like a thousand wounded monsters. Flashes of fire lit the jungle as shells burst into fragments, swept away in all directions, carrying with them dust and rocks, branches torn from trees and pieces of flesh and bone.

It was in this circumstance that young Lt. Joseph Umeh, formerly of the Suicide Squad, arrived at the 30th Brigade Camp at Emele-uzo. He was angry to be sent there. His request to be transferred to the rear had been rejected and he was now being sent to another hot sector.

"To another hot sector," he murmured, biting his lower lip with his front teeth, "I must be told whether I alone caused this war. How can I be moving from sector to sector like an armoured car, whereas other officers, those that have God-fathers, remain at the rear attending parties."

He had felt like this, disillusioned and angry, since he received the deployment signal. He had almost gone mad. Something would have happened to him if he had not been restrained by some of his fellow officers. He had wanted to march to his C.O. and tell him to "go to blazes." He would have ripped open his fading battle shirt and shown him the scar of a ferret wound spreading from his navel down to his groin. He would have shown him his buttocks too. And then, said to him: Sir, have you ever heard the whistling of a bullet? But his fellow officers had restrained him. No doubt he would have ended up in a Court Martial which might have cost him his life.

And to top it all, he had also to carry his kit on his head and hitchhike a distance of about fifteen miles to Uzolla sector. What an affront! His O.C. had refused to assign a vehicle to him because he was no longer his "responsibility." They would not even allow him to take his batman with him because of "scarcity of men." So he had to carry his kit on his head to th

front.

So, Lt. Joe Umeh was like a battered old pugilist. He had joined the Rebel Army because he wanted to cut a figure. His bravery in battle was not all as a result of his belief, but something inside him, a capacity for hard labour and an obsessive desire to excel. Many of his kind had kissed the dust and rotted in hundreds of fields. But, he was lucky. Since the start of the shooting, he had taken part in twenty battles. There were some he knew who got killed in their first battles. Before every battle he never expected to return alive, but God was very kind to him.

It seemed he would never die. After each battle, he came out full of praises. Once he had single-handedly wrecked a ferret car which he had trapped in a ditch. The proper name for him should have been the "forest fox." But, his mates and followers called him "Atila." He was tall and heavy, but his face and manners were gentle. He smiled often, even when he was angry.

God was kind to Lt. Umeh, but his fellow human beings were hostile. In spite of all his exploits, he had been passed over again and again for promotion. Maybe it was because he was a stammerer or because he did not curry favour with his superiors. It could have been both. It could also be because his face was ugly (not from nature, but from the handiwork of a bullet which had hit him between his right eye and his nose). He was lucky though. The bullet had travelled very far before it hit him and buried itself two inches deep. The doctors had pulled it off quickly. So within four weeks he was again battle-worthy.

The 30 Brigade Camp in which he found himself was dark and cold as a mortuary. There was a tiny arrow of light sticking out of some place. So he walked towards it. It turned out to be a batcher. He halted and listened and then tapped on the bamboo door. After about ten seconds, he heard boots approaching the door. When the door swung open, the light of a lamp hit his face and he was looking up at a soldier. Lt. Umeh said, "Good evening. I am Lt. Umeh recently deployed here. Can I see the Adjutant?"

The soldier stepped back into the room and said, "Come in . . . I am Captain Ofili, the Adjutant. I am pleased to meet you."

"Thank you."

"How did you come?"

"On foot."

"Hah, you must be tired."

"Yes, I am really exhausted."

Captain Ofili led the way to the end of the hall. Lt. Umeh noticed that he had a slight limp. He was happy to see a man who had got a battle scar, like himself.

Captain Ofili said: "Lt. Umeh, we have no food in the camp. But, we have some palm wine. Let me get you some."

"It's okay, sir."

Captain Ofili indicated a low bench by the corner and asked Umeh to sit down. There was a cupboard full of files by the corner, too. Ofili opened it and brought out a bottle of palm wine and a tumbler which he handed over to Umeh. Umeh filled the glass, drank half of it and looking up at Ofili asked, "When do I meet the C.O.?"

"Not this night. He lives five miles away. But he will be here tomorrow morning."

Umeh sighed. "When did the present operation begin?"

"Exactly at 18:00 hours. It has always been like that here. We have lost over eighty men since the present ops. Over ten officers have died since the last 20 days."

"This is a disastrous war," said Umeh, full of premonition: "We are doing the impossible, like throwing pebbles at a man armed with a spear."

"And on top of that, hunger," added Ofili.

There was a long pause during which the two men reflected. Presently, Ofili said, "Umeh, come along, let me take you to my room. I suppose you want to sleep?"

"Yes," said Umeh, "I need to sleep. I am dog tired."

Ofili limped along, leading the way, across the dark field of the camp. Soon, they approached a collection of batchers. Ofili tapped on the door of one of them. A young private opened the door.

When he was seated Ofili said, "Umeh, we are glad to ha you here." But Umeh kept mum. "We have heard of yo exploits." Umeh sighed and said, "But, you have not heard my problems."

"Everybody has problems."

But Umeh said, getting a trifle angry, "I don't care about

other peoples' problems."

Ofili was surprised. He asked, "What is wrong?"

"I have two fat bullets inside my buttocks, but that doesn't qualify me for a transfer to the rear. I am among those who have to die so that the mighty lords may live and enjoy."

"Yes, I understand. I too have a crippled knee. But couldn't the doctors remove your bullets?"

"How could they? No. The bullets went into corners where they cannot be tampered with. They won't come out unless my bones are split like firewood. And yet I do not deserve to be given rear duty." Lt. Umeh was getting more infuriated as he spoke.

"Now look," he said, unbuttoning his khaki shirt and loosening his belt, "this is a ferret wound I got at Onitsha sector."

Captain Ofili shrugged his shoulders when he saw the scar. He did not say anything. It was amazing that somebody could have had such a wound and remain alive.

Umeh continued: "So you can see . . . I have been moving from sector to sector collecting bullet wounds and being stitched all the time like a punching bag."

Captain Ofili sighed and said, "Hah, if one were to worry about the injustices inflicted on us little men, the war would have ended a long time ago."

There was silence for about five minutes. Captain Ofili indicated the bed and said, "Umeh, you better sleep. I go back to the office. I'll remain there until I hear reports from the battle."

Umeh asked, "What of the other officers?"

"They are all taking part in the ops. And if we lose them, only two officers will be left in the Brigade—you and me."

"Why?" asked Umeh in amazement.

"We have been expecting several officers from the DHQ. But, none has arrived. Good night."

Captain Ofili wanted to get away fast. His conversation with Umeh did not cheer him. When a hero loses faith, his admirers go dumb.

Later in the night, remnants of the attackers from the 32 Brigade staggered back into the camp. Of the one hundred and twenty attacking force only forty returned. The two officers

who led them had been torn to pieces trying to charge a Federal position. The report, though shocking, was not altogether disheartening for there were several reports of cold-blooded bravery. There was the story of a young private who charged a machine gun crew with an empty rifle. It was only the lack of ammunition that brought them defeat, claimed the survivors.

The next morning, during parade, the C.O. drove up in his landrover. There was a hush as the six soldiers on escort jumped out on to the field and spread out, brandishing automatic rifles. It was as if the whole camp was full of enemy troops. The escorts stood in a horseshoe formation behind him. The Adjutant limped towards him and saluted. The C.O. got the report of the last operation and asked, "Have the Infantry officers deployed here arrived?"

"Only one sir."

"His name?"

"Lt. Joe Umeh, sir."

"Dismiss the parade and bring him to me."

In the office, the C.O. congratulated Lt. Umeh on his previous exploits and explained his plans, one of which was to launch an attack on the Federal positions the same night. He told him, "As soon as the objective is secured, at least five hundred troops will arrive from other sectors to help. Lt. Umeh . . . I'll allow you to draw your plans and choose your men. You have ample ammo."

"Yessir."

"Any questions?"

"Yessir. Please, can I have some automatic rifles for my men?"

"There are no automatic rifles . . . As you were."

"Yessir."

Lt. Umeh walked across the wide school field toward the old school hall where the privates were being rested. Some of them were sitting on the grass in front of the building and breaking palm kernels which they chewed and swallowed hurriedly in order to numb the hunger which was gnawing their maws all the time.

Some of them were naked, stark naked. Some had tattered rags around their hips. The outlines of their ribs were clearly discernible on the dark skins.

When they saw him striding towards them, they got to their feet like tired dogs and began to scuttle back into the hall. Lt. Umeh smiled—a wan, painful smile. He was not surprised. These boys were like waifs waiting for extermination. These boys were afraid of the world. The world had treated them badly. They were full of bitterness; an inexpressible feeling was eating deep into their hearts. They were the boys who won and lost battles. When they were well led by good officers, they fought. If not they ran. They were used to being kept at a camp for rest which was meant to keep them available for new attacks. And so they were afraid of new officers, new signals and new movements.

Lt. Umeh walked on as if he was not interested in them. He strode into the hall and saw many of them lying on the bare floor among little heaps of kernel husks. They stood up with great effort and saluted, "Mon sarp."

"Good evening, my brothers," he said. "Wey the sergeant?"

"Here sir," said a tall boy who had no visible sign of his rank.

"Okay, I want everybody outside immediately."

"Yessum."

Lt. Umeh stood there and watched them shuffle along like people who had never drilled before. Only two or three of them had boots on. But those boots were worn to the sole.

Outside, they stood in lines and waited for him. Lt. Umeh marched forward and said, "I be Lt. Umeh. I don fight for every sector, but I never die. And I no go die. Those wey follow me, no go die. I don come make I come help you people here. Make you no fear. Everything go be alright. You go get plenty wakis. Stand by . . . Rest and sleep. Biafra, Kwenu! . . . Biafra Kwenu! . . ."

There were only fragmentary sounds of "yah."

Lt. Umeh said, "Make una sing me one song."

There was silence for about thirty seconds. Then the sergeant began, "Enyi Biafra le le, Enyi Biafra le le," expecting the boys to re-echo the second line. There were only tired responses, but he kept on singing. Singing painfully.

"Remember nu Chuma Nzeogwu
Chuma Nzeogwu bu nwa Biafra, Enyi.
Remember nu Willie Archibong
Willie Archibong bu nwa Biafra, Enyi."

The singing continued for a few more minutes and died.

Lt. Umeh was now incredibly down-hearted. His head was full of voices speaking to him at the same time. He went back and lay on the bed till midnight.

At 5 a.m. Lt. Umeh was at the battle line with the boys. With the light they would see the Federal positions and attack immediately. That was the plan. The Federal side would not be expecting them so soon after the previous day's disaster. It was going to be a surprise attack.

The boys were armed with bolt-action rifles which they called "cock-and-shoot." They had six bullets apiece. Lt. Umeh, since his last encounter with the C.O. had been very taciturn. But these boys had never fought under him and so could not tell that he had changed.

His position was about five hundred yards to the enemy trenches. He was looking up at them from a valley. He said to the boys, "You no go fire until I command." "Yessir," they murmured with fear in their hearts. At six, he said, "Advance."

When they marched about a hundred yards he pulled a dirty white handkerchief from his pocket stuck it to his bayonet and said, "Make una drop your guns. Raise your hands. We are surrounded." They obeyed easily enough.

From where they lay with their guns at the ready, Federal troops watched in amazement as the platoon marched towards them with their hands raised over their heads.

Ikechukwu Madubuike

The Pledge

Dissatisfaction
Is
My
Pledge
Blood
My
Redeemer
On the elephant tusk of blackness
I build
A tower of salvation
A new torch
On the colours of the sun
Blackshine!
A fresh rhythm
In a tired world

Jenudo U. Oke

Equal Share to All

The law of Moses says:
an eye for an eye
a tooth for a tooth.
The law of Jesus says:
turn the other cheek.

The law of Aristotle says:
take the mean between two extremes.

The Golden Rule says:
do unto others as you
would like them to do unto you.
Bernard Shaw's law says:
do not do unto others as you
would like them to do unto you
for their taste might be different.

But I say unto you, my son,
these laws are conflicting.
Show the world you have no prejudices
Hate everybody equally
regardless of age
regardless of race
regardless of color
regardless of creed
regardless of shape of nose
regardless of national origin.

Micere Githae-Mugo

Wife of the Husband

His snores
protect the sleeping hut
but the day's
load
and the morrow's
burden
weigh heavily over
the stooping mother as she

sweeps the hut
bolts the pen
tidies the hearth
buries the red charcoals
and finally seeks
her restless bed
. . . . .

His snores
welcome her to bed
four hours to sunrise

His snores
rouse her from bed
six sharp:
Arise
O, wife of the husband!

Rasheed A. Gbadamosi

In the Beginning

The charitable old man had a white, long beard. He plucked a few strands off his beard and wrapped them in a leaf. Then he gave the charm to Arinjo adding, "This comes from my body, take it. It will come in handy. In time of need, suck it. And if you have faith, wish anything and it shall be done."

Arinjo set out on the journey. He paid his respects to the old man. He was going into the wild, through the gate into the Everlasting Forest.

But the gate was shut. Iwin stood there, his forehead emitting smoke. He would not allow entry until Arinjo had paid homage to him, acknowledged his might, his supremacy.

"I've never paid respects to anybody else," Arinjo said.

"Then you'll have to go back," Iwin told him.

"If I turn back I'll be dead. I've got to go beyond this gate. Beyond this gate into the Everlasting Forest."

"Then bow to me."

"I can't."

"I guard this gate. Nobody goes through until he touches the earth with his chin and pays homage to me."

"For the third time, I bow to nobody else."

Iwin was furious. He trumpeted for the beasts. He called them to come and watch the battle: the battle for supremacy between him and Arinjo.

Within a few moments all living animals were assembled outside the gate of the Everlasting Forest. The elephants were there. The lions sat down, regal. Monkeys beat war drums. The snakes curled up in silence. Birds perched on the trees. The tortoise surfaced from underground. Even the foxes ignored chickens. And rabbits appeared in daylight.

Up in the sky, the sun started to fade away. It appeared the moon was attempting to overshadow the sun. Down on earth, Arinjo and Iwin commenced the battle. They wrestled s violently the ground trembled and threw up so much dust th were barely seen. The more furious the fighting, the mo smoke emitted from Iwin's forehead. Like the threaten

eclipse above, it was hard to judge who was dealing the heavier blows.

Suddenly, Iwin disengaged and took a few steps back, breathing hard. At the wink of an eye, he was transformed into a lion. That was not surprising. He was a spirit. And spirits come in all forms; they'll do anything to break man.

Courageous man never turns back at the gate. He fights the spirit as he must to finish his journey. Sometimes he is defeated and he dies. But he fights and fights and fights again to enter the Everlasting Forest.

So now, Arinjo fished in his pocket and brought out the charm the white-bearded old man gave him. He stuck it in his mouth and he too became a lion. The two lions roared and clawed each other. Presently, the lions turned into tigers and the tigers into rhinoceroses, the rhinoceroses into hippopotami and the hippopotami into cobras.

All the time, the spectators silently watched the struggle between Arinjo and Iwin.

Up in the sky, neither the sun nor the moon had triumphed.

Just then, a cobra turned into an elephant and, within a second, the elephant seized the cobra with his trunk and smashed the cobra's head to the ground. Slowly, the elephant split open and out emerged Arinjo, sweaty and exhausted. The beasts cheered and paid homage to Arinjo. The sun came up and the moon raced across the sky to another world.

Arinjo was now supreme. He threw away the charm. He was through with the white-bearded old man. And he would go through the Everlasting Forest alone.

Quietly, the animals dispersed afraid of each other and afraid of Arinjo.

Omolara Leslie
Kalu Uka

Reviews

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN FICTION by Charles Larson
Indiana University Press

What interfered with the promise of the title: *The Emergence of African Fiction*? This study, is, after all, a much-needed one in African literary criticism. More than this, Mr. Larson has made a significant contribution to that discipline by making coherent and sustained analysis of single works of African fiction, by going through their form and technique in careful detail, thereby providing an admirable precedent in a field where impressionism and expertism predominate.

But with some thought, the sources of irritation become manifold. First, there is the title itself—"The Emergence of African Fiction"—which indicates a scope not attempted. African fiction is not African prose literature since World War II because fictional arts existed in Africa since traditional times. Neither did African fiction in European languages emerge only after World War II since such fiction goes back to the 1880's in Portuguese Africa. (See Moser: "African Literature in Portuguese: the first written, the last discovered," *African Forum*, II, 4, Spring 1967.) Mr. Larson's study is as generally weak on history as it is on non-Anglophone African fiction as a whole.

It appears that "emergence" is used, not in an etymological but in a figurative and personal sense of "emerging into the mainstream of Western tradition" the note on which the study's last chapter ends.

In keeping with this approach, the authorial personality in *The Emergence of African Fiction* obtrudes, discarding more and more, as the chapters progress, careful consideration and scholarly statements for ex-cathedra dicta, exhibitionism, hearsay and personal prejudice. The discreet control of personal whim such as is found in Judith Gleason's *This Africa* or the critical writings of Bernth Lindfors is totally lacking. Of course African scholars such as Anozie, Irele, Nwoga, Echeruo, Ogunba

and Wali, demonstrate more humility before their subject matter than Mr. Larson who ascribes to himself the right to appoint deans of African letters, to challenge Tutuola about his writing habits, to throw aside African culture as passing anthropology, to pretend to inside knowledge of Africa for having taught some time there, to claim knowledge of "the African reader," to intimate to this "African reader" what his aesthetic and literary preferences should be, and to speak for him regarding reasons for his likes and dislikes—which in summary are that the "average" African reader (who is never identified) cannot appreciate the lyrical, the subtle, the complex, or the cerebral.

Suspicion is aroused initially by Newton Stallknecht's introduction which says this book is about a cultural event of prime importance—to wit, the emergence of an African fiction "that responds to European influence and interprets its own world in European terms."

Wonderment sets in when Mr. Stallknecht ends his introduction saying that the novels discussed "remind us that as we study African letters we are in contact with gifted and sensitive people, now for the first time acquiring or having forced upon them, perhaps rather too suddenly, sophisticated habits of self-observation and self-criticism." Though the author, Mr. Larson, seeks to dissociate himself from such condescension and impertinence, he never quite succeeds. His tone approaches Mr. Stallknecht's as the study proceeds.

In the opening chapter, "Critical Approaches to African Fiction" which is a fitting start to such a work and a potentially interesting study in itself, Mr. Larson does not accomplish the required scholarly task of collecting the major critical ideas or critical approaches regarding African fiction and discussing them in some depth. Rather, this first chapter skims the surface of critical thought and excludes the theoretical ideas of practising African critics. Suspicion is aroused generally by the essay's superficiality; the exclusion of serious African and Africanist critics, the sparsity of ideas considered and finally the better-than-thou need to pillory another critic, Ronald Christ, before Mr. Larson goes on to say his piece.

Unfortunately, Mr. Larson is guilty of all the faults he self-righteously condemns. His main points are: one, the

reception of African literature by the West has, for the most part, been sympathetic. (Who needs sympathy?) Two: Anthropologists have been favorable to African literature because they have been interested in African cultures per se, and not literature itself. Three: literary critics have been unsympathetic simply because they have attempted to force the African writer into a Western literary tradition to which he does not always belong. Mr. Larson thinks "The African writer has relied on his own traditional African aesthetic. It is therefore unrewarding to the non-African reader and critic to look at any of the major genres in contemporary African writing—the novel, poetry, and drama—solely from the perspective of Western literary criteria and terminology." In his view, this is too much like "trying to force a glove with three fingers on to a hand with five. Instead we must look at African writing not only for whatever its similarities with Western literary forms may be, but also—once we have identified these—for what is different, and therefore African."

But the last conclusion does not follow. Distilling the Western from the African does not leave an exclusively indigenous residue. Contemporary African writers do not write wholly from their traditional aesthetics, nor would Mr. Larson be capable of identifying those aesthetics, even if the writers did. Culture is not separable from literature if literature is the imaginative rendering of life in words; the image of an individual or collective cognition of reality.

How does Mr. Larson meet his stated critical objectives? He gives a topology of African novels based on theme, structure, and narrative technique. In the second chapter, he discusses *Things Fall Apart* which is named the "archetypal" African novel—the archetype being the "situation" identified as the conflict resulting from the European's arrival in Africa and the subsequent cultural stress created in all African societies. An insightful point, since, indeed, African writers appear preoccupied with this drama. Mr. Larson also does a careful step-by-step analysis of *Things Fall Apart* which deserves emulation, just as he gives an interesting, original analysis of the integration of oral material and devices into the novel's mode.

Unfortunately, the chapter is weakened by a poor knowledge of the sociology and history of the African novel, as the whol

work is weakened by insufficient information ab
sociology of Africa—for instance, Peter Abraham's
cannot be used to represent black South Africa. An ina
see Ibo culture from the inside leads to a misinterpret
an Ibo proverb on page 36, which betrays a breach of sen
towards the affective parts of *Things Fall Apart* and Ibo p
itself. Somehow anthropological material and the Ibo p
private and day-to-day life seem separable. What appe
anthropological baggage is the reality of life for the Ibo
at the novel's time, artistically necessary to the portra
Okonkwo's character within his setting and indicative obli
of the seeds of the oncoming tension between Okonkwo an
people. The communal as "character" in the African
differentiates the genesis of the African novel from that o
European novel whose origins are coincident with the ris
dividualism in Europe and the appearance of the so-ca
economic" or bourgeois man—a rise which is not "ages ago
Larson's sense of history which permits him to say on page
breach of sensibility of which this reviewer speaks ma
Larson miss the effects of the description of the march
efuna's execution which does evoke "a mood of immine
ly and despair" through the contrapuntal irony. From t
cause, Mr. Larson misses the significance of Okonkw
o his mother's village, not to "a nearby village"; t
al importance of the exile and the emotional ethic
his punishment including Umuofia's condemnation c
's defiant participation in the execution (not murder
una. Mr. Larson misses the reasons for Okonkwo'
orrow over his act as he does the emotional
of Nwoye's defection to the Christians which means
nd historical death of a lineage.
n which inexorably follows is whether one can
of affect in aesthetics without seeing or feeling
the perspective of the work's culture; without
– empathising with the cultural values which
a different people, are
in this chapter references to forerunnin
ed essays on *Things Fall Apart*; strikingly
fied critical statements and unverifiable
vn students and informants, somethin

continual in the study. While Mr. Larson's empirical approach is good in this part, as it is in the rest of his work, his final judgment is as troubling as Mr. Stallknecht's introductory remark. Mr. Larson feels that through Obierika, Achebe has indicated that the man of the future will not be a man of action but a man of thought. Nowhere does the novel or Mr. Achebe imply that the man of thought was absent in Old Ibo society. Nor was the reflective consciousness absent; in fact, Okonkwo was atypical in his time and among his peers for his tragedy derives in part from this predicament. The reflective elder (Obierika and Akuebue in *Arrow of God*) is and was the norm in pre-colonial Africa. So when Mr. Larson says that "one is led to believe within the past eighty years, Ibo society has shifted radically from one extreme to another, from the active Okonkwos to the thinking Obierikas," Mr. Larson is projecting. He is supposing that the activity of mind did not occur in or govern traditional society, that there was a conformism in traditional society, conceivable only to the Euro-American imagination, which precluded thinking and which made every person a mirror reflection of another, except for extraordinary men like Obierika. Obierika, however, was a typical elder.

In chapter 2, Mr. Larson discusses Onitsha market literature and types them "Pamela in Africa," though this study is supposed to use not only Western terminology, but African variants from an African point of view. Mr. Larson gives no additional or alternative African terminology to his "Pamelas" and "Gothics," as he promised in his opening chapter. Assertions are generally unfootnoted. After a brief undocumented history of Onitsha literature, the sources of which he attributes to "a unique series of cultural upheavals," Mr. Larson proceeds to discuss the literary qualities of this genre. He analyses in detail one example of the Onitsha novellas and two novels of Ekwensi including *Jagua Nana* because he rightly sees Ekwensi as belonging to that "school" of African literature. Mr. Larson's analysis is always interesting. Unfortunately, the chapter is marred by the usual flaws: inadequate sociology ("the Nigerian who has left traditional familial ties"), inadequate social psychology (why the drawings on the novellas are of white women); false assertions (proverbs have a more important function in Ibo society than in any othe

African society); and unproven personal estimates where primary sources or statistics are needed.

Analogies with Anglo-American examples tend to obscure the social background and mores of African fiction for the constant references to Defoe, Richardson and Fielding will tend to equate in the reader's mind, the differing expansionist, commercial and economically insurgent period in England with the dissimilar Nigerian situation as it equates the social and economic position and possibilities of the Ibo woman to those of the eighteenth century English woman who had fewer participatory rights and duties in society than the Ibo woman. Not only this, these facile comparisons affect Mr. Larson's appreciation of the *African* drama that is active in the novellas. In being apparently unaware of the powerful economic position and hence social possibilities in traditional times and today, of the Ibo woman, and in particular, the Onitsha trading woman whom Mr. Larson wrongly calls the "Merchant Priestess" for "Princess," he dismisses what he feels is Ekwensi's "glorification of African women" and is obviously puzzled by the fascination with women in Onitsha literature in general. What is new in Onitsha literature is not the economic independence or capacity of the Ibo woman but the new freedom from ethical and social restraints; the freedom from emotional and social responsibilities and a disorderly sexual comportment springing from the pursuit of personal sensual gratification over and above everything else which all together horrify to the point of trauma the consciousness of the didactic authors. Not only is there trauma but psychological stress because these authors approve Westernization while they condemn the malaise it introduces into their society. It is from a concern with disorder—moral, sexual and social—that their condemnatory attitudes spring, because order is at the heart of traditional society. Yet the tension in contemporary Africa is between maintaining that order and embracing, at the same time, the behavior that derives from atomic individualism where only the laws of the state protecting property, not human emotions and interests, restrain the ego's rapacity.

Were Mr. Larson actually criticizing these novellas from an African point of view, he would recognize the socially derived humor which the epistolary style evokes in certain Nigerian

circles and the artistic use that is made of it by African writers like Mr. Achebe; he would not dismiss the age of *Jagua Nana* as irrelevant to the story (for in the U.S. a woman's sensuous life is viewed to be definitely over at forty); nor would he underestimate the pathos deriving from Jagua's inability to have a child at forty after years of prostitution nor mock her attendant moral drive to return to her village to commence a traditionally upright life. All these have meaning and psychological significance from an African's point of view.

In the fourth chapter which is on Amos Tutuola, Mr. Larson's discussion of Time, Space and Description is at times brilliant and always ingenious. It is clear however, that he cannot deal with the ontological gap or with Yoruba cultural symbols such as the Thumb Child. It is in fact striking that Mr. Larson makes no use of Yoruba sources and authorities, nor does he use the most important literary studies which have been made on Tutuola apart from Harold Collins. He does not employ insights of the Yoruba linguistician, Afolayan, on Tutuola's prose when a linguistic understanding is mandatory to the appreciation of Tutuola's stylistics and literary effect.. Statements deriving from a lack of information necessarily recur in such a work. Tutuola's post-Drinkard writing is not totally uninfluenced by the West; the simultaneous occurrence of a tale in Dahomey and in Tutuola does not attest to "the permeation of the folktales from culture to culture" but to the existence of Yorubas in Dahomey and Western Nigeria.

From chapter five onwards, Mr. Larson covers safer because more technical grounds. Ngugi is discussed as an example of the "situational" novel. In an originally contributive chapter to African fictional criticism, Mr. Larson discusses characters and modes of characterization in African fiction. This reviewer feels *Mine Boy* is not important enough to represent the writing of Peter Abrahams or to measure up in maturity to the other novels under discussion. In chapter seven, Mr. Larson discussed in close detail *Le Regard du Roi* (The Radiance of the King) which he claims has been considered "the greatest of all African novels" by "several" unnamed critics. For Mr. Larson, the novel is an example of "assimilated negritude" which is de[illegible] implicitly as the deft weaving in of African cultural [illegible] into a work in such a manner that the reader is unawar[illegible]

presence and to such an extent that ultimately the writer produces "a more intellectualized concept of African traditions, values and life." This is a useful definition and insight.

Mr. Larson's preoccupation with racial harmony and subsumption infuses his impassioned and sometimes beautiful analysis and interpretation of *Le Regard du Roi*. Yet the thrust of these emotions, the direction of this subsumption becomes suspect in the very next chapter where he discusses Lenrie Peters's *Second Round* as a West African Gothic which is "universal" because of "its very limited concern with Africa." Universality is apparently equated with being Western (pp. 229-30). It is possible for Mr. Larson to conceive a universality which excludes Africa. A little more information on the social history and sociology of Sierra Leone would have revealed to Mr. Larson the reasons for the literary differences in Dr. Peters's novel.

Too short and finally dishonest shrift—of one paragraph length—is made in this chapter, of the contemporary "black aesthetics" movement in Third World criticism which is *not* demanding that a frontal attack be made on the *race* situation or that a writer protest since the psychology of protest is now dépasse. What is being demanded is that Third World literature or writing reflect the objective condition, the reality of the existence of the oppressed who may comprise whites and browns. No true and rich representation of their lives as lived and their situation will fail to encompass, contain, and signal directly or indirectly, the oppression which is at the crux of their existence and which affects their reality immediately or remotely. The concomitant aesthetic demanded, therefore, is one that reaches towards their material, psychological and emotional liberation.

Hence, liberation, not race or protest is felt to be one pressing and irrefutably necessary element in the black aesthetic if human beings are to assert and define their human dignity. Mr. Larson, on the contrary, believes in works which "try solely to be a work of art" independently of human culture and existential condition. In fine, his inadequate discussion of the Third World aesthetic reduces these serious aesthetic and intellectual considerations to absurdity. The concept of universality is not being rejected by certain black schools of

thought because it is Western or white in conception. It is under attack because universality in Western scholarship is usually a synonym or euphemism for Western as Mr. Larson proceeds to corroborate in his discussion of Lenrie Peters.

In the final chapter, Mr. Larson declares the fiction of Soyinka and Armah to be the novels of the future because their authors ignore the past(!) to solve "present day social and political problems"; and because they treat Western themes such as individualism and the alienation of the artist, using modern Western techniques and modes of experimentation. When Mr. Larson's study ends with a sigh—so much like the reversal of Clarence, being subsumed into the bosom of the King in *Le Regard du Roi* . . . "How surprising we might conclude that with Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah, the African novel as a literary genre now moves into the mainstream of Western tradition, yet how even more surprising, we might think, that this did not happen long before now"—the irritants crystallise. The facets declare a belief in a literature in vacuo; the myth of a necessary evolutionary progress from a different traditional literature to the mainstream of Western tradition; the movement from a mindless African past to a "civilised" thinking present. And at the heart of the crystal is the shining faith that we are all Americans under the skin; that given time, Western education and the inevitable erasure of cultural aberrations, we shall all walk into our Anglo-American inheritance: of individualism, monogamy and the atomic family; free enterprise and free competition; the collapse of emotional order and a superficial challenge of all forms of authority; masculinity neurosis and the loss of most human moorings—all of which, of course, are not culturally determined.

THE CROCODILE

By Vincent Eri
The Jacaranda Press, Papua, New Guinea

This novel is clear, eloquent, and solid, a masterpiece of description. Accurate and sensitive in the rendering of natural scenic variations as well as in rendering the fluctuations of human emotions, whether of love, or fear, fear of sin, or a dream or a hallucination and terror, the terror of an eerie night or of a panic-stricken village during an air-raid, its inspiration must well up from deep springs.

For example, here is the opening.

> "The *harsh rustle* of the sago palms contrasted sharply with the *slow gentle swaying* of the coconut palms." (p. 1)

But we are not in the highly romanticised and effervescent surrounding of the South Sea Islands or the Caribbeans familiar to foreigners through Hollywood.

No, here we are firmly entrenched in a real village with real people. We have a real hero, who is not fairytale stuff, but by quick transitions of an accomplished writer's pen and mind, moves from school to youthfulness and early manhood. He graduates to status of "carrier" for the white overlord, soon after he has attained native status through marriage and the birth of a tender young son. He tries to erase the unpleasant tedium of an arduous day of canoe paddling on a river patrol with an intolerant white bully by imagining sexually pleasant sensations in a dream.

> 'By the Creek a pretty young girl was lathering her body with soap. Hoiri threw away his RAMI and walked up to her. Miraculously he felt no shyness, and she didn't show any inclination to escape. "You must be starved for it," she said simply. "Well, what do you expect when my wife has just had a baby?" "Come here! Let me soap you up, this is probably the best rubbing down you have ever had.)) "The touch of your hand makes my hair stand." "What, don't you like it?" "No, I mean it is giving me a nice feeling." "You needn't thank me for that. I'm only being helpful." Her hands moved about his abdomen

carelessly. He felt himself growing taller. "Look, let's get on with it. Why don't we leave the conversation part for afterwards?" He pulled her towards him. She followed the direction of his hands willingly. Hoiri felt himself sliding steadily into her, forcing the soap out. Just then there was a violent pull at his legs. "Wake up, cousin," shouted Meraveka.' (p. 88)

There everything dissolves, the pleasant focus of dream is scattered by day-break. Such a realistic touch could only be given by a sensitive writer who understands the uses of therapy for a tired body and soul.

It is thus with sure, authentic touches here and there, throughout the eight chapters of the novel, that Mr. Vincent Eri demonstrates, vindicates and deserves his citizenship of Papua. He has, with this first published novel of those parts, dispelled the journalistic fiction and exotic myth about primitivity and superstition with which journals, and even Time Magazine, recently, clothe such islands as Haiti and Papua, New Guinea.

Here is true fiction, coming from a sympathetic and understanding imagination. For Mr. Eri is keenly aware of his primary readership: intelligent and humane people the world over who have subsisted thus far on the mythical diet about bizarre black folk on those islands. Specially is he aware of the white Australian masters. The novel is as much education for them as for the hero, Hoiri, in his effort to penetrate the arrogant soul of a white man through mother-wit retorts and questions.

Therein, lies the spine of the entire novel. First the personal growth, development and maturity of Hoiri, and second the factors that prevent meaningful communion between the black and the white races.

This latter, the racial question, is usually a heated issue. Black American writing on the subject sizzles with the heat of molten lava erupting from centuries of dormant subservience. The symbols in such writing are usually apocalyptically fiery, as Mr. James Baldwin or Eldridge Cleaver or Leroi Jones has shown

But Mr. Eri writes about race with a sensitive equan

Yet his attitudes are clear, his tone unmistakably derisive

white man's pretentious poses. He is not bitter or satiric,

he is disparagingly ironical, a master of the back-handed compliment which deflates whatever it seems to commend.

For instance, Hoiri receives news of his wife's death. The patrol sergeant, Latu, an indigene, seeks permission of the white officer for Hoiri to go home. But the white man pooh-poohs the idea in very supererogatory mocking terms:

> . . . You want the whole patrol called off. Yes, that's what it is. And how cunning . . . I wasn't wrong thinking you were a cunning bastard . . . (p. 100)

The superior understanding expected from the "super" race having failed, ironically, it is the despised black who shows wisdom.

> 'Friends, you've all heard and seen what has happened. This patrol officer is new, besides being young. He is still wrapped in the cocoon of his white-man thinking. The colours of his eyes have not changed to enable him to see our way of life, which is outside the cocoon.' (p. 101)

Several instances of such reversed and ironical portrayal abound. A young Australian soldier during the war gives Hoiri, as his friend, tins of rice and beef, a Government official accuses Hoiri of stealing. While a carrier during the war, Hoiri makes toys and earns by his skill and patience over fifty pounds off American troops, but the Angau officer impounds the money. In each case the excuse for exploitation is the same: natives are no good bastards; undeserving, except of the pittance of tobacco and sugar.

Again, ironically, true wisdom the kind of temperament which is needed to ameliorate situations, stems from the native. It is during the hunt for the crocodile which had snatched his young pretty wife that Hoiri voices his intelligence. He jumps down from a tree, a spear, bow and arrows in his hands, steadies himself, and muses:

> 'How nice it would be if people cooperated in the affairs of their day-to-day living like the two feet of a man. . . . One foot does not boast of holding up the rest of

> the body longer than the other. If one is maimed, then the other accepts the responsibility without a grudge.' (p. 110)

The truth about the relationship of the races in that part of the world, however, is that those who stand to gain, those colonizers who apportion the pittance to the native, would never see a change in the status quo. Without indulging in overt moralizing the author underlines the crux of the matter. The problem, really, is that:

> '. . . The last thing white men want is that the black become their equals.' (p. 94)

even though it should be clear to anyone with just a modicum of decent shame and moral qualm that the wealth white men enjoy so proudly is not really theirs alone. The white man's real achievement then is to destroy what should be the organic relationship between the races. Not even integration of efforts and forces during the war against Japan teaches the white man any truth.

But Mr. Eri's criticisms are never just partial barbs against the white man. His hero, Hoiri, is equally critical of his fellow indigenes, especially the evil sorcerers who spirited away his wife. If only those people too reckoned with the retributive powers of the ancestors, or with the organic necessity of reciprocal good manners between citizen and citizen, then the world would be a better place for everybody.

It is clear therefore how gracefully and sanely balanced the novel is. It gives the foreigner encyclopaedic information about commerce, education and history of the tribe, about the vegetation, and village life; about marriage customs and rituals. Philosophically there are religious juxtapositions of an inexorable spirit world and a Christian superimposition by Missionaries. With all this, Mr. Eri tells his readers that those islanders are real people, people who try to grapple with the fascinations, mysteries and pleasures of life in its various phases of war and peace, just like most other communities.

In so faithfully re-presenting fictionally, the traditional, transitional and modern life of the community in Papua, Mr. Vincent Eri has done worthy service to Literature. For us here

in West Africa he is a collaboration between the Chinua Achebe of the trilogy and the Elechi Amadi of *The Concubine*. That is, while he shows how a people's way of life was impacted upon by that of an insensitive colonizer, he also depicts the effects of those inexorable forces in the land which are so elemental they beat the most rational analysis and so fail to put life under simple rubrics like "tragic" or "absurd."

n Contributors

novelist and short story writer. He has also recently a book of poems, CHRISTMAS IN OEMS. He is at present a Visiting Professor at usetts, Amherst.

self: " . . . was born in Eastern Nigeria and has around in West Africa, Europe and America. Harvard Square, U.S.A."

born in Onitsha and is at present in the United ppeared in a number of periodicals and he has ok of poems, AFFIRMATIONS.

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Contributors

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ANNOUNCEMENT

We are glad to announce that OKIKE is returning to Nigeria this summer after an absence of four years. Its new address will be:

P.O. Box 53
Nsukka
Anambra State
Nigeria

We take this opportunity to thank our many readers and friends in the United States for their help and patronage during these years. In particular our gratitude goes to the W. E. B. DuBois Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst for giving us shelter, and to the Ford Foundation whose grants saved us from the worst pressures of these inflationary times.

We look forward to many creative years for OKIKE in its native soil of Nigeria and continuing friendship with our readers and friends abroad.

Although there are contributions in this number from other parts of Africa and elsewhere, the focus is primarily on writing from eastern Africa. The next issue will focus in a similar manner on southern Africa.

Editor

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Abdi Sheik-Abdi

THE MAN WHO SHOT THE SKY

In the beginning the Heavens and the earth were not so far apart. Man's prayers weie answered without delay. The life-giving rains were more frequent and one had a greater sense of security, having the bright sky so close overhead. Then man started sinning against his Maker and for every transgression the sky receded in proportion. A sorrowing man's arrow finally drove the sky out of human reach. That distant blue mirage had once been a comforting canopy over man's head. Curse be upon the offending Midgan's arrow.

There is a flat, grassland region between the Eastern Coast and the town of Galkayo in Central Somalia inhabited by a tribe of men known as the Midgo. These are people who have not been affected by modern civilization. They live simply, dress minimally, and herd no cattle or sheep as the rest of the people in the region do. The Midgo subsist on wild berries and roots, supplemented with venison and fowl, ostrich meat being the highest prized delicacy. The Midgan's tools consist of bows and arrows and a simple snare which is set by attaching it to a flexible branch on one end and anchoring the other looped end with a pressure-triggered device hidden in the ground and covered with dry leaves and grass. The Midgan adult invariably dons a piece of tanned hide worn around the hips, the women often going about their business bare-breasted while children under fifteen run free, stark naked.

The Midgan is a no nonsense, tight-lipped species of man who minds his own business and hardly crosses the more numerous Aji's path. Conversely, the Aji (gentile) has a certain grudging respect for the Midgan on account of his proverbial temper. It is not unknown for a Midgan to shoot a man for no greater provocation than a mocking look.

Aside from his temper, a Midgan's choice of diet is his mos unique characteristic. It is believed that early in man's deve opment, after Adam's seed had populated the earth with the

progeny, each nation was bidden to choose its own staple diet among nature's bounty. Some elected to herd sheep and goats and live off their milk and meat; others preferred to herd cattle; some chose the humped camel which not only yielded life-sustaining milk and meat but also provided them with transportation; others among Adam's seed were content with tilling the land. But the Midgo would have none of these tiresome occupations. They would rather eat whatever they found wherever they found it. A hungry Midgan has no qualms about what he eats. He eats not only wild berries and roots dug up with his bare fingernails but also the putrid flesh of dead animals left on the open field by satiated savage beasts or by the haughty Aji who never touches meat that hasn't been prepared according to Islamic custom. The most odious thing about the Midgan's diet, however, has to be his much cherished ostrich meat. The offensive odor peculiar to this bird's fat is enough to make an Aji woman swoon. Despite his indiscriminate taste, the Midgan does occasionally crave Aji food: the meat and milk of domesticated herds.

Once a Midgan was sitting in front of his grass hovel thinking how wonderful it would be if he killed a full-grown ram and feasted on its fat-rich flesh. His wife, meanwhile, sat by him preparing a breakfast of ostrich eggs, while he himself was busy making arrows for his bow. Even though the Midgan was a formidable hunter with his bow and arrows, the surest way of landing a kill was with snares. But one had to lure the deer to the snares somehow. And though the Aji did not like the practice, the best way of luring game was to set fire to a portion of the grasslands and lay snares there the following season after tender shoots of grass had begun to sprout. Deer found the new pasture growing upon fired soil most irresistible.

"Woman," began the Midgan as he put the finishing touches to the feather of an unusually straight arrow which he had just made.

"Yes," answered his bare-breasted wife promptly.

"How would you like to take a sip of the rich oil extracted from the fat tail of a ram?"

"But dear, where will you find such a ram?" inquired she, matter-of-factly.

"This very day, I will start a fire in a certain patch of grazing land I know," he proceeded pensively. "After rains pack the

ashes," continued he, "there will sprout tender shoots of grass among which I will lay my snares. Deer will be caught in these snares. After we feast on their venison, I will tan the hides and from them make water-skins and other articles which I will barter for a black-headed ewe among the Aji. This ewe will bear me a ram which will be cared for by you until it attains full maturity. Then we will make a feast of it and you will know what domesticated meat is like. Its fat tail will yield a lot of rich oil for us. Now how would you like to take the first sip of that oil?"

"You have a sip of it, dear," his wife responded.

"No, you have the first sip," the Midgan insisted.

"No. You are the hunter. Have the first sip," his foolish wife persisted, mule-headedly.

"Don't argue with me," cried he in exasperation, "I want you to have the first sip!"

"No, Horrif. You are the man of the house. Have the first sip—." Oh, why insist so, fated woman!

"I say you have the first sip!" cried the Midgan irately. His brows contracted and his nostrils quivered as he spoke. Any sensible person would have recognized these ominous signs. But his unwary wife wasn't even looking.

"No, dear. Really," continued she teasingly, "you must do the honors . . ."

It is alleged that when a Midgan gets angry he begins to exude a strong odor which can be detected from afar. The peculiar odor of the Midgan's sweat is attributed to the ostrich fat he relishes. This angry Midgan was now giving off his peculiar odor which soon reached his unwary wife's nostrils. She quickly looked up in terror, but before she could open her mouth to mollify her husband's ire she felt a sharp pinching sensation just above her breast and a ghastly "whooshing" sound fell upon her ears. At the same instant she staggered backwards as her jaw fell and her husband's image became a blurred dot on the horizon.

The Midgan's bowstring quivered, making a mournful tune as his wife uttered a mild reproachful gasp. A Midgan's poisoned arrow could do its deadly work in a matter of seconds. His wife was dead before the rash man realized the enormity of his action. He meant no harm to her whom he valued above all. Only she should have known better than t[illegible] argue with him.

The grief-stricken Midgan whirled about like a mad dog seeking after its own tail. Beating his bare feet against the ground wasn't going to bring back his dead wife. But it was imperative that he do something. It wasn't like a Midgan to sit idly, brooding over a misfortune. He laid another arrow across the wood of his bow; then looked fiercely about him, searching for a worthy opponent upon whom he might vent his anger. But there was only his dead wife and some low bushes growing around his grass hovel. He wished there was some rapacious beast, such as a hungry lioness, with which to do battle (death was preferable to the guilt-ridden lonely life that awaited him), but there was no living thing in sight besides himself. The sun, large and resplendent, had just emerged from the encircling horizon. The sky hung pregnantly, a fathom or so overhead. The stars, appearing large and bright even in broad daylight, bore wide smiles on their moonish faces. Their complacence was more than the sorrowing Midgan could bear. He took aim at one conspicuous star which seemed to be particularly amused by his sad antics. With a demonic cry he let the arrow fly at the Heavens. But the missile never hit its intended target. The sky receded at a prodigious speed as if unwilling to come in close contact with an earthly object. It is believed that the arrow has been flying heavenward ever since while the sky continues to recede at an astronomical pace. With the shooting of that fatal arrow the life-giving rains have gotten scantier and very few prayers have been heard in Heaven since.

Andrew Salkey

POEMS

LION TAMERS

(For the revolutionary women fighters in the Eritrean Liberation Movement)

All the world is underdeveloped, and the proof is the existence of the Third World —Josué de Castro

I'm looking at a group picture of you,
published in a safe Sunday newspaper,
spread wide on a family table,
thousands of tightwire miles away
from your lion-hunting silence.

Your faces are all set against
the world's hill and gully
and your own flat savannah,
reported only during every other drought,
every other famine, every other genocide,
across the centuries of leonine serfdom,
across the uselessness of the burnt grass,
across the stench of the stinging wind.

You sit down now with your re-educated men,
the unity healing the ancient divisions
with touching elbows and shoulders,
locking out the crippling solitude
with matching dreams and actions.

At this distance, even I can hear
the dying swish of the useless tail,
the hereditary roar dropped to a moan,
the old lion house crumbling away,
the new land rising slowly in your eyes.

APRIL '71

(In memory of Josina Machel—8/10/45-4/7/1971)

You wouldn't leave Mozambique;
you simply wouldn't leave.
April had to take you away.

Instead of going abroad
on your hard-earned scholarship,
you went to Cabo Delgado,
Niassa and anywhere else
Frelimo sent you.

You wouldn't leave Mozambique;
you simply wouldn't leave.
April had to take you away.

April had to take you away,
though you were cheek and shoulder
in the long struggle in the bush,
facing the burning day and the uncertain night.
April had to take you away.

You wouldn't leave Mozambique;
you simply wouldn't leave.
April had to take you away.

What you've left behind
has grown deeper than the northern gorge,
broader than the early confidence
of the solitary walking teachers,
stronger than Cabora Bassa.

You wouldn't leave Mozambique;
you simply wouldn't leave.
April had to take you away.

Those who remember you
remember you walking, fighting
and making Mozambique come true;

those who remember you
remember the April killer, too.

You wouldn't leave Mozambique;
you simply wouldn't leave.
April had to take you away.

THE MAN FROM NEW KENYA

Looking for all the world
like a loyal Kikuyu,
misshapen felt hat,
cast-off jacket,
settler's tennis slacks,
a glint of urban hope
in his eyes, he said,
with lancing regret,
"The land's still not ours."

Melvin B. Tolson

From THE LION AND THE JACKAL

Introduction

1939 was a critical year in world history. The pact between Hitler and Stalin was a cruel surprise ominously increasing the fear of the spread of fascism.

In 1939 Melvin B. Tolson completed his novel, *The Lion and the Jackal*, a portion of which is here published for the first time, and "Dark Symphony," the poem which won first place in the National Poetry Contest sponsored by American Negro Exposition in Chicago. Tolson's first significant recognition as a poet.

In 1944 Tolson published his first book of poems, *Rendezvous with America*. In 1947 he was appointed poet laureate of Liberia. In 1953 he responded to this honor with his book length poem, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*. The following stanza indicates the meaning of Liberia for Tolson.

LIBERIA?
No waste land yet, nor yet a destooled elite,
No merry-andrew, an Ed-dehebi at heart,
With St. Paul's root and Breughel's cheat:
You are
The iron nerve of lame and halt and blind,
Liberia and not Liberia,
A moment of the conscience of mankind!

In 1965 Tolson published *Harlem Gallery*, his best-known book, which caused Karl Shapiro to write: "A great poet has been living in our midst for decades and is almost totally unknown, even by the literati, even by poets."

Nathan Huggins groups Tolson with Ellison, Bellow, and Malamud as he comments: "Through their works, the reader is taken through the 'province' into the world at large. Also, art as craft defies parochialism. For there is pure pleasure in the discovery of a brilliant artistic conception, well constructed

so that it holds together and works. Melvin Tolson's *Harlem Gallery* gives us such delight, independent of its ethnic center."

The following excerpts of *The Lion and the Jackal* evidence Tolson's early attempt to dramatize and strengthen the common political interests of the American and Ethiopian peoples. Tolson's experience as an Afro-American caused him to write of this fascist threat to Ethiopia with personal and racial intensity.

Robert Farnsworth

* * *

I

At the front of the coach sat two Italian nuns. One was a big-bosomed woman with a hairy lip. As the war chant surged in the outer night, she gazed straight ahead, a belligerent smirk on the white solid of her face. Beside her shrank a swarthy companion, luminous-eyed, with quivering nostrils and long eyelashes that fluttered up and down. They were on a strange and belated mission to bring back the little mulatto daughters of Italians who had gone native in that land of burnt faces.

The fragile hands of the younger woman flitted to and fro across the black folds of her lap. "Sister Mary," she whispered, "oh, why should we rob these poor people of their land and freedom?"

A scowl cracked the frozen white face. "That is the business of one greater than we, Sister Naomi."

"And who is that?"

"Il Duce!"

Sister Naomi laughed nervously a laugh like the tinkle of vesper silver. "How can we convert the natives to the Son of Man when we practice such inhumanity to man?"

The big woman shuddered. "You remember what happened to Father Debesri?"

Sister Naomi's eyes dilated. "The horror! How can anyone forget *that*?"

"The New Order is born in travail." The square of the big woman's jaws set like granite in a Roman quarry.

"One finds oneself on an island of fears."

"Oh, ye of little faith."

"Hate begets hate, Sister Mary."

"*Si, si*, Sister Naomi. Didn't the black savages murder our beloved countrymen at the Ualual Wells?"

The swarthy woman's voice peaked in mocking laughter. "Didn't Il Duce's own *Popolo d'Italia* boast that the Ethiopian dead tripled those of the Italian?"

"What else could one expect in a meeting between civilization and barbarism?"

"*Per l'amor di Dio*, Sister Mary! Pray tell me what our soldiers were doing in Ethiopian territory?"

The big woman's mouth popped open like the mouth of a stranded bass. "Do you realize what you're saying?"

"I got the facts from Father Debesri himself."

"That *diavolo* of a man?"

"It was the hypocrisy of the Ualual incident," said Sister Naomi, passionately, "which turned Father Debesri against Caesar Africanus for ever. Father Debesri said the Turin *Stampa* printed the map showing Ualual in Ethiopia. Then the Italian maps deposited with the League of Nations showed the wells at least forty miles inside Ethiopia. Later these maps were stolen from the League Library by ———"

"Sister Naomi!"

"Father Debesri said such infamy must rise against us like the ghost of Banquo!" The fragile hands fluttered to her bosom. "And yet we're on our way to Addis Ababa!"

"On a French train."

"Did you see the hate in the faces of the natives at the stations along the way, as they looked at us?"

"What of it? Aren't they barbarians and black?"

"*O Dio*, Sister Mary, aren't they human?"

"I suppose our strange journey, since war is what it is, must be a trial to a virgin." Sister Mary bit her lower lip and paused to let the acid of her sarcasm seep in. "But what about the little girls we're trying to rescue?"

"It seems to me they should be left with their mothers, anyway."

"Their mothers?" Sister Mary quaked with mirth. "Only Omniscience knows where their mothers are. A sow doesn't always keep up with her litter."

"Since the war was plotted years ago, the girls should've been got out."

"The Italian consul at Addis Ababa did the best it could. Those in the convent school are already gone. The late ones are from the interior."

The express jolted and creaked as it dragged up an acute grade into the cavernous hills. The war cries of the Danakils billowed and echoed like the monster roar of a jungle pack.

Sister Naomi shuddered. "They say Haile Selassie keeps lions in the Palace."

"Imagine a Roman holiday among Blacks!" A humorless grin twisted the blond face. "O *Dio*, the poor Whites!"

Sister Naomi said sharply, "The Romans threw foreigners to the lions for much less than robbing the land and enslaving the people."

"Our concern is not the lions, Sister Naomi, but the future mothers of our African empire. *Viva il Re*!"

"May the Virgin Mary bless the motherless . . ."

"Sister Naomi, I do hope you do not remind them of their motherless fate. Of course, they *are* bastards. But their Italian fathers did only what pioneers have always done."

"And what's that, Sister Mary?"

The big woman laughed, "O *Dio*, my innocence! In building an empire, the pioneers have to take their women where they can find them."

"*Molto serio*, Sister Mary," said the little nun. "Great is the pity."

"I am a true Roman," the big woman declared, her gray eyes ablaze with arrogance. "My ancestors come from Perugia, not a thousand feet above the Tiber—a city of Cathedral barracks and moated battlements and dashing *condottieri*!"

"The slaughterhouses of fiefs and overlords!" exclaimed Sister Naomi, in disgust.

"Si, si," said the other, drunk with the glories of a frescoed past, "traitors were hacked to pieces and their heads hung around the square."

"In order to revive these glories, we must steal land and beget children!"

"If you had met Signora Teresa Loffredi, the champion *Madre Prolifica*, as I did one afternoon," said Sister Mary

"you would not talk as you do. Signora Loffredi is the mother of twelve; and although her husband is without work and her children are hungry, she is happy that another Roman baby comes to her little family."

"O *Dio!*" cried Sister Naomi.

II

Near the middle of the coach sat John McKnight, rawboned, prematurely gray, with the fine wrinkles at the eyes and nose indicative of the man who habitually screws up his face in seasons of thought. For four years he'd served in the Rome office of the *Star-Gazette*, but last month he'd been expelled for writing dispatches Il Duce considered offensive to the good name of Fascist Italy. Near the correspondent slouched M. Caillavet, unkempt, sardonic.

"Ours is a ringside seat," said the Frenchman.

The American's face loosened in a wry smile. "I heard in Paris that you'd settled in Djibouti to write the Great French Novel."

"Monsieur, what's the American proverb about a fool changing his mind? In France, when a man says 'second floor' he means 'first.' And maybe that's how my Paris friends confused you, an American, just as they confused Monsieur Woodrow Wilson before you, at Versailles. Two days ago I received a cablegram from *Echo de Bordeaux*. I've agreed to do a series of articles for Genevieve Equem, one of the few human beings I've known. Then, too, I have the artist's urge for a tremendous climax. What could be more stupendous than closing the memoirs of Henri Caillavet with the death march of Europe?"

"The death march of Europe?" exclaimed McKnight.

"Oui, monsieur. The invasion of Ethiopia is the first movement. Listen to the drums. The staccato of machine guns you cannot hear. That part of the *allegro* is being played now beyond Passo Gaschiorchi." The French cynic took a long draught of brandy. "Have a swig, monsieur?"

"No," said the American in the French of Harvard. "There's excitement enough."

"Excitement enough? My dear fellow, wait until you hear the scherzo with its bombers and tanks and gas!"

"How long do you think the war will last?"

"That's a gamble with the rainy season." With a wave of his bottle, the Frenchman ventured, "Six months."

"Six months?"

Out of the darkness, above the rumble of the train and the whoops of the warriors in the gondola, came a voice of protest. "I take issue, monsieur," said Colonel Jacques.

M. Caillavet turned impatiently. "The issue was settled, monsieur, in the bloody legend of Cain and Abel."

Colonel Jacques leaned forward, and his words shot across the intervening space: "Bombing deserts and forests is foolish; *n'est-ce pas*? Can you gas an enemy when you don't know where he is? What good is a tank against a guerilla?"

Abba Micah Soudani listened, unaware that he was under the benevolent scrutiny of Colonel Jacques, whose every word was aimed indirectly at the Amharic, even as the cue of a billiard expert strikes one ball to pocket another.

"*Quand meme*," said M. Caillavet, "are there not towns—Addis Ababa, Ahrar, and Adowa?"

Recalling an article in the London Times, McKnight said, "Their inhabitants are doubtless in the eucalyptus groves by now."

Colonel Jacques chuckled, "Monsieur, to conquer Ethiopia, the fascists must conquer the unholy trinity—thirst, hunger, disease."

Abba Micah smiled into his beard. Here was a White who knew the land of burnt faces. The odd palaver of these Whites gave him a camel steal to chew and kept his mind from becoming drunk on the *talla* of a bard's fancy.

M. Caillavet waved a deprecating hand, then held his bottle aloft before mouthing it. "Monsieur, a Caesar must give *les miserables* bread or circuses. Man is a wolf! This is the dead bone Il Duce dragged from the catacombs of the Caesars. The result is the circus *Africanus*. It is easier to supply than bread."

The colonel agreed with the proverb of the Caesars, but he cut in with mock severity, "Monsieur, what has that to do with the point of contention?"

M. Caillavet went on doggedly: "Now a circus must have equipment as well as performers; *n'est-ce pas?* When I was in Eritrea last month I saw endless donkey water-trains, huge bags of thalers, caravans of supplies, shiploads of stevedores and artisans, corps of the Benito Mussolini Engineers putting up hangars and airports."

Colonel Jacques brushed those facts aside determinedly. "Disease kills more Whites in the tropics than hunger or thirst."

"Among the slaves of fascism," retorted M. Caillavet, in the facile manner of the intellectual snob, "none renders a service greater than science. I know myself that Sir Aldo Castellani, the specialist in tropical diseases, has been busy for Il Duce since 1932."

Stirred by unpleasant memories of his expulsion from Rome, John McKnight said: "I got in bad with Il Duce over this very thing. A Swiss doctor from Berbera told me that Sir Aldo Castellani had sent tons of quinine and serum tubes into Eritrea, established hospitals and laboratories, inoculated tens of thousands of fascist soldiers at Massawa and Mogadiscio. In a dispatch to my New York paper I said this indicated Il Duce had cast the die for war in spite of his talks for peace."

M. Caillavet shook his head understandingly. "The British trained Castellani well in Uganda and Ceylon. He is now ready to combat typhoid, cholera, gangrene, malaria and snake bite in Ethiopia."

This revolution brought pain into the eyes of Abba Micah, as he realized for the first time the magnitude of the fascist preparations. For a few moments he felt as if the passage of air had stopped in his lungs. And then he closed his eyes, while the bard's fancy sped back to a Byzantine painting of the Christ, nailed to a cross between thieves, on Golgotha, the Mountain of the Skull. It was a picture done in sombre colors by his young friend, Balachjo, on the wall of the Coptic church at Adowa. The Christ was black. Abba Micah Soudani gripped the old English pistol and the Chinese dagger in his girdle; and this choked his impulse to groan aloud. He remembered the words of Lidj, now in jail in Djibouti: "The difference between master and slave is a gun." Then he sighed deeply and relaxed. Would this poky train ever reach Addis Ababa? Yes, the Whites were still arguing. He was sorry he had let his fancy wander. A man with a burnt face could pick up many

chunks of meat from the palavers of the Whites. Already he had odd news to give the distressed King of Kings.

Colonel Jacques was saying, "Didn't the guerilla, Abd el-Krim, fight France to a halt?"

"That war almost ruined France," the American observed, with an almost exultant alacrity that puzzled the listening bard.

"France is a bourgeois democracy," said the French cynic, "and therefore two things are certain—freedom of speech and topsyturvydom of blunders."

"You're pro-fascist," said the colonel, bluntly.

"Non, non," protested the Frenchman. "*Nom de Dieu, non!* I am pro-Caillavet."

Silence, in the coach. The drums talked back and forth in the night—north, south, east, west.

M. Caillavet lit a cigarette, leaned back in his seat, inhaled thoughtfully.

"Put that out!" shouted the tight-visaged conductor, who was already in a nervous sweat. "Do you want to get us bombed?"

As he flicked out the match, M. Caillavet sneered, "Monsieur, are you a lover of *liberté, egalité et fraternité?*"

The conductor mopped his brow and scratched his head. "Oui, oui, of course," he mumbled.

"Then you shouldn't be afraid to die," laughed the maudlin Frenchman. "The death of the believer should precede the death of the belief. I heard the legions of fascism singing at Assab, 'We are ready to die for Il Duce.'"

And now the Whites looked up in amazement. Above them towered a shommoed patriarch of a figure with wrathflaming eyes, his magnificent busby of lion mane awry.

"Messieurs," he thundered, trembling as he brandished his old English pistol and Chinese dagger, "I have heard the pros and cons of this invasion that comes like a thief before dawn. Messieurs, there is just one way to conquer Ethiopia!" He paused, breathless, and glowered at the white faces in the shadows.

"Speak, prophet!" yelled M. Caillavet, "Let us hear your gray-bearded wisdom." Then the Frenchman slumped sideways in his seat.

"There is just one way to conquer Ethiopia," Abba Micah Soudani repeated, with a grandeur of dignity that fixed the

eyes of the Whites. "Castrate every man and boy in the land of Ethiopia, so that no sons shall rise, in the rainy season nor the dry, to wreak vengeance in the names of their fathers!"

Not since that memorable Fourteenth of July in his boyhood, when he first heard the surging multitudes marching through the Arc de Triomphe singing the *Marseillaise*, had Colonel Jacques felt the uprush of patriotic sentiment that he experienced now in his callous soul.

"Bravo!" cried McKnight. "I think I shall see Valley Forge —without the ice and snow."

Barry Oduor-Otieno

POEMS

NAIROBI

Blazing sun,
Scorching steel, strike bronze, stone, glass,
Black charcoal ways criss-cross below.
Flashing windshields of crawling cars,
Stretching, snarling, turning, trembling loath
Mile upon mile.

Houses square high,
Low and gabled,
On howling antennae.
Sparse weak trees,
Towers in heaven's distance,
The whole earth slanting,
Now........
Leaning against the windows,
Dropping out of sight,
Work of man's hand.

Wires, lights, spires,
Scream by, groaning, weary in panic.
No liberty statue,
Out of this
Burning their way in diamond-hard sobriety
The upward sky,
Hot, blankblue and static,
Investing everything with gazelle motion.

Faceless crowds.
Voices.
Furious.
Stampeding.
Like hungry Tsavo elephants,

Chasing a water-hole,
Brutal, sardonic, skeptical.
Spring out of the ground,
Pushing trucks.

Waving arms like crossing dread highways,
Vanish into nowhere,
Or erupt out of buildings.
Millions downtrodden,
I for one,
Under this bone-cracking weight.
Days and nights
Filled always everywhere
With the eternal cry of human
Pain and agony.

Be gone!
Insanity and conceit.
Passion resort spots,
Brandy soda cigarettes.
Female flaming hair floor-length robes,
Feeling excitement close to pain,
Mercy of mysteries.
Son's faces answer abjectly to proddings,
Never felt Afro-saxon before,
Tightening the huge hunger-knot,
With backward discoursed smiles,
Bound for prison or "Heaven."

Continent's folk.
Homecoming.
Stepped into a new and healing light,
Too late:
Like the armpits under my arm
Familiar loneliness and contempt,
Mocking smile,
Cosmic, knockabout, macabre, nightmarish.
Formless.
Illogical.
Ironic and bawdy
Miscarried expectations.

THE SIEGE

Bursting torments stopless
Rolling along alleys of fear.
Tunnels of anguish
But tweaking the tail of the nearest devil
Imperceptibly
To abolish fear in fine sands of dreams vain.

Visual nightmare.
Dozing in anguish, singing in pains staying all through
Crawling into false friendship daily.
Like eyelids of rose petals.
The daylight comes pimpled like a yesterday,
Anguish woes.

I remember I remember
Huts afraid, sooty, rusty, sticky and dripping
Quiet petty immense hatreds knead
Miscarried hopes and vanities
Nowhere to put!
The river listless in its hopeless bed
Unsure in its flow emptily.

No despise no disgust.
All dump there, all pedal there
That dismal I am not
But content and yelp
The great dog licks and bites
Devours our skins all of us.

A SOLEMN QUEST

Crippled-bird
Dusk-eyed infirmity,
Unpretentious wounded-tiger.
Drop-by-drop,
I will squeeze this slave blood
Out, out of me.
Deepen my eye
Extend my vanity art
To self-perceived dimensions.
Perforate deaf ears,
Rip apart blind eyes
See and hear.
Supple intelligence
Dissolves incredible sweetness of disposition.
Delusions?
Delicate minor, wan,
But tremendous figurine.

Taban Lo Liyong

SEVEN MEDITATIONS

Famous people operate openly, calling for acknowledgement. Advertising their achievements. Preparing their way for a triumphal entry to Rome. Rome, that city of intense audience. Rome, that city whose gates always opened to the men who are supermen. Rome, the city of the wolves. Rome, the city that embroils its inmates. Rome, the heart of intrigue. Rome, within which Romans quarrel, to rush out of gate and fight themselves, in the colonies, in the provinces, in order to win a march back to Rome in Triumph.

Infamous people, no less than the famous, want their actions acknowledged. Biggs robbed the train in Britain. The accomplishment of the robbery is greater than the punishment to be meted out to the culprits. The fact that an impossible mission has been made possible, is enough gratitude to one's intellect. The fact that one has outwitted a system—foolsproof—and all the brains the system had used to design a protective device, is enough pat on the back. The game is up. One has won in a battle of wits. The winner please step forward.

I did it, you hear me, it was me who did it. Vice or virtue, we leave clues leading to the perpetrator.

* * *

It is a comforting thought. To realize that your benefactor will help himself generously to public acclaim. So that the deed was merely the preliminary act. The audience reaction, the more important undertaking.

It is also more comforting to know that the man who cut your throat is going to squeal to his girl-friend. To know that he would like to justify himself before a fellow human, that he killed you in order to merit her approbation. That he is a hero because he has sinned. With the threat to her that he could do it again, and God help him choose another (not her as victim).

It is comforting to know, that ancients knew the power of an audience. That intelligence has to be passed on. That even a carefully guarded secret has to be dispersed little by little. That nobody has a secret because he has narrated parts of it already. That in our dreams we inform on ourselves. That if a man keeps on talking he will have no more secrets left. That we actually become saner, healthier by unburdening ourselves of secrets. That man's heart is not a dead end for secrets.

That, if you have seen the chief's asinine ear, you will have to confide that fact to a hole, the hole to echo, echo to us all.

* * *

Man prides himself on being exceptional. We are afraid that the others look down upon us. We fear we don't have much to justify ourselves in their company unless we come with gifts.

Friendship is an exchange of gifts. The elephant invited the duiker to visit himself. His mother cooked a sumptuous feast.

On the return visit, an exceptionally wonderful dish was consumed by the elephant. Wishing to congratulate the duiker's mother, the master cook, the elephant inquired about her.

Whereupon the duiker said: "We just ate her. I have no substance with which to acquire meat. I have no other way to repay your hospitality."

Unequal exchange of gifts results from friendship between people without the appropriate currency. The poor duiker has to cook his own mother for him to continue meriting invitation to the elephant's table.

The poor man has to become informer. The woman who becomes a gossip has made her looseness an asset. She goes to extremes listening at keyholes, to come up with a story to justify her presence where it would otherwise have been resented.

When God and Kings were there, we knew where to gossip with profit. Now, with the dispersal of the Godhead, gift bearers clash with one another going left and right.

* * *

For four years (1964-67) I worked at dead heat towards Platonism. Platonism is good enough pillar to immolate one-

self against. At least Plato is religious, intellectual, idealistic. An approbation from Platonists is a very recommendation, in deed. A very good reassurance, in deed. That is a good company to keep. With Platonists you can maintain tension for the duration of a discussion. You poke left and right. You probe here and there. You explore the various twists of an argument. You straighten out the grooves, before they reform again. You withdraw, and re-explore. You plunge inwards. You question. You don't let up. Maintain the inquiry. Ask new questions. Brush side-tracks aside. Forget about the red-herrings. Search and search. Search for the way towards understanding. The proper study of mankind is man (and woman). Man know thyself. So we continue with the Socratic method. A dialogue, so the teacher does not tire himself out unnecessarily. It is not a solo performance. It is a group therapy. Group confrontation. The origin of light is one. But the areas illuminated are many. The way up and the way down is one. So we go on, probing the path of knowledge. On, and on, and on we probed. Hoping to find wisdom at home.

* * *

I climbed the hill of knowledge only to find wisdom not at home. Let down, once more, let down.

Then I came back, wiser, because I had developed wings to fly away with from my enemies and towards areas of concern. I came back wiser, because I had programmed into my computer sense data all the way from here up to there, there, and from there back to here. More technically efficient. With my dèjá vu strengthened.

I came back better of judgement because I had learnt the difference between a process and an end. The hill of knowledge does not exist. Wisdom does not cap its top. But this hill exists in the realm of symbols and you climb it in a state of personal ritual. You want to relate to it. You want to be meaningful to yourself in its vocabulary. So you go to the mountain, and the mountain knows neither you nor Mohammed. It is inert. You bruise yourself against it, for memory's sake, to reinforce certain grooves of thought in your mind.

I came back knowing that there is a figure of speech and reality. A manner of saying things. Taken literally one can go

on from confusion to confusion. Understood at the level of illustrations to point out ways for us, we make more meaning out of it.

* * *

When I was descending the hill of wisdom, I stopped in limbo, rested my head against my folded arms, and saw, as in a dream, the rushing up by those who are still searching for an object of devotion; and those who were busy trampling on temples and cows because they felt cheated that heaven was not at home; and of course there were those, happy in their ignorance, whose understanding, whose curiosity had not yet awakened, who were busy acting, oblivious of the flash news from Jupiter.

I stopped in limbo, and as in a dream, I saw approach me, a figure clad in understanding who told me to write down what I had seen, for the better guidance of those of awakened consciousness, who are likely to sin, and sin worse, through disillusionment.

I took out my pen, and on some leaves he had offered me, I set down on paper, what I had seen, heard, thought, read. To those who are unfamiliar with my progression and retrogression; those who don't know of my anabasis and catabasis. Those who don't know how I regrouped myself after my disintegration, when they read this, they will not know it.

What you are reading was written there in limbo under divine guidance, guidance of the lord of understanding.

"Taban has reached another stage in his advancement," some of you might remark when you see the publication of the other works in the future.

I see the possibility of my past Platonism being punished in my later-day Aristotelianism.

Judge: Taban, you are guilty of this publication.
Taban: It is not I who wrote that.
Judge: What do you mean, you are Taban, aren't you?
Taban: Of course I am Taban. But, your Lordship, the Taban who wrote that is not here with us.
Judge: Do you have a twin brother of the same name?
Taban: No, your Lordship. What I mean is that the Taban who wrote that lived here four years ago.
And he is no longer here with us.

Judge: Where is he?

Taban: He belongs to History. He is up there in Parnassus in Utopia, sitting on the right hand of Jesus and Plato.

Judge: Please explain yourself.

Taban: I can only explain the Taban now standing here before you. That too I shall try, to the best of my ability, because he is shifty, all the time changing, that Proteus. You see this Taban here in the dock, he has changed a lot since he stepped in here. But, your Lordship, I have no commerce with the Taban who is up there, intellecting. I knew him four years ago when he lodged in these mansions. But he has since gone. Gone without leaving a return address. There is no possibility of conjuring him back to life.

Judge: Don't be ridiculous. Here before us is a document written and duly signed by Taban. Did you write it or not?

Taban: With due respect to your Lordship and this august court, sir, I agree that the said document is a product of the house bearing the official stamp of the firm. But, each year, as a rule, we have new tenants moving in and old tenants moving out. You should have been there, your Lordship, at the last changing of guards. How the old crony was spirited away, yes, literally spirited away, squeezed up the chimney in smoke, your Lordship, and the new tenant booked in, rough like a Mussolini peasant.

Now, there have been four occupants of the house since that document was produced and signed. I am the latest occupant, absolutely ignorant of what went on before, and equally oblivious of what will be the fate of the house after I am gone.

I submit, that echoes of past goings-on in the house reverberate to my ears. But the sound is so faint, the memory so blurred that, without the use of an amplifier, transformer, I am virtually hopeless.

In any case, My Lordship, you can't question me about the activities of the former occupants, can you?

Judge: Are you the heir?

Taban: What do you mean?

Judge: Have you the right of ownership to everything in the house?

Taban: Yes and no. Mine is strictly the right of occupancy within temporal limits. But I do not own the scars of yesteryear. I am not the alcoholic whose smell is still present in the house. Three years ago, there was a sexmaniac who went about raping girls and women. I am not he. I am, as you see, myself, sir.

Judge: This has gone on for too long. Who are you?

Taban: I am Taban present and not Taban to come, or Taban past.

Judge: In your former life, did you write this document?

Taban: Difficult to tell. But, I guess so. I recollect it very hazily. But, as your Lordship has learnedly put it, that document was written in my former life.
If I may be of help, Sir, could I suggest that you should have brought up your accusations to that former life, against that former Taban? You do wrong to detain Taban present (who should be otherwise engaged) for the commissions by Taban past.

Judge: Case dismissed. Sergeant, search for former Taban, accuse him for his former acts, in the former court, for my former self to judge.

Sergeant: Should I go in my former or present self?

Judge: Both.

Plato: Ridiculous.

Okot P'Bitek

THREE FABLES

HARE, OGRE AND TORTOISE

Ogre's hair had grown very long and clumsy, so he began to look for a barber. He went from village to village, but many people knew the nature of Ogre's hair and refused to cut it, saying, "We have no razor." When he approached Hare's home Hare said, "Uncle, welcome; what are you looking for?" Ogre told Hare that he was looking for somebody to cut his hair. Hare invited him into the house and immediately set to work.

Now Ogre's hair was a very strange type. When you finish cutting one side of the head and begin the other side, the other side begins growing very fast and long. Hare struggled with his uncle's hair the whole day without making any progress. By the time the cattle were coming home Hare was thoroughly fed up, but there was nothing else to do for fear of being eaten up.

Suddenly Hare shouted "Yes," as if someone had called him, "Just wait, let me first finish my uncle's hair."

"Who called you?" Ogre asked.

"O, it is my wife, but, of course, I cannot go before completing the work."

Ogre said, "Just go and hear what your wife wants to say, but come back as soon as possible." Hare walked out of the house, went to the back and dashed across the plains at a great speed, saying, "What kind of hair is this? If Ogre wants the house let him take it."

After some time Ogre realized that Hare had escaped and went out in hot pursuit, singing in a deep and frightful voice:

> Hii, hii, Hare, hii!
> How dare you run away
> Before completing my hair?
> Hii, hii, Hare, hii!

When Hare heard this song he ran even faster towards Elephant's house. "Elephant, Elephant," he panted, "Help me, help me."

"What is the matter, Hare? Who is chasing you?" Elephant asked.

"Ogre, can you not hear his song? He wants to eat me because I could not finish cutting his hair."

"Go into the house and hide on top of the firewood stack," said Elephant.

Ogre had a walking stick made of thunder and lightning. As he entered Elephant's compound, Ogre threw the stick down; there was a blinding flash and an ear-splitting thunder. "What is that?" Elephant asked.

"Elephant!" Ogre roared, "Elephant, have you seen Hare this way?"

Elephant whispered urgently to Hare, "Go, go quickly, I cannot help you." As Hare escaped through the back door, Elephant said to Ogre, "Yes, I saw him passing here a short while ago."

Hare raced across the grass towards the house of Rhino with Ogre at his tail singing the frightful song:

> Hii, hii, Hare, hii,
> How dare you run away
> Before completing my hair?
> Hii, hii, Hare, hii.

Rhino saw them and told Hare not to come to his place. Hare sped past towards Python's compound and entered the house. When Python heard the voice of Ogre he told Hare to get out quickly. Hippo, Lion, Buffalo and all the other strong animals could not help Hare. Then, almost giving up, Hare limped into the house of Tortoise.

"What is the matter, my friend Hare?"

"O, my friend Tortoise, you must help me." Ogre threw down his walking stick. Lightning flashed, and thunder roared. "Tortoise, Hare is in your house," Ogre shouted.

"So?" Tortoise replied.

"Listen, you little thing, my eyes will soon become red."

Tortoise told Ogre that his eyes will also become red. At once Ogre seized Tortoise and swallowed him. Tortoise took out his hunting knife and started cutting up Ogre's intestines.

Ogre cried with pain. "Hare, please help me, the pain in my stomach is terrible. Make some porridge to soothe my

stomach ache." Hare brought boiling porridge in a large gourd. "Open your mouth wide," he told Ogre. Then he spoke to Tortoise, "Jump on the other side, quick." Hare poured the whole gourd of boiling porridge into the mouth of Ogre, and he died. Then Tortoise came out.

Hare brought a basket of mushrooms to Tortoise and thanked him for saving his life.

HARE AND HORNBILL

Hare and Hornbill were great friends. One day Hare said, "My friend, we have looked for girls all over this land, and there are none that are good enough for you and me. Let us go up to Skyland, perhaps we will find some suitable ones."

Hornbill replied, "I know it is getting a bit late for us to get married, but you know my problem, you know I have this terrible thing!"

"You mean your chronic diarrhoea? But this is nothing to worry about," said Hare. He produced a large cork, and sealed up Hornbill's anus.

The two friends made preparations for the journey, and after packing their luggage and saying good-bye to their families, Hare got on Hornbill's back and they flew up through the clouds into Skyland. There was a big marriage dance; Hare and Hornbill put on their dancing costumes and went straight into the arena. Hornbill danced gracefully, touching the ground lightly and moving his wings up and down to the rhythm of the drums. His neck swayed this way and that way, and his eyes sparkled with love. Hare danced as best he could, but he could not follow the rhythm of the dance, and sang out of tune, and his big ears looked funny. Beautiful girls fought to dance before Hornbill, but none came anywhere near Hare; and when he approached the girls they ran away from him. That night Hornbill slept with a very pretty girl. Hare slept cold.

The next day Hornbill won two girls; Hare again slept cold. The next night when Hornbill was asleep, resting beside his fourth lover, Hare tip-toed into the house and unhooked the cork. Three days accumulation of diarrhoea spewed out and flooded the entire house. The stench rose like smoke and the dancers fled from the arena, and the village was abandoned.

Hornbill sped down from Skyland in great shame leaving Hare behind.

The Skylanders made a rope from grass and tied it around Hare's waist, and gave him a drum. As they let him down they told Hare that they would continue making the rope longer and longer until they heard the sounds of the drum, which would indicate that Hare had reached earth. Hare descended slowly, but on seeing the faint tips of the highest mountain he hit the drum. So the Skylanders dropped the rope. And Hare came hurtling down like a falling stone. But just before hitting the ground he cried to the smallest black ants, "Collect me! Collect me!" Hare hit the ground and disintegrated into many many small pieces. The smallest black ants collected the pieces and put them together again, and Hare became alive.

Today when Hare is running you hear his chest making crackling sounds, because the bones of his chest were not put together very properly.

LOAF, HARE AND TORTOISE

One day Loaf set out to visit his mother-in-law. On his head he put white ostrich feathers. His hunting horn hung on his neck, and a beautiful leopard skin on his back. Loaf carried his battle axe and his spear in one hand, and in the other hand was a rope pulling a big black he-goat, a present for his mother-in-law. On the belt around his waist there hung a small bell. You could hear Loaf coming from a long way off, as the bell went ting, ting, ting.

Hare who was very hungry, saw Loaf coming along the path. He immediately began dancing and singing with joy:

> Loaf is so sweet, sweet, sweet;
> Loaf is so sweet, it must be eaten;
> Loaf you are so sweet,
> Loaf, let a child eat you,
> Loaf, you are so sweet.

When Loaf came near Hare, Hare said, "Loaf, where are you going?"

"I am going to visit my mother-in-law," he replied.

"But Loaf, you are so beautiful, and I am so hungry." Loaf said that that was not his problem. "I am going to eat you."

Hare said, and attacked Loaf at once. Loaf knocked Hare down with his battle axe, and continued with his journey.

When Hare had recovered he ran fast through the grass and cut the path ahead of Loaf and met Bushbuck. "Bushbuck, are you hungry?" Hare asked him.

"I am very hungry, my friend."

"Good," said Hare. "Do you hear the bell down the path?" Bushbuck listened and said he could hear it. "That is Loaf. He is going to visit his mother-in-law, to whom he is taking a fat billy goat. Let us eat them." Bushbuck put his head down with the horns at the ready. And as Loaf was just about to pass Bushbuck charged. Loaf wielded his battle axe and knocked Bushbuck to the ground. "You are big for nothing. Look at you," Hare told Bushbuck, and sped through the grass and cut the path ahead of Loaf, and met Rhino. "Rhino, my friend, are you not hungry?"

"I am dying of hunger; but why do you ask me such a question?"

"Look down the path and listen carefully," Hare said, "Do you hear a bell?"

"Yes, and I can see a beautiful Loaf with a billy goat."

Hare touched Rhino's horn gently and said, "Do you think we can kill him and eat him together with his goat?" Rhino took up position by the side of the path with his sharp long horn at the ready. Hare also hid in the long grass by the side of the path, but in a position where he could witness the great killing of Loaf.

As Loaf reached the place Rhino charged with great vigor; but Loaf hit his head with the battle axe and he fell down dead. "What a weak beast you are, how can you be knocked down by Loaf?" Hare said. Buffalo, Hippo, Elephant were all beaten by Loaf. By now Hare was very tired and very hungry. When he saw mighty Elephant knocked down he gave up any hope of eating Loaf and the billy goat. But he once more ran through the grass and met Tortoise. "Ha, my friend Tortoise, do you know who is coming down the path?" Hare said.

"No," replied Tortoise.

"It is Loaf."

"What about Loaf?" Tortoise asked.

"You mean you are not hungry?" said Hare.

"No, I am not hungry," Tortoise replied.

"But you see Hare has a billy goat which he is taking to his

mother-in-law. Let us kill Loaf, then you will take the goat and I will eat Loaf."

Tortoise hid in the grass with his club lifted up. As soon as Loaf reached the spot, Tortoise hit him on the head and killed him. Immediately Hare seized Tortoise and said, "Tortoise, how do you want me to kill you?"

"But Hare," Tortoise protested, "did you not ask me to kill Loaf so that you may eat him, and I take the goat?"

"That is not the issue now. What I want you to tell me is how you would like to die. Shall I dash you on the rock or throw you in the fire?" Tortoise asked Hare to strike his shell with a piece of rock. He did and there was a spark of fire. "Did you see the fire?" Tortoise asked. "Yes," Hare replied. "Now listen my friend," said Tortoise, "if you really want to kill me do not waste your time dashing me on the rock, because only a big fire will be caused. And you must know that I cannot burn in fire either." Immediately Hare threw Tortoise into the river.

Tortoise dived to the bottom of the river and caught a big fish. He held it up to Hare and said, "My friend Hare, do you want some fish?"

Hare asked, "But why have you not drowned?"

"But I am asking you if you want fish?" Tortoise said. Hare's mouth was watering because of the fish. He nodded his head to show that he wanted it. So Tortoise asked him to come nearer the shore, and he did. Tortoise moved nearer and nearer, holding the fish high. "Here, take it," and as Hare bent over to receive the fish Tortoise grabbed his legs and pulled him into the water, and Hare drowned.

Tortoise took the dead Loaf, the big billy goat and the fish to his home.

chike

Stephen Ndichu

POEMS

DO NOT WEEP FOR ME

Do not weep for me
Daughters of my brother
Wives of my brother
Kinsmen of my brother
Weep for yourselves
Weep for your children
Weep for my brother

A gun
My twin-brother's gun
His finger on trigger
A gun
Pointed at my heart
Aimed at my skull
By my brother
Intent on my golden egg
For being natural
With the gradualness of evolution
I lay golden eggs

My bro . . . .
Tup . . . . tup . . . . tup
This . . . . is . . . . too . . . . much!
My bro . . . .
My . . . . b . . .
My . . . .
M . . . .
. . . .

I'm the layer of golden egg
I never die
I go
  but
I return
Terror!

I come to live with you
To sup with you
Have no peace
Slayer of brother
For every human face you see
Have no rest
For every blade of grass touched by wind
Have no peace
For every stone you lay your foot on
Have no rest
I come to dine with you
Terror!

REFUGEE

A man running at dawn
A man fleeing at break o' new day
A woman screaming at dawn
A child running at break o' new day
A child fleeing at dawn
A black man
A black woman
A black child
Running, fleeing at break o' new day
which is everyday
From
Black men
Black women
Black children

Peter Nazareth

DEPARTURE

George Kapa drove to the airport to see David D'Costa off. There had been stories two weeks ago that the buses of emigrants were stopped at the various road-blocks and robbed. George could not stand to see these buses; they reminded him of the Jews in Europe being carted off to Hitler's concentration camps to their deaths. But the comparison was not apt: the East Indians were actually being saved from death. At least, those of them who were not so poor that they had to travel by train to the coast of Mozania, from where they would go by ship to India. According to press reports from Mozania, when the trains stopped at some stations, the soldiers went in and raped the women and girls, beat up the men, and stole the few possessions they were allowed to take.

George could not understand why the foreign papers kept saying that East Indians were hated fanatically by the Damibians and that the General had gained in popularity with his shrewd decision to expel them. The foreign press had printed photos of Damibians dancing with joy when the General announced his expulsion. Well, one could always get photos of Africans dancing and say that they were dancing for this or that reason. This was an old game of the colonialist press. In fact, whenever George saw these buses passing, he was so ashamed that he tried to block them from his mind. And he noticed that the Damibians by the roadside stopped and watched silently. They did not dance for joy.

George had not been to this airport earlier. A not-yet-opened aircraft engine workshop about a mile from the airport building was being used for the "expellees," a new word that appeared on the news these days. George drove along Chapel Road, round the curve, and then down the slope leading to the hangar. A new car park had been hastily cut out of the

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waste ground near the lake shore. He parked and walked slowly over to the wire-fencing. He reached the gate.

"*Simama! Wapi wewe na kwenda!*"

Two soldiers in battle fatigues guarding the gate, rifles raised.

"Ko ono *Rafiki*." George knew it was not safe to reply in English when the army spoke in Swahili. Swahili had never really become one of the languages of Damibia, but as there was such a multiplicity of languages, a kind of pidgin Swahili had become the *lingua franca*, mainly among the uneducated. Most of the soldiers were highly conscious of being uneducated. So they took every opportunity to humiliate those who could not speak Swahili. Moreover, today was the last day of the expulsion and the soldiers could be jumpy.

"You have a Muindi friend?" asked one soldier in some astonishment.

"Well, actually a Mugoa friend." George knew that although Goans were also lumped under the term East Indians, generally they were not disliked at all. This would be a safe reply. It was.

"*Kuja*," said the soldier, opening the gate. "Do you have any identification?" George produced his driving license, which had his name and photograph. He was let through.

George looked around, looking for David. There were two big sheds, one of them to be a workshop and the other a hangar. The hangar was being used to deal with people while the workshop was piled high with suitcases, trunks, boxes, like a matchbox skyscraper. "Good Lord," thought George, "Will they ever be able to clear those things? I doubt anyone will get anything. The army will steal it all." George had heard the previous day that some soldiers had gone to the airport when there was no flight and took many of the boxes and trunks. Then they passed the word round that there were free things for everybody at the airport. Some of the people wanted none of it: they did not think of having things that had the taint of blood on them. But others were tempted at the thought of sewing machines, pressure cookers, etc. which they knew would not be available shortly. People had gone on a shopping spree before the East Indians left. Meanwhile, the soldiers told the police, who were still law-abiding, that people were looting the property of the East Indians at the airport. This would be

bad for the image of the country. The police went along just as people had started to take things and arrested them: the ex-houseboys, garage attendants and ex-ayahs. The police took them to the jail and locked them up. Later, army personnel came over, forcibly took the keys from the police chief, took the prisoners out, and stabbed and shot them to death, not caring one bit for the screams of the wounded and dying or even that the police-station and jail was just off the main road.

George looked around cautiously, from behind dark glasses. It wouldn't do for the army and security personnel there to see him looking around. He gazed into the other building. Was it crowded! East Indians of all shapes and sizes and ages. There was an old woman, so old that George wondered whether she would be able to make it to the plane. She was limping around, bow-legged, helped by a young girl. There was a young Sikh in a smart bell-bottomed suit and wearing a turban. His beard was small and very neat; it looked like he had used an invisible trapeze net to hold it in place. Strange, when George was young, he used to be afraid of these Sikhs, who looked very fierce and warlike and were all over the place. Unlike the other East Indians, the Sikhs came into contact with Damibians all the time because they were carpenters, lorry-drivers, contractors, plumbers, and even policemen. George had been to Malaysia last year and had seen that there were Sikhs in the police force there as well. The British seemed to have liked using Sikhs as policemen in the old days. Maybe it was easier to frighten the people with such a foreign and foreign-looking people. The Malaysians seemed to be even more terrified of the Sikhs than he had been. What would they think if they saw the Sikhs leaving Damibia so tamely? They would think the General was a real monster, to be able to subdue even these fierce people! George was sure that this young Sikh was Gurmeet Singh, one of the national hockey players who had recently represented the country at the Commonwealth Games. The General had made an offer of citizenship to all the East Indians representing the country and he had paraded with them on their return, saying, "If all East Indians had been like these people, there would have been no problem." The General was a sports fan. Obviously, this particular hockey player had not accepted the offer.

George could see a makeshift table at the far end, where a

customs check was taking place. There had been stories that the women had been completely stripped and searched because some of them had hidden gold round their bodies or even in their menstrual pads and up their vaginas. He could not see this happening here; maybe it had been only a rumor. "Sq—eea—allk! Bo—ooo—wwwww!" A groaning from the far end of the table. George's heart leaped up. What was going on? Oh, it was only one of the customs officers taking out a saxophone and blowing it, perhaps looking for hidden gold. He saw the officer handing it to the owner, a short, mustachioed man, and gesturing to him to play. It was Ramos Pacheco, who played for one of the well-known Goan bands, Nobby and his Nobs, after civil service hours. There must have been a farewell ceremony for Ramos at the Institute last night. Ramos had been a good and conscientious assistant treasurer. Ramos took the saxophone and wailed out a whole verse of "St. Louis Blues." God, the man could play with feeling! George had never heard him play like this with Nobby and his Nobs. That blues had been George's favorite music ever since Louis Armstrong had visited the country in the early sixties. From Satchmo, George had learned that the blues carried the suffering of a people helpless against their problems and oppressed by the whole power-structure but also the determination of the people to carry on living. Ramos must be hating to see the evening sun go down because not his baby but he would be leaving this town.

George was amused to see so many cloth and canvas bags tied with twine and string and so many blankets rolled into bundles. East Indians thought they were so different from the Damibians but actually they were the same. George was always embarrassed when he wanted his mother to come with him to Lubele and she came with all these bundles. She even did this when she travelled by taxi, and George had to go to the taxi and carry out all the stuff. George himself, as a seasoned, modern traveller, always travelled light and smartly with two small suitcases and an attache-case bought in New York. But perhaps these East Indians were taking a piece of the country, the touch and smell of it, which you couldn't do with modern valise cases and suitcases.

David hadn't appeared. Oh, there, in the distance, on top of the hill and near the fence of the former Minister of Citizenship & Internal Affairs, was a whole procession of vehicles and

a bus. That must be him, escorted like a king. (And he was a socialist, smiled George.) Suddenly, George heard shouts and thumps. He lowered his gaze to the gate. A black Damibian in black rags was just buckling at his knees. A soldier was near him, rifle butt raised. A smartly-dressed civilian African next to him raised his arm and gave the black Damibian a karate-chop on the back of his neck. The man collapsed like a sack of potatoes. Before he hit the ground, the soldier had struck his back with his rifle butt. As soon as the man was down, the soldier and the civilian kicked him over and over again with hob-nailed boots. "God!" thought George. "They are killing him in front of everybody!"

"He was trying to steal one of the bundles," said an African at George's elbow. George did not say anything. Like the other two, this man did not look like a Damibian. He could be an *agent provocateur*. George began to feel pains shooting up his back.

The man was then dragged to his feet, grabbed by the two men around the shoulders, and rushed to the gate, which had been opened for the new bus. He was thrown through the gate and sailed into the air, just missing the bus. "Just like a plane taking off," thought George. But amazingly, he saw the man pick himself off the ground, wipe the blood off his forehead and nose, and then stumble off. "The people have a lot of endurance!" thought George, admiringly. "The General will find that it is not easy to kill everyone in this country." Maybe David was right—he should have identified more with the people than with the toys of the West.

The bus was through the gate and the passengers were getting off. Some of them looked like Damibians, Africans, with dark skin and kinky hair. Maybe they were half-castes. The General had extended his decision three days ago to cover those people in Damibia who were "of East Indian origin, extraction or ancestry." This meant, in effect, that anyone who had as much as one East Indian grandparent had to leave. Many such people had considered themselves indigenous Damibians, Africans, and had never gone to the Citizenship Department to apply for citizenship. They had to leave now. So much for the General's occasional accusations that the East Indians had not integrated and intermarried. Those who had still had to leave and so had their offspring. There was a black woman! Could she also have an East Indian ancestor?

A few years ago, a group of very Indian-looking Indians had come from India to Damibia, saying that they were trying to trace their African ancestors who had come to India from Eastern Africa in the sixteenth century and intermarried there. It seemed that there were no racial problems in those days. No, George could not believe that the black woman had any East Indian blood—or, more correctly, genes. She was wearing a sari, but wearing it badly, as though it were a busuti. Maybe she is trying to convince people that she has Indian blood because she does not have any: maybe she is so scared of what the army will do after tomorrow that she is running away while she can.

Ah, there were David, Josephine and their children getting off the bus. The daughter was carrying a doll and the son a locally woven cot for the doll. George checked his impulse to rush to the bus and waited for them to get off and join the end of the queue. He then went up.

"*Jambo, Daudi!*" he said.

"Who—" exclaimed a startled David. "Why, George!" He looked like he couldn't believe his eyes. He made as though to embrace George, but he was too weighed down with a case, a camera and a transistor radio. "Good to see you, George!" said David. "How is Miriam!"

"Fine!" said George. "She couldn't come—"

"I know," said David. "You have come. I appreciate it."

"Where's Evaristo?" asked George.

"I told him not to come," said David. "He is staying on to sort out our affairs. He'll join us after that. He'll go to Goa first to collect my mother and bring her along."

What could one talk about at a time like this except the most literal facts and the most banal clichés, hoping that the feeling could be sneaked in under the words? "I wanted to bring you a final thing for good luck," said George. "You know, among our people, when someone is setting off on a long trip, to unknown territory, we believe in giving him something of the old soil so that he will still have roots. But I could not—."

"Yes, I know," said David. It would not do for anyone, most of all a Damibian, to be accused of handing something to one of the expellees. David looked nervous and kept looking over George's shoulders, as though he expected someone to co

along and stop him from leaving.

The queue was inching forward. George moved to one side.

George was getting impatient. David was probably used to this business by now. He had had to join queues nearly every day for the past few days. He had to queue first over checking his citizenship, then to get his exemption, then for his identity card, then for cards for his wife and children, then to be interviewed by the Canadians, then for the medical results from the Canadians, then to get his emigration papers, then to get exchange control approval to take a travel allowance (which had been reduced to shs. 1000 per family, one month's rent in Canada), then to be innoculated against yellow fever and smallpox, then to have his belongings accepted for airfreighting: and he was one of the lucky ones. What about Jackson Gomes? Jackson had to queue outside the British High Commission to see if he could get back British citizenship, since the Damibian authorities had taken his citizenship away on the grounds that he had not correctly renounced his British citizenship. After queuing for over a day, the British told him that he had in fact correctly renounced his British citizenship; the Damibians were not right to tell him that as the British Home Office had stamped the Certificate four months after his Damibian Citizenship came through, the Citizenship was invalid. He would have to take the matter up with the Damibian authorities, the British said. "Might as well tell someone to talk to a hungry lion," Jackson had told George the night of David's farewell. "People have been beaten up just for looking suspicious near the Immigration Department." Jackson had to queue: the Indians would not accept him, the Canadians didn't want him, the Australians only wanted highly qualified doctors, the Indians said he was not an Indian. The U.S. government took a decision to accept 1,000 stateless East Indians with no qualification. Jackson joined this queue, expecting to be asked "What did Lincoln say at Gettysburg?" and "When was George Washington born?" Instead, he was asked to prove that he was stateless. This he could not do. When it was too late for acceptance, he had proof that he was stateless: the letter from the Immigration Department asking him to remove himself from the country by December 21st. Jackson left the previous day for a U.N. camp in Austria, embittered with Damibia and Africa.

But George had forgotten how to queue and was getting tired. He kept shifting from one foot to another. The only other time he had seen so many Indians was when he passed through Bombay on his way back from Malaysia. He hadn't known until then that there could be so many poor Indians in India. He thought that was why so many Indians had left their country and come to Eastern Africa. On the other hand, as an official visitor, he was taken to visit some of the factories and to have dinner with some of the owners. There he had seen wealth and luxury such as well beyond the reach of even the wealthiest of Damibian East Indians. It all reminded him of the pyramids he saw at Giza, Egypt. The broader the base of the pyramid, the higher the topmost point was from the ground.

Wealth had certainly not saved the richest East Indian family, the Mankoos, a family of industrialists. The head of the family had been locked away in "the Tokyo" while the checking of citizenship was taking place. He was freed three days ago and told he was not a citizen because he did not have his papers checked. The whole Mankoo family was told to leave before the 21st. The General grabbed the big industries belonging to the Mankoo family, or rather, to the foreign capital and run by the Mankoos. George did not have any sympathy with the Mankoos. It was true that they must have worked hard; the first Mankoo had walked in from the coast and walked round for hundreds of miles selling small things to the people. It was also true that all East Indian family businesses were run on small profit margins as they had low overheads and as the whole family worked. But they must have also bribed their way to success. There were rumors about the "gifts" they had given politicians in the previous regime and, after the coup, it was rumored that they paid the wages of the army for two months. And the General no doubt decided to grab the whole cake instead of taking slices. No, what pained George was that the Damibian regime had no respect for international law. Once people were citizens, or had even indicated their wish to be so, Damibia had to keep its word. How could a man travel on a Damibian passport only to be told eight years later that he was not a citizen? And for no specific crime except that he had the wrong ancestors? There should have been specific accusations and trials. There even were many indigenous Damibians who were not worthy of being citizens. The General himself: he was rumored t

sending cash in U.S. dollars to a Swiss bank. So many African, Asian and Latin American leaders did this—and then they died, leaving their ill-gotten gains to be enjoyed by the gnomes of Zurich and Europe. It was also said that the General was born across the border . . .

George pulled himself out of his thoughts, feeling they were becoming too dangerous. What if the soldiers near the gate could read them? His life would not be worth one shilling. He would be fed to the fishes in the lake just across the car-park.

David had at last been cleared by customs. But he was separated from George and they were not even within shouting distance. David waved. George nodded his head. David began to articulate something. George took it to mean that he had better go. George was not used to going to see someone off at the Damibian airport and then leaving before the plane took off. His feet were turning to lead.

David broke close to the rope fencing dividing him from George and croaked, "The General has destroyed us."

George looked around. Was that soldier eyeing him suspiciously? Maybe they would accuse him of stealing some property belonging to an East Indian. It was getting dark. George decided that he had better leave. He raised his arm to David and waved it back and forth, like a wiper brushing away the muck from a dirty windscreen. This was not the way to say goodbye, but he had made the gesture. They would meet again, if George lived. He waved his hand again and articulated the words, "See you!"

And then George turned and walked to the gate. The soldiers looked at him and asked him to identify himself. He produced his driving licence again. They looked at it and reluctantly opened the gate.

"After tomorrow, eh, we will see whether the General is right or wrong. *Kwaheri!*"

George was startled. Was the man trying to trap him into making a statement against the General? He couldn't take a chance so he openly replied, "*Kwaheri,*" walking to the park, half-wondering whether he would find his car. Once, his car had been stolen when he had gone to the Blanwa Post Office, in broad daylight! The Damibian car thieves were real experts. They could make duplicate keys, steal wheels, strip down cars, and so on. When he had bought a new car with the insur-

acce. he had fitted it with five anti-theft devices: a concealed key which cut off the ignition, a switch which caused the horn to sound off if the car were touched, a steering lock, a gadget which locked the steering wheel to the clutch, and round wheel-nuts which could only be removed with a special spanner. Still, he had no doubt that his car could be stolen if the thieves wanted. And lately, they were doing it at gunpoint. His car was gone! No, there it was, obscured by someone who had parked badly. These days, the car thefts had slowed down, probably in anticipation of the cheap and even free cars that would be available soon after the expulsion. But George knew that this was only a lull. In fact, once it was clear that the Indians were going, people had gone on a spending spree. Blanwa had become a beehive city for the past two weeks, like Cairo. The people somehow knew that there would be commodity-problems after the expulsion and were stocking up. As for cars: there would not be enough Indian cars for everyone in Damibia who wanted one. When the lack of foreign exchange combined with the lack of experience and lack of sources of foreign credit for the new importers, there would be an acute shortage of cheap cars and then, would there be car thefts!

As he started his car, George wondered whether it would not be safer to buy a bicycle. It had been fun in his younger days, and during his visit to America he found that it was no shame or loss of class to ride a bicycle. The people did it to keep in shape and he might have to do it as well, to keep in unshot shape. His Peugeot 504 would be in great demand. Wouldn't David find it ironical if he saw George on a bicycle! He would feel that George was being converted to his brand of ascetic socialism.

The evening mist had risen. He saw points of light across the lake, from the islands. Flashes of lightning, going to the bottom of the lake. One of those islands was the famous Rake Island, where the British diplomat had hidden while the country thought he had been kidnapped. How old that affair seems, he thought! That was one of his disagreements with the old regime: it made a fuss about small matters. A storm in a teacup, while now there was a hurricane in a lake of blood. He rounded the climb and the makeshift airport faded into the gloom behind him. Passing the brick-red Catholic Church, he made a sign of the cross, wishing David a safe flight. Statistically, with so many East Indians leaving by air, there was a

chance of at least one plane crashing. He had always wond when taking off whether the plane would fail to make it an would end up in a watery grave, fitting for a water engir These days, he seemed to think a lot about death. He begun to feel that just to have a marked grave on land relatives who could visit it was a kind of luxury, like ownir car ten years ago.

George arrived home. He heard the screaming of a jet gine and a rumbling. A plane was taking off. Was that Da taking off? He wished him well. But what the hell, he thoug as he entered. The way things were going, it was no use bei sentimental about David's going; he would probably have quit himself. He did not see how the killings would sto When things went wrong, the General always wanted to blam someone, and by the laws of diminishing returns, George turn would come sometime, although he was not involved i any kind of politicking. Better prepare himself for the tim he had to leave in a hurry. That is, if any country would accep him. With all this foreign publicity about Damibians fanat ically hating East Indians, he would be blamed for the expul sion and be told he had to live with the consequences of his inhumane action, just as after the General's public statement that he admired Hitler, the Damibian Embassy in New York had received eighty bomb threats from very active New Yorkers.

George switched on the television. Tom Kisorwa came on. "East Indians are reminded that today is the last day for their departure. They have four hours left. All who have not left will face the consequences."

George felt betrayed. He wanted to leave Damibia and shake its dust off his shoes forever. He had better start preparing himself psychologically for having to leave home.

"The General has let God down very badly," he said.

ph Bruchac

EMS

ACK SWEEPER

a faded grey suit coat
d blue bowler hat
e swishes his broom
f long brown twigs
cross the sidewalk
nd into the gutter.

His dark face
seems composed
though Haiti
and Dahomey show
in his astonished eyes,
as he turns, sweeps,
dips to keep
the water flowing,
turns and sweeps
papers and garbage
into the stream
which flows
to the sewers, the Seine
and the sea . . .

And as I walk
where he has passed
I see ahead of me
on grey pavement
moist half circles
and swirling designs
like the torn petals
of fallen dark flowers.

THE PATH

Half way between breath and Earth
colors borrowed from the Sky
the bent back of the Snake
above the gateway

in the shadow of the steamship's funnel
he watches
as three birds
fly beneath the arching path

the first is a bird of metal
its voice tears the air
the white chalkline of its passing
is too straight to form a circle

the second is a bird of flesh
it dips close in the wave
picks up a discolored orange peel
turns its wings into a window
of distance, flies through it, is gone

the third is one which cannot be seen
its feathers brush his cheek

it is the one
he has returned to follow

(For Kofi Awoonor)

Michael S. Harper

HEALING SONG FOR ROBERT E. HAYDEN
(AUGUST 4, 1975)

He stoops down eating sunflowers
snowballed at his prayer-rugged
table, 'message/solution/masses'
his ghetto-blues-plantation,
driven into inner/outer realities
as buffers drawn from his eyes.

Penned in that magnificent voice
where victorola mutters 'Koppin' songs,
his sedge burning night-trains,
this serape-man found wanting
only in that 'God Don't Like Ugly'
phrase; he draws his own lightning,
believing differently,
an angel surrendering angles of desire:
his masked heart-centered soul reveals.

Rused in dance steps of jubilo,
atavisms of worship shutting out sound,
his full essential flowering
balances in the 4 am traduction,
his Emancipation Tree.

Hidden in ancient tetters
of autobiography,
he tropes of 1863 moverings,
his Osceolas already sacrificed
as Lincoln's mass production lines
funnel bodies to the Crater;
his Easter families agonize
at blue doors of transformation.

Self-accused in venial sins, his gorgeous
offerings lift blind pigs to Bessie's
witchdoctoring, her blue-black tongue
singing down Jesus,
'watch your goin' be like comin' back,'
he witnesses flesh pull down in anger,
killing calves of hunger to no higher law.

Ragboned Bob Hayden, shingled in slime,
reaches for his cereus ladder of midnight flight,
his seismographic heartbeats
sphinctered in rhiney polygraphs of light;
Dee-troit born and half-blind
in diction of arena and paradise,
his ambient nightmare-dreams streak his tongue;
mementoes of his mother, of Emma, he image-makes
peopling the human family of God's mirror,
mingling realities, this creature of transcendence
a love-filled shadow, congealed and clarified.

A STORY

My fingers systematically work to shreds a piece of paper. I do not even notice what they are doing although somewhere in my mind I notice when one has been worked to shreds that I should pick up another one. I would be pleased to put the whole thing on a more sophisticated level and talk of my whole life leading towards this pinpoint where I have to make a decision; self-consciously feeling that it might "affect the whole of my life." But that it is to dramatize a rather personal problem which is best left alone. In any case it is hard to know the exact moment when your deciding to do one thing or the other is really going to be influential later on. I have found that events and decisions which lead towards them are like playful dogs which run far ahead and come tearing back only to go off at a tangent. Ribbons which cannot be held in one hand and be controlled; time, that old gypsy man.

The pieces of paper are torn to shreds and now I'm conscious of what I have done. The table is littered with them; the open windows let in some slight wind that fearfully tugs at some of the periphery and guiltily drops them back before they have moved from where they are.

I'm a funnel through which all the past pain passes leading towards some fine point in time. I realize that I always have to make up my mind even when I decide not to, because *that* is also a decision. I'm helpless before this anger that has decided my existence, making my deepest and most private thoughts common flags for every eye to see; making my cry a professional show in which I'm in competition with the rest of my century. Very melodramatic and all that; giving me a place in the stream of platitudes; comforting me with Company that I never can physically enjoy. It's all mockery, a mockery.

She lies there on the divan, her mind not really on the book she is reading, pretending just like I am that she is listening

to the music that is tearing the whole flat to pieces. Considering that the place is not sound proofed, it's a wonder that the neighbours have not complained about the screams, the groans, the parading of only undergrounds unknowns which have come to mean so much in our lives. She listens, I listen. I hear nothing but the feeling, the feeling. . . .

In flashes which have recently been increasing, I look about me with a complete stranger's eyes. I cannot understand my presence here, nor why this table should be known this way and not the darker way the record player is. I look around in panic at all this new everydayness which seems to be all around me, holding me down, and I'm ready to run. I don't want to remain where I am for even a second. And even though I know that I'm looking at a reality that I have been seeing every day, I wonder at this new perspective that has been making me fear even to cross the street.

She unfurls herself from the divan and restores my vision.

"You're stupid," she says. Her weak brown eyes look at me, really at me. She is the only one who has ever been able to do that. "You are stupid." And she goes back to her reading.

She thinks that she will goad me into action if she taunts me with words. But I know why she is doing it.

"You sit there writing what you think are masterpieces awaiting discovery and yet you don't know that you are the only one who thinks that they are worth it. Even the artistic anger you put in the tearing of your works makes the whole thing a sordid show which should be reserved for children."

I look at her. She is right. She is not a child. What the hell am I doing here?

"In a flash you will think that you have heard a moving line that will exactly put down your feeling: only you will write down someone else's line—or some platitude which even you will be ashamed of reading after you have written it."

She speaks into the book. Deliberately as if she is in an interview against hostile pressmen; she clearly pronounces her words. I look at her and see her. But I also don't see her. Somehow, she does not exist. Her words are more alive, forming frames in my mind which I try to put to my way of seeing. But she does not exist.

"You are stupid." But her words do not hurt anymore. As she goes on speaking, I forget to listen, deliberately shut out her voice so that the music is lou[illegible] [illegible]ain.

She grew into my mind slowly over a long time so that I cannot exactly remember how we could have met the first time. I don't think it would really throw a lot of light on the situation anyway. We just happened to be in contact and it became rather ridiculous not to admit each other's presence. So we settled on "hi" in the corridors; that was all. Then of course we at one time ended up in each other's company among many others and we had a casual conversation that meant entirely nothing but which somehow made me think that we were privately telling each other what no one else should hear. And to clinch it we would laugh and smile in a knowing way so that later on when I was asked by some curious person about it, I was all secrets:

"It's nothing really."

"Oh come off it."

"Honest . . ." laughing at the same time, hiding something big.

"Shit." Pronounced slowly so that the final "t" does not come out and the whole word sounds respectfully like "shea," whatever that is. They never believed me that it was just a casual conversation from an acquaintance.

There is something wrong in me that I cannot understand. Physically, I'm all right. But I cannot find the cause for my tiredness and sadness which has become a second nature to me. When confronted with this, we tend to look at our minds to find the cause. But what is there cannot make one feel the way I am. I don't understand.

I suspect though that mine is a fashionable sadness, true for the world to see and exclaim:

"How deep! How sad!" While I look out of pathetic eyes at it and beg it not to treat me so bad. It is all a personal game on a stage with a critical audience. I am disgusted with myself but what can I do? Am I really stage-acting?

When hard-pressed for an answer, say in one of those deeply intellectual conversations, then I usually recourse to two answers. I grow angry—and it is so, so easy—at the waste I see around me. Our people neglected, all the wealth concentrated in one place where it looks as if some uneducated, uncouth whore was suddenly let into an expensive store and she simply chose a riot of colours because the price tags show that those are the most expensive she could ever get. You see what I mean? It's so easy to grow angry on this. So easy to speak of

the oppression our people are suffering and at the same time when I'm allowed to be prophetic, I quote Fanon and how all this is going to end in trouble for all of us. Then of course, ironically I say that some of us—meaning not me and therefore that those people who see me should look at genius for the last time—might survive. I don't wax lyrical because *that* has become suspect nowadays. I spew out revolutions in words instead. And people listen. By god they do!

But these are usually only fools who happen not to have read the right books. It's all in the game of trying to impress so that you can stick out. It's exactly the same game that a sore finger plays.

What makes me angry is that I start listening to myself and find that I am fed up with the formulas someone has set before which govern our conversations. I'm so quick at understanding these formulas and varying on them that it cannot really be noticed—except by my me that somewhere inside mocks at my misuse of the brain; laughing and laughing—mockingly saying:

"Yes, all that is very good, but what do you want to do about it?"

"What can I do about it?"

"Action—Organize. Start something."

"But what?"

"Get to know the people."

"But how? I mean, I'm not popular."

"Make yourself!"

"I can't, I tell you. It's in my nature *not* to rhyme with anyone."

"Hah!"

"Yes! I mean—uh—"

"Yes? You mean you are an intellectual who never can be bothered about the common man."

"You're now using clichés which don't refer to any concrete reality."

"The people, then?"

"Still a cliché. You dirty old man. You want to wreck me, huh? Criticizing me for not thinking originally when even you can come up with my sentence but you must throw in clichés which you overheard." It (he) keeps quiet. I go on with my conversation. But now I'm listening to myself too much, waiting to hear any dissenting voices. I do not, but I *feel* them.

feel that behind that silence there is profound criticism. I end lamely; someone takes over, using me for a reference as if I'm some text book on revolutionary thought.

I reserve this argument for those who are content to remain waiting outside on the walls.

* * * * * *

After disappointment in the leadership of a few people whom I had trusted entirely, I became disillusioned about the Revolution. But I did not tell them of my disillusionment. No, that would have been like trying to make someone who wants to believe in a lie see the truth. You create unnecessary enemies who won't even see at the end of your efforts. I agreed entirely with these dialogues but also decided that I would find some more important things to take the place of the Revolution. In any case, it was stupid and futile to talk of a Revolution here. Being bloody, a revolution would mean my seeing a brother's blood flowing in the streets. Maybe someone who didn't understand but to whom I was pointed. And because of miseducation that man would not realize the difference between me and his bitterest enemy. Thinking that the evolution of the people's minds would be much more important, I decided that there really was not anything a lone person could do. Teaching did not appeal to me and in any case I would end up with people who had already decided on what systems of thought to have if ever my inclination was towards *that*. Getting some obscure—but *paying*—job (I made sure of that) needed a bit of maneuvering.

But I got it. And then Revolution came to mean strictly a relationship between me and the next person who I never bothered to be interested in. It would be a purely personal matter and I would make sure I didn't lose control of the situation any one minute.

* * * * * *

There have been times when I have felt an insane rage so that I don't *want* to have control over my suddenly unreliable anger, my actions. But outside I appear to be normal, only "a bit under weather." The usual blues everyone has one day or the other. The rage builds up and my disappointment may it rise and rise.

She played around with me so that I was not exactly sure what I was. Thinking that I was special, one day, I only found out that I was only one among the many who shared her. Yet I was sure I was kind of special. But then this could only have been because of different reactions she had to each one of us so that we tended to think that we were the *One*. Right. I don't know how many people dislike me—still do not. I also did some disliking of my own. But this is getting ahead. The first time I discovered this was in a rather cheaply sordid way where, finding two people, you do not fail to notice that they were in a compromising situation. You notice how I deliberately avoid trying to use "crude" language, resorting to sophistication to hide exactly what happened. Actually it was nothing more than a kiss. I was all politeness; excused myself, asked for the file that I had gone for and then left. I tended to see it in a funny light—an I-was-right-all-along kind of light. That's what I thought. Somehow I forced myself to eat lunch *and I never tasted it*. It was sickening. There was something in me that rejected each and every thing from outside. Still I found it amusing, consciously.

But in the night, only self-deception broke and I turned and turned, my chest burning—not with shame but anger. It was not even anger that was directed towards her, wishing to harm her. No. She somehow had committed the ultimate in betrayal. I had never known such a deep change happen so fast in me. I literally didn't know myself. And I swore that was the last time I would make room for anyone in my life. I had never realized just how much I had allowed her to *intrude* in my life—making me intimately take her into my very being, only to be told that I shouldn't have done *that* in the first place without prior consultation.

The mixture of anger, sadness, disappointment and deep loneliness made me feel as if I was outside of everything, left to myself to slow down into nuisance while the rest of the world whirled faster and faster. I got headaches, swallowed medicines whose effects I doubted even before I put them in my mouth; everything was a nightmare.

* * * * * *

We went on behaving exactly the same as before to each other. I even wondered at myself. It's good I did not have any

qualms about hypocrisy otherwise I don't know what would have exactly happened. We in fact "took it in our stride" as if nothing had changed—but I knew I had. Since one of the things I respected about her were her brains and she had shown so many times that she had them, I really looked at her many times in genuine puzzlement. I could not understand her actions, her attitudes. I just could not.

* * * * * *

"It gratifies one to have attention paid to her by many men. You know it reassures her that she has got appeal. This is so vital to her ego. The moment she loses them, she knows she is finished." I think I admired her for one thing then: that she had the guts to say that right out to me; that she still had what "it takes"; that whatever she would soon be fearing was not there was still there in enough measure to make her flaunt it on faces. I felt a familiar sensation of anger, old, old anger I had felt at the cheating come boiling up and I killed my mind from that thought; not because of my charitable feelings but because of what I was fearing might happen in me.

* * * * * *

She wants me to marry her but I know I'm incapable of love. I'm afraid of what might happen if ever I was to let myself really love. I would hate to do most of the liking. It is too painful. And I cannot pretend in this since it will not be taking advantage of the other person but really allowing someone to come and fix her life with your own.

She feels that for me to make anything of my writing, I have to have peace—lots of it. I agree with her. She wants to create some for me—I am afraid—of her. She might give me security without any peace. I don't know where to turn.

* * * * * *

I told you my more meaningful answer would be petty, highly personal and in its own lame way, characteristic of minds which have begun to stagnate. She wants me to get married to her so that I safely write revolutionary books from a middle class angle, arriving at safe conclusions which somehow will seem to be new; "making a name" for myself as the only young genius ever to come out of this mess without a

profoundly disturbing vision about the society I live in. She is content to wait—so long as I make sure that I do this. Her goading me with intellectual insults does not really want to see anything come out of this mind. She has already decided that as a *potential*, I'm more powerful than if I actually write. It would be hateful to her to realize that all the while she never had genius under her leash. But I realize this and so to be cured, I've got to reject each and every value she stands for. But I can't do this. I just can't. She is the only person whom I have cared deeply enough for to make me not laugh at the ridiculous way we hunt each other in our scramble for survival and happiness but rather to grow angry. She is the only person whom, if ever such a word could be applied in my life, I could say she inspires it. (But this is not so. I like her, deeply. Love. No! A thousand times and a thousand reasons No!)

* * * * * *

The October evening yesterday was looking more special, as if it had meaning for only one of us who saw it. But I felt that that was not meant for me. Somehow, as usual, I had been left out of things; always on the periphery of the full experience of beauty, love, pain or anger. And suddenly there was a flash of light through the leaves as the sun sank lower than some branch that had been obstructing the full light—and my pain blazed so that I felt dizzy. I swayed and held onto a tree. But the anger could not come. I could not *make* myself cry to save myself from all this.

I turned away, back to her.

chike

Anthony McNeill

UNGOD POEMS

UNGOD AT THE FONT OF THE BLUES

"Poetry is a case of the loser winning. And the genuine poet chooses to lose, even if he has to go so far as to die, in order to win. . . . He is certain of the total defeat of the human enterprise and arranges to fail in his own life in order to bear witness, by his individual defeat, to human defeat in general."
Jean-Paul Sartre

ungod who endure in the desert lift
the lush way
to taste listen smell touch
see the shape of this One
bird through the garden,
its acute, tinnient cry.
The adamant know
clear methods of tracking,
then lay the grief down
raggedly singing.
One rises announces
the sky
has burst into flames;
another—
my spirit be—
comes a sack full of ashes.
I open the window
see the bird blind

alone in such fine
sorrow so long

HELLO UNGOD

Ungod my lungs blacken
the cities have fallen
the easy prescriptions
have drilled final holes in my cells
Ungod my head sieves in the wind
Ungod I am sterile
Ungod it appears
I am dying
Ungod I am scared
Ungod can you hear me
Ungod I am testing for levels
Ungod testing 1 2 3
Ungod are you evil
Ungod I can't hear you
Ungod I am trying
Ungod I can't reach you
Ungod my lungs blacken
the cities have fallen
head sieves in the wind

Ungod disconnecting.

FURY UNGOD

Ungod turns to fury & flits
the 4 psychic ways of the moon.
His eyes are neutral as porcelain.
He fidgets with boxes/ He stacks

symbols deasil from Z to A.
He mutates for struck children.
He shuts like a Buddha/ then spins
lunar gardens until the day

stuns & deftly drought re-begins.
He hustles The Wizard of Oz,
dilacerates ether, switches
his arms cruciform Steel programs,

schemata smoke in his brain.
He summons a fluent grenade
to each hand. Every rock is laid
at last in his contract. His aim

is the flushing of planets.
His track culminates in ashes,
eggs, flowers/ The fisher grubs ashes
and sings in the ooze of the heart

J. A. Opiche

TROUBLES

"Every road leads to the city in the sun," she thought. The city in the sun, not in the dark.

Aloo giggled, wiping the trickle of tears with the sleeve of her black cardigan. She looked at her eight-months old baby girl and she felt fresh tears rolling down her cheeks. It was a very cold morning. Her daughter Akinyi was literally screaming, scratching her mother's chest; obviously she was hungry. Even Aloo herself was being stung by hunger. The last meal she had had was maize and beans at the house of her distant maternal uncle who was living in Majengo. She had had to plead in order to get even this meager dish. Akinyi had had a mug of diluted porridge. She had refused breast-feeding when she was six months old.

The innocent creature was starving. Mother and daughter were sitting on the hotel-pavement. People passed hurriedly. Some went in, some came out of the hotel, all wearing serene smiles. They were at peace with everything, including themselves.

"What have I done to deserve such suffering?" Aloo thought. Amidst plenty, the masses starve: a few gluttons grow fat. Greed. Selfishness. All inherent in man. Could not these passers-by feel any sympathy and give a dry crust to the howling little girl?

"Better dead than alive," Aloo muttered to herself.

"How could James be so cruel to me?" she wondered. They had been darlings for the last three years. Everybody knew they were going to marry each other. They were seriously in love and when her pregnancy announced itself, James nursed no doubts; he was the father-to-be. Aloo stayed with her parents as she waited for her School Certificate results. She had conceived towards the end of her final year so she did not have the misfortune and shame of being sent away from school. She was at peace with herself; after all James was in

constant touch with her. He was proving to be an unusually responsible young man. He often came to see Aloo.

Somehow, his frequent visits and letters began to dwindle in Aloo's sixth month of pregnancy. At first, she excused it; James was busy, being a medical student finalist at the University. Aloo soon lost her optimism and her final blow came when her already budding fears were confirmed.

In a one-sentence letter, James rejected her. Five hours later she brought forth her Akinyi.

Aloo's mother gave her all the comfort and consolation she needed at this miserable period of her life.

"That's the order of the day, my daughter. In our days, such an act of irresponsibility and cruelty could not be tolerated," the mother said.

"But mama, how can James be . . .?" Aloo started.

"Play it calm, dear child. Don't worry. He changed his mind; his was a rash decision, my daughter. You were his wife the day he made you pregnant."

"But," . . . Aloo started hotly.

Her mother, realizing that she was losing her temper, walked away.

Aloo had lived through nightmares since she got the bombing letter. Could James have gone mad to do such a thing to her? Why had he suddenly changed his mind? Had he got a mistress or a wife in Nairobi? How did he expect her to care for the baby, His baby? I have been his only darling for the last three years; why does he decide to ruin me so?

The child started crying. Aloo frowned, looked at it and hesitantly started breast-feeding it. The child fell asleep on her chest; she laid her on the sack spread at the corner of the room. She knelt beside the child, hot tears started rolling down her cheeks and she started sobbing aloud. Once more, her mother came to her rescue. The old woman called her daughter for a calabash of porridge.

Mother and daughter engaged in some talk about life. Life can be cruel at times, especially when one is rejected. No wound strikes deeper than that of love turned to hate. All this crossed Aloo's mind and she felt a lump swell in her throat. Tears. Her mother consoled her. "Somebody is having a similar experience my daughter, or even worse. James is not the only man, after all. Why should [illegible] yourself because of a

selfish creature?" This sounded hopeful and Aloo calmed down. They talked on and by the time they had finished drinking the porridge, a decision had been reached. When Akinyi was five months old, Aloo would go to Nairobi and stay with her distant maternal uncle. From his house in Majengo, she would try and get a job and above all, she would trace James and try to reconcile the wrongs. She had genuine love for James and was prepared to forgive him everything of the past. She cared for her reputation and dignity. She did not want to lose her face in society; although she had already started this process; having a child outside marriage gives the impression that one has been promiscuous though this was not the case with Aloo.

This morning, as she and her daughter sat on the pavement, all these thoughts went through her mind.

Why had life been so cruel to her? she wondered. Her coming to the city had trebled her disillusionment. In her, the bosses had seen a desperate, beautiful girl ripe for exploitation.

"Come next Monday at 5:30 p.m.," one boss had told her.

"Meet me at Brunners Hotel at 6:30 p.m. promptly, then we can see how to fix you," the director of some company had told her.

"Do you mind accompanying me on my business tour to the Coast, during which we'll sort out your problem?" one manager had the audacity to ask her.

"Who are you? Where is the official letter of introduction?" has been asked in one government office.

After these attempts, Aloo had lost the hope of getting even a temporary job. Which office is open at 5:30 p.m.? Or have the working hours been extended, she had wondered. Meet him at 6:30 p.m., go to the Coast! Shit! I have my kid to take care of and who told him I am in a holiday making mood? I thought my school certificate was the most appropriate letter of introduction or what is this other letter I was expected to produce?

All these bitter memories rushed through her mind now, especially when she saw some elegant, ugly girls going in and out of offices.

She could not help recalling her troubles with the police. Being new in the city, she had often found herself harassed by the police. She had no money for bus-fare and she had to do

the job-hunting on foot. At late hours, the police had accus her of loitering, had mistaken her for one of those ladies of t twilight. One evening she was almost arrested but her scho identity card saved her.

While she was recalling all this bitter past, one particular nasty scene kept lingering at the back of her mind: she re membered with great horror the way James had treated he when she had tried to get a reconciliation. She had gone t James' room, early one Monday morning. She had not for gotten the frown on James' face as she entered his room. H carried his nose up, as if Aloo had brought some sordid stench into the room. She sat on the nicely made bed although James had not asked her to sit.

James sat on his desk, switched on the table lamp and opened a huge file. Aloo's presence did not appear to bother him. Aloo felt tension magnify within her and the silence worsened it. She gathered herself.

"So how are you for so long? It is . . ."

"Don't be piggish. Can't you see that I am fine and that's why I can sit here and open this big file?" James interrupted her rudely. . . .

There was silence, now broken by James: "What brings you here so early in the morning? I thought we had forgotten each other," James said harshly.

"We may try or pretend to forget each other but there is a permanent reminder glaring at us: Akinyi. She is eight months old now."

"But James," she started hesitantly, "the letter. What . . . Did you mean what you said?" she asked.

"Did it give you the impression that I was playing, that I was joking? Gone are the days, when we used to joke," James retorted.

"But why? What happened? Why this drastic change of mind after all the promises? I still can't bring myself to believe your letter," said Aloo in desperation.

"What promises? We signed no contracts with each other and the sooner you bring yourself to believe that I am serious, the better. It is high time you stopped nursing this hope of yours," James almost stormed at her.

Aloo had shrunk in terror as she saw the glaring eyes of James. He had walked out of the room, with a murderous countenance, leaving her there.

These incidents rushed to Aloo's mind as she stood in the cold. Her situation had worsened. She felt pity for her daughter; that an innocent soul should suffer thus: how cruel life can be! She decided there and then that Akinyi would go to her grandmother. Her uncle willingly accepted the idea and took Akinyi home. There at least the kid would have the warmth of a grandmother and some food to eat, however meager. Akinyi did not deserve suffering. But did Aloo?

Aloo continued her job-hunting mission. She was now fighting the battle alone as her daughter was now under the care of her granny. Often, she met some of her school-mates who were now working; some were happily married. At such times, she always felt ashamed. Her friends pitied her, their pity only served to tickle Aloo's deepening wound of bitterness. She always ended up in tears. She continued her fruitless search. She was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Her clothes, her shoes were wearing out. She had nobody to lean on for help. She decided to have a last try at James.

In spite of the rough handling she had gotten from him, some love for James still lingered in her heart and she decided to manifest it. This was her last chance; either she succeeded and won James or she was doomed.

It was a lovely Sunday afternoon when she went to James' room. On the way, she tried to calm her fears, she would try her best. She knocked; no response. She hesitated and opened the door softly. The room was empty. On James' reading desk, there was a note:

"Visitors: 15.2.74. We *have gone to see 'Language of Love.' Will be back at 9:15 p.m.*"

"Who are WE?!" Aloo wondered. Her curiosity led her on. She opened the wardrobe which was for the first time left ınlocked. In it, she found the explanation of her present state here was staring at her, 3 dresses and two pairs of a woman's hoes. She stood motionless. She felt dizzy, and almost fainted lowly collapsed on the bed and sobbed bitterly.

She calmed down eventually accepting her situation; a ject, she had been replaced—She had been given a sharp ot. What was she to do, now that she had discovered the th? For half an hour, she sat on the bed. Thought after ught ran through her mind. She had to make a decision, e and for all.

Did she deserve this? Could she love another man the way she had loved James? Was life worth living? She recalled a speech she had once heard during the grand celebrations of ten great years of independence: what fruits of independence had she reaped? Misery and suffering were her delicious fruits.

Moving the pillow a little, more grief overcame her as she saw a photograph of James and his girlfriend in the nude. Tears now ran freely, she did not bother to wipe them.

James' table was a small dispensary. Numerous bottles of various medicines, chemicals, mixtures, tablets. An idea struck Aloo. She looked eagerly through these and picked out a small bottle labelled *POISON*. She shook the bottle and the content framed. She got excited, opened the bottle and saw the yellow content. At that moment an idea struck her, she took a pen and paper on which she wrote:

"Note:

James, the happiness you have selfishly denied me, I will find it in the other world. Enjoy yourselves. Life without love is hellish. Your rejected Scrape Aloo."

She carefully placed her note beside the one James had left. She lay on her back and sipped two mouthfuls and carefully replaced the bottle. She felt dizzy. Then one sharp pain. A deep groan. Silence.

At 9:30 p.m. James and Annie walked towards the room, holding each other tightly. They were excited. The film had been a thrilling one and tonight their bed would be the screen. They realized that in their hurry they had not locked the door. A cold chill ran through James as he walked in, followed by Annie who was staggering behind.

An inert heap on his bed.

"What?" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"What do I see?" he screamed aloud.

"Mama yangu, I am ruined!" he wept aloud. The earth underneath his feet gave way and he fainted on the floor.

Annie woke out of her fantasy. She saw the two ghastly sights and ran out screaming.

Malusu Jose

MATUNDA YA UHURU

Hey you there!
Come around.
Sit down.
Open this one, eh!
Relax
Feel at home in
Our Democratic Country
Tell the Manager
I've specially
Selected you
You must join me—

What do you take,
Honey?
Let's eat
Let's eat for those
Who cannot eat!
Drink!
To your health
And love!
Cheeerssss!!!
Pro-sperity in trade . .
Let's eat
Matunda ya Uhuru.
Cheers!
Let's drink
To our country
To our Uhuru . . .

I've selected you . . .
What's your name, eh?

Phruuuu!!
Mmmthwa. . . . !!

We don't ask for names here, Bwana.

No! I must
Why? I must
I must know you . . .
I must do . . . eh . . .
Know what I mean?
Eh, how much, eh?
'Nngaaappi'?

Man is subject to change
Give me your full name and address, Dar.
Well,
I am The Fruits of Uhuru . . .
Matunda ya Uhuru.

Terry *Mphahlele*

POEMS

KIKUYU SUNSET

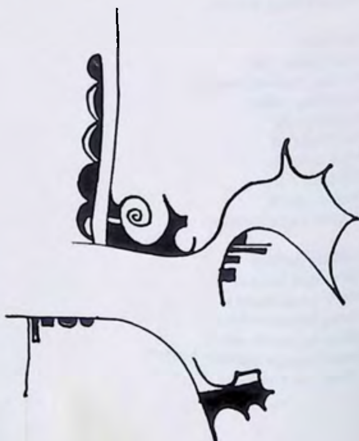
Kikuyuland
Tucked away behind dusty
Red-painted skirts of Nairobi.
Fiery suns threatening to
Burn through the night
Should we dare survive,
So it seems to say.
All thirsty for skies'
Rationed silver droppings,
Kikuyuland awaiting sunset.

End of long hazy
Days dragging lazy folk
Surely making matters worse
For hardworking folks,
As beaming rays of
Sun caress heads of
Bald-headed women
Who religiously till
Red cemented earth.
They will just have to wait.

Then growling bellies
Of ordinary men beckon
Their weary hunchbacks,
While young lovers whisper
Secret plans to sneak away
Behind see-through curtain bushes.
I know they can't wait.

Then comes my turn to seek
Secluded spots to watch
Sun loose the silent war:
Those crickets get so involved.
As clouds in bloody skies
Speedily push the tired sun
Behind love-sick horizons,
As though it had been a menace.

It's only now the sun realizes
Its secret love affair and
Dares me to get involved.
Kikuyu sunset must win
Those crickets don't seem to
Know; we wait no more.



KIKUYU LOVE AFFAIR

Now I know why
Mothers insist
On early bedtimes
For the young:
It's true
horizons in
Kikuyuland
Make passionate love
To submissive suns
On fiery red
Low sunset grounds.

Funso Aiyejina

THE GOVERNOR'S TREE

"Aminu . . . Aminu . . . Aminu . . ."

It was the peak of the dry season and the silently oppressive afternoon re-echoed the call several times. It reverberated around the new blocks of offices and sailed to the extreme corner where Aminu sat with his wrinkled chin resting in his cupped hands. As he opened his eyes in search of his caller, they were greeted by the sharp rays of the sun. He stretched his arms in a sweeping arc and their joints creaked like a door off tune with its hinges; then he yawned with his mouth wide open showing remnants of a once complete set of teeth.

After listening a while and thinking that whoever was calling had given up, he sank back onto the piece of crumbling cement block that had served him as a stool. Gravel chipped off the sides of the piece as he sat on it.

"Aminu!"

The call this time was loud, with an underlying tinge of urgency.

Aminu got up determined to go after whoever it was who was so insistent on howling his name for all the evil spirits walking the afternoon to hear. Just as he turned the corner of the building he literally ran into the Chief Messenger who was fuming all over with rage.

"So you did not hear me shouting your name since?"

It was a question that demanded no answer but Aminu quietly murmured "sorry oga."

"Be sorry for yourself," retorted the Chief Messenger. "Oga wants to see you in his office."

That must be trouble for him, he thought. The D.O. had hardly ever asked him into his office. He ventured to ask the Chief Messenger what the trouble was but he was as un-cooperative as always.

"Go and see for yourself," was the curt reply.

Aminu walked gingerly up the steps that led into the D.O.'s office and his aging limbs trembled uneasily as he mounted one step after the other. When he got to the door he hesitated for a few minutes and shot a pitiful look at the rags that went by way of clothing for him. The numerous tracks of black thread that snaked all over the dusty shirt reminded him of his wife's constant attempts to stitch the tears. His pair of trousers laughed sadly at the areas around the knees which were the points of greatest friction during his daily chores of watering the flowers and cutting the grass around the office blocks. As he looked down towards his dust-laden motor-tyre slippers, his eyes caught the rolled-up bottoms of the trousers and he blinked in recollection of the tatters that were carefully concealed within the bulging bundle of folds.

He took off his slippers and stamped his small feet on the concrete balcony to remove the dust, gave a careful tap on the door and was answered by a loud, sonorous, and haughty voice that commanded him to come in.

"Good afternoon, Sir."

The D.O. looked up at him, nodded a reply and went back to the speech which he was writing. He was one of the many young graduates who had decided to settle for the supposedly easy civil service jobs rather than work with firms and corporations. He walked straight and tall, hardly saying anything to anyone, nodding his head in answer to greeting. At school he had been the most outspoken critic of the government, but he was now perfectly complacent sitting in the office reading files and writing welcome speeches in praise of the government. For two weeks since getting the news of the Governor's proposed visit he had busied himself with the writing of this welcome address. The concluding section of the speech had obviously given him more worries than he had bargained for. He read it over silently and then aloud to hear its poetic effect . . . "Your regime, your excellency, has witnessed a phenomenal progression in mass prosperity, there has been comfort for the common man in the street, your watch words have been equality of opportunity, equal and equitable distribution of the wealth of the land, fair play for everyman before the law and . . ." He broke off. What should come next? What would make the people clap loudest and the Governor smile broadest? He put his ball-point pen between his large

white teeth and bit hard at its tip's end.

As he looked to the ceiling in search of the missing words, his eyes caught sight of the waiting figure of Aminu. He had forgotten that he was still waiting. He got up and walked up to the window which gave view onto the long lawn that ran from one end of the blocks of offices to the other. With one hand holding up the window blinds and the other akimbo, he fixed his gaze on an object directly opposite the window.

Aminu watched him, silently fearing what must have given rise to these dreamy actions.

The D.O. continued his gaze at the small tree that stood in the middle of the long lawn—beside the post which bore the fluttering flag of the nation. The partial greenness of this small tree contrasted with the dry and brown grass around it. Despite the prolonged dry season the little tree had retained that greenness due to Aminu's constant effort at watering it. However, things had not been the same in the past few weeks. Women had trekked miles in search of water to drink not to talk of having any to water a tree. The dry season had lingered on for too long.

The D.O., when satisfied with the survey of this privileged tree in his dry domain, turned from the window, letting fall the blind, and faced Aminu.

"The Governor's tree is dying."

The D.O.'s utterance was no question, neither was it a plain statement of observation.

"But oga . . . there is no water . . . the pumps are no longer flowing and . . .," stammered Aminu, not knowing how else to react to the D.O.'s remark.

"And so the Governor's tree should die?" interrupted the D.O.

Aminu felt like asking the D.O. if he was expected to water the tree with his blood. He felt so the more when he remembered that it was the D.O. himself who, acting on the advice of the Water Superintendent, had issued a circular informing the populace that because the rivers which supplied water to the Waterworks had dried up, they had to put a stop to the pumping of water till it started to rain again.

"Let me tell you," the D.O. continued, "in a fortnight the Governor will come round on a meet-the-people tour and he must meet that tree alive. If that tree dies, you will lose your job. Do you understand me?"

nu understood him all right.

implications of the situation flooded him and tears l up in his eyes but he suppressed them. He would not ... no ... not before this upstart who was young enough his son.

ou can go."

ninu shuffled out of the D.O.'s office with the music of hat tree dies you will lose your job" tormenting his mind the continuously playing sound of a stuck record. It played ill Aminu felt that it was all the reality that existed in life. hing else mattered now other than the tree. He shifted the w of the tree from one facet to the other in his mind's eye il it finally culminated in the stooping Governor as he anted the young seedling to declare the foundation of the ices laid.

That was some months back and the site of the now dazzling ocks of offices had been crammed full of an anxious crowd ome to catch a glimpse of the newest breed of rulers. Aminu ad stood with the crowd and watched the Governor plant the ceremonial tree to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone of the District Office. He cut a highly impressive figure in his dashing military uniform and the people were impressed by the dog-sense alertness of his gun-carrying and stern-looking bodyguards. Aminu hardly knew then that with the completion of the building he would be employed as a gardener to look after the tree.

"No ill must befall that tree," the D.O. had warned sternly on the day he was employed. The tree had responded to his magic touch until the dry season came and lingered on longer than anyone bargained for. And now he would lose his job if the tree died!

The D.O.'s threat rang on ominously even as Aminu walked absent-mindedly into his thatched house that afternoon. Mama Olu—his wife—knew almost immediately that something was wrong. She noticed the hollowness of his response to the children's greetings. But she played the good housewife that she had always been.

He suppressed his misery and ate with forced relish so as to please his wife. When he had finished eating and their children had started scrambling over the leftover, Mama Olu drew up to him and asked what the matter was.

"But you could easily go to the office with water from home

to water the tree," suggested Mama Olu after she had heard his story.

"Go with water from home?" Aminu asked with an expression which declared that such a scheme was ridiculous.

"Yes, go with water from home."

"Even when we haven't got enough to drink at home?" queried Aminu.

"But you have got to retain that job in order to sustain the family. You leave the home end to me. I know how best to handle it."

Many people stared at him as he walked along the street with a pot of water carefully balanced on his head. Some thought he had gone mad and others thought that he was only trying to be funny. But Aminu walked on not minding their glares and unspoken jeers.

As he poured the water around the base of the tree a shoot of joy sprouted within him. And a ray of hope rose within his heart and he hoped that this would grow in magnitude as the Governor's tree resurrected.

Before the turn of the first week, the figure of a man carrying a pot of water along the streets every morning had become accepted. People no longer stared openly at Aminu. But the Governor's tree made no perceptible progress. The dry season had gradually led up to a drought and the earth had become baked. No amount of watering could now save the tree especially as the baked earth absorbed almost all the water before any got to the roots of the tree.

So when Aminu was summoned to the D.O.'s office towards the end of the second week, he knew what the decision would be. But was it his fault that the Governor's tree had made no progress despite his persistent efforts to see it blossom to life? Was it his fault that the rains had refused to come though they were long overdue? He felt like walking up to the D.O. and asking him these questions and many more.

He was prepared to hear the obvious as he went up to the D.O.'s office. He knocked hard and pushed the door open even before the voice within bellowed a "come in." He had not even bothered to remove his dust-laden slippers, neither did he bother to dust them clean. After all, he thought, he was going to carry some more dust out of the D.O.'s office. But why must the dust of the Governor's tree be added to his already dusty life? Why must these people at the top turn him into

dust before God asks him to return to the dust that he is and that he will eventually become when the final call comes? He could neither comprehend these whys nor could he ask them aloud.

The D.O. was looking out of the window again, surveying the surroundings like a monarch. But he did not wear the smile of a contented monarch. The wind was mounting and the D.O. could see the dead and the dying leaves of the Governor's tree dropping one after the other with every puff of the wind. It was as if every falling leaf intensified his anger against the gardener. Aminu felt like telling him that what he saw through his window was not all that there was to life. He felt like asking him to go out to the world and see the realities of life—the realities of the drought.

When he turned to face Aminu, the red glow of the anger in his heart blazed through his face and lighted red his eyes. And as he spoke, his voice sparked like coal fire amidst dry grass.

"The tree is dying and the Governor comes tomorrow . . .," he broke off, not knowing how to continue.

"I told you that," he continued after a momentary silence and a few vigorous shakes of his head, "that . . . if that tree dies you will lose your job. You think you can ruin my career? . . . The Governor will never give me a good recommendation when he discovers that proper care has not been taken of the tree that he planted. But before you ruin my career, I shall ruin you." And with his voice charged with every conceivable bitterness he made ready to pronounce judgement.

Aminu looked straight at the D.O.'s face. He was expecting a sack so he was not surprised at the D.O.'s virulent anger, rather he felt like telling the D.O. one or two home truths. He opened his mouth to speak but no words came out of it.

At that moment there was a knock on the door and the Chief Messenger came in with a letter for the D.O.

He hurriedly opened it as soon as he noticed the "Top Secret" seal on it. The day had gradually darkened so he went to the window and parted the window blinds to let in some light. He held up the letter to the light to read it.

"Damn it!" he muttered, flinging the letter on the table. He looked out of the window and his eyes fell on the Governor's tree. He could not now make out its outline as clearly as he had on his previous surveys. The sky had gradually dark-

ened and there were now signs of an impending rain. turned away from the window to face Aminu and the Ch Messenger.

"Aminu," he started after taking his seat at the table. " away but make sure that you take a better care of the Gove nor's tree. Next time I will not give you another chance an I . . ."

His next words were drowned by the sudden splatter of th sharp arrows of the first rain of the year. Aminu turned to go Thoughts of the numerous leaks on his roof at home so much occupied him that he did not see the D.O. look sadly at the letter and then instruct the Chief Messenger to tell the Chief Clerk to cancel all invitations to the cocktail party with the Governor.

s Lester

HE OUTSIDER IN EUROPEAN AND AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

The Outsider is the one who stands apart from the norm—the igious, racial, or class minority, the artist who hates the ajority for not seeing as he sees, the intellectual whose par- cular kind of knowledge creates a chasm between him and he norm, the nihilist who does not accept the definitions of ife and reality posited by the majority. These are only a few who inhabit the nether world of Outsiderness in Western culture. The very nature of their condition is alienation, which is not only a state of being, but more importantly, a way of seeing, an attitude toward what is accepted as reality.

The most obvious kind of Outsider is the sociological one, the member of an ethnic, religious or class minority who is rejected by and unacceptable to the majority. This is really a quasi-Outsider, for most in this category try to make them- selves acceptable to the majority. Here, a literature of protest and petition is created which seeks to convince the majority of the injustices of exclusion. It is a literature whose purpose is to change the attitudes, and consequently, the behavior of the majority toward the minority.

Much of Afro-American literature up to the Harlem Renais- sance of the 1920's reflected this attitude. It was a brief for the defense against a prosecuting and persecuting majority. However, the Outsider found a unique expression within it in the figure of the mulatto, a dominant type in early black fiction.

The mulatto is, perhaps, the ultimate sociological Outsider, looking white but defined by society as black. Although much of the literature about the mulatto experience is sentimental in tone and style, it hints at one of the themes of Outsider literature: Life is absurd.

In this literature, the mulatto hero or heroine passed into the white world, married white, was accepted and loved by whites until the fateful day when the hero's true racial identity

was revealed, generally through the hero's own admission. At such point, those who had loved him when he was white now hate him, because he is really black, and the hero returns to the black world where he is accepted for himself, i.e., his essence, not his appearance.

In his person, the mulatto asked the question, "What is real?" Is it what it appears to be, or is it something in the mind? "Appearance is reality," answers the mulatto, passing into the white world. "Appearance is reality," the white world agrees, until it learns that white is really black, at which point it declares, "Reality is what I define it to be." Black writers in the mulatto genre could not bring themselves to face the logical end of the mulatto challenge to white definitions of reality, which was—white people are absurd.

Such a declaration could not come from a people uncertain of their place in existence. It was safer to define alienation as socio-political rather than philosophical, for if one could not hope for eventual acceptance by the majority, how was life to be lived?

In European literature, the Outsider who yearns for acceptance is represented by Thomas Mann's "Tonio Kruger." It is a good example, representing many facets of the Outsider experience which black writers would explore as they plunged deeper into their own hearts of darkness.

Tonio Kruger's marginality is seen first in his name—Tonio, a shortened form of the Italian, Antonio. "Tonio—why what sort of name is that?" asks Immerthal, one of Kruger's adolescent classmates. "Though of course I know it's not your fault in the least." What a new dimension is placed on, ". . . it's not your fault in the least" when heard through the ears of the black experience, and Tonio Kruger's response parallels the black response to being deemed guilty for what he could not control: "Yes, it's a silly name—Lord knows I'd rather be called Heinrich or Wilhelm." The mulatto changes race; the darker-skinned black creates white fantasies, as with Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*; Tonio Kruger wishes to change names, to be called as others are called, and proving Shakespeare wrong: a rose by any other name might wither and die.

Names are important to the Outsider, for it is not what he does that identifies him, but who he is. There was a man named Malcolm Little, who was reborn in prison and chris-

tened himself Malcolm X, the 'X' a slash mark negating Western history itself. That man was reborn again in Mecca and was rebaptized as El Hajj Malik Shabazz. His names are a record of his journey through identity. Naming is an important African ritual, for by our names, we know ourselves and are known by others. A name is more than a symbol of identity, it is identity—"Tonio—why what sort of name is that?" Immerthal really meant, "What sort of person are you? Who are you?" Thus, Jews and Italians pass into the American mainstream, or try to, by changing their names, for like Tonio Kruger, their names place them outside, identify them as Other.

To the more advanced Outsider, however, names are so important that they do not have them: Kafka's Mr. K, the nameless heroes of Barbusse's *L'Enfer* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and James Baldwin's declaration, *Nobody Knows My Name*, implying that even he doesn't. Kafka and Dostoyevsky go even further and give heroes a non-human aspect, creating beetle-men, and the black writer, William Demby calls a town *Beetlecreek*, in his novel of that name. (And why did three such disparate writers choose the beetle as the symbol of Outsiderness?)

Tonio Kruger's name represents the two poles of his nature, which Mann significantly portrays in images of dark and light. Tonio's mother, Consuelo, is "black-haired" and Tonio's father "had brought her long ago from some place far down on the map." That place is eventually revealed to be Italy, which is not all "far down on the map," but, in the Aryan psyche, Mediterranean people are Other. Mann presents Consuelo as someone from the hidden underside of the collective human psyche. (And one shudders to think what Africans would have been to him.)

Tonio hates this dark side of himself, just as the mulatto in black fiction hates his hidden dark self. The self-hatred in "Tonio Kruger" is symbolized by Tonio's unfulfilled longin for Ingeborg Holm, the blond Aryan, and his rejection of th girl who is attracted to him, Magdalena Vermehren, who ha "great, dark, brilliant eyes." At the end of the story, the adul. Tonio sees Ingeborg for the first time since adolescence. She is with his childhood friend, Hans, and gazing at them, he sees "the blond, fair-haired breed of the steel-blue eyes, which stood to him for the pure, the blithe, the untroubled in life; for

a virginal aloofness that was at once both simple and full of pride." He becomes aware that someone is looking at *him*. It is a woman, nameless, who is reminiscent of Magdalena for she "was looking up at Tonio Kruger with black swimming eyes. He turned away." The description is so brief that one wonders if this woman is real. Perhaps she is the spectre of that side of himself he refuses to acknowledge and accept, that side of himself "to whom nothing mattered at all," as he characterized his mother. He turns away from it and the story ends with Tonio seeking to escape his Outsiderness by romanticizing the bourgeoisie and pledging his life to them.

It is odd to find such a window onto the black experience in European literature, but then, blackness has always been a symbol of terror and the unknown since the Middle Ages, as well as a symbol for the sensual, the emotional, the "nothing matters at all" of Mann, the "dark gods" of D. H. Lawrence. The white Westerner projects onto non-whites what he fears in himself, and since darkness symbolizes the unknown, dark people become the hidden aspect of the white soul.

The dark self has also been difficult for blacks to accept, but for different reasons. Society as a mirror which gives its members a beautiful image of themselves never existed for blacks. They looked into mirrors and saw not themselves but happy slaves, Stepin' Fetchit, and minstrels. Unable to believe their eyes, they spoke and said, "Who am I, mirror, mirror on the wall." And the mirror said, "One to whom nothing matters at all." America convinced blacks that they would not be accepted until they gave up watermelon, stopped talking like niggers and singing trashy music, used deodorant and got a B.A. Claude McKay in his trilogy, *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom*, depicted what happened to the sociological Outsider who followed this advice, even in part. He became a philosophical Outsider.

The hero of the first two novels is Ray, an educated Haitian, whose education alienated him from blacks. He is no longer of them. They call him "Professor" because his education shows in his speech, his love of books, and the way he moves. They accept him, but they and he know that his education has placed him outside black culture. Ray's response to his dark self is the opposite of Tonio Kruger's. Ray exalts the darkness and from that vantage point, presents the Outsider's critique

of Western culture and civilization, which has become a theme of twentieth century fiction, black, American, and European.

> He hated civilization . . . He hated civilization because its general attitude toward the colored man was such as to rob him of his warm human instincts and make him inhuman. Under it the thinking colored man could not function normally like his white brother, responsive and reacting spontaneously to the emotions of pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow, kindness or hardness, charity, anger, and forgiveness. Only within the confines of his own world of color could he be his true self. But so soon as he entered the great white world, where of necessity he must work and roam and breathe the larger air to live, that entire world, high, low, middle, unclassed all conspired to make him painfully conscious of color and race . . .
>
> It was easy enough for Banjo, who in all matters acted instinctively. But it was not easy for a Negro with an intellect standing watch over his native instincts to take his own way in this white man's civilization. But of one thing he was resolved: civilization would not take the love of color, joy, beauty, vitality, and nobility out of his life and make him one of the poor mass of its pale creatures. . . .
>
> Could he not see what Anglo-Saxon standards were doing to some of the world's most interesting people? Some Jews ashamed of being Jews. Changing their names and their religion . . . for the Jesus of the Christians. The Irish objecting to the artistic use of their own rich idioms. Inferiority bile of non-Nordic minorities. Educated Negroes ashamed of their race's intuitive love of color, wrapping themselves up in a respectable gray, ashamed of Congo-sounding laughter, ashamed of their complexion (bleaching out), ashamed of their strong appetites. No being ashamed for Ray. Rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to hell and live instinct!

McKay sounds several notes. He gives us a new statement of the Rousseauian primitive, exalting instinct over intellect, Id over Superego. He asserts cultural blackness as a value to live one's life by, and in so doing, was the primary source of inspiration for the French-speaking African poets of Negritude in the 1930's, particularly Senghor. McKay, also, makes an unconscious link with Thomas Mann, for he recognizes the Anglo-Saxon cultural tyranny which imposes itself on everyone different. He sees that the Outsider is not primarily sociological, but one whose values and lifestyle differ significantly from those of the dominant culture. Unlike Mann, however,

McKay is not afraid of the dark.

Further into the twentieth century, European Outsiders would not only cease to fear the dark, but through it, find some kind of meaning for meaningless existences. In Sartre's *Nausea*, Roquentin's psychic nausea disappears only when he hears a record of a black woman singing "Some of These Days."

> When the voice was heard in the silence I felt my body harden and the nausea vanish; suddenly it was almost unbearable to become so hard, so brilliant . . . I am *in* the music. Globes of fire turn in the mirrors, encircled by rings of smoke.

Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* presents another "mulatto"-like figure, Harry Haller, who divides himself into a civilized man and a wolf-man, the latter, of course, representing the "Tonio" of his "Kruger." He opens himself to this dark side of his nature, goes to a tavern, where he meets a girl who makes him listen to jazz, introduces him to the saxophone player, Pablo, and a sensuous woman, Maria. Other European Outsiders seek their darker, outside selves through violence, like Raskolnikov. Most significant, however, is that the more blacks become a part of Western civilization, the black Outsider begins to resemble Roquentin, Harry Haller, and Raskolnikov. Richard Wright's hero in *The Outsider* only becomes alive when he listens to the blues or engages in the act of murder. Ralph Ellison's invisible man sits in his underground home listening to a Louis Armstrong recording of "What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue?," wishing he could hear five recordings of it simultaneously. And, in a statement that foreshadowed white rock music of the sixties, the Invisible Man says, "When I have music I want to *feel* its vibrations, not only with my ear but with my whole body."

The philosophical Outsider, European and black, is dead in some essential way and only by awakening the dead part of himself—the senses, the emotions—will he come alive. And, of course, no people in Western society are more alive to their feeling selves than blacks.

Jean Toomer is the poet of the Outsider experience, black or white, and is the only writer to examine in detail woman-as-Outsider. For our purposes here, it is enough to say that Toomer describes women whose essence is violated, thus

transforming them into spiritual Outsiders. In this context, it is significant that most of Toomer's women are mulattoes. However, it is through a male, dark-skinned character that we are presented with a solution to the Outsider's problem.

In the story "Box Seat," Toomer's hero, Dan Moore, is uneducated, one who holds firmly to the canestalk of his racial heritage, which enables him to see the falsity and hypocrisy of black bourgeois existence.

Dan is walking down Thirteenth Street toward the house where his girl friend rents a room. He feels out of place on the street, because the houses are "virginal," "shy girls whose eyes shine reticently upon the dusk body of the street." The people who live in them "Open gates, and go indoors, perfectly," the black version of Eliot's "In the room the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo." Dan walks on the porch of his girl friend's house and is enraged when he can't find the doorbell.

> Break in. Get an ax and smash in. Smash in their faces. I'll show em. Break into an engine-house, steal a thousand horse-power fire truck. Smash in with the truck. I'll show em. Grab an ax and brain em. Cut em up. Jack the Ripper. Baboon from the zoo. And then the cops come. "No, I ain't a baboon. I ain't Jack the Ripper. I'm a poor man out of work. Take your hands off me, you bull-necked bears. Look into my eyes. I am Dan Moore. I was born in a canefield . . .

Here we have one of the rare instances of the assertive Outsider, sure and proud of that identity. There is nothing passive about Dan. He does not stand outside, like Tonio Kruger, longing to get in. He is the Outsider enraged because others do not see as he does. "The hands of Jesus touched me," Dan Moore's doorstep interior monologue continues. "I am come to a sick world to heal it." Dan Moore is the black man with the truth of the earth within him, for he was born in a canefield. He is the race unpoisoned by its contact with white civilization, because his soul is made of cane fibers.

Because it is, Dan hears and sees another reality than the one society upholds. When Mrs. Pribby, his girl friend's landlady, sits in her chair, Dan hears

> a sharp click . . . The click is metallic like the sound of a bolt being shot into place . . . The house contracts about him. It is a sharp-edged, massed metallic house. Bolted. About Mrs. Pribby. Bolted to the endless rows of metal houses. Mrs. Pribby's house. The rows of houses belong to other Mrs. Pribbys. No wonder he couldn't sing to them.

Muriel, Dan's girl, is afraid of him, and she asks what he's doing now, and Dan gives the classic Outsider reply: "Nothing as the world would have it. Living, as I look at things." The Outsider does not "make a living"; he lives and his living is a threat to the world. Muriel tells Dan, "You ought to work more and think less. That's the best way to get along." Dan responds with the Outsider's vicious judgement: "Mussel-heads get along."

Dan goes to the theatre and one of the acts involves dwarf prizefighters. They, too, are Outsiders, but degraded, humiliated Outsiders, a spectacle for the entertainment of the sociological black Outsider audience seeking to become Insiders. The dwarf who wins the fight sings a song to the audience, holding a mirror that flashes in the face of each person he sings to, the dwarf's way of saying that "You are me." The audience laughs, however, and the tension in Dan, who identifies completely with the dwarfs, increases until he leaps to his feet, shouting, "JESUS WAS ONCE A LEPER!"

On one level, this extraordinary story is the black Outsider's critique of white society and its values. Dan sees the falseness of others. Like Sartre's Roquentin, Dan finds civilization so repulsive, it makes him ill. But where Roquentin sees only meaningless, which is typical of the self-pitying Outsider, the weak Outsider, Dan is aware of a deeper meaning and is impelled to try and communicate it. His one-ness with his racial experience has brought him to an understanding of suffering so profound that he becomes a suffering Christ figure intent on redeeming the world.

The only other figure in Outsider literature similar to Dan is the hero of Richard Wright's story, "The Man Who Lived Underground." Fred Daniels lives in the sewer beneath the city streets, hiding from the police for a murder he did not commit but was beaten into confessing. (This is a metaphor for an aspect of the black experience, because all blacks have been accused of and confessed to a crime they did not commit and cannot name.) Fred Daniels, like Dan Moore, is uneducated. (It is no accident that both men are named Daniel, with its Biblical symbolism of society as a lion's den.) How Dan Moore came to his Outsider vision is unknown, but Fred Daniels comes to his by living underground. His will to survive impels him to sneak into the outside world for food, but he does not go above ground; he penetrates the underside of the world by re-

moving bricks from the sewer wall and entering buildings. He spies on the world without being seen and without being a participant, and it is this act of non-participation that gives him a new perception of reality.

He makes his way into a building, stumbles down steps and comes to a doorway, where he peers through the keyhole into a room and sees,

> ... the nude waxen figure of a man stretched out upon a white table ... Above the naked figure was suspended a huge glass container filled with a blood-red liquid from which a white rubber tube dangled. He crouched closer to the door and saw the tip end of a black object lined with pink satin.

He realizes eventually that he is looking into a mortuary, but because he is now outside the world, unable to read the signs which identify everything in it, everything has a new and striking reality. He hears a roaring noise from behind a wall, follows it up a winding stairwell until he cautiously goes through a black curtain.

> He parted the folds and looked into a convex depth that gleamed with clusters of shimmering lights. Sprawling below him was a stretch of human faces, tilting upward, chanting, whistling, screaming, laughing. Dangling before the faces, high upon a screen of silver, were jerking shadows.

It is a movie house and on realizing it, he laughs. But because what is called reality is now unfamiliar to him, he discovers absurdity.

> These people were laughing at their lives, he thought with amazement. They were shouting and yelling at the animated shadows of themselves.

Like Dan Moore, he wants to tell them they are unreal.

> His compassion fired his imagination and he stepped out of the box and walked out upon thin air, walked on down to the audience, and hovering in the air just above them, he stretched out his hand to touch them ... No, it could not be done; he could not awaken them. He sighed. Yes, these people were children, sleeping in their living, awake in their dying.

Fred later spies into an office and sees a safe crammed with money. He steals it, not from greed but because "he was in

trigued with the form and color of the money, with the manifold reactions which he knew that men above ground held toward it." He also steals a typewriter because it is one of "the serious toys of the men who lived in the dead world of sunshine and rain he had left. . . ."

He papers the walls of his sewer with hundred dollar bills, laughing uproariously. "If only people could see this!" he exclaims. "He wanted to run from this cave and yell his discovery to the world." Along with the money, he'd also stolen hundreds of watches and diamonds, and he winds the watches, drives nails into the money-covered sewer walls and hangs a watch from each one. "People certainly can do some funny things," he says to himself, talking about the world that invented watches and worshipped green paper.

His euphoria gives way to deeper insight, however, as he sees into the heart of the world.

> Maybe anything's right, he mumbled. Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself, murder, theft, torture.

He has reached the existential vortex. There are no values; there is no right and wrong; there is no reality except that which the majority defines as real. But the black Outsider does not succumb to the Nietzschean will to power, or the Camusian nihilism of Mersault in *The Stranger*. Fred Daniels and Dan Moore, because they are black and despised, drop through the vortex into the humanity of saints.

Fred Daniels crawls through one of his holes in the wall and peers into a shop from which he'd stolen a radio and there sees a young black boy being accused of the theft.

> . . . he felt a sort of distant pity for the boy and wondered if he ought to bring back the radio and leave it in the basement. No. Perhaps it was a good thing that they were beating the boy; perhaps the beating would bring to the boy's attention, for the first time in his life, the secret of his existence, the guilt that he could never get rid of.

Fred Daniels has plumbed the depths of Outsiderness, and like Dan Moore, he is brought into a closer relationship with others, unlike European Outsiders who exist in agonizing isolation from others and themselves.

Fred Daniels uncovers within himself Original Sin and he

leaves the underground and turns himself into the police, telling them that it doesn't make any difference that he wasn't guilty of killing the woman, which the police now know, because "I'm guilty!" What is he guilty of? He is guilty of having participated in the illusion which everyone accepts as reality, of supporting that illusion with his life, of supporting its existence in others. Now that he knows the truth, he does not feel liberated: He is overwhelmed with the depth of his sin. The police eventually kill Fred Daniels, saying, "You've got to shoot his kind. They'd wreck things."

Perhaps it is only black writers who could have written this kind of Outsider, a man who identifies with dwarfs and a leprous Jesus, and another who knows Original Sin. Toomer and Wright's Outsiders overcome their alienation by going through the tunnel of racial suffering and coming out on the other side so intensely aware of everyone's suffering that they become Jesus figures, going mad or dying for the sins of the world.

European Outsiders never resolve their alienation. Some, like Camus' Mersault, are unconscious of being Outsiders. Mersault does not agonize as do Dan and Fred Daniels. Mersault is beyond such, accepting absurdity as being so normal that he believes in nothing and is undisturbed by the nothingness.

Such an extreme of Outsiderness is, perhaps, impossible for blacks, because the black Outsider is a part of something, which is the racial experience of suffering. (While writing this essay, I was looking through a copy of Colin Wilson's *Religion and the Rebel*, the Bible of my sophomore year at Fisk University, and was startled to find scribbled on the inside cover a reminder of my own struggle with Outsiderness: "Suffering is Awareness. This is preferable to middle-class white America." How often as adolescents do we write things it takes decades of living to fully understand.) Suffering is awareness and the black Outsider uses that suffering Awareness to become humanity. One can only see himself when he stops looking for his reflection. In European literature, the Outsider sees himself and sees nothing. In black literature, the Outsider sees himself and sees everyone. The Outsider identity of blacks is dissolved by compassion, a concept almost wholly absent from the literature of the European Outsider.

We are all Outsiders, and it is ironic that those who dwell

in darkness should be the ones to proclaim that, at least in literature. (In reality, or what passes for it, it appears that blacks are becoming Mersaults.) Tonio Kruger should have looked through the window of his dark self and seen that Inge's blondness was a sheen hiding her leprous sores. If he had done that, however, he would have been forced to see his own. That, of course, is what none of us want to do.

On the eve of America's Bicentennial, which promises to be a masturbatory ritual, perhaps the vision of the black Outsider is needed more than ever, to hold the mirror to the audience's face and hope that they will see that Jesus was a leper, to walk out of our personal undergrounds and admit that we didn't do it, but we are guilty. Then, perhaps two hundred years from now there might be something to celebrate.

Chike

Ezekiel Mphahlele

NOTES FROM THE BLACK AMERICAN WORLD: IV: IMAGES OF AFRICA IN AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

In a preface to *From the Fugitive Blacksmith or Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849) the author says: "It is under the mildest form of slavery, as it exists in Maryland, Virginia and Kentucky, that the finest specimens of coloured females are reared. There are no mothers who rear, and educate in the natural graces, finer daughters than the Ethiopian women, who have the least chance to give scope to their maternal affections."[1] It is quite clear that by this time—200 years since the first slaves arrived in this country—the visual memory of Africa had thinned out, that the residual memory had worked itself into folk poetry and music.

Africa appears in anecdotes reported from the mouths of old people who came from the slave south. A narrator relates her grandmother's anecdote about how they had been lured with lengths of red flannel by white slavers in Africa. They had collected the flannel, until they were on the boat where the whites had lured them. The gates had then been shut and the slave cargo carried away. The grandmother said she had liked it on the boat. The granddaughter ends the narrative thus: "No, I ain't never had no desire to go to Africa, 'cause I swine to stay where I is."[2]

Another and good-humored anecdote tells how the narrator got to the area where she lived as a slave. A man came up to her town and said there was a free train going back to Africa. People sold their things and got on the train. We can imagine the rest.[3] One narrator gives a brief account of his role on the side of the Confederates in the Civil War. "My white folks see

that I was not abused," he recounts. "When the news of the surrender come, lots of colored folks seem to be rejoicing and sing. 'I's free, I's free as a frog,' 'cause a frog had freedom to get on a log and jump off when he please. Some just stayed on with their white folks. One time they say they send all the niggers back to Africa. I say they never git me. I been here, and my white folks been here."[4]

Age and the need to survive in territory one knew so well had a lot to do with the attitude to Africa those days. In blunt language, one narrator tells how his father said to his master when the news of freedom came, "You brought me here from Africa and North Carolina, and I going to stay with you long as ever I get something to eat. You got to look after me!"

African folktales and African historical accounts were contained in the lyrics of many songs Black slaves sang at the secret camp meetings, before the lyrics were changed to suit the Christian religion.

While the colonization spirit lasted, Africa became the "heaven," the "refuge," the "promised land," that feature in so many guises in the spirituals. "The parting songs of Negroes who sailed to Africa conditioned the remaining slaves for colonization," says Miles Mark Fisher.[5] "These people compared the difficulty of securing manumissions for expatriation to the deliverance of Daniel from the den of lions." By late 1924, Fisher observes, the interest of blacks in African colonization was weakening. Again survival in territory one had come to know well became the paramount concern.

We are now familiar with the B'rer Rabbit stories that became a distinctive part of slave lore. B'rer Rabbit's ancestor was the African mythological character who, although relatively weak, outwitted other animals and survived. He never gave up the struggle. In West Africa, we are told, his equivalent would be Legba, the slippery messenger of the gods. "In these West African versions, there is a sense of organic leadership between the people and Legba, or with Anansi the spider, another form he takes, and the rest of the forces of the universe."[6] Obviously, George P. Rawick puts it, the African slave "brought with him the content of his mind, his memory."[7] He also observes that "the process whereby the African in the New World changed in order to meet his new environment was dependent upon his African culture. While it is certainly true that the African under American slavery

changed, he did so in ways that were recognizably African."[8]

We have come a long way from the sixteenth century, but in spite of the much greater mobility of the Afro-American today, in spite of all he has assimilated from his Anglo-Saxon environment, Africa still haunts him. Always with the emergence of a new cycle of black consciousness, Africa features prominently in Afro-American literature.

One feels too embarrassed even to mention in passing Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) and her notion of Africa. She is something of a curio in the history of black American letters. But as Africa has always been bound up with the Afro-American's view of himself, we cannot ignore even the curios. Phillis Wheatley wrote a verse structured after the neoclassic models of eighteenth century England, an age in which poetry was largely a bookish enterprise in which decorum toned down emotion. Her images of Africa were therefore shaped at once by the poetical diction she had learned in her studies (a diction in which language stagnated), by the literary pictures of African "primitiveness" that were circulating in England during that "age of enlightenment," and by her Christian upbringing in Boston.

She is grateful to have been removed from her native Africa as a slave—"the land of errors," as she puts it, where she had lived in "Egyptian gloom," in "those dark abodes." It was by divine mercy, she states, that she was saved from her "Pagan land,"—the "benighted soul" that she was. There is something in the poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America" that uncannily antedates Booker T. Washington when she says:

> Remember, *Christians*, *Negroes*, black as *Cain*,
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.[9]

It is quite obvious of course that whenever Phillis Wheatley wrote "Africans," she was thinking both of those living in Africa and America.

The prose writings of Gustavus Vassa (c. 1745-1797) breathe a nobility that is sincere, vigorous even while it shows refinement. He had a much more cosmopolitan exposure as a sailor. His patronage by the whites, whether they owned him or not, was nothing like that Phillis Wheatley enjoyed. For the white man whose name Phillis took, adopting an African girl was the kind of moral investment Vassa was never likely to fall victim to. He was more a commercial commodity to his

masters. When he writes about Africa, it is to recall with nostalgia the splendour, pomp, and humanism of the people in the kingdom of Benin. He writes with reverence and admiration of his people's love of music, dance and poetry, attributes we are not familiar with since the treasures of Benin civilization were revealed to us. Naturally, he was writing for Western audiences. He felt it necessary to even inform them that his people were "extremely cleanly,"—which was also part of their religion.

In this pioneer period of Afro-American literature, which began a century and a half after the first blacks arrived in Virginia in 1619—about 1760—writers evinced three modes of responses: they might try to contain the agony of slavery so that they survive; or they might express their indignation; or they might, as Phillis Wheatley did, write in a way that would prove to the white man that blacks could be as good as any of them. A curiously ironic mixture of escape and self-assertion. In any case, the African connection would naturally have to be played down. George Moses Horton (c. 1797-c. 1883) was accommodating, but he hoped to be able to collect money from his writings that would enable him to return to Africa. He ended up an accommodationist and died in this country.

The period of concentrated protest, especially through the medium of slave narratives (1830-1865), was too preoccupied with the agony of slavery to dream. Africa as a dream determined some of the lyrics and mood of the spiritual. But what mattered more, as the idea of returning to Africa proved progressively that the stark realities of the black man's condition were to be acted out on American soil, was the fact that the spiritual, like the blues, gave black expression a distinctively American stamp. These modes of expression, like Indian pottery, were indigenously American, even while Anglo-Americans were still writing and thinking as an extension of England. We can say this without negating the African elements in black expression.

The period 1865-1910 is characterized by both accommodation and protest. It is a period dominated ideologically by Booker T. Washington and his opponent W. E. B. Du Bois. The slave narrative was still an important genre, but Afro-American fiction had made its mark with William Wells Brown's Clotel (1853). The theme of the mulatto was to become an increasingly intriguing one for black fiction. Paul Laurence

Dunbar (1872-1906) was by and large an accommodationist, although occasionally his verse strikes a posture of mild indignation. When he wants to express intense indignation, his Victorian mannerisms get in the way. So even when he writes his "Ode to Ethiopia," one feels an awkward distance between the poet and his subject:

> On every hand in this fair land,
> Proud Ethiope's swarthy children stand
> Beside their fairer neighbor.

He is of course talking about all people of African descent. The name "Ethiopia" projects an image of independence which in turn suggests that of slavery in the New World. Although the image "tune their lyres to sing of Ethiopia's glory" echoes Ethiopia's past, the country is still only an idea rather than a physical and human reality; indeed it is much too facile to leave a lasting impact on the reader's mind. But Dunbar was beset by many problems—money and misguided white patronage.

To move into the Harlem of World War I, into the 1920's, is to move into another set of issues that were hotly debated: an era of as many contradictions as was possible amid such a great diversity of personalities, leadership, ideologies, social goals, as appeared on the scene. It is an era dominated by men like Du Bois once again, by Marcus Garvey, other nationalists, black socialists, the communists, etc. Commenting on the complexity of the issues of the time, Harold Cruse writes:

> The twentieth century revolution had churned up too many ingredients from the depths of society for any one govement to successfully contend with. A post-world war period that could give rise to the ideologies of colonial unrest, migrations, nationalism, socialism, communism, unionism, racism, reformism, and all forms of radicalism and federal repression could hardly be comprehensively grasped.[10]

He quotes W. E. B. Du Bois himself as observing that the ideologies of the era "embraced more than our reasoned acts. They included physical, biological, and psychological forces; habits, conventions and enactments . . ."[11]

Garvey's back-to-Africa movement had its bitter opponents, e.g. Du Bois and other socialists, and nationalists who, having

taken a cue from Booker T. Washington's plea for self-help projects and economic self-sufficiency for blacks, had staked all they had on survival in the American society. "Garveyism," writes Edmund David Cronon in his *Black Moses—The Story of Marcus Garvey*, "failed largely because it was unable to come up with a suitable alternative to the unsatisfactory conditions of American life as they affect the Negro. Escape, either emotional or physical, was neither realistqc nor a lasting answer."

Toward the end of the 1920's, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was hurling stones at some of the assumptions of the black condition in the Harlem of the decade. He argued that the black man was selecting certain values out of American life because he needed to acquire a culture. "In spite of the efforts of those who would have him dig up his African's past, the Negro is a stranger to African culture." Still less were the educated blacks attracted to Garvey's nationalism, because they had by natural process invested in certain American white values. Negro business was abundantly dependent on white capital. Frazier commented further that the Harlem movement that was rediscovering its potential out of an ethnic experience was preoccupied strictly with culture. Even then, black writers were not being read by many of their black middle-class contemporaries.

The rediscovery of Africa in the 1920's can therefore best be understood as a state of mind. In pointing to the viability of black culture, thinkers like Alain Locke sought to renew "self-respect and self-dependence" among the blacks. He saw what he called the black man's "new internationalism" as "primarily an effort to recapture contact with the scattered peoples of African derivation . . . the possible role of the American Negro in the future development of Africa is one of the most constructive and universally helpful missions . . ." Note that he thought of Africa as a place to be *developed*. And yet he sensed another level of contact with Africa—through the arts. Locke noted in an essay, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" that, apart from the carry-over of the talent for rhythm from Africa to Afro-American art, there was little evidence of any direct connection of the Afro-American with his "ancestral arts." Afro-American art had absorbed a lot from its immediate cultural environment and something new had blossomed. There could not therefore be any emotional kinship between the African spirit and the Afro-American: the African spirit in

art was "disciplined, sophisticated, laconic and fatalistic," whereas the Afro-American was characterized by "naiveté, sentimentalism, exuberance" and improvisation. Afro-American art was a natural result of the American experience and "the emotional upheaval of its trials and ordeals." But inasmuch as African art had influenced the art of certain Europeans, there was the "possibility that the sensitive artistic mind of the American Negro, stimulated by a cultural pride and interest, [would] receive from African art a profound and galvanizing influence. The legacy is there at least, with prospects of a rich yield."[12] He observed further that the closer knowledge of "the skill and unique mastery of the arts of the ancestors" would help boost the black American's talents in those arts Africa excels in, i.e. sculpture, painting and decorative designs.

Du Bois and the NAACP were getting involved in Pan-African conferences; churches and other organizations were calling themselves African this and African that. This state of mind that was trying to grope and reach out for an image of Africa—a consciousness that was going to experience a revival generation after generation—persisted in some of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. It was as if the writers of imaginative literature, poets especially, felt the burning urge to reconcile the sense of an African heritage with the unrelenting demands of an American commitment. While, significantly, Jean Toomer was searching for his more immediate and therefore more palpable past in Georgia, in the period of captivity, other poets were making statements about Africa that perceived only hazy outlines of the continent, mostly from what they read about it. One can imagine the poets and novelists in those days trying to maintain an equilibrium between the romantic and the realistic. The temptation to ascribe to an African heritage the zest for life, self-abandon, passion, instinct as against intellect, was often too strong. White novelist and critic Carl Van Vechten reinforced this in his portrayal in *Nigger Heaven* (1926) of what was popularly called "primitive" passions. Indeed this is one of the reasons why in retrospect, the patronage of Harlem by the Greenwich Village whites (including Van Vechten himself) has become so suspect. It is fair to say, however, that the initial impulse to search for a metaphor for Africa was in itself a response to the degrading political and economic condition of the black

masses. It was more elevating to point to Africa as the source than to the slave south.

Claude McKay (1890-1948) hardly touches Africa in his poetry. In "Exhortation Summer 1919" he apostrophizes: "Africa! long ages sleeping, O my motherland awake!" The poem was the cry of a man outraged by the "Red Summer" of 1919—a time of bloody rioting in several places in the U.S.A. Africa here is merely an all-embracing term for black people. Indeed, as one or two of his Jamaica dialect poems indicate, having left Africa was a kind of blessing: the West Indian would still be wild and uncivilized back in Africa. Anyhow, Africa is just "a dim unknown land." The thought of it fills him with "a rare sense of things remote/ From this harsh life of fretful nights and days." Still a vague if exotic picture.

There is also that continent whose ancient empires and civilizations he recounts in the sonnet "Africa." He is not exploring his feeling about it: he is merely making a statement about Africa's past grandeur. By the same token, he pities Africa—"the harlot" whose time has passed, as a result of colonialism.

It is quite clear that McKay was ambivalent in his response to Africa when she seemed to whisper in his ear. "Outcast" is a moving poem that indicates this.[13] He longs, in spirit, for Africa: "dim regions whence my fathers came." He would go back there, "to darkness and to peace," but the white world holds him to ransom. He avoids the cliché that would make a return to Africa look as simple as switching on a light; he feels a commitment to this hemisphere, so he must live with the burden of having been born "under the white man's menace, out of time." Quite apart from stock images like "jungle songs," "darkness" and "peace," the poem is a moving statement that says a lot about the cultural dualism of the black American, his American condition and the commitment that it claims. There is often a temptation to regard cultural dualism as a pathetic condition. It is not. It is the enduring strength of the Afro-American.

McKay's ambivalence also comes through in what his fictional characters say. Jake, the ex-soldier in the novel *Home to Harlem* (1928) is being lectured to by a Haitian student on a train. Jake's image of Africa as jungle and Africans a "bush niggers," cannibals, is being corrected by the lecture The student tells him that, on the contrary, Jews were once

slaves of the Egyptians; that West Africa, Ethiopia and Southern Africa had flourishing civilizations and kingdoms in ancient times.

Ray, the wandering intellectual in *Home to Harlem*, is also in McKay's second novel, *Banjo*. He is intrigued by the violent longshoremen who act out their "primitive instincts":

> Educated Negroes ashamed of their race's intuitive love of color . . . ashamed of Congo-sounding laughter, ashamed of their complexion (bleaching out), ashamed of their strong appetites. No being ashamed for Ray. Rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to hell and live instinct.

McKay is toying with the exotic image here. Sterling Brown did not like *Banjo* much as a whole. He wrote that Ray, of whom his creator says, among other things: "a black man even though educated, was in closer biological kinship to the swell of primitive earth life," is a vitalist, not a radical, however anti-bourgeois and anti-imperialist he may sound.

Writing on Countee Cullen (1903-1946), Darwin T. Turner reminds us in his authoritative book *In a Minor Chord* of the twentieth century stereotype of the black man—as "a child of nature, whose uninhibited behavior is directed by unrestrainable passion, innate rhythm, an inherent talent for music."[14] He tells us that Cullen succumbed to the myth. Cullen was sure of the achievements of the Afro-American. He admired the walk of a waiter in Atlantic City: "Ten thousand years on jungle clues/ Alone shaped feet like these." In "A Song of Praise," he exults in a girl's dark skin and walk which is "like the replica/ Of some barbaric dance/ Wherein the soul of Africa/ Is winged with arrogance." Again we see here a poet who is trying hard, so hard, to project his mind into a continent he has only read about in books. The best remembered of the poems he wrote around a black consciousness and published under the title *Color* in 1925 is "Heritage."[15] He sustains here a long dialogue between a dominant twentieth-century self and another—almost a shadow—that reminds him of his African heritage.

Arna Bontemps called Cullen a "worrier." There is a great deal of truth also in what Nathan Irvin Huggins says in his *Harlem Renaissance*—that Cullen's efforts were not merely to grasp the meaning of Africa for himself and as "the well-

springs of Negro spirit and identity . . . Africa and 'paganism' were instruments in his personal rebellion against the Christian church." He *was* confused. The poet was later to say in a preface to his anthology *Caroling Dusk* (1927) that "dependent on the English language, [Negro poets] may have more to gain from the rich background of English and American poetry than from any nebulous atavistic yearnings toward an African inheritance." Quite obviously he was thinking of poetry as a thing made, a manipulation of bookish language, and not a spontaneous expression of emotion and thought as well, which elements are shaped by history, by social reality. In his anthology he introduces his contributions by saying: ". . . . reared in the conservative atmosphere of a Methodist parsonage, Countee Cullen's chief problem has been that of reconciling a Christian upbringing with a pagan inclination."[16]

In "Heritage" Cullen would have us believe that he is writing out of some kind of pain. Nothing suggests any particular experience that has caused the pain. He generally feels the Africa in him urging him to "doff this new exuberance" and behave in simple, sensuous passionate ways, so to speak. We are never to know really *why the pain?* Africa comes to his mind in a romantic haze that suggests distance in time and space: "Eden," "jungle star or jungle track," "scarlet sea," "bronzed men," "spicy grove, cinnamon tree," "barbaric birds," "jungle herds . . . Trampling tall defiant grass/ Where forest lovers lie." A student of Keats, Cullen loads the poem with automatic epithets his master was so fond of in his early poetry. This use of rhetoric keeps Africa even more distant from what Cullen thinks he is experiencing. What are we to understand him really to be *feeling* when he says pride, "dear distress," joy, are mixed in him, that "dark blood" is damned in him "like great pulsing tides of wine?" What is it about Africa, which comes to him in a romantic haze, that makes his blood want to "surge and foam and fret" to bursting point? Clearly Cullen was, like young Keats, overfond of the sound of words and almost unbearable sensuous imagery. Africa here is a rhetorical device. He goes so far as to call it "a book one thumbs listlessly." Again we are confronted with images that take us back to the Africa of the picture books, the continent that conjures up pictures of "leprous flowers" with "fierce corollas."

If the question he keeps asking "what is Africa to me?" is

orry, it fails to register in those terms,
bout the effect of rain on him: "like a
n" he twists, writhes, "like a baited
red drip" through his body . . .

into his own religious questionings:
then gods" are not for him; he wishes
e the supplicant would be bringing to
ge of the black man's suffering. This
Africa is meant in a romantic-mys-
ension the poet hopes will enrich the
ullen knows about African religions
questioning depth. The picture-book
not say anything about his heritage
religious doubts. It is no wonder
y asking his Lord to forgive him "if
es a human creed." Don't we, after
nk serve our needs?

ame famous in the 1920's, probably
poets, Langston Hughes (1902-1967)
acquainted with Africa. In 1923
S. *Malone* to pay his way to Africa.
aphy *The Big Sea* (1940):

rkening the sea's edge with the loam of
nd beautiful as the night. The bare,
he market places. The rippling muscles
cocoa beans and mahogany on ships
or that was why our ship was there—
Africa.

nside. My Africa, Motherland of the
o! Africa! The real thing."

ore about Africa in his non-fiction,
ontinent for readings and confer-
till shortly before he died. In the
ed in some of his poetry, as well
ies. He also edited, much later,
and prose.

"I, too, sing America . . . I, too,
made it known to his white

patroness that she could not expect him to write poetry that advanced the popular notion of the black man's passions and instinctive behavior patterns usually associated with Africa. He was urban and American. And this characterizes Hughes' attitude to Africa throughout his life: never patronizing or condescending or apologetic to Africa for being American, or vice versa; never denying his heritage. Nor did he see it as his mission to crusade among Afro-Americans to embrace Africa. It was unfortunate that in his last years be became something like a spokesman for America in Africa, under the auspices of the United States Information Agency. He was reluctant to read his militant poetry at social occasions sponsored by the Information Agency. But it was still better than if someone else had been sent who did not have his warmth, humility and dignity.

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"—Hughes' first poem which The Crisis published in 1921, is a lyrical expression of his acknowledgement of the black man's African heritage. A heritage he exalts and which unites all the black peoples of the world. It evokes memories of the cradles of civilization like the Euphrates, the Nile and of the Congo and the Mississippi.

There was much that black poets wrote about Africa in the 1920's that sounds today like a frivolous self-indulgence. As if some poets merely wanted to hear how lines about Africa sounded. At times Langston Hughes' early poetry about Africa has this kind of ring:

All the tom-toms of the jungle beat in my blood.
And all the wild hot moons of the jungles shine
in my soul.

I am afraid of this civilization—
So hard.
So strong.
So cold."

And yet, in his own fashion, he could distil a poignancy into his lines that defines his condition on American soil, even while it expresses a nostalgia. As when he says he was a red man at one time, a black man, and the white man came and drove him out of the forest. He lost his jungles and is now "caged in the circus of civilization." He also defines the blacks scattered all

over the world in the telling imagistic lines of "Black Seed." "Hybrid plants" growing on strange soil, "in another's garden," pruned and mutilated by white gardeners.

Africa was a state of mind that knew where the black man's commitment eventually lay—in a land where he had invested so much in human life, human labor, in political drive and energy, in material resources—however frustrating life still was. It has been so ever since, each time Africa has loomed large in the consciousness of Afro-Americans. One knows that the image of Africa generally serves a real and psychological need for blacks. They seek cultural stability in a society that gives you lots of space to run, but keeps you running.

Hughes could also sing in muted tones about Africa that express a sense of loss. As in "Afro-American Fragment"—a 1930 poem, "So long,/ so far away is Africa," he admits.[19] Most of what he knows about Africa, his trip to West Africa notwithstanding, is mere memory of what he read in history books, and what has lain in his inherited consciousness all along. Otherwise, Africa is out of reach. Later, when Africa became independent, Hughes was to sing much less exuberantly but still with pride. Africa is now a giant waking from sleep, an occasion marked by storm clouds, lightning, thunder.[20]

There are reasons why Africa was often nothing more than a rhetorical prop for imagistic fancy in the poetry of the 1920's. The various directions black consciousness was moving in; the inequality of oppression and economic advancement; the controversy around Garvey's nationalism; the realities of cultural dualism that mitigated against this fugitive kind of nationalism; the fact that Afro-American arts received greater patronage and dissemination among whites, who were much more mobile, had more money, were more literate, than among the small black middle class; the rather thin layer of acquaintance with Africa, which came to the American mostly through reports in *The Crisis* and other less sympathetic media; the time and physical distance between the two black worlds—all these factors would tend to make it difficult for Africa to become an organic part of black consciousness. Organic to the extent to which a Jewish consciousness is rooted in a religion that connects a Middle Eastern nation with its diaspora. Organic to the extent to which Africa could become more than a rhetorical or political posture. The very fact

that the theme of African ancestors disappears from black folk poetry, and generation after generation of written poetry, is a measure of the ruthless urgency of the claims the American commitment made on blacks. Nor have we heard the last of this, alas.

In addition to it all, it seems that in any case the diction and form Langston Hughes chose for his verse, which is closest to everyday speech and highly imagistic, was unsuited to carry the pyschological and philosophical weight of such a theme as Africa in Afro-American terms. Even when he writes on topical subjects like tyranny and military rule in Africa, the Angola, the Lumumba we are presented with come to us in mere predictable vignettes, questions, epigrams, however fitting the brooding sentiments of the poet may be.

Sterling Brown repudiated the Harlem poets. He distrusted the facile use of Africa as a poetic idea—"more poetic dreaming than understanding," as he said. He said of Walter Everette Hawkins that he "combines race-pride and race-history in a manner favored by many contemporary Negro poets." "I am Africa," Hawkins had written in the poem "Thus Speaks Africa," "wild is the wail of my waters/ Deep is the cry of my Congo." Again: "And then like the Phoenix of Egypt,/ I rose from the ashes immortal." Hawkins was less convincing here, Brown stated. Brown was himself busy grappling with the Southern idiom and themes in the attempt to capture the quality of life down there. He considered himself above the excessive optimism or the faddism in certain Harlem circles, preferring to deal with the cruelties of black life in the South. As Africa was part of consciousness of some of the Harlem poets, the best Brown could do was to acknowledge the fact, without approving it. He acknowledged it even in his friend Arna Bontemps who, he insists today (in even more trenchant remarks about the Renaissance) was "not a member of that motley crew . . . that Mystic Order."[21] In this tribute he pays to Arna Bontemps after the latter's death, Brown warns the "young militant Black poets" that he finds "more relevancy in Arna's few poems than in all your denunciations of whitey or honky, and . . . your phoney mile-separated love for Mother Africa, from a bunch of Foney Mother Africans who wouldn't be caught dead 10 miles from Chicago in Cicero, or 10 miles from Harlem in Hoboken. Arna would gently say to them: "Stop shucking and jiving brethren and sistern, get some

sense in your heads instead of cornrows on top of it, and stop this nigger obsession with dashikis and HAIR!!!"[22]

Arna Bontemps (1902-1973) does not dramatize or flaunt his esteem for Africa. In his typical subdued manner he imagines himself coming back, "if there can be returning after death." But he asks not to be looked for in this desolate country of his birth. Rather, "Beneath the palms of Africa." If not there, then "across the shining dunes," perhaps . . . following a desert caravan. He wants to cling to the memory of Africa—"a jungle tree with burning scarlet birds." There, in spite of the centuries of slavery, he will still be "seeking ornaments of ivory," "a jungle fruit." This is still a romantic sentiment. But the general brooding tone of the whole poem—"Nocturne at Bethesda" (1926)—elevates the sentiment, lends depth to his grief.[23]

"The Return," also a brooding poem, evokes images of jungle, "muffled drums" and "pendulums of vine," which Bontemps associates with darkness, wherever he may be.[24] It is difficult to understand why a particular "night of love" should necessarily have been, as he puts it, "retained from those lost nights our fathers slept/ In huts;" why this "night must not die." Why does he find it so necessary to "keep the dance of rain our fathers kept/ And tread our dreams beneath the jungle sky"? Later in one poem, one senses a fondness for the image of rain, and that the poet revels in the imaginary land of dance, "golden moon," "naked feet," "young spice trees," "jungle tapestries." There is no limit to what this state of mind—the image of Africa—can expand, turn into itself and out, becoming more and more ephemeral, fanciful and therefore self-indulgent.

> Let us go back and search the tangled dream
> And as the muffled drum-beats throb and miss
> Remember again how early darkness comes
> To dreams and silence to the drums.

We are back here to the lyrical use of Africa as a point of reference without any concrete center in the poem from which to take off. Bontemps' poetry usually has an intellectual and emotional center, and perhaps he was merely trying to be with it, so to speak.

In "Golgotha is a Mountain" Bontemps has an emotional

center.[25] The catalogue of mountains that he recalls is sparked by the image of Golgotha and the sorrow that overwhelms him:

> There are mountains in Africa too.
> Treasure is buried there.

He imagines himself among the diggers of that treasure, where:

> African mine workers slave for the white man:
> Those mountains should be ours.
> It would be great
> To touch the pieces of glory with our hands.

This wealth was once the African's pride and splendor, epitomized in the legend of Sheba's association with Solomon. In slavery, we walked with bowed heads. Bontemps makes it possible for us to make a meaningful transition from the African hills that lie ravaged by the white man's greed to the Afro-American situation. This should give us a hint that it is the awareness of African political and social realities that will restore a meaningful relationship between the peoples of the black world, that will make romantic affiliations unnecessary.

Reading *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* by Melvin B. Tolson (1900-1966), as with the rest of his verse, is a cerebral experience. Emotion is dissipated by the verbal horseplay, the dazzling or befuddling allusions he makes. Consequently I fail to extract an image of Liberia or Africa that I can *feel*.

Between the Depression and the 1950's Africa features very little in the overall imaginative literature of the black American. The Pan-African sentiment must have reached bottom in the Depression, just as the Harlem Renaissance fizzled out. Then World War II made its own demands, whether one joined the army or stayed home. Anti-colonial activism claimed all of Africa's political and social resources. Africans became more aware than ever before of their ethnic differences and divisions. As nationalism had, by definition, to unify ethnic groups against a colonial authority, the struggle for independence had to be localized. A Pan-African conference did, however, materialize in 1945. Thirteen years had to pass

before Kwame Nkrumah called the All-African Peoples Conference in Accra. The aim here was to unify freedom movements all over the continent, instil into them a singleness of purpose. This was exclusively an African concern. Earlier in the nineteen fifties the Afro-Americans had become involved in their own civil-rights activism—boycotts, sit-ins, demonstrations and so on.

Robert Hayden (b. 1913) makes only slight and inconsequential references to Africa. Margaret Walker (b. 1915) remembers the "bizarre beginnings in the old lands" that made her. There was, of course, Alabama where she was born. There was Africa too. Some day, she promises, she will roam the "hot lanes of Africa and Asia. I shall stand on mountain tops and gaze on fertile homes below."[26] She seems to be looking for a new faith. The Africans first believed in "black gods" of ancient times, in seeresses, charmers and evil spirits. In America blacks have believed in white gods. This has gone on too long. Neither set of gods has helped. "The touch of one fiery iron, . . . the cleansing breath of many molten truths" will perhaps begin another epoch of awareness and action. Miss Walker feels her roots "deep in southern life," in the "mud and muck of misery of lowlands," so she is not about to go on an imaginary spree to Africa.

The image of Africa in the Afro-American mind of the sixties and the seventies has become more complex than ever before. Africa has become independent since the last group of poets collectively sought a release from their bitter realities and indulged in romantic fancies about the African continent. The attainment of self-rule by Ghana in 1957 was the beginning of an era that was to experience a more fervent and more enlightened interest in Africa among American blacks. The Afro-American visitor to Africa found a people who were proud of their newfound freedom, of their presence in world affairs. The African is no longer the same man as he was as a colonial subject. But then the enlightened Afro-American has also changed. The climate that made possible those Pan-African get-togethers has changed. A new basis will have to be found for any new relationship. And this is the reason for the games we are playing with each other today in the four main black sectors: the African, the Caribbean, the American, and the British areas. There are painful awkwardnesses. In addition, and unfortunately, there is a tendency for some

black militants to interpret the second prospective African revolution in Afro-American terms; to create African heroes that are not considered as such any more by Africans; to overlook the fact that Africans still have to live at ease with one another before they can acknowledge and accommodate a number of Afro-Americans as a group—in the profoundest sense of "acknowledge" and "accommodate"; they also fail to appreciate that neo-colonialism has its complexities in relation to the African's consciousness. And yet there are Afro-Americans who understand all this. It becomes more and more difficult to grasp the measure of diversity in the Afro-American's images of Africa, to grasp the depth of feeling or otherwise in his invocations of the continent. Poetry, by its very nature, can be deceptive as an index of this. It can lend a surface of dignity and importance to some very shallow and banal sentiments when the rhetoric that whips around on the political platform and through the mass media, when the mood of nationalism and its by-product, withdrawal from white society—when all these factors have prepared the mind to turn such sentiments into ritual. I shall thus be merely content to show the various facets, colors, dimensions of the image, without pretending that I fully grasp the nuances, the paradoxes of our relationship.

Let us right at the outset acknowledge that in social terms the African-American's feelings about Africa are an on-going process. It began that first treacherous moment when he was captured in a raid and led to the slave ship. Since then, he has had to reconcile within himself, often without knowing it, the proud memory of a glorious African past, with the memory of another and later phase that was fraught with untold pain, shame, indignation, fortitude, hate, but which he survived. However superficial and ill-conceived the recall of Africa may be in the lesser poetry of African-Americans, it is still no laughing matter.

We shall need to keep asking ourselves as we go along: what do we notice in the author's tone whenever he invokes or makes reference to Africa? What feeling does he want to convey to his audience about Africa? From what depth in his consciousness and dreams has Africa surfaced, and how convincing is he in the manner in which he makes this known to his audience? Does he feel it as an on-going quest, or is the image an easy way out of an emotional and intellectual

dilemma? Is it a mere act of self-indulgence, an act that undermines the intelligence of the reader, because it does not care whether or not the poem increases the reader's awareness and feeling?

FOOTNOTES

1. Reprinted in *Five Slave Narratives*, ed. William Lorenz Katz (New York Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1968], p. v.
2. B. A. Botkin (ed.): *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1945], p. 57.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
5. *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1953], p. 52.
6. George P. Rawick: *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972), p. 98.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
9. Julian D. Mason (ed.): *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939].
10. Harold Cruse: *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1967], p. 126.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Alain Locke (ed.): *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1968], p. 256.
13. Arna Bontemps (ed.): *American Negro Poetry* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1963], p. 28.
14. Darwin T. Turner: *In A Minor Chord* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971].
15. Countee Cullen: *Color* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1925, reissued by Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1969].
16. Countee Cullen (ed.): *Caroling Dusk* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1927], p. 179.
17. Langston Hughes: *The Big Sea* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1963].
18. Langston Hughes: *The Weary Blues* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947], p. 102.

19. Langston Hughes: *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 3.
20. Langston Hughes: *The Panther and the Lash* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).
21. Sterling Brown: "A Personal Tribute, An Incomplete Estimate: Arna Bontemps" in *Black World*, Vol. XXII, No. 11, Sept. 1973, Chicago.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
23. In *The Poetry of the Negro 1746-1970* ed. by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1949 & 1970).
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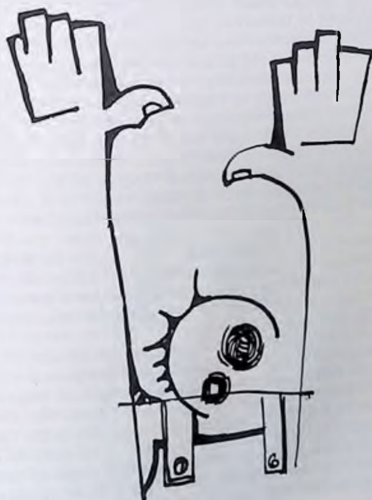

REVIEWS

O. R. Dathorne. **The Black Mind: A History of African Literature.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974. 527 pages, selected bibliography, index.

Is it possible to write a history of African literature without systematically covering the chronological development of African ethnic and national literatures? Is it possible to write a history of African literature without discussing the specific influences on the development of individual creative writers? Is it possible to characterize the African mind in literature without knowing the languages in which authors express themselves? Is it possible to characterize the African mind in literature without any reference to non-literary characterizations of the African mind? These are some of the general questions raised by Dathorne's book.

Many specific questions also are raised by Dathorne's book. Is it possible to discuss indigenous African literatures without mentioning Amharic literature? Is it really true that the writing of African poetry in English began in the 1940s? Can one adequately discuss negritude without reference to Lilyan Lagneau Kesteloot's two major works, *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie, 1963) and *Intellectual Origins of the African Revolution* (Washington: Black Orpheus, 1972)? Is it possible to discuss Ijimere's plays without mentioning that Ijimere is a European, Ulli Beier? Are there really only three important contemporary South African poets who write in English: Dennis Brutus, Keoraptse Kgositsile and Mazisi Kunene? Is a selected bibliography adequate support for a history of African literature when many of the works of literature are not cited in the footnotes?

In view of the development of criticism of African literature in recent years, it is truly amazing that one person would try to write either a one-volume history of African literature or a one-volume characterization of what Africans say about themselves in literature. (Dathorne says that this is the focus of his book, p. vii.) But Dathorne has tried to do both in one volume—a quite substantial volume with 458 pages of text—and has not succeeded in doing either. The lack of success is perhaps no fault of Dathorne's *per se*, for he has been a

scholar of African literature for many years and has a command of more languages than many African literature scholars. The problem is largely that Dathorne has tried to do what no one person could possibly do.

No one person can possibly be familiar with all the relevant sources for writing a history of African literature, as the omissions in Jahn's comprehensive works make all too clear. Without a command of resources on all African ethnic and national literatures, generalizations about African literature are bound to be skewed, as some of Dathorne's certainly are. The very organization of his history shows his relative lack of familiarity with sources in French and especially Portuguese compared with English, for in the chapters on literature in English he discusses individual authors and their works, whereas in the chapters on literature in French his discussion is partly by author and partly by topic and in his chapter on literature in Portuguese the discussion is by topic only. In all of his chapters such historically important data as dates of birth and death of authors, formal and informal education of authors, major influences on authors' writing and publication are absent. While such data are randomly presented about authors in English, they are only occasionally presented for any authors in Portuguese. A striking absence for a history of African literature is a systematic discussion of the influence of African authors on each other. Probably this is absent because Dathorne has organized his discussion by author and topic and has focused on the content of individual literary works.

Dathorne's study is not a history of ideas in African literature either, for the topical organization of the book overrides the chronological organization. Although the book is generally chronological, beginning with oral literature and pre-European writing, and discussing early writers in English and French before contemporary writers in these languages, the book is specifically ahistorical. To cite a few examples: literatures in African languages are discussed in the section on the heritage of African literature, but little recent literature of this type is discussed. Where it is discussed, it is categorized as "heritage," not "contemporary writing." There is little indication that African language literatures, other than Swahili, thrive alongside European language literatures and that some authors who write in European languages also write in

African languages. Because Dathorne organizes chapters by genres, in addition to language, authors' works in prose, poetry and theatre are separated. Thus the development of African literature in general, as well as in specific regions, nations and ethnic groups, are not discussed. The section on tradition which discusses traditional artists, oral literature including song, and African scripts stands apart from the two sections on written literatures. There is no indication of the current mutual influence of oral and written literatures. In fact, such an influence is sometimes denied in contradiction to the evidence Dathorne himself presents. For example, Dathorne says that the link between new staged theater and unwritten indigenous drama is tenuous (p. 407), and then goes on to describe the use of dance, drumming, choruses and music in the plays of such writers as Michael Dei-Anang, Pat Maddy and Wole Soyinka.

To discuss the black mind as it is revealed in African literature should involve more than delineating themes in the works of the same genre written in the same language as Dathorne does. It seems that much of the recent African-oriented criticism of works of African literature has pointed out that their intellectual content is related to the manner in which the works are written and their contexts of creation, rather than merely being related to the major themes stated in them.

A first-hand acquaintance with the language in which literature is written is essential to appreciate the way in which the literature is constructed (or "creatively ordered" to use Dathorne's term, p. 5). The loss of meaning and style in translation are well-known, and meaning and style both are crucial for delineating the African mind as expressed in works of African literature. A knowledge of the socio-cultural and literary components of the literature also is needed. This, of course, requires the detailed study of literary artists within their general socio-cultural backgrounds, as well as their individual idiosyncratic backgrounds. Dathorne has included relatively little data of this type. Of course, neither Dathorne nor any other individual has time to acquire this kind of data about all African literary artists.

In delineating the black mind as it is revealed in African literature, comparison is essential, both to show what is revealed through African literature that is not revealed through

other sources about Africa and to show how the black mind differs from the Indian, Latin American or other minds, for many themes in African literature are common in other third world literatures and some are even found in European literatures. Dathorne makes no comparisons to non-literary descriptions of the black mind nor to other third world literatures, although he mentions New World literature by blacks in rather abstract sweeping terms in his short concluding section "Crosscurrents." If there is anything unique about the black mind, Dathorne's book does not reveal it, since it lacks not only a comparative framework, but also a synthesis of the author, genre and language summaries which are provided in separate chapters.

The term "black mind" is a loaded term which does not seem to be related precisely to the content of Dathorne's book, which is essentially an uncoordinated synopsis of major literary themes. Some of the material has been published before in other contexts. "Ibo Literature: The Black Man's Burden" (pp. 99-102), for example, appeared in *Africa Quarterly* 7 (1968), pp. 365-368, under the title "Ibo Literature: The Novel as Allegory." One has the nagging suspicion that Dathorne's lecture notes were the basis for much of the book and that the title is too lofty for the contents. In any event, the term "black mind" has numerous negative connotations related to philosophical speculation of the ilk of Lucien Levy-Bruhl in *Primitive Mentality* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1923) and *How Natives Think* (New York, 1925), biological determinism as examined by J. C. Carothers in *The Mind of Man in Africa* (London: Stacey, 1972), and anthropological over-generalization recently exemplified in Jacques Macquet's *Africanity* (New York: Oxford, 1972). Surely Dathorne did not intend to begin a new myth about black intellectual functioning. The term "black mind" does not seem to be a precise expression of his stated focus on "what do we say about ourselves?" (p. vii).

The history of African literature and the intellectual traits of literary artists revealed in African literature are certainly topics worthy of study. But both topics are beyond the scope of any individual to master. To adequately cover these topics an encyclopedia of African literature is needed—an encyclopedia with many contributors who know the languages' and

socio-cultural backgrounds and personal histories of the authors whom they discuss. A true history of African literature must expand on some of the ideas only briefly mentioned by Dathorne, for example, that some short stories were broadcast before they were published in West Africa, that radio plays are a part of the literary creation of African writers[2], and that writing in non-European scripts had an impact on the development of contemporary African literature.[3] It must be based on primary sources for literature in all languages, not on primary sources for some languages, translations for other languages and secondary sources for others. Through group effort a more comprehensive history of African literature than Dathorne's could be written, and through group effort of scholars discussing literatures in languages they speak and read a more penetrating analysis of the intellectual content of African literatures should be possible.

NOTES

1. Albert Gerard has related the inadequacies of histories of South African literature to the linguistic limitations of the authors of these histories, and has suggested that team work by persons with complementary linguistic competencies is essential for writing an adequate history of South African literature. ["Towards a History of South African Literature," in Hena Maes-Jelinek, ed., *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World*. Liege: Revue des Vivants, 1975, pp. 79-80.] Surely his observations apply equally to other local literatures of the continent.

2. An obvious connection between the oral and written literary traditions is the oral presentation of literature over the radio. Yet there has been no systematic survey of literature read over the radio for African audiences and there is no basic bibliography of literature by African authors which has been broadcast to African audiences. An investigation of this topic seems essential both to delineating the relationship between oral and written literatures in Africa and for learning more about the aesthetic criteria which African audiences use to evaluate literature.

3. Attitudes toward writing in Africa are related to purposes for which the script is used, as is made clear in the African case studies in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Jack Goody, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 161-297). Therefore, it is not the existence of an African script *per se* which is significant for the development of written literature, but the purpose or purposes for which the script is used and the extent of literacy in the script. To show the relationship between African scripts and the development of written literature in Africa, literary scholars will have to engage in field studies of the African scripts and/or collect a wider range of written sources about these scripts than Dathorne utilizes.

Nancy Schmidt

Longing for Darkness: Kamante's Tales from Out of Africa. Collected by Peter Beard. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975. $19.95.

Harold Courlander. **A Treasury of African Folklore.** New York: Crown, 1975. $14.95.

Baroness Blixen, born Karen Dinesen, who chose the pen name of Isak Dinesen, lived in Africa many years ago. When she first came to Kenya, as she tells it in *Out of Africa*, "there were no cars in the country, and we rode into Nairobi, or drove in a cart with six mules to it, and stabled our animals in the stables of *The Highland Transport*." Carried away by the beauty of Kenya's mountains, she felt as she watched the lordly elephants march across the plains she was living on the rooftop of the world. Unfortunately, even in her time, there were no ceilings on the rent, and when her farm suffered disasters successively in its coffee crop, its flax production, and an invasion of grasshopper-locusts, she was forced to sell it to pay her debts. The loss of the farm, and the leaving of Africa, wrought profound sorrow in her, and it was only through the recapture of her African experiences in her books that she was able to come out of the ancestral family home in Denmark to which she had retreated, and to face another public responsibility—this one, the role of the writer-artist.

Karen Blixen's African world is a matter now of history and myth. She was an aristocratic lady farmer who loved the African land and what she considered the unspoiled, pristine state of the animal kingdom there. Her life, as revealed in her books, is a testament to an ideal of public service based on an aristocratic order, a state of purity in which beauty is measured by the tightened bow, the courage of the undaunted brow. No one really knows what she would have done, had she stayed on in Kenya and had to choose between a way of life bred in her bones and a spirit abroad in the land native to the country but alien to her aristocratic principles.

What every reader of her books does know is that the colonial lady never shirked her role as provider and supporter of the vast realm of her farm; nor did she ever cease to love her African servants, and the world the two of them created.

One of those servants who has remained faithful to her memory up to the present moment is Kamante Gatura. Kamante, as readers of *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*

know, was a young boy when Baroness Blixen came across him while riding on the plains of her farm. He was a wounded calf, thin and sickly, with an infection in his leg that hobbled him. Blixen, who also served as doctor on her farm (again, her aristocratic training impelled her to take responsibility for the "squatters" on the farm), nursed him and saw him recover. Till the day Baroness Blixen left Africa, Kamante remained in her service, filling various capacities and achieving fame as her superb cook and loyal retainer.

Karen Blixen knew the world she had found—the Kenya farmland 6,000 feet above the sea where she could watch a shy orphan bushbuck (Lulu) being suckled by a bottle of milk, or ride her horse, with her two Scotch Deerhounds behind, through the morning mist and dusky landscape of an afternoon—was a dream world, that it would soon pass into a dream, and the remembrance of it. In *Out of Africa* she wrote: "The colony is changing and has already changed since I lived there. When I write down as accurately as possible my experiences on the farm, with the country and with some of the inhabitants of the plains and woods, it may have a sort of historical interest." In *Shadows on the Grass*, her last book on Africa, she confessed (in 1960) that she "realized to what extent my own book (*Out of Africa*) had become history, a document of the past."

What appeal then does Isak Dinesen hold for the modern African, and the reader of modern African literature, today? Is she, like Lady Gregory, an august patron of the folk art, a genuine character, or merely an amiable eccentric and brave adventuress? Is she indeed, as some African literary analysts would think, a relic of past condescensions, of writers like Haggard and Hemingway and Joseph Conrad who sentimentally and arrogantly applied epic vagueness to the "mysterious" qualities of the black African? Dinesen, every reader is likely to agree, was no fool, though she was often given to madly generous acts. She was strong-willed and hot-tempered (she could be provoked to strike her servants, among them Kamante, and then suffer remorse). She could write in gross generalizations, "It was not easy to get to know the Natives. They were quick of hearing, and evanescent; if you frightened them they could withdraw into a world of their own, in a second, like the wild animals which at an abrupt movement from you are gone,—simply are not there. Until you knew a

Native well, it was almost impossible to get a straight answer from him." Even when she thinks she is paying a compliment, she could be patronizing: in writing of the stoic nobility of the "Natives," she observes that "in the face of pain or of a great operation they generally showed little fear,—but it was their great dislike of regularity, of any repeated treatment or the systemization of the whole; . . . . When I myself got to know the Natives, this quality in them was one of the things that I liked best. They had real courage: the unadulterated liking of danger,—the true answer of creation to the announcement of their lot,—the echo from the earth when heaven had spoken."

Dinesen's honesty—and her refusal to evade decision and choices—can be viewed as admirable or foolhardy, depending from which bureaucratic niche it is observed. When all else is stripped away, she remains heroic in her willingness to stand alone and not accept the shelter of the crowd. This quality above all marks Dinesen's writing, and the character which comes out of the writing: she was a believer in that order which posits the responsible leader and the faithful follower, but which also acknowledges the value and courage of the lowly as well as the highly ranked elements within that order. There is no need in this hierarchy for the middleman, the bourgeois, to establish legalistic and schematic safeguards and warrantees. Her ideal is the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, century gentleman and gentlewoman—any century but the twentieth. In a passage about two of her closest friends in Africa—two aristocratic gentlemen, both of whom died in their adopted land—she wrote: "The particular, instinctive attachment which all Natives of Africa felt towards Berkeley and Denys, and towards a few other people of their kind, made me reflect that perhaps the white men of the past, indeed of any past, would have been in better understanding and sympathy with the coloured races than we, of our Industrial Age, shall ever be. When the first steam engine was constructed, the roads of the races of the world parted, and we have never found one another since."

Now, 43 years after she left Africa, and 13 years after her death in Denmark, her servant Kamante has put down his recollections of the woman who changed his life. Peter Beard, the author, photographer, and Africanist (he like Dinesen lives on a mountaintop farm in Kenya; he now employs Kamante),

is largely responsible for the publication of Kamante's book, *Longing for Darkness: Kamante's Tales from Out of Africa.* Over a period of twelve years, "sometimes casually, sometimes scrupulously," he worked with Kamante, putting Kamante's recollections down on tape. "In Room 205," he recalls in his Introduction to the book, "of the New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi, Abdullahi (from *Shadows on the Grass*), Saufe Aden (from *Out of Africa*), and I sat down with Kamante and three of his sons to make hundreds of hours of tape recordings in Swahili, translations, transcriptions, and editings. A few months ago, the final version was copied out by hand in ten days in the main tent of Wart Hog Ranch, the camp outside Nairobi where we had all come to live. On April 17, at the best hour of the day, under the eyes of two passing giraffes, a couple of dik-diks, and the incorrigible hogs, the last page was completed."

These words from Beard's Introduction show his love of his subject, of everything connected with Dinesen's and Kamante's world. It is extraordinary—this book's love affair with Kenya—with its feel of the country, its fables, the spirit of African landscape and the body of its animals, vegetables and minerals. Love, passion, joy, and tragedy are all here, in the transcribed words, in the brief introduction by Thomas Dinesen (Karen's brother), and most of all in the drawings done by Kamante which dot and flit across the pages of the handsome book. Beard has contributed photographs, and Dinesen's own photographs of her farm and her animal progeny and her human staff are reproduced from early prints. The note from Jacqueline Bouvier (Kennedy) Onassis that ends the book is a sincere tribute to a magic world that is gone from reality—but then what magic world ever existed in reality?

The book contains memoir, history, and Kamante's charming animal fables illustrated by him in color and in black and white line drawings. Instead of being set in type, the manuscript in Kamante's hand-script is reproduced on lined paper. The book, in sum, is a production that re-creates an Africa that may never have existed but which has nevertheless sustained African and non-African dreamers and visionaries alike. The book is of another age, or really of no age at all, an ageless time.

Harold Courlander's *A Treasury of African Folklore,* on the other hand, is what one might call "the real stuff"—the real

myths of African tradition as opposed to Dinesen's self-created mythology. Courlander is a novelist, scholar, critic, and collector who in his thoroughly documented study gives a recounting of various myths, their histories, and introductions to each of the several cultures and traditions surveyed in the collection. Among these are the unwritten literatures of the Sudan, the West Coast of Africa, the Bantu areas of the Congo and the South, the Eastern hinterlands; his survey includes myths and oral traditions told in the languages of the Hausa, Kanuri, Yoruba, Zulu, Amharic, Mbundu, Hottentot and Shangaan peoples.

Courlander's book is indeed a "treasury," but its jewels have been badly packaged by the publisher, and possibly by the editor-author-collector. For one thing, the book is seemingly a collection of tales of unwritten literatures, with accompanying essays by Courlander. Many of the essays however are excerpts from various (and highly respectable) studies written by other scholars. Courlander's job really has been that of an editor—and a good one; it is misleading however to list him as an author. For another, Courlander is perhaps too ambitious. His subtitle, "The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings and Humor of Africa," exposes a grasp after an unlimited goal. The Western world is sadly deficient in knowledge and study of African folklore, and this book is a welcome aid, but one collection alone cannot fill the yearning gap.

Yet even with its flaws, the volume is one of the few comprehensive and reliable studies in the field. Courlander approaches his material with a liberal, open mind. He says of African studies and students that "we understand now what we were not ready to comprehend a century or so ago—that the diverse social structures and processes of Africa, as elsewhere, are products of the civilizing movements of mankind, other faces of the human response to the challenges of living." Indeed, Courlander, who is well-known as an Afro-American specialist, may be signalling a new orientation to Black Studies when he says, "We have gone beyond that age in which, warmed by our own particular accomplishments, we readily divided the world into the 'civilized' and the 'primitive' . . . When we say 'Africans' it is merely a convenient manner of saying 'mankind in Africa' . . . peoples, villages and tribes that through millennia of contest with one another, with the land

and with ideas have provided particular answers to questions of organization, survival, and the meaning of life." In defining African history as "innovative, creative and frequently unique," but with "influences from outside black Africa that affected its traditions and literature," he is able to free himself from the tyranny of a black cultural nationalism (and the agony of finding justification for every defeat a black person has encountered and every mistake he has made), and to concentrate on experiential and historical knowledge. Courlander's courage is exemplified in his admission of the defeat and servitude of Africans during past centuries, but for him such an admission of historical misfortune is simply another way of stating a shrewd means of survival in a transitional epoch of history.

In this sense, Courlander's book of folklore is again at the opposite pole from Kamante's memoir. The subject matter of Courlander's book is the past, the far past, but its concern is very much with present time, and how to reflect present approaches to the past. Kamante's accounting, superficially about early twentieth century life in Africa, is really a remembrance of things forever gone and out of reach, and without any attempt to alter that past through a contemporary observation on it.

Indeed it is Kamante's world, only 40 years past in chronological time, which is myth in its most rarefied sense: an impossible notion, an ideal, a dream. The myths Courlander has collected still have some basis in everyday life, they operate in the realities of African consciousness and tradition.

Martin Tucker

Daniel Leab. **From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures**, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1975. 301 pp. $15.00.

Lindsay Patterson, editor. **Black Films and Film-makers: A Comprehensive Anthology from Stereotype to Superhero**, New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1975. 298 pp. $12.50.

The discovery that much of the American audience for films in the post-television era was Black has led not only to scores of execrable exploitative films, but also to a veritable flood of academic critical-historical writing on images of Blacks in the cinema. Unfortunately, some, at least, of these books and articles are also exploitative. Writers with very little or no cinematic sensitivity, research ability or vitality of mind have ground out literally millions of words on this popular and controversial subject, hoping, I am sure, to net, if not millions, then certainly thousands of dollars in royalties and stipends.

Daniel Leab's history of "the black experience in motion pictures" must, I'm afraid, be seen in this light. What other explanation can be offered for a book by a well-placed and experienced historian (Leab teaches at the University of Texas), which is virtually innocent of conceptualization? *From Sambo to Superspade* is a naive history, almost a mere chronology. It fails to look critically at the interaction between individuals and the economic system in the development of marketable literary (or pseudo-literary) images. Leab relates developments in the cinematic images of Blacks only to social phenomena that affected the mass audience—the Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights Movement—without significantly considering perhaps equally influential changes in performance and directorial personnel, tastes in correlative popular literature, structures in studio management. Most disturbing is the fact that Leab, who has written extensively on labor history, hardly touches on the relationship between biased unions and black personnel in the film industry.

Donald Bogle, in his more casual but rather elegant "interpretive history," *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* (Viking Press, 1973), makes important points about the ways in which individual actors, for example, were able to alter and expand the stereotypic roles they could not afford to refuse, creating for themselves room for personal expression

that black audiences—and good screenwriters—could respond to. These efforts seem to be lost on Leab. It also does not occur to him to consider the effect of long-term interest on the part of talented directors like Martin Ritt (*Edge of the City*, *Paris Blues*, *The Great White Hope*, *Conrack*, *Sounder*) in the development of more sophisticated roles for Black artists.

Leab's subject is too large for the conceptual framework he brings to it. For example, the fascinating question of British and American films on Africa. Leab does not ask, as he might, why it is that stereotypes of Black Americans slowly alter in ratio with changes in racial politics, while the stereotypes of Africans continue unabatedly racist and colonialist, despite the rising tide of African nationalism and the increased identification of American Blacks with their African cousins? The perennial popularity of Tarzan, with his unexplained mastery of the African environment, and the intermittent appearance of films like *The Roots of Heaven* and *Born Free*, with their assertions that whites are more responsive to the "conservation" requirements of African "natural resources" than local Black Africans, strongly suggest that audiences, actors, critics and even historians are slow to relinquish their comfortable stereotypes of Africans as incompetent, superstitious, corrupt, inarticulate and altogether negligible human beings. The consideration of this possibility might have served to complicate a rather shallow and over-general thesis.

Leab's analyses of individual films, though often extensive, are rarely original or insightful. At best, he brings to the surface of his argument the kinds of racial, cultural and ethical paradoxes involved in white producers' contemptuous production of ghetto-based, black-casted, sex-and-violence features for black audiences. Of greater value are his summaries of some older films that are almost impossible to see. The book is also quite meticulously researched, handsomely laid out and illustrated.

Lindsay Patterson's anthology is an altogether less exploitative and more useful book. It consists of essays and articles, almost all of which have been previously published, and a few excerpts from books. Patterson's general topics are heavily weighted in the direction of performance studies—there are nine pieces on actors and acting, seven on particularly important films—but there are good sections of criticism on stereotypes, producers' practices, black financed produc-

tion efforts. And although there are rather a few too many pieces by the editor on films he idiosyncratically admires, the selection for the most part is excellent. Some are already classics, if in such a relatively recently developing field one can speak of classics. Albert Johnson's discussion of Sidney Poitier's film personality has been relied upon by many later writers, Leab included. Of similar value to students are several casual comments on blacks in films dating from 1929 and 1936. Other selections range from autobiographical excerpts to fragments of history (useful as supplements to more general works such as Leab's) to sophisticated cultural criticism—and cracking good writing—by Patterson himself and the inimitable Pauline Kael. Patterson's essay on how films have spread the forms of American race and color consciousness and discrimination to countries like Brazil and Mexico is a powerful reminder of the international significance of the American film industry's racist distortions of the human image.

Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr.

Chinweizu. **The West and the Rest of Us,** New York: Random House, 1975, 505 pp. $15.00.

Within the past decade, an important new political and economic literature has emerged from Africa to challenge traditional western theories of development and underdevelopment. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and Samir Amin's *Accumulation on a World Scale* are, perhaps the best examples of this new genre.[1]

The significance of this new work is that it locates Africa within the past and present circumstances of world history and world political economy and asserts, without equivocation, that the much-admired "rise of the west" is inextricably linked to Euro-American exploitation of Africa and the Third World. These critiques, though often hurled as gauntlet to the West, are however much more than that; they are also part of a process of internal self-examination by African intellectuals, part of their search for a usable perspective by which to liberate Africa—once and finally—from colonialism and neocolonialism. In that sense, Rodney, Amin et al are the scholar-heirs of an analytical-visionary tradition fathered by the Martiniquean-born psychiatrist and Algerian revolutionary, Frantz Fanon, who urged Africa and the Third World to realize that:

> It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes . . . (so) . . . if we want humanity to advance to a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries.[2]

Because he makes the same call to Africa to self-criticize and self-reform, that is, "to invent" and "to make discoveries," we may place the bold and ambitious new book, *The West and the Rest of Us*, by the Nigerian author, Chinweizu, within the Fanonesque tradition. Subtitled: *White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite*, the book is intended to be "a critical investigation into the purposes of western imperialist expansion during the past five hundred years . . . [and] . . . an investigation, within the context of that expansion, into the man-made causes of Africa's backwardness."

In keeping with that intent, *The West and the Rest of Us* is a wide-ranging survey of western imperialism and of the rise

and fall and pseudo-rehabilitation of Africa. Leaping regions, time-spans, and social systems; from the ancient African civilizations of Ghana, Mali and Songhay to the twentieth-century freedom struggles of Francophone and Anglophone Africa, to the boardrooms of London, Paris and New York where, the author says, the fate of Africa's economy is still decided, Chinweizu has attempted an epic work to pound home his critique-lament:

> . . . the impact of five centuries of European contact with and expansion into Africa has been to make Africa a ravaged satellite of Europe. As a consequence, African culture has lost its autonomous centers, lost its independent bearings and become eccentric . . .
>
> For post-colonial Africa the major bequests from half a millennium's satellization to Europe have included extensive social fragmentation, lack of cultural cohesion, the entrenchment of ignorance, an agrarian technology that went to sleep five centuries ago, rudiments of an industrial economy implanted during the first half of the twentieth century but rudiments that are however diseased vehicles for maldevelopment—as well as a pervasive colonial mentality—that ragbag of complexes that hobble African initiative.

Chinweizu reserves his special spleen, however, for his own class-kinsmen, the African elite, who, from slave-trading days down to the present, he lambastes for witting and unwitting betrayal of Africa's heritage and interests. The struggle between the West and Africa has never been one of the racial inferiority of peoples, he declares, but a struggle over resources. Modern African elites have misperceived Africa's problems because of their fawning need to imitate and please their colonial masters. Subservient to western culture and analyses, these elites have neglected the proper control of African resources and the autonomous development of Africa's economy which could alone create that power which leads to true equality and respect among nations.

It is a *realpolitik* for Africa then which Chinweizu is advocating; a realpolitik grounded in industrial development, cultural authenticity, and—last but not least—nuclear technology. For only through girding Africa with industrial and military power commensurate with the age in which we live does Chinweizu feel that any legitimate claim to modern-day statehood can be made. Indeed he suggests that the reluctance to bid for real power as symbolized by "the bomb" is a real measure of the self-policing timidity of African "leadership" (not to men-

tion the horror with which such a prospect would be viewed by the West) and the patronizing racism of the West.

This audacity of position, this posing of the previously unthinkable (the atom bomb in black hands!) is what characterizes the volume throughout, so *The West and the Rest of Us* is an important book for that reason alone: it challenges us to think things anew.

Appearing as it does at this juncture of African and world history with the forces of liberation and the forces of oppression confronting each other eyeball to eyeball in southern Africa, with the collapse of the British pound and the eroding viability of bourgeois ruling parties in Japan, Italy, France, *et passim*, *The West and the Rest of Us* is another example of the revolution in ideology and world political relations occurring before our very eyes. To seize this moment of opportunity positively, "to advance Man a step further," Africa and "the Rest of Us" must understand and face without sentiment, romance or evasion what the West has done to us and what we have done to ourselves. Chinweizu merely reminds us what another heir of Fanon, the martyred leader of the national liberation struggle in Guiné-Bissau and Cape Verde, Amilcar Cabral, bid us never forget:

> We note . . . that one form of struggle which we consider to be fundamental has not been explicitly mentioned. . . . We refer here to the struggle against our own weaknesses. Obviously other cases differ from that of Guiné; but our experience has shown us that in the general framework of daily struggle this battle against ourselves—no matter what difficulties the enemy may create—is the most difficult of all, whether for the present or future of our peoples.[3]

William L. Strickland

FOOTNOTES

1. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972. Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.
2. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963.
3. Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, London, Stage 1, 1969. p. 74.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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ANTHONY McNEILL is a Jamaican who holds advanced degrees in writing from the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Massachusetts. He has published poems in numerous journals and has two collections of his work, *Hello Ungod* and *Reel from "The Life-Movie."* He reads his own poems on the Caedon recording *Poets of the West Indies*.

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MARTIN TUCKER, Professor of English at Long Island University (New York), is the author of *Africa in Modern Literature* (1967). His study of Joseph Conrad will be published this year. His work has appeared in COMMONWEAL, THE NEW REPUBLIC, THIRD PRESS REVIEW and RESEARCH IN AFRICAN LITERATURE.

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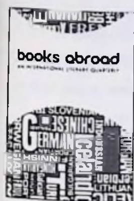

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