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***The Literary Links of Africa and the  
Black Diaspora: A Discourse  
in Cultural and Ideological Signification***

**A thesis submitted to the Department of English  
Studies in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English**

**JUNE 1992**

**DEDICATION**

***FOR MY WIFE FUNMILAYO,***

***AS A TOKEN OF MY APPRECIATION AND UNDYING LOVE.***

***AND***

***FOR OUR SON ADEDAYO,***

***TO WHOM WE OFFER THE COMPLETION OF THIS THESIS AS THE ONLY  
CONSOLATION FOR HAVING TO LIVE WITHOUT HIS PARENTS FOR THE PAST  
THIRTY MONTHS!***

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## ABSTRACT

The politics of the Middle-Passage and its attendant socio-cultural and historical trauma is the starting point of this study. The dispersal of Africans, or at least people of African origin, to different parts of the world has produced over the past few decades numerous dissertations and theses describing socio-cultural linkages between Africa and the Black diaspora. On the part of creative writers and literary critics of every persuasion, there exists a consensus of creative and critical opinion that seeks to establish that "the history of Africa and the Africans...is one of iron, blood and tears." (Nkosi, 1981, p.30)

The study is in agreement with Omafume Onoge's submission that the cultural imperialist process went beyond mere acts of vandalism to produce a period in the history of Africa and the black diaspora in which "many educated Africans (and their counterparts in the diaspora) required a major act of intellection to ascribe aesthetic value to our traditional arts." (Onoge, 1984, p.5) The study grapples with the source(s) of this socio-cultural apathy, and how the liberal humanist discourse which replaced the body of the colonialist's mythologies is predicated on what JanMohammed describes as "an ironic anomaly." (JanMohammed, 1985, p.281) My exploration of this ironic anomaly begins from the premise of the myths, legends and traditions that are subsumed, truncated, misread or simply repressed to propound this 'humanist' philosophy. What emerges from this cultural and ideological exploration is a vernacular theory of reading built around the carnivalesque figure of Esu-Elegbara (the Yoruba 'trickster' god) whose "functional equivalent in Afro-American profane discourse is the Signifying Monkey." (Gates, 1990, p.287)



The study is in two parts. Part One consists of three chapters exploring different aspects of the cultural and ideological discourses between Africa and the black diaspora from historical and theoretical perspectives. Part Two focuses, in four chapters, on the works of five writers from Africa (Nigeria and Ghana), South America (Brazil), the West Indies (St. Lucia) and the United States. These are Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Jorge Amado, Derek Walcott and Amiri Baraka respectively. The conclusion summarises the major arguments of the thesis.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **The Three Way Process: Ties Between Africans in the Diaspora and those in the Homeland**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Edward Blyden who was born in St. Thomas in 1832, went to New York in 1847 but was refused admission to an American university because of his colour and therefore emigrated to Liberia in 1850 to become a leading politician and pioneer theorist of the 'African personality' is the outstanding example of this three way process. (George Shepperson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism")

The origin of the African diaspora is traceable to the 'discovery' of the New World. This discovery eventually set in motion "the long and bitter rivalry over colonial possession for which after four and a half centuries, no solution has yet been found." (Eric Williams, 1972, p.3) The discovery of the New World eventually led to the economic theory which asserted that the prosperity of a new colony depends upon one single economic factor - plenty of good land. Resting on this theory, the forces that settled in the New World needed, next, only cheap labour to work its 'good land' to reap this prosperity. An economic imperative consequently gave birth to the need for cheap labour and the belief that "labour must be constant and must work or be made to work in co-operation." (Op.Cit., p.4)

The solution to this need for 'constant labour' was first realised in terms of the vast market for cheap labour which Africa provided. This phenomenal entry of Africa and Africans into the 'world' production system could be seen, first and foremost, in terms of its economic importance. It is only at subsequent points of the

historic contact that those socio-cultural factors that further problematized the contact manifested themselves in the diversified field of colonialist mythologies on the sides of both the colonizer and the colonized. It is important therefore, that we see slavery and the slave trade that resulted from this encounter in its class/economic perspectives and not in racial terms. The reasons for slavery, Gibbon Wakefield once observed, "are not moral but economic circumstances, they relate not to virtue but to production." (Cited in Eric Williams, *Op.Cit.*, p.6) History also points to the fact that the first Africans in the New World went there as indentured labourers and it was only gradually "during the first half of the seventeenth century that the status of these and subsequent Black immigrants changed to the point where Black and slave came to be synonymous." (Walter Ofonagoro, 1976, p.56)

Prior to this time, to meet the need for a constant supply of cheap labour the Europeans first turned to the Aborigines and only then to Africa. The reason for this 'U-turn' in European thought could be found in the various mythical conceptions of the 'African personality'. These myths, even though given the powerful support of religion which reified them to the level of divine essence, does not necessarily contradict the foregoing analysis of the historic contact as being primarily economic. The myths are better realized in terms of Marx's famous dialectical delineation of 'the base' and 'the superstructure'. Thus, they function as superstructural realisation of an essential economic base. For example, there is a myth credited to Batholome de Las Casas, Bishop of Chiapa, Mexico, who claimed that the work done by four American Indians could be done by one African, and because of his (Batholome's) humane motivation to save the Aboriginal population from extinction, he went to Charles V, King of Spain and Emperor of the Hapsburg Holy Roman Empire in

1517, and pleaded that he be allowed to use African labour instead of the supposedly weak Amerindians, in the name of 'humanity and efficiency'. Other myths claimed that Blacks have been ordained by God to be the perpetual slaves of the Whites:

More charitable but no less racist authors like Stanley Elkins have gone further to suggest that the experience of slavery produced in the African in the Americas, a 'sambo' personality...essentially childlike in behaviour and character, a mental midget, a head-scratching, foot-shuffling over-grown child, grovelling and subservient to appetite. (Ofonagoro, Op.Cit., p.54)

With these constructions of the African personality, the stage was more than set 'for the reactionary sperm', to paraphrase Wole Soyinka, 'to carry out the rape of a race'. But to the African, in the words of a Runaway slave:

It all started with the scarlet handkerchiefs...it was what the scarlet did for the Africans...when the Chiefs saw that the Whites - I think the Portuguese were the first - were taking out these scarlet handkerchiefs as if they were waving, they told the Blacks, 'Go on then and get scarlet handkerchiefs'...And they were captured. (Estembam Montejo, cited in Lemuel Johnson, 1980, p.62)

While the African was busy chasing 'scarlet handkerchiefs' little did s/he know that s/he was actually being systematically adapted towards raising cotton, sugar, and other crops in the New World. Thus, if it were not for the productive power of the black wo/man which '*an all wise creator*' had perfectly adapted to suit the labour needs of the New World, its lands would have remained a howling wilderness. (See Eric William and passim)

The notion of an 'all wise creator' has functioned in colonial literary texts from various socio-cultural and perhaps more importantly, economic and political perspectives. The encounter between Shakespeare's Caliban and Prospero, and Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday are just two of its literary manifestations. The creative articulation of these writers has been used by past and present critics to

emphasise the fact that an unquestionably important watershed in the phenomenal entry of Africa and Africans into the 'world' production machinery is slavery. Africa as the dispersal point for both the remaining Africans in the homeland and those in the diaspora has also continue to engender varied reactions. These reactions have at best, over the centuries, produced ambivalent results.

The primary aim of this study is to bring into critical focus the dominant influence of Africa as the dispersal point of those 'slaves' and their descendants and to see how they and those Blacks (and their own descendants too) that remained in Africa have continued to perceive and react to their African homeland over many centuries of physical and spiritual estrangement.

This introductory chapter through its cyclical exploration of the socio-cultural and political imperatives that inform the undeniable comparative possibilities raised by modern Black literature seeks to establish primary principles for the entire study. An integral part of this principle is the vernacular theory of 'the Other' which the study adopts in its 'reading' of abiding themes and preoccupations in a selection of Black texts. For, just as slavery and colonialism are twin elements that produced the historical framework which informed the 'colonial' stage of Black thought and expression, the 'postcolonial' era ostensibly works its way through equally traumatic experiences such as neocolonialism in Africa, acceptance and integration in the United States, and creolization and miscegenation in South America and the West Indies. Claims and counter-claims by the colonized and the colonizer have produced complex myths that further portray the powerful presence of Black expression in a postcolonial context. Historically, the primary terrain of these conflicting mythical postulations is evident in the bias which writers and critics bring to their judgement of the negative

and positive effects of what can be termed as the age-old attempt to 'colonize conflict'. Less than three decades ago for example, Louis James in his introduction to *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature* makes the following claims:

Only an extremist would deny the positive contributions to West Indian social and political life made by England. They were ubiquitous, and deeply ingrained, far more so than in India or Africa. English education opened up a cultural heritage which reached beyond England to Europe and Asia and Africa. It produced a *highly developed tool of language* with which a writer like Walcott could explore his own unique predicament, just as the British liberal traditions formed the basis for the struggle for independence from England. (Louis James, cited in Sylvia Wynter, 1978, pp.19-20 my emphasis)

The other side of this positive effect of English colonial education also recognised by James, is one of the theoretical starting points of this study:

At the same time the English tradition could be destructive. Petrified within the social structure as the standards of respectability, they could also, as we have noticed, *divide class from class, and constrict the evolution of national ways of life*. (Op.Cit., p.20, my emphasis)

It reveals an ideological stance therefore, to view 'the division of class from class' and 'the constriction of the evolution of national ways of life' as being of equal advantage in a tradition whose positive effect is the ability to provide individual authors with 'a highly developed tool of language' with which to explore 'individual' unique predicaments. The presence or existence of a 'highly developed language' also presupposes that a 'lowly developed' version of that language exists, which cannot be anything but 'low'. Could these taken together serve as one way of perceiving further, 'the division of class from class'? Also, is the whole process of 'the constriction of the evolution of national ways of life', another means of realising what the Afro-American author, Ralph Ellison, describes as 'archetypal theories' which ignore the specificity of literary texts? Through modern critical theory and discourse

analysis, it is now possible to interpolate these various allusions or separate 'the wheat from the chaff'. In his study of 'the Epic and Novel', Bakhtin describes this 'highly developed language' as belonging to an historical process and identifies it with the development of 'high' literature. Bakhtin asserts further that if:

all genres in 'high' literature (that is literature of ruling social groups) harmoniously reinforce each other to a significant extent, the whole of literature, conceived as a totality of genres, becomes an organic unity of the highest order. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.4)

Similarly, various postcolonial writers and critics begin their counter-discourse to the large body of the colonialists' mythology concerning them and their people through what the Afro-American critic Henry Louis Gates refers to as a process of 'symbolic revision'. Transgression of boundaries colonized by these conglomerations of 'genres of high literature' becomes the recognizable form and context of their counter-viewpoint. Sylvia Wynter, recognising this role in George Lamming's reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in *The Pleasures of Exile*, affirms that Lamming performs the highest function of criticism by 'opening for us Shakespeare's play'. Wynter further observes that Lamming's reading is from the perspective of a twentieth century Barbadian Negro and not an 'archetypal citizen of a universal world':

Lamming places *The Tempest* within the process of England's creation of Empire. *The Tempest*, he shows us, was as much the cultural expression of England's adventure as were the voyages of Drake and Hawkins its economic expression. It is the measure of Shakespeare's genius that at the height of England-Prospero's intoxication, he should have been aware of the dimension of Caliban's tragedy - 'That when I waked, I cried to dream once more.' (Wynter, Op.Cit., p.21)

The subversive nature of Caliban's use of language becomes the recognizable pattern of articulation or deformity which also acquire the 'natural' attribute of 'low' discourse. Caliban embodying this 'low' status, wearing it unabashedly like Ismael



Reed's image of 'burnished amulet' in *Mumbo Jumbo*, displaces it into a language of subversion, offering neither apology nor remorse by informing Prospero that "You taught me language and my profit on't is that I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language." This historical framework informs Chinua Achebe's equally subversive assertion: "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it." (Chinua Achebe, 1975, p.7) Like Lamming, Achebe informs the colonial texts which he intends to revise that 'We have met before' and 'four centuries separate our meeting.'

Of equal importance to this cyclical framework is Louis James' observation that it was 'the British liberal tradition' that formed the basis for the struggle for independence from Britain. The undeniable presence of this liberal tradition further informs what this study has recognised as the existence of 'two highs' and 'two lows' in theoretical terms in the next chapter. The reason for this recognition is quite simple, and it concerns the altruistic realisation that decolonization and socio-cultural self-definition at various stages are often limited to the perspective or the adventure of their time. While very few writers and their works transcend arbitrary periodization, many work within the mainstream. Peculiar moods of socio-cultural angst and what I earlier described as the ambivalent responses of peoples of African origin to the idea of an African homeland as they inform the various stages of Black expression are critically focused in the rest of this chapter and should serve to show how this theoretical postulation is arrived at through a careful exploration of concrete historical events.

## 1.2 Africans in the Diaspora and their response to their African Homeland

In what appears like a manifesto for a healthy relationship between Africans in the diaspora and those in the homeland, Boniface Obichere concludes his essay on the cross-current of the homeland/diaspora relationship, in this way:

Afro-Americans should look to Africa as their homeland and they should get involved in African affairs just like the Jews, the Irish, the Germans and other groups in the United States show concern and get involved in the affairs of their European or Middle-Eastern homeland. Afro-Americans can derive a psychological and racial pride from the progress of Africa. Africa can derive a lot of productive and beneficial inputs from the vast technological skills possessed by Afro-Americans. What is needed overall and what will result from the continued interface and the interaction and the international cooperation between the two groups is a better understanding of each other. (Boniface Obichere, 1975, p.35)

In contradistinction to this moving manifesto are the two poles of diaspora Negroes' reactions to their African homeland or the idea of it, represented by the declarations and beliefs of Edward W. Blyden, on the one hand, and (half a century later) Ralph Ellison, on the other. In 1898, Edward Blyden, regarded as the father of black nationalist ideology, published a pamphlet, *The Jewish Question*, praising "the marvellous movement called Zionism...(Blyden) had been deeply impressed by Theodore Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*, 1896) and apparently saw a striking parallel between Herzl's ideal and his own labour to build in Liberia a Negro state and centre of African Renaissance." (Jacob Drachler, 1975, p.53) This romantic candour in Blyden, which equates Africa to the level of a 'Black Zion,' seems to be what Ellison was reacting to, when he declared half a century later that:

'if everyone had to have some place to be proud of...I am proud of Abbeville, South Carolina, and Oklahoma city. That is enough for me.' He was concerned, he said, that 'by raising the possibility of Africa as a 'homeland', we give Africa an importance on the symbolic level that it does not have *in the thinking of people*.' (Ralph Ellison, cited in Drachler, Op.Cit., p.123, My emphasis)

But 'the people' to whom Ralph Ellison refers will certainly not include the mass of Afro-Americans and West Indians who embraced Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and its 'back to Africa' programmes. Neither can Ellison's 'people' be said to include a young Black student at Atlanta University among others, whose articulated opinion of the profound racial issues confronting him is recorded in Boniface Obichere's article in this way: "What is happening man is Africa and the Black revolution. Africa is the source, dig, and there ain't nothing the Black revolution can do if it left out Africa." (cited in Obiechere, Op.Cit., p.15)

For, even when often accused of fraudulent mismanagement of the assets of his Universal Negro Improvement Association, the irrepressible Marcus Garvey, within the twenty odd years he spent in America, from the time he left his native Jamaica in 1917 until his death in 1940, did not quit the scene without leaving Pan-African ideologues on both sides of the Atlantic something to ponder for generations to come. Like his predecessor, the West Indian born nationalist of the nineteenth century Edward Blyden, Garvey held the notion of 'Africa for the Africans'. He established *The Negro World*, a weekly newspaper edited by Garvey himself and the famous Blackstar Steamship company, among other enterprises. But unlike Blyden, Garvey did not succumb to the eighteenth and nineteenth century Christian oriented (Negro) belief that: "it was divine plan to permit enslavement of Africans so that they could be civilized abroad and then return home to civilize the pagan Africans." (Jacob Drachler, Op.Cit., p.53)

Rather, Garvey admonished his followers to expunge from their reasoning any feeling of superiority towards the native Africans. The diaspora Negro in Garvey's

teachings was implored not to look upon his brother and sister in the homeland, whom he soon re-discovered (under Garvey's direction and leadership) in Africa, as his cultural inferior, but as a true kinswo/man from whom s/he has been separated by a most unfortunate accident of history, for three hundred years. Thus, Garvey taught, if and when the time comes for the Negro to go back to Africa:

It will not be to go back to Africa for the purpose of exercising an over-lordship over the native, but it shall be the purpose of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to have established in Africa that brotherly cooperation which will make the interests of the African native and the American and West Indian Negro one and the same, that is to say we shall enter into common partnership to build up Africa in the interest of our race. (Marcus Garvey, 1975, p.67)

With such a populist manifesto, it was not difficult for Garvey to charm himself into the hearts of first and foremost, those lower class Blacks in the Americas who felt abandoned and powerless as a result of the obviously absurd social, economic and political order of their societies. To this category of Blacks as Jacob Drachler observes, "the dream of a homeland becomes...a desperately desired escapist compensation." (Jacob Drachler, Op.Cit., p.65) But, if Garvey and his ideas can be regarded as another significant landmark for the diaspora Negro and his/her response to an African homeland or the idea of it, the other end of that polarity is, many will argue, that represented by W.E.B. DuBois - regarded in Pan-African circles as a pioneer of the movement's major ideas and beliefs. Garvey and DuBois were obviously antagonistic towards each other's beliefs and teachings; the difference between them can easily be categorised in terms of DuBois's intellectual or academic disposition, in contrast to Garvey's atavistic or emotive sensibility in articulating profound racial issues. Thus, Garvey's atavism is consequently expunged in DuBois's academic belief that:

the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant same as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is the social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and the heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa. (W.E.B. DuBois, 1975, p.77)

Understanding DuBois and his writing, in terms of output and complexity, is no doubt an important step towards grasping the dominant attitude of Negro intellectuals in the diaspora and their response to their African homeland or the idea of it. Obviously, a man of such intellectual disposition could not at the same time achieve the populist thrust of either Marcus Garvey or Booker T. Washington, and the mass following which the 'method' of the latter men engendered.

This intellectual Negro response to the idea of an African homeland, which DuBois typifies, has a long and interesting history. It can be traced to the earliest attempt of Negroes to express themselves through the art of writing, among other media. It is traceable to the views expressed by the black poet, Phillis Wheatley of Boston, in a poem written in 1773, in which the persona expresses the following seemingly shocking views about his/her African homeland:

T'was not long since I left my native shore  
The land of error and Egyptian gloom:  
Father of mercy! T'was thy gracious hand  
Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.  
(Phillis Wheatley, 1969, p.285)

Obviously, 'the dark abode' is the African homeland. It is also this homeland that is casually referred to as 'the land of error and Egyptian gloom' from which the speaker has been rescued by a 'father of mercy' and transported to the new or present 'abode'. The 'father of mercy' in the poem is the Christian God of Wheatley's master to whom she was taught to use her precocious genius to sing praises. Phillis Wheatley, according to Jerome Kilinkowitz "was purchased near Boston harbour as

a child by the merchant John Wheatley,...Her poetry, written in fashionable style of such English poets as Alexander Pope and Thomas Gray, praised her masters, their society and their Christian religion." (Jerome Kilinkowitz, 1978, p.10) Thus as I have earlier observed, a dominant attitude among the 'pocket' of Negro intellectuals of Wheatley's and subsequent generations, is the view inculcated in them by their White masters that it is 'part of a divine plan to permit the enslavement of Africans, so that they can return home to civilize their pagan brothers and sisters in Africa'.

This dominant seventeenth and eighteenth century belief among Negro intellectuals was so strongly held that not even Edward Blyden (whose attitude it is necessary to recast here to delineate an opposing viewpoint to that represented by the persona in Wheatley's poem) escaped from this line of thinking. Blyden's counter viewpoint, however, is that represented in the pamphlet he published in 1898, in which he equates Africa to a 'Black Zion'. The point of all this is that when Blyden's romantic candour is placed side by side with Wheatley's speaker's sense of escape from 'the land of gloom and Egyptian error', called Africa, what we get are two ends of a polarity; Negro intellectuals in the Americas have, either by implication or outright declaration, identified with one and repudiated the other. Here, we may certainly recall Ralph Ellison's rebuff of Edward Blyden's romance with Africa to illustrate the point further. For while not rejecting Africa on the same grand scale as the speaker in Wheatley's poem, Ellison's viewpoint is, nevertheless, a rejection of the very idea of an African homeland. And whatever else his declaration may stand for, Ellison is certainly far removed from Blyden's romantic idea of a 'Black Zion' and closer to the Negro voice's attitude in Wheatley's poem to his/her 'land of error and Egyptian gloom'.

In a twentieth century sense, these dominant attitudes have produced fascinating literary results. One of its immediate products is that 'high brow' middle class literature produced by those Negro writers who maintain that the idea of an African homeland should remain, at best, an abstract concept. They maintain that beyond the fact that "all black men at one time or another left Africa or have remained there" (James Baldwin, 1961, pp.28-29) they have little or nothing in common. This school of thought holds tenaciously to the belief that, in a twentieth century sense, the only thing Black people have in common is their relationship to the White world.

James Baldwin, a very complex and highly philosophical Negro writer, for example, insists that different historical paradigms have produced the Negroes and their native African counterparts. Baldwin's belief is based on the following historical premise:

the African has not yet endured the utter alienation of himself from his people and his past. His mother did not sing, 'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child', and he has not all his life ached for acceptance in a culture which pronounced straight hair and white skin the only acceptable beauty. They face each other, the Negro and the African, over a gulf of three hundred years - an alienation too vast to be conquered in an evening's goodwill. (James Baldwin, 1975, pp.104-5)

Thus, by arguing that the African and the Negro are caught in different historical struggles, Baldwin concludes that a journey to Africa cannot yield any symbolic result for him. If anything, it will only reinforce his "gloomy feeling that (he) won't find any answers in Africa, only, more questions." (Op.Cit. p.5)

But Baldwin's attitude only typifies one level of the Negro's reaction to the idea of an African homeland. The West Indian writer, for example, has not been as tempted as his/her American counterpart to dismiss the whole issue of an African homeland with the same casualness. Rather, the issue has been taken up seriously as

one capable of generating a profound crisis of identity, which needs to be resolved rather than dismissed. No West Indian writer has been more plagued by the whole question of 'who, what, am I?', than Derek Walcott. And, as D.S. Izevbaye observes, "The closing lines of 'A Far Cry From Africa' contain the best known and the most explicit statement on the theme of the divided man, and it is therefore important for the insight it gives into the literary consciousness of a period in the literature of Africa and the Caribbean." (D.S. Izevbaye, 1980, p.80)

It would be naive and incorrect to hold tenaciously or insist that the two attitudes charted here represent the only ways diaspora Negroes have articulated their response(s) to the idea of an African homeland. Rather, the chart is in line with the focus of this study and consequently its belief that because these views represent dominant attitudes, they deserve close critical observation. Thus, for my immediate purpose in this chapter, the next two sections will examine the writings of a selection of Black writers from across the diaspora under the sub-headings 'Negro Intellectuals and the African/Diaspora relationship' and 'Creolization, Miscegenation and the West Indian Writer' respectively. The creative efforts of these writers are treated as 'modes' (and in this sense two significant variants) of perceiving the response of 'Africans' or at least, people of African origin to their African homeland or the idea of it.

### **1.3 Negro Intellectuals and the African/Diaspora Relationship**

Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! Our great West African Heritage. In one second we will hear all about the Ashanti empires, the great Songhay civilization, and the great sculpture of Benin - and some poetry in Bantu - and the whole monologue will end with the word *heritage*. (original italics)

(Lorraine Hansberry)



I have a feeling that I won't find any answers in Africa, only more questions.

(James Baldwin)

One question that any serious student of the 'cross-current of the African/Diaspora relationship' must of necessity be plagued with and need to resolve, concerns the manner in which non-conformists or so-called Black radicals are often violently cut down in their prime. This is often done with the readily observable connivance of the state, while theoreticians or integration-seeking Blacks, often robed in academic and establishment garb, are easily 'contained' by the system, allowed to thrive, and often given state assistance in carrying out their activities.

The origin of this relationship dates back to the beginning of the historic contact between the West and Africa. It can be traced to the type of amorphous relationship that has always existed between the Blacks and the Whites, in slave ships, on to the plantations of the New World (with the appointment of slave drivers the majority of whom were themselves slaves), and it culminates in the period of emancipation (and the emergence of a black middle class). Finally, the racial issues involved must of necessity be traced to the whole question of whether emancipated slaves ought to be integrated into the white dominated, racist society or be shipped back to their African homeland, whence their fore-fathers were abducted in the first instance. This pattern of experience culminates in radical stances, maintained by those blacks who believe that, because no positive future awaits them in the white dominated society, they must be allowed to return to their African homeland or, at least, be allowed to maintain a firm contact with her. The plausible argument of holders of these views is that within the American milieu of a culturally pluralistic society Blacks, like every other cultural group in the society, must be given a fair

chance to promote their own culture, in this sense a 'culture that is itself based on a value system'. They argue for the preservation and maintenance of black culture that is based on a black value system which could only be African, "because we are Africans, no matter that we have been trapped in the West these few hundred years." (Ron Karenga cited in A. Sivanandan, 1983, p.60)

Thus, whether in the form of the separatist approach of the 'Nation of Islam' or 'back to Africa' movements of the Elijah Mohammed/Farakhan/Malcolm X or Garvey types, it is a fact that whatever mode of black protest or radicalism the white establishment cannot contain, it seeks ways of destroying. The list is endless of the Malcolm Xs, Martin Luther Kings, the Marcus Garveys, Angela Davises and the Soledad brothers, cut down by seemingly invisible forces often disguised as their fellow black adversaries, just at that period when they seem to be becoming 'too effective' in their approach to the racial issues at stake.

In the 'Niggerzone of the Dozens and Blues' a simple picture painted by Mitchell-Kerman establishes the powerful text that informs what has been recognised in the introduction to this chapter as a system that divides class from class and constricts the evolution of national ways of life. In black profane discourse, 'Signifying', whose other components are 'playing the dozens, rapping and sounding', according to Roger Abrahams:

can mean a number of things; in the case of the toast, it certainly refers to the Monkey's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean "making fun" of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures... (Roger Abrahams cited in C. Mitchell-Kerman, 1973, p.311)

It is equally important to add however, that Signifying is the language of the majority

of Blacks most of whom exist without economic or political power and could rely on the toast of the Signifying Monkey (their cultural heritage) as a way of encapsulating their thoughts and having them expressed in as dignified a language as possible. Thus Mitchell-Kerman describes Signifying as 'unique in Black English usage' in the sense "in which signifying is extended to cover a range of meanings and events which are not covered in the standard English usage." (Op.Cit., p.313)

Encompassing the entire spectrum of life's experiences, Signifying responds to mundane and serious issues affecting individual personal experiences and collective communal predicaments in historical and contemporary settings. As far as literary discourse is concerned, Signifying encompasses the basic background giving black texts their rhetorical strength and, ostensibly, their means of extrapolating the relationship between the signifier and the signified. The first epigraph to this section, drawn from Lorraine Hansberry's powerful play *A Raisin in the Sun*, is a clear example of this interplay of signification. The character George Murchison's exasperation at the way 'our great West African heritage' has become an intellectual issue often leading to futile discussions in history (Ashanti empires), ethnography (Songhay civilization) and literature (poetry in Bantu) is widely portrayed in sharp and witty phrases, the end result of which is to show that when intellectuals withdraw into abstractions their discourse becomes monologic rather than dialogic. The following example suffices to illustrate the point further.

Mitchell-Kerman is simply explaining a fact when she states that "chit'lins are considered a delicacy by many Black people and eating chit'lins is often viewed as a traditional dietary habit of Black people." (Op.Cit., p.315) There is little wonder therefore, that 'a simple Black woman' uses chit'lins as the object of her focus in a

conversation with Mitchell-Kerman and another Black woman. The end result of this Signifying exercise is to come to terms with the day-to-day realisation that obstacles to a common humanity and common destiny within the black community arise as a result of trivialities which could be 'teased out' of a would-be turncoat through the indirect message-bearing device of signifying. The following exchanges are between Barbara, an informant, Mary (Barbara's friend) and the researcher (Mitchell-Kerman). The setting of the short scene is Barbara's home and the episode begins as the researcher is about to leave:

Barbara: What are you going to do on Saturday? Will you be over here?

Researcher: I don't know.

Barbara: Well, if you're not going to be doing anything, come by. I'm going to cook some chit'lins (rather jokingly) *or are you one of those Negroes who don't eat chit'lins?*

What follows this jokingly expressed accusation is an open-ended discourse; Barbara's remarks seem to be addressed to the researcher but one of the dynamics of Signifying is the strategy through which 'the signifier may employ the tactic of obscuring his/her addressee as part of his/her rhetorical strategy'. Thus Mary, not merely feeling but understanding herself to be the real addressee, picks up the trend of the conversation:

Mary:...That's all I hear lately - soul food, soul food. If you say you don't eat it you get accused of being saddity...Well, I ate enough black-eyed peas and neckbones during the depression that I can't get too excited over it. I eat prime rib and T-bone because I like to, not because I'm trying to be white...Negroes are constantly trying to find some way to discriminate against each other. If they could once get it into their heads that we are all in this together may be we could get somewhere in this battle against the man. (Op.Cit., pp.314-5)

To be 'accused of being saddity' according to Mitchell-Kerman means to be 'affected, to consider oneself superior', in short, to embrace or make significant moves towards

adopting white values. To eat 'soul food' (which I have compared to the African Negritude in chapter three) on the other hand, is to be described as a true soul brother or sister and to reject white values and standards. The simple binary opposition which this level of demarcation connotes is partially addressed in the later part of Mary's response to Barbara's 'Signifying accusation': 'if they (soul brothers and sisters) could get it into their heads that we are all in this together may be we could get somewhere in this battle against the man'. Thus, 'signifying' is "directed not only at Whites but at Negroes too, who have rejected their blackness or have never been aware of it...It appears in fiction, in drama, in poetry, and in criticism, both literary and social, when such distinctions are admitted." (Stephen Henderson, 1969, p.75)

Consequently, poets like Sonia Sanchez and Le Graham take this binary opposition to its logical conclusion by identifying through poetry the values to be bitterly repudiated for being white and those to be encouraged for being black. In Sanchez's poem addressed to 'black record buyers,' she complains about white singers becoming fabulously rich by simply imitating black singers 'while the men like Al Hibbler and Roy Hamilton whose voices they stole have relatively little popularity today'. The duo of white singers are further 'signifyingly' described as 'Righteous Brothers' who symbolize to the poet, the fact that:

white people  
 ain't right bout nothing  
 no mo'.  
 don't tell me bout  
 foreign dudes  
 cuz no blk/  
 people are grooving on a  
 sunday afternoon.  
 they either  
 making out/  
 signifying/  
 drinking/



### *Identity in America:*

The tragedy of the Negro in America is that he has rejected his origin - the essentially human meaning implicit in the heritage of slavery. Prolonged suffering and social rejection. By rejecting this unique group experience and favouring assimilation and even biological amalgamation, he denies himself the creative possibilities inherent in it and in his folk culture. (Essien-Udom, 1970, p.vii)

Average middle class Negroes have arrived at this point because, in their bid to assert their 'Americanness', the heritage of slavery, for instance, has become a source of embarrassment to them. Their response to their African homeland or the idea of it, is predicated on the noticeable 'failure' of those blacks who have, at one time or the other, gravitated towards Africa rather than lived and abided by the one-sided racist norms of the white dominated society.

How one of these promising young men, Malcolm X, was brutally cut down in his prime, just at that time when his fraternization with his African homeland was becoming a source of embarrassment to the white establishment, is the theme of James Baldwin's *One Day When I Was Lost: "A Scenario based on Alex Haley's The Autobiography of Malcolm X"*. The hopelessness of Malcolm's quest is poignantly portrayed in Baldwin's depiction, in vivid scenes in which historical facts, mainly from the protagonist's life, are masterfully and skilfully blended with Baldwin's own artistic rendering of the 'mission impossible' which Malcolm seems to have set himself. From the beginning, Baldwin's version is a parody of the whole seemingly grotesque idea of an African homeland vis-a-vis Marcus Garvey's 'back to Africa' movement. Thus, "A voice is heard, shouting, 'Brothers, Sisters, this is not our home! Our homeland is in Africa! *In Africa!*'" (James Baldwin, 1973, p.6, original italics) Almost immediately, all hell breaks loose as, "We hear a trolley car's clanging bell, and see, from the point of view of the motorman, a beaten, one-eyed blackman,

lying across the streetcar tracks, watching his death approach." (Op.Cit., p.6)

We are introduced to Malcolm, shortly after this scene of despair or, better still, hope betrayed before it is conceived. The man, 'lying across the streetcar tracks, watching his death approach' is Malcolm's father, suffering in the hands of the dreaded Ku Klux Klan for the same cause that we shall witness Malcolm pursuing very shortly. It amounts to a continuation of this hopeless despair, when we meet Malcolm X, a short while later:

in a great hall, somewhere in Africa being draped in an African robe. The ruler, who places this robe on him, pronounces his name at the same time that Malcolm repeats it to the student:

Malcolm: Omowale.

Student: It means the son who has returned!

Malcolm: I have had so many names. (Op.Cit., p.7)

The hopelessness of Malcolm's quest is further depicted in the final encounter between him and the man who converted him, while in prison, to the Nation of Islam movement. The man, Luther, was to become Malcolm's greatest rival in the movement and in their last memorable meeting, Luther articulates why he has to triumph over Malcolm and the seemingly herculean task he has set himself:

Malcolm: You've won, you know. What will you do now - with your power?

Luther: I will keep it, and use it.

Malcolm: I thought you wanted to change the world.

Luther: I know that's what you thought. Malcolm - the world's much more like me than it is like you. People recognise me. They see me in their mirror. But they don't see you. You're not in the mirror with them. That's why people always look so - surprised - when they see you. You want to change them and they - don't want to be changed. (Op.Cit., p.226)

Thus, at the end of *One Day When I Was Lost*, it does not come to us as a surprise when we are again called to witness the brutal assassination of Malcolm X, because the premise for his failure has been established right from the very first scene



of Baldwin's artistic version of Malcolm's life and beliefs. He is just another Negro who has chosen the revolutionary, heady path that is doomed to fail. What this pattern of depiction connotes to those blacks who idolize outstanding figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, is the conviction that writers like Baldwin, being on the side of the oppressor, are 'liable to be accused of being saddy' for having renounced the 'essentially human meaning implicit in the heritage of slavery'. Black British spokesman and critic A. Sivanandan describes Baldwin, in retrospect, as having 'matched with the king that God forgot' during the civil rights campaign:

But when the fight for rights was over - for the vote and property and a place in the American sun - opening up the road ahead for the long and protracted and deathly struggle against capital and the state, against exploitation on a world scale, against death-dealing imperialism, Baldwin was not there. He was writing in Paris and London and Istanbul, or rapping pointlessly with Margaret Mead and her ilk, or making an arse of himself on BBC television - returning endlessly to the themes of love and the life interior... True he rallied - momentarily - to the cause of Angela Davis, but without the faintest notion of what the larger issues were all about - an innocent abroad, from another country, another world, the world of the writer qua writer. (A. Sivanandan, *Op.cit.*, p.73)

Realising that militant blacks and commentators on the African/Diaspora relationship are not likely to identify with this endless retreat into the theme of love and the 'life interior', especially when it is to the detriment of the racial issues confronting them, Baldwin asserts, shortly after the publication of his novel *Another Country*, that: "I simply dread facing the tigerish Negro press if I return to America without having visited the land which they so abruptly are proud to claim as home. The more particularly as neither *Another Country* nor my report about Africa is likely to please them at all." (James Baldwin, 1975, p.30)

In any case, let us bear in mind the fact that Baldwin has already divulged his apprehension to us through "his gloomy feeling that (he) won't find any answer in

Africa, only more questions." (Op.Cit., p.104) His literary predecessor and pathfinder, Richard Wright, working with the same frame of mind had earlier made the historic journey to Africa and returned with, as Baldwin rightly predicts, more questions. But Wright's questions had to do more with phenomena which he was not adequately equipped to resolve rather than any apparent contradiction as to why Afro-Americans should fraternize with Africa. Rather, Wright's discomfiture centres around why people of African origin should not look towards Africa as their homeland.

Wright's visit to Africa is reported in his essay, "On Tour in the Gold Coast", in which he confesses that he had long concluded that 'racial qualities were but myths of prejudiced minds'. But his apparent discomfiture becomes manifest when he is confronted, during the tour, with what he calls 'Survivals of Africa in America', even when as a civilized blackman "he stoutly denied the mystic influence of race." (Richard Wright, 1975, p.92) Nevertheless, Wright came across a cultural trait which he was convinced he had seen in America and safely categorised as an integral part of the whole fetish cult of the Negro's religious mentality. This significant repetition in cultural forms however, did not convey any message to Wright about 'the shape of time and history', as he merely exclaims:

I'd seen these same snakelike veering before...where? Oh, God, yes; in America, in storefront churches, in Holy Roller Tabernacle, in God's Temples, in unpainted modern prayer meeting houses on the plantations of the Deep South..And here I was seeing it all again against a background of a surging nationalistic political movement. How could that be? (Op.Cit., p.91)

But, in an essay entitled "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," James A. Snead urges that:

In any case, let us remember that, whenever we encounter repetition

in cultural forms, we are indeed not viewing 'the same thing' but its transformation, not just a formal ploy but often the willed grafting onto culture of an essentially philosophical insight about the shape of time and history. (James A. Snead, 1990, pp.59-60)

Snead's theoretical paradigm here could be seen to have eluded Richard Wright and others like him who, having thoroughly imbibed cultural theories from the point of view of the hegemonic social and political order, are prone to refuse to acknowledge the ontological importance of this 'essential philosophical insight about the shape of time and history' and how this is grafted on to black culture in repetitive forms.

Thus, like Wright, Baldwin asks after the 'Conference of Negro - African Writers of 1956': "what beyond the fact that all black men at one time or another left Africa, or have remained there, do they have in common?" (Op.Cit., p.104) Samuel W. Allen seems to be answering Baldwin's question, when he asserts that, beyond the fact that black men have at one time or another left Africa or remained there, what they have in common, is "a type of reconnaissance in the formation of an imaginative world free from the prescriptions of a racist West." (Samuel W. Allen, 1962, p.12) Not to labour the issue, let us turn our attention to the West Indian counterparts of the Afro-American writer and examine how they perceive their 'world' vis-a-vis their African homeland.

#### **1.4 Creolization, Miscegenation and the West Indian Writer**

In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters. Because this literature serves historical truth, it yellows into polemic and evaporates into pathos. The truly tough aesthetics of the New World neither explains nor forgives this history. It refuses to recognise it as a creative and culpable force. This shame

and awe of history possess poets of the Third World, who think of language as enslavement and who in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence and nostalgia.

(Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History")

Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is an exercise in artistic or creative exorcism. Dedicated as it is to exorcising all those forces that have conspired to oppress and exploit the black race, the play echoes Walcott's belief that a profound sense of history must necessarily produce in the black wo/man a 'literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves'. One such descendant is Makak; sixty year old, charcoal burner, 'ugly as sin', and who as he confesses, "live(s) like a wild beast in hiding. Without child, without wife. People forget me like the mist on Monkey Mountain." (Derek Walcott, 1970, p.226) Makak is however, set on the path to freedom, rather unwittingly, by one of the major symbols of his oppression, represented in the play by the White Apparition. But Makak's 'freedom', like the entire play, is a dream, and in this sense, one that exists only in psychological terms.

The play takes the form of a spiritual journey through which Makak wanders across the entire landscape of his subjugation and oppression. Thus, the play is described by the playwright as, "a dream, one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal characters as in that of the writer and as such, it is illogical, derivative and contradictory." (Op.Cit., p.208) It is not surprising, therefore, that the presentation of Makak should be along the lines of the 'hallucinated being' of Jean Paul Sartre's prologue to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. For Makak is a being 'tired of always being insulted by his demon, (who) one fine day starts hearing the voice of an angel who pays him compliments'. The angel, in the play, is the White Apparition and as Makak explains to Mostique (Makak's alter-ego), part of the compliments this symbol of his 'longing, as inaccessible as snow, as fatal as

leprosy' pays him, is to "call out my name, my real name. A name I do not use. Come here she say. Come don't be afraid. So, I go up to her, one step by one step. She make me sit down and start to talk to me." (Op.Cit., p.235)

For Makak, sixty years old, charcoal burner, 'ugly as sin', these are indeed more than compliments. To further confound him, Makak's memory of this encounter with the Apparition is of the highest sensual order. His remembrance of her is that of 'the loveliest thing I see on earth, floating towards me just like the moon walking along the road'. But as the play progresses, it becomes clear that the Apparition is only 'jeering' at Makak, and as Jean Paul Sartre further observes, "the jeers don't stop for all that; only from then on, they alternate with congratulations. This is a defence, but it is also the end of the story. The self is dissociated and the patient heads for madness." (Op.Cit., p.221)

This is because 'the defence' put forward by the tormentor is also a farce, meant, as it is, to render the hallucinated being further confounded, stultify his path to a true liberation of the mind, and facilitate his descent into madness. In the play, this is acted out in the form of Makak's arrest for being drunk and disorderly and breaking up Alcindor's cafe. At this point in the play, Corporal Lestrade, described by Lloyd Brown as Makak's 'bourgeois alter-ego', along with the two habitual felons, Tigre and Souris, play prominent roles. Also at this point, Lestrade is still very much that part of Makak's longing for the white man's value systems. Thus, it does not come to us as a surprise when we encounter Lestrade as the seemingly committed or, at least, enthusiastic custodian of the white man's law, and using the same jeering language as the White Apparition, Lestrade articulates Makak's madness. In doing this Lestrade also divulges his subconscious and inner urge, which is to see black

people challenge the white man's law, which he serves. But like Makak, black people as far as Lestrade is concerned, 'are paralysed with darkness. They paralyse with faith. They cannot do nothing, because they born slaves and born tired.' And as for the particularly 'special' case of Makak, Lestrade has the following uncomplimentary tirade:

Let me tell you what happen. I following this rumour good. And this is the same as history, Pamphilion. Some ignorant illiterate lunatic who know two or three lines from the Bible by heart, well one day he get tired of being poor and sitting on his arse, so he make up his mind to see a vision, and once he make up his mind, the constipated stupid bastard bound to see it. So he come down off his mountain, as if he is God self, and walk amongst the people who too glad that he will think for them. He give them hope, miracle, vision, paradise on earth, and is then blood start to bleed and stone start to fly. And is at that point, to protect them from disappointment, I does reach for my pistol. History Mr. Pamphilion, is just one series of breach of promise. (Op.Cit., pp.261-2)

With this lucid articulation of the general decadent complacency plaguing Makak and the black population, the action is projected into the second part. Here too, the observation of Sartre about the state of existence of the hallucinated being is very important. Sartre's assertion is another account of the black man's notorious 'double consciousness,' a man of two worlds, master of none, and as Sartre further observes this "makes two bewitchings; they dance all night and at dawn, they crowd into the church to hear mass; each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brother and becomes our accomplice; his brother does the same. The status of *native* is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonised beings with their consent." (Op.Cit., p.277, original italics)

It is also in the second part that most of the play's contradictions are resolved, and the premise for these resolutions is contained in Sartre's observation. For it is at that point when the hallucinating being is able to eliminate or succeeds in

apprehending that part of him that is always tempted to betray his inner urge (exemplified in the play, by the elimination of Mostique, who represents that part of Makak that is always reminding him of the 'reality' of his existence, 'a poor charcoal burner, ugly as sin!'), that he becomes truly reconciled to his revolutionary black self. This coupled with the symbolic awakening of Lestrade (Makak's bourgeois alter-ego) who cannot stop hankering after the white man's value systems (his law, religion, and politics) sets Makak on the path to realising his revolutionary potential as a black man. When this happens, Makak ceases to inhabit that dangerous zone which is the exclusive preserve of 'men of two worlds', master of none.

It is only when he attains this 'status' that Makak is able to lead the symbolic journey 'back to Africa'. Again, the journey, like the entire play, exists in spiritual rather than physical terms. But once they are back in Africa, Makak, ably assisted by Corporal Lestrade, the two habitual felons, Tigre and Souris, and Basil the carpenter carry out a symbolic execution, before a gathering of African tribes, of all those who have had a hand in the black man's subjugation and oppression. The list includes, in Basil's words:

Noah, but not the son of Ham, Aristotle,..I'm skipping a bit, Abraham Lincoln, Alexander of Macedon, Shakespeare, I can cite relevant texts, Plato, Copernicus, Galileo and perhaps Ptolemy, Christopher Marlowe...Mandrake the magician. (The TRIBES are laughing) It's not funny my Lords, Tarzan, Dante, Sir Cecil Rhodes, William Wilberforce, the unidentified author of The Song of Solomon, Lorenzo de Medici, Florence Nightingale...but why go on? Their crimes, whatever their plea, whatever extenuation of circumstances, whether of genius or geography, is, that they are indubitably guilty...some are dead and cannot speak for themselves, but a drop of milk is enough to condemn them..For you, my lords are shapers of history. We wait for your judgement, O tribes.

TRIBES: Hang them!

Basil: It shall be done! The list continues ad nauseam. (Op.Cit., p.312)

But it is only after acquiring the true willpower to reject all those white values

capable of stultifying his revolutionary potential, including "An invitation to be the President of the United States...An apology in full from the Republic of South Africa...A floral tribute from the Ku Klux Klan..", (Op.Cit., p.313) that Makak is able to resolve the inner 'tension or self-conflict in the development of a revolutionary consciousness'.

The high point of the trials, however, is the thorough but swift conviction and symbolic execution of the unwitting catalyst to the whole experience, the White Apparition. For it is only when the Apparition is brought in and Makak, urged by his lieutenants, beholds her, that he is able to complete his quest, and in his own words, 'Now, O God, now I am free.' "The revolutionary psyche which Makak's dream projects is now complete. He now returns to the other reality represented by the jail cell. But, as we have already seen, the very capacity to dream has confirmed his revolutionary possibilities." (Lloyd Brown, 1978, p.62)

And, with this literary *coup de grace*, Walcott succeeds in doing what many Negro writers in the diaspora, bogged down with the twin notion of 'acceptance and integration' find very difficult to do. Makak never goes back to Africa, but the journey he has made in spiritual terms is enough to free him from the debilitating effects of having to denounce the collective heritages of slavery, creolization and miscegenation. The sixth chapter of this thesis is devoted to a critical examination of this pattern of creative articulation, reading it in terms of its realisation as the profane discourse of 'the low,' or what Walcott refers to as a 'literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves'. Its form and language transgressively confront the mythic imagination of 'the high', structuring it as we have seen towards the end of the play into a 'dialogic discourse' as opposed to the monologic or occluded discourse



of 'the high' that gave birth to this need for symbolic revision.

It is also along this line of the profound crisis of identity plaguing the 'divided man' that much of Walcott's poetry can make sense. Out of his collections, his widely quoted, "A Far Cry From Africa" readily comes to mind. And even here the spiritual journey to Africa is of paramount importance to the poet. For in "A Far Cry" the features of the East African landscape provide Walcott's narrative thrust with an historical but purposeful identification with a black humanity and consequently a means of realising the creative possibilities inherent in this traumatic folk experience.

Thus:

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt  
of Africa. Kikuyu quick as flies  
Battern upon the bloodstream of the veldt.  
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.  
(Walcott, 1962, p.18)

However, it is not merely the East African landscape alone that provides the narrative thrust of "A Far Cry", but perhaps more important is the Mau Mau struggle against British colonialism which the poem addresses. This struggle provides a common heritage that unites the poet and those Pan-African counterparts of his, back in the African homeland. By focusing on their struggle, Walcott is able to draw from the 'creative possibilities' inherent in a common heritage and in his folk culture. It is this profound sense of history that provides the pulsating tempo, leading to the frenzied conclusion and of course, the basic dilemma of "A Far Cry From Africa".

While Walcott's overall aesthetics could be summarised as a blending of the writer's Afro-Western heritages, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, for example, insists through his poetry, critical works and polemics on an Afro-Caribbean orality with the borrowing from Western sources relegated to a non-consequential position. Two

examples of Walcott's position are his 1962 poems *In a Green Night*, among which "A Far Cry" remains a vivid testament, and his recent rewriting of the Homeric poems and their adaptation into a Caribbean epic, *Omeros*. The consistent pattern in these works is a creative rendition or blending of the poet's Afro-Western heritages. Brathwaite on the other hand, maintains an Afro-Caribbean outlook in the acclaimed New World trilogy *The Arrivants* and in his 1979 oral essay lecture to students at Harvard University, published in 1984 as *History of the Voice - the Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean*.

Derek Walcott's and Edward Brathwaite's positions on the issue of the role of history and heritages have over the years assumed 'a Walcott versus Brathwaite stance'. This study perceives the difference(s) however, as two important views on the same side of a polarity. If the difference is seen as one of emphasis then, obviously, Walcott's plea for "a fresh but not innocent 'Adamic' naming of place" where history recedes further and further to the background could be regarded as "the potential of a new, but not naive vision." (Ashcroft et al., 1989, pp.34-35)

The middle ground between Walcott's seemingly ahistorical approach and Brathwaite's deeply historical sensibility would be the Guyanese novelist and critic Wilson Harris's plea for the cultivation of an imaginative escape that will ultimately yield a liberation from the destructive dialectic of history. To do this the imagination should be imbued with a mobile strength, fleeing tyranny in one landscape to find solace in another, the extreme form of which would be George Lamming's articulation in *The Pleasures of Exile*. While the Akan folklore, the story of 'Ananse - the spider,' the trickster character, provides Harris's mythic focus, Ayi Kwei Armah's review of the 1984 edition of Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* originally

published in 1960, returns to the premise of the historical context. Armah maintains that in the sense of an hegemonic world order, whether from historical or contemporary perspectives and in the racial psyche of Africans or people of African origin, "Africa's presence or absence is central." (Armah, 1985, p.570) The balance which Armah strikes in his review of Lamming's book is in the view that the dilemma of choosing what to identify with and what to leave out between African and Western heritages "is not exclusively West Indian":

It is still endemic among African intellectuals, and it can strike Afro-American artists and thinkers with crippling force. In one of the book's liveliest passages, Lamming, wandering in the castle of his skin, stares in the mirror of his mind and sees James Baldwin. Baldwin, too, has had, though perhaps in a less formally structured way, the sort of education in which the achievements of Western civilization loom fantastically large...Baldwin's bind is real; he's trapped within the kinds of Western premises we know only too well. (Armah, Op. Cit., p.522)

Armah concludes from this analogy that it is only the intellectual whose knowledge of the "continent his ancestors came from is a judicious selection of negative misinformation: savagery, wars, famine, drought, catastrophe; the jungle and the tribe" (Op.Cit., p.571) who needs to liberate him/herself from what Fanon calls 'intellectual dependency'. One might acquiesce with Armah that the discourse on the condition of exile is not resolved with Lamming's primary conclusion or what he calls 'the pleasures of exile': "The pleasure and paradox of my exile is that I belong wherever I am." (Lamming, cited in Armah, Op.Cit., p.571) In *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o agrees more or less with Armah and observes how Lamming's philosophical standpoint places him "outside the stream of history and politics; his lack of a historico-moral and political frame makes him feel impotent to control society."

(Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 1981, p.127)

Thus, the desire to 'belong wherever one is' could be a pragmatic choice, a way of making adequate use of available resources, but those who regard this essential pragmatism as a conceptual trap also argue that finding pleasure wherever one is, is at least as important as knowing where one ought to be. In a 1984 article entitled "The Death and Rebirth of African Deities in Edward Brathwaite's *Islands*", Funso Aiyejina argues that while Brathwaite focuses on both Western and African concepts of God, the emphasis which is maintained is to establish "the tangible physical and subliminal links between Africa and the New World." (Aiyejina, 1984, p.398) The essential Brathwaite however, fuses this sense of 'what is' and 'what ought to be' stylistically and thematically to mean choice of an appropriate language or idiom that could express adequately these historical moorings. Thus having paid homage to Claude Mckay and his contribution to his 'Nation language,' Brathwaite notes with regret that it is not the volumes of poetry *Constab Ballads* and *Songs of Jamaica* which are the hallmarks of Mckay's contribution to his folk language that conferred universal acclaim on the poet, but the thematically provocative but stylistically retrogressive sonnet "If We Must Die" among others which heralded the poet's name to places as diverse as the floor of the British parliament.<sup>1</sup> Reading this occurrence as one among the numerous ploys of theories of universalism, Brathwaite notes with anger and regret that even though the 'Black world' would like to be

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<sup>1</sup> In a brilliant honours dissertation entitled "The influence of the Oral Tradition and Music on the Published Works of Afro-Caribbean and Black British poets" (University of Stirling, 1991) Julianne Hussey observes how Mckay's celebrated sonnet "If We Must Die" that was regarded as a piece of subversive literature by a United States senator in 1919, became a rallying analogy which the then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill used in calling on the patriotism of the British Army to ward off the aggression meted out to the rest of the world as a result of the institutionalised racism of Hitler's Germany.

universal, to be universally accepted:

But it's the terrible terms meted out for universality that interest me. In order to be universal Mckay forsook his nation language, forsook his early mode of poetry and went to the sonnet. (Brathwaite, cited in Julianne Hussey, 1991, p.16)

In contrast to Brathwaite's position however, is Walcott's declared identification with not merely 'this Africa' but also in a tangible and subliminal sense, 'the English tongue I love'. As earlier observed Walcott's position might be potentially new but it is equally visionary, and definitely not naive. Before we draw a conclusion from these patterns of responses, let us turn to the particular instance of the Africans in the homeland and examine how they have been apprehending their 'world' vis-a-vis the plight of their counterparts in the diaspora.

### **1.5 The African Response to the Diaspora**

What we usually call diaspora is not merely a physical thing. You my brothers in America are considered the Diaspora but we have different kinds of Diaspora actually. The physical one you have had in your lives since you left Africa four or five hundred years ago is one thing; but we in Africa have had another kind of diaspora, a mental and spiritual diaspora. We have been taken out of ourselves while being in Africa. We have been colonized, which means that our minds have been changed by foreigners which means our minds have been in a diaspora for centuries too.

(Francis Bebey)

The response of the Africans in the homeland to the plight of their counterparts in the diaspora is clearer than the whole gamut of Afro-American and West Indian responses to the idea of an African homeland. In the African response, two standpoints are clearly discernible. First and foremost is the unflinching conviction of most African thinkers and Pan-African ideologues, that wherever they might be found, a continued identification of Africa as their homeland is a welcome

line of thinking for all men and women of (black) colour, including the 'miscegenated' ones or what the Brazilian author Jorge Amado refers to as the 'mulatto of style'. That wherever they may find themselves in the world, all these people should think of themselves first as Africans and only secondly (if indeed, there is a need to) as Africans in exile. What the African response has found very difficult to resolve however, is whether the men and women of African origin in the diaspora should remain wherever they are (North/South America, Europe or the West Indies) or return home to Africa. On this later point, there are probably as many views as there are thinkers on the controversial subject of a homeland/diaspora relationship.

It is important to state here, however, that the only Africans in the homeland who are aware of the plight or state of existence of peoples of African origin in the diaspora are the socio-political elites, the majority of whom were themselves educated in America or Europe where they, probably, first came into contact with the excruciating effects of racism, on a large scale. No African leader has come to personify this pattern of the African/diaspora relationship as much as the late Ghanaian leader and foremost Pan-Africanist, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Osagyefo, as the renowned East African political scientist, Ali Mazrui, observes:

might not have been a great Ghanaian, but he was, in a sense, a great Afro-American. No other African leader was more conscious of his ties with the black people of America than Nkrumah. As we know, Nkrumah himself was educated in the United States. His activities among American Negroes ranged from dating Negro girls to preaching in Negro churches. The book that had the biggest impact on him in his formative years was, he tells us, the testament of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican who captured the nationalistic imagination of black people in the United States. (Ali Mazrui, 1975, p.223)

But it is also this early experience that seems to have set the stage for the ambivalence that is to characterize the African response to the diaspora. For, after

their student days in America, many from Nkrumah's generation also emerged as the political leaders of independent African states. This ambivalence exists in terms of the perplexity felt by these emergent leaders of independent African states when dealing in the realm of 'international diplomatic subterfuges', with the countries hosting their black counterparts in the diaspora. Here again, employing the particular example of Nkrumah, Ali Mazrui observes, how "as a visiting Head of State, Nkrumah was careful about what he said on civil rights in his host country. In fact, he hardly mentioned the specific Negro problem of the United States. To some extent his audience was disappointed. Yet his presence in Harlem as President of an African country was a moment of excitement to his audience and to Nkrumah." (Op.Cit., p.234)

This ambivalent or cosmetic response to the plight of the people of African origin in the diaspora has at best succeeded in reducing the African/diaspora relationship to two perceptible levels. It has succeeded, first and foremost, in reducing the African response to the diaspora to the level of an abstract concept. This intellectual abstraction, working through a network of rhetoric, does not resolve or answer the basic or fundamental yearnings of the Negro who, having been plagued by an acute crisis of identity, needs to feel a sense of pride in his/her African origin and homeland. As Ali Mazrui rhetorically observes, even though these people would like to be proud of their African origin, the question remains, 'which Africa? Is it just the concept of Africa?' And it amounts to a betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the mass of Afro-Americans and West Indian Negroes when one observes that it is only black intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic who have benefited and are still benefiting from this level of abstract relationship between Africa and her diaspora.

Ali Mazrui cites the particular examples of the West Indian historian, George Padmore, and W.E.B. DuBois of the United States, to both of whom among others Ghana opened her doors on attaining independence and who ever after lived and died as citizens of Ghana. It amounts to a profound irony of history that it is these intellectuals, who very often poured derision on Garvey's 'back to Africa' movements, that lived to make the historic journey back to the African homeland, while the ordinary Negro people in the Americas who very often need a little more substance in their abstraction were utterly neglected.

This level of the African response to her diaspora is taken to its logical conclusion in the articulation of Negritude, the first philosophical and cultural movement which aspired to fill the spiritual vacuum created by centuries of separation between kindred spirits. In the words of one of the founding fathers of the movement, the foremost African statesman and first president of independent Senegal, Leopold Sedar Senghor, the whole problem of a diaspora/African relationship "is a *situation*, a network of relationship." (Senghor, 1975, p.242) This 'situation' or abstraction, Senghor articulates in simplistic terms, to "mean being a Negro among white Americans. For us, Negro Africans, this meant, yesterday, being the colonized among the colonizers. Today, it means being underdeveloped nations among developed nations, being poor in the midst of the rich." (Op.Cit., p.242)

The Negritudian attitude towards this 'network of relationships', is based on the rather precarious premise that, since slavery has been abolished, and the twin concept of 'acceptance and integration' set in motion, we should accept the fact that things are being 'normalised'. The Negritude concept is reinforced further by the fact that the majority of African nations have been 'decolonized', and admitted into the



United Nations. To Senghor and his colleagues, this points to the fact that "we must accept a new ideal to be realised, a new world to be built." (Op. Cit., p.243) This 'new world ideal' is to be built, presumably, on the famous Negritudian premise that assigns to Africa and the black race the role of supplying 'an emotive sensibility' and vigour to a technologically oriented world controlled by Europe and America. The result as Senghor concludes, will yield a "twentieth century humanism (which) will be the symbiosis of all human values, if only all civilizations contribute to it. Negro civilization first and foremost." (Op.Cit., p.243)

Of course, the next generation of the African elite, especially the literary elite, has provided a resounding response to this simplistic articulation. In their response, they have addressed not only the abstract role assigned to the relationship between Africa and her diaspora, but also poignantly condemned the subservient position which Negritude has ascribed to blacks, in its self-appointed task of reordering a 'world' that is hardly interested in any such changes. In these responses, two patterns are also observable. First and foremost is the sheer feeling of outrage which many of these second generation African/black elites felt as the continent and indeed the black race are goaded by their Negritudist predecessors.

Wole Soyinka, once described as "a useful barometer for measuring the continent's intellectual development" (Kolawole Ogunbesan, 1979), personifies, to some extent, this level of response. Soyinka, who "is often quoted for his tiger-tigrity, duiker-duikerity quip, flatly rejected the narcissistic impulse of Negritude and its hankering back after an imagined mythological past of innocence and pristine purity." (Harry Garuba, 1985, p.38) It is also within this framework that the writings of Ayi Kwei Armah, the then young Ghanaian writer, who emerged on the African

literary scene at the close of the 1960s, can be situated. The significance of this period to the African/diaspora relationship lies in what one of Armah's chroniclers describes as a period when "the American radicals settled for compromise and Ghana (and most of black Africa) for mediocrity and the dawn of liberty seems to have retreated." (Robert Fraser, 1980, p.6)

Thus, in Armah's five novels and occasional polemics, there is a creative articulation of, at least, a viewpoint that seeks to explain the debilitating factors that 'slowed down' the progress that Africa and the black world made in the late 1950s, beginning with Ghana's independence and the early 1960s, when a vast majority of African countries attained at least political, if not economic, independence. The starting point for Armah is his controversial debut, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, in which he lays bare the rapacious greed of Africa's socio-political leaders at independence and the personality cult often built around their figures. In this highly successful first novel, Armah succeeds in no small way in articulating the stultifying state of affairs at home, giving us a background to why African leaders, preoccupied with the task of running corrupt regimes, could not achieve more than rhetoric and retreat into academic abstraction while dealing with countries hosting their Pan-African counterparts in the diaspora. Replacing the colonial powers without clearly formulated policies on how to direct the affairs of their newly independent states, Africa's socio-political elites survived on a dependency policy hankering back to the same imperial powers which they had supposedly removed.

A second level of the African response to the diaspora is also traceable to the conclusions of Negritude and its apostles. Observers at this level see the whole issue as one emanating from a grand conspiracy between the emergent political leaders of

Africa at independence on the one hand, and their black middle class counterparts in the diaspora, on the other. Nigerian playwright and poet John Pepper Clark's *America Their America* and the Ugandan writer Taban lo Liyong's "Negroes Are Not Africans" are two memorable examples of this level of response.

J.P. Clark's response or better still, feeling of outrage, is as David Drachler observes, "a virtuoso outpouring of contempt for practically everything and everyone in America", (Drachler, 1975) partly because of what Clark himself experienced there. Clark's outpouring has its historical antecedent in what one suspects to be a twentieth century resurgence of that seventeenth and eighteenth century Christian oriented Negro belief that it was part of a divine plan to permit the enslavement of Africans, so that they could be civilized abroad and then return home to civilize their 'pagan brothers and sisters'. Clark's outrage is carried to its logical conclusion in Taban lo Liyong's similar belief that the root cause of the problem lies in 'the dismal philosophy of Negritude' and its collusion with the black middle class in the diaspora on the one hand, and the emergent African leaders at independence, on the other. Thus, lo Liyong's rather persistent emphasis that:

Negritude is an American philosophy - it was imported to Africa by default, by DuBois of the United States and Aime Cesaire of French West Indies. President Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal and the former President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, were the African representatives of this alien and dismal philosophy. It burnt Nkrumah out, and it almost did Senghor in except that he had recanted. (Taban lo Liyong, 1975, p.265)

It is truly at this point that one may agree with Robert Fraser that 'the American radicals' (at least, those of the 1960s) seem to have settled for compromise and most of black Africa for mediocrity, and thus, for the black wo/man in general, 'the dawn of liberty seems to have retreated'. This historical, but overtly socio-political and

cultural premise, has been invoked to provide a framework for my critique of the evolutionary stages of black expression in the next section and consequently the distinctive insight which this study supplies to what should be the basic concern of any committed critic of comparative black literature, in theoretical and practical terms.

### **1.6 The Literary Links of Africa and the Black Diaspora: A Critique of its Evolutionary Stages**

One does not expect the life style of African people in Babylon to be a precise duplication of that exhibited by Africans in the homeland because each has experienced oppression differently.

(Paul Carter Harrison)

The epigraph to this section is taken from Paul Carter Harrison's book, *The Drama of Nommo*, a very important work in its declared intention to help in formulating or arriving at an "uncompromised consciousness of a black world view." (Harrison, 1972, p.xiv) However, as 'the spirit of Nommo' begins to unfold so does its essential Negritudist premise. Indeed, one is made increasingly aware of 'mechanical' assertions such as 'a black man's total sense of spiritual being is like a built in survival kit,' or 'when Nommo force is properly activated' and many others. (Op.Cit.) Gradually, it becomes clear that *The Drama of Nommo* offers a conceptual framework or starting point for a critique of the evolutionary stages of black expression in general. Harrison's book also seems to suffer from the same problem of 'over generalization' for which Jahneinz Jahn's equally important book, *Muntu*, is often criticised. (See Jahneinz Jahn, 1969 and passim) The following discussion should help to rephrase or add to the historical premise which Harrison's and Jahn's works explore.

Black wo/men carry in their names the nature of their problem. They are black before they are wo/men. Their basic credentials bear the recognizable scars of a mediated history. In his book, *Theatre and Nationalism*, Alain Ricard gives us an insight into the nature of the problem when he examines 'the myth of the Negro past', through the personal odyssey of blacks living in America. In Ricard's view, the cohabitation of blacks and whites in America can, at best, be viewed as a perfect example of 'two cultures and two societies in contact.' Twice removed from reality, the peculiar nature of Black wo/men's existence under this atmosphere of cultural pluralism, is not merely as a result of their constituting a 'racially different minority' or the fact that they have to live on an 'agricultural economy'. The tragic nature of their existence, as Ricard concludes, is "accompanied by a total negation of their culture." (Alain Ricard, 1983, p.25) To provide a deeper insight into the nature of the problem, Ricard cites Melville Herskovit's summary of the basic premise(s) on which racist theories and assumptions about blacks are dubiously built. These assumptions are that:

1. Blacks are naturally infantile.
  2. The least intelligent among them were enslaved.
  3. Assembled from the four corners of Africa, they have no common identity.
  4. Even if they have preserved some identity, they have hastened to renounce it so as to adopt European culture which is so obviously superior.
  5. The blackman therefore has no history.
- (Cited in Op.Cit., p.25)

Through what Henry Louis Gates describes as narrative parody, critical signification and the theory of symbolic revision, every stage in the evolution of black literature has worked out its relationship with this body of racist myths and assumptions. This introductory chapter merely points to this background while the

next two chapters engage with the various stages in theoretical and practical terms.

My own reading of this narrative parody and pattern of critical signification employs the large body of African/black mythology and by working through the poetics of transgression and carnivalesque essence, arrives at a coherent understanding of black experience at home and abroad. Cyclical, rather than linear, manichaeian or exclusive dialectics is another theoretical strategy which this study employs in arriving at what it considers the ultimate role of a vernacular theory of 'the Other' that will vividly encapsulate the basic preoccupation of black literature in a postcolonial era. As critical theory continues to oscillate between what Chinua Achebe describes as "the recrimination between capitalist and communist aesthetics in our time," (Achebe, 1975, p.21) Achebe further invokes the enigmatic African deity, Esu, 'lord of the roads and crossroads' to "pass again between them (the capitalist and the communist) down the road and inaugurate the second act - the fight for self-abasement, for a monopoly on guilt." (Op.Cit., p.21)

In another critical study, Henry Louis Gates Jr., recognising the potential of this deity in contemporary criticism, adopts the figure of Esu as an enabling conceptual metaphor which he urges the critic of comparative black literature to consider as 'our metaphor for the act of interpretation itself'. In Gates' article, "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey", he makes the following observation and suggestion:

In Yoruba mythology, Esu always limps, because his legs are of different length: one is anchored in the realm of the gods, the other rests in the human world. The closest Western relative of Esu is Hermes, of course; and just as Hermes' role as interpreter lent his name readily to 'hermeneutics', the study of the process of interpretation, so too the figure of Esu can stand, for the critic of comparative black literature, as our metaphor for the act of interpretation. (Gates, 1990, p.287)

As critics of comparative black literature continue to recognise that the task before them is not a simple one, as they work their way through mediated discourses in history, mythology and literature seeking to penetrate centuries of oppression and consolidated abuse of the socio-cultural psyche of a race, a recourse to mythology continues to offer many critics and writers on both sides of the Atlantic, not merely a means of escape, but perhaps more importantly, what Soyinka describes as:

the simultaneous act of eliciting from history, mythology and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or its irrelevance (= retrogression, reactionarism, racism, etc) in contemporary world reality. (Wole Soyinka, 1976, p.xi)

Recognising the need to assert that an authentic 'black world view' existed prior to the historic contact between Europe and Africa and that this view has survived centuries of callous mishandling at the hands of alien forces, black texts have employed narrative parody at various stages of their evolution as ways of articulating the imperfections of this world view on the one hand, and each of these texts has either revised or rewritten the articulation of its precursor to explicate its own creative dimension to the common dilemma, on the other. In chapter three of this study, I try to come terms with this pattern of figuration and symbolic revision and what this portends for the development of black literature. What the rest of this chapter examines, however, is the historical premise that gave birth to this need for constant revision. The following articulation by the Afro-American writer, Amiri Baraka, in an interview with Elaine Duval, paints a graphic picture of this historical premise:

First of all, you have to understand that after every upsurge in the Black movement, there is a reactionary thrust from the oppressors. And after every social upsurge in the movement, there is a

corresponding upsurge artistically and culturally. During the nineteenth century period of the anti-slavery movement, a host of slave narratives were being written...the kind of pre-civil war revolutionaries in the free north. They created a literature...you know -sort of like Frederick Douglas and David Walker. In the early twentieth century, with Garvey and DuBois leading the movement, you have the Harlem renaissance. In the sixties, you have Malcolm X and Martin Luther King...the panthers...you have the black Arts Movement. You see, you always have a corresponding kind of artistic and social upsurge. (Amiri Baraka, 1987, p.3)

For the African and West Indian axis of black expression the same pattern of revision is clearly discernible. Indeed, the preceding sections have elaborated upon both the historical and political imperatives dictating the pace of the artistic and cultural upsurge that Baraka describes. In Africa, the pattern is observable in the works of Ayi Kwei Armah. However, the only work of Armah to bear the subtitle of 'an historical novel' is his fifth, *The Healers*. Armah concerns himself in his first two novels *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, with creative articulation of those stultifying factors impeding national growth or the development of true nation states. The writer's task from *Why Are We So Blest?*, explaining as it does, the possible reasons for the failure of his three main protagonists, Solo, Modin Dofu, and his girlfriend Aimee Reitsch, also provides for the discerning student of the 'cross-current' of the African diaspora, an historical framework. This framework is, however, complete only when we move into the historical terrains of the two later works, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. While Armah's works in general, as one of his critics observes, "provide an historical explanation for present failure and connect current manifestation to an embracing world view...the pertinence of this to Armah can be seen when we recognise that his books have increasingly concerned themselves with questions which are ultimately historical in nature." (Robert Fraser, 1980, p.10)



Thus the 'last' in the series can be viewed as the starting point of the African historical saga as *The Healers* explains not only how but why, 'a century ago, one of Africa's great empires, Ashanti fell'. This fall is orchestrated not so much by the destructive presence of the white colonisers, but more importantly, by the rapacious greed of the indigenous leadership which led to disunity among kindred societies. But in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah speaks rather of the all-pervading, catastrophic effects of slavery. Thus, "we are as a consequence invited to contemplate a multiform middle passage by the Oracular Okyeame voice with which Anoa opens the novel." (Lemuel Johnson, 1980, p.58) In Anoa's articulation, the rather philistine attitude of Africans to the all-pervading catastrophic reaches of slavery needs to be poignantly addressed. This she does in prophetic terms:

Slavery - do you know what it is? Ah, you will know it. Two Thousand Seasons, a thousand going into it, a second thousand crawling maimed from it, will teach you everything about enslavement, the destruction of souls, the killing of bodies, the infusion of violence into every breath, every drop, every morsel of your sustaining air, your water, your food. Till you come again upon the way. (Ayi Kwei Armah, 1972, p.17)

The thesis of *Two Thousand Seasons* is based on the realisation that it is as a result of the loss of an egalitarian African way, simply called 'the way' in the novel, that the African is bound to experience enslavement, leading to a most traumatic 'destruction of souls, and the killing of bodies' until 'the way' is rediscovered. The importance of *Two Thousand Seasons* also lies in its creative articulation of the historical antecedent of contemporary African leaders, through the portrayal of the buffoon figures of Kamuzu and Koranche and their insatiable love for "dishonest words...the food of rotten spirits." (Op.Cit., p.171) Like their modern equivalents, Kamuzu and Koranche and their local parasites in league with the white slave traders

and colonialists reinforce the widely held belief that most of black Africa's heroes do not need to be wooed by Western capitalists - they prostitute themselves and their people at real bargain prices.

There is an organic unity in the leaders that we find in *The Beautiful Ones* and their historical equivalents in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In the rather grim atmosphere towards the end of *Two Thousand Seasons*, for example, King Koranche, urged by the protagonists of 'the way,' is made to confess his greed and those of his parasites and, not the least, his despicable alliance with the white destroyers. Thus, "Koranche, the king died confessing crimes he had sought to hide from our people." (Op.Cit., p.197) So ridiculous is the nature of these confessions that they lead the omniscient narrator to observe that, 'laughable is the courage of kings and parasites, ludicrous indeed their puny bravery beside their greed's intensity'.

Also when, in *The Beautiful Ones*, the powerful party man and 'Minister plenipotentiary, member of the Presidential Commission, Hero of Socialist labour...His excellency, Joseph Koomson', describes the antics he has to perform before he can acquire a fishing boat, like the protagonists of 'the way' in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the perceptive hero of the book, the Man, was to ask "if anything was supposed to have changed after all, from the days of chiefs selling their people for the trinkets of Europe." (Armah, 1980, p.149)

Armah's works present a basic dilemma to criticism for which only a vernacular theory of 'the Other' can adequately account. A parade of his characters will not be a parade of heroes, but a grotesque conglomeration of malformed or mutilated beings embodying in their nature a symbolic binary opposition to the essentially 'high' discourse in literature, philosophy, statecraft, religion and culture,

that has erstwhile occluded them in its own understanding of socio-cultural and political realities. The authorial ones that acquire Western education return home, not looking for roles as leaders but seeking to be reunited with an organic society as Baako does in *Fragments*. Those in traditional settings, Anoa and the protagonists of 'the way', Damfo, Densu and 'the healers' in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* respectively, present the same opposition to the ruling feudal elites.

On a comparative basis, the dilemma of these heroes finds imaginative identification in their West Indian counterparts. The poetry and fiction of Claude McKay can be used to illustrate the point further. In poems like "If We Must Die" and "In Bondage", McKay seeks the soul of an organic society, just as in novels like *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom* the issue of a sustaining community preoccupies the writer. In carnival fashion, the writer apprehends the traumatic impact of cultural dualism and displaces it into what Kenneth Ramchand describes as symbolic "final liberation and embrace of the folk." (Ramchand, 1978, p.93) The constitutive elements of folk tradition or culture such as tea-meeting, picnic, market, harvest festival, pimento picking, house-parties, and ballad-making are celebrated and offer expressive ways of setting these cultural traits in symbolic confrontation with faces full of high class anxiety, such as those of Priscilla Craig, Bita Plant's missionary mentor in *Banana Bottom*. Bita insists even after university education in England, on being united with the organic society, "dancing down the barrier between high breeding and common pleasure under her light stamping feet until she was one with the crowd." (McKay, 1933, p.84) Mrs. Craig on the other hand, is solely concerned about Bita's education and her paranoid belief that this should set her 'high' and above people like Hopping Dick, whom she regards as "a low peacock,

who murders his h's and altogether speaks in such a vile manner - and you an educated girl - highly educated." (Op.Cit., p.210)

The various strands of appropriation and control of this low discourse as it confronts the mythic imagination of the 'high' is discussed in theoretical terms in the next chapter. This pattern of control achieves creative realisation in *Tent of Miracles* by the Brazilian author, Jorge Amado. The pervasive theoretical framework of the novel is perhaps better realised in terms of what Fredric Jameson describes in his article, "Post-Modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" that "it was only in the light of some conception of a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm that genuine difference could be measured or assessed." (Fredric Jameson, 1984, p.57) This dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm functions in *Tent of Miracles* through its carnivalesque parade of symbolic characters, the majority of whom reinforce what Jameson refers to as 'genuine assessment of difference'. The novel's understanding of 'difference' as 'otherness' is profound and its genuineness is evident in the creative interrogation of the mythological framework through which the dominant cultural hegemony has imposed an occluded discourse on the society. The examination of this mythic perspective, however, leads to a complex interplay of signifying practices on the part of both the dominant and the subordinated.

The theoretical starting point of the novel is simple and it concerns how a 'mulatto of style', Master Pedro Archanjo, an easy going 'runner' at the medical school but one with resolute convictions about racism and a firm understanding of his 'declaration of racial democracy', becomes apotheosized with the arrival in Brazil of the North American scholar, James D. Levenson. With a framework in which no one including Archanjo is spared the process of symbolic revision, the 'high' discourse

that seeks to apotheosize him becomes the first target of this revision in ways that echo Derek Walcott's observation that the modern state is essentially "impatient with anything which it cannot trade." (Walcott, 1972, p.7) Since most of these issues are discussed in the chapter on Amado's novel, my concern in the rest of this chapter is to explore primary principles in relation to my theoretical postulations in the next two chapters.

Amado's novel achieves what Bakhtin describes as the tendency of the novel to "become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, element of self-parody and...finally, the novel inserts into *these other genres* an indeterminacy." (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7, my emphasis) 'The other genres' of Bakhtin's reference are those "genres in 'high' literature (that is the literature of ruling social groups) harmoniously reinforcing each other to a significant extent." (Op.Cit., p.5) By inserting into its discourse the notion of indeterminacy and what Bakhtin further refers to as 'a certain semantic openendedness', the postcolonial 'text of blackness' sets itself against the mythic imagination of that conglomeration of 'genres of high literature' and their erstwhile imposition of a discourse of occlusion on an entire populace. What results from this interplay of semantic openendedness is a dialogic imagination in which self-parody achieves for the 'low' a true assessment of 'the self', mutilated and confined 'in the light of some conception of a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm'. The clarity of vision which this theoretical framework achieves for 'the low' leads them to celebrate life in carnivalesque propensity with the limited resources at their disposal. Thus:

Pedro Archanjo was serious for a moment: distant, grave, almost solemn. Then suddenly his face was transformed as he burst into a loud, clear happy laugh, that infinitely free laughter of his; he thought of Professor Argolo's face, those two leading lights of the medical

school, those two know-it-alls who knew nothing about life. "Our faces are metizo faces, and so are yours; our culture is metizo but yours is imported. Its nothing but powdered shit." Let them die of apoplexy. His laughter lit up the dawn and illuminated the city of Bahia. (Op.Cit., p.154)

Archanjo's infectious and infinitely free laughter is an integral part of the spiritual freedom of 'the low'. Their understanding of religion, politics, culture and economics is bound up with flexible and reflexive frameworks that condense what Foucault has described in Vol.1 of *The History of Sexuality* as "hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression," (Foucault, 1978, p.5) into a modern synthesis whereby repression, appropriation and control of these 'open spaces' become a dominant strategy of the 'high' in postulating a 'proper' image of 'the self'. The farcical facade of the 'high' symbolized and reinforced by its desire to transform the open spaces into the close confines of houses, is a theoretical strategy which Foucault observes, has been protected by "a solemn historical and political guarantee." (Op.Cit., p.5)

Dismantling this 'historical and political guarantee' has been the spoken or unspoken concern of many texts of blackness in both colonial and postcolonial settings. Ostensibly, many have had to work within the framework of the hegemonic discourse or more precisely what Bill Ashcroft et al. describe as the framework of those 'who have attacked the imperialism of Western thought from within', such as Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard and Derrida. The notion of 'discourse' which in the Foucaultian sense could be best understood as a system of possibility of knowledge becomes a primary starting point. Appropriation, legitimization, truth and power have all acquired problematic status and their application is displaced further into an understanding of European postmodernism as being analogous to postcolonialism. Jean Francois Lyotard's critique of the enterprise of Western science has also been

used as a theoretical base for dismantling assumptions about language and textuality and 'to stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations' as they find echoes in postcolonial texts. Ashcroft et al. also note that Lyotard's critique stresses narrative as an alternative mode of knowledge to the scientific and questions the privileging of contemporary scientific ideas of 'competence' over 'customary knowledge'. The critics conclude that:

Lyotard is aware, as a result of these perceptions, that in oral societies where narratives dominate, ways of knowing are legitimized as a product of actual social relations and not valorized and reified as a separate 'objective' category above and beyond other categories (as the western category of science is separated from those of ethics and politics, for example). (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p.165)

The conclusion to be drawn from this theoretical springboard is that 'truth', 'logic' and 'power' are local and particular rather than abstract and universal. For, while science "classifies the narrative dominated oral world as belonging to a different mentality, 'savage, primitive, undeveloped' (a terrain from which we can construct the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization)", Ashcroft and his colleagues urge us to recognise the 'special tenor' of this discourse, especially how "it is governed by the demand for legitimization." (Op.Cit., p.166)

However, if this is the terrain from which we can construct the history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of western civilization, it is also the starting point for ideologues and aestheticians of the Black Arts movement. Just as the political elites are calling for the 'transfer of Western science and technology' to beleaguered 'unscientific' black societies, literary critics and writers are also preoccupied with what constitutes black aesthetics and how much of this black world view should be affected or contaminated by ideas from Europe and the West. Chinua Achebe constructs the terrain of this African/Black world dilemma by asking:

Where does the African writer come in all this? Quite frankly he is confused. Sometimes - in a spasmodic seizure of confidence - he feels called upon to save Europe and the West by giving them Africa's peculiar gifts of healing, irrigating (in the words of Senghor) the Cartesian rationalism of Europe with black sensitivity through the gift of emotion. In his poem "Prayer to Masks" we are those children called to sacrifice their lives like the poor man his last garment. (Chinua Achebe, 1975, p.23)

From this Negritudian premise and the all-important position of Negritude as the first philosophical/literary movement that aspired to articulate the basic dilemma of blacks in a colonial context, we arrive at the problematic terrain of terms such as 'truth', 'logic' and 'power'. Achebe's answer to Senghor's ideas summarised by him above, is a hesitant, "I am not so sure of things to be able to claim (that) the world may...wish to be saved by us even if we had the power to do so." (Op.Cit., p.24)

But it is Soyinka's articulation of the overall significance of his patron god Ogun, that captures the real essence of the appropriation of 'truth, logic and power'. Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* is a literary as well as a political statement on the nature of the amorphous relationship that has always existed between the African/black world and Europe and the West. Soyinka's study is devoted further to espousing the authenticity of the African world view. Ogun, Soyinka informs us, "is embodiment of Will, and the Will is the paradoxical *truth* of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man." (Op.Cit., p.150, my emphasis) If this statement appropriates and localizes the problematic term 'truth', 'logic and power' are also constantly returned to, in a bid to address what Soyinka refers to as the 'naive and sentimental' articulation of Negritude. Thus:

We must not lose sight of the fact that *Ogun is the artistic spirit*, and not in the sentimental sense in which rhapsodists of negritude would have us conceive the Negro as pure artistic intuition. The significant truth of Ogun is affirmation of the re-creative intelligence; this is irreconcilable with naive intuition. The symbolic artifact of his victory



is metallic ore, at once a technical medium as it is symbolic of deep earth energies, a fusion of elemental energies, a binding force between disparate bodies and properties. (Op.Cit., p.150, my emphasis)

The graphic articulation of the 'true' essence of this deity, also described as 'the forerunner of paleotechnic man', 'tragic actor and primordial voice of creative man' does not merely return 'logic and power' to the harassed black sensibility, but perhaps more importantly engages the colonizing spirit (Western logic and science) on its own ground. Sango whom Soyinka describes as 'god of lightening and electricity', for example, is described as a culpable force because 'his history revolves around petty tyranny'. Technical medium, paleotechnics, and electricity, are some of the favourable terms freely used by Soyinka to point to the fact that cognition and deductive (scientific) reasoning are not the exclusive preserve of any culture even if a whole hegemonic discourse might have led to a conception and belief to the contrary. The overall aesthetic quality of Soyinka's counter-discourse, one must not fail to point out, like the hegemonic discourse which it revises, is equally governed 'by the demand for legitimization'.

The exegesis of a possible objection to this counter-discourse, also acquiring the quality of an hegemonic discourse, is beyond what this introductory chapter could resolve. I engage with the two hegemonic discourses, the first from the perspective of Europe and the West and its African/black counterpart in theoretical and practical terms in the next two chapters of this study. Meanwhile, it is enough to point out, using Lyotard, that the overall aesthetic proposition which this thesis postulates recognises that:

there is no question...of proposing a 'pure' alternative to the system: we all know...that an attempt at an alternative of that kind would end up resembling the system it was meant to replace. (Lyotard, cited in Bill Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.166)

A second possible objection is articulated by Michel Foucault in a conversation with Gilles Deleuze on 'Intellectuals and Power', in which the two critics agree that 'theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice, because theory is in itself practice'. Thus:

The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge," "truth," "consciousness," and "discourse." (Foucault, 1977, pp.207-8)

Thus, as a vernacular theory of 'the Other' this thesis recognises every strand of what Deleuze also describes as "the indignity of speaking for others." (Op.Cit., p.209) I have had to work within the matrix of the African/black profane discourse to appreciate the theoretical fact that 'only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf'. Working in this way, it is easy to come to terms with the monologic framework and discourse of occlusion by which the dominant has constantly ridiculed 'representation'. The discourse that emerges from this recognition is dialogic rather than monologic, and it is further described by Foucault as the form "which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents - and not a theory *about* delinquency." (Op.Cit.,p.209) The enigmatic African deity known as Esu (Exu or Eshu) misread for centuries within the African/black matrix supplies the 'special tenor' of this counter-discourse of 'the low'. The deity's carnivalesque essence is a celebration of the power of those marginalized and confined, because when they speak through the deity and the deity speaks through them, they possess the equivalent of what Foucault refers to as "an individual theory, of prisons, the penal system, and justice." (Op. Cit., p.209)

## CHAPTER TWO

### Transgression as Concept and Form: A Study of the role Esu-Elegbara<sup>1</sup> (the Yoruba 'trickster' god) can play in reading Black Texts

#### 2.1 Introduction

The politics of the Middle-Passage and its attendant socio-cultural and historical trauma is the starting point of this study. The dispersal of Africans, or at least people of African origin, to the four corners of the World has produced over the past few decades numerous dissertations and theses describing socio-cultural linkages between Africa and the Black diaspora. On the part of creative writers and literary critics of every persuasion, there exists a consensus of creative and critical opinion that seeks to establish that "the history of Africa and the Africans...is one of iron, blood and tears." (Lewis Nkosi, 1981, p.30)

I have tried to come to terms, in chapter one of this study, with the ambivalent

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<sup>1</sup> I have tried as much as possible to use the correct Yoruba orthography in describing the mythological figures discussed in this chapter. However no attempt has been made to change spelling patterns where quotations are used from standard sources. The reader must recognise that the differences in spelling arise out of inflectional operations as these figures have travelled over space and time, arriving at destinations with different orthographic and inflectional practices. Thus the mythological figures are either 'Aryanized' or 'Anglicized' depending on the primary culture that colonized or enslaved their Pan-African 'carriers' in the first instance. I have described some of the prominent figures by placing alongside the standard Yoruba referent the likely changes that may occur from that as a result of the reasons described above:

#### Yoruba

Esu-Elegbara  
Sango  
Yemoja  
Afose  
Babalawo  
Obatala  
Orisa

#### Others

Exu, Eshu, Exud, Elegba, etc  
Xango, Chango  
Yemaya  
Afoxe  
Babalao  
Oxala  
Orixa

result that this tragic view of history produced in Africans and their Pan-African counterparts in the diaspora, without losing sight of the immediate experiences (slavery, colonialism, creolization and miscegenation, acceptance and integration) that produced these responses. According to Lemuel Johnson, the following is a summary of the historical framework that informs this overriding sense of incoherence: "whether it be in the elegantly studied ironies and memory of Hayden's poetry or in the casual precision of the Cuban Estemban Montejo's recall, the Middle Passage has remained an enduring, even necessary, motif in the literature of the black diaspora." (Lemuel Johnson, 1980, p.63)

Mere cursory empirical observation of the cultural survivals of Africa throughout the Black diaspora, which social anthropologists and historians of culture have meticulously documented over many centuries of physical and spiritual estrangement between Africa and her diaspora, will reveal a host of African gods and mythological figures, defying space and time to cohabit with their Western or European counterparts, albeit under the tag (like their Pan-African worshippers who imported them into the Western world, in the first instance) of second class gods and primitive myths symbolizing 'the Other'. At the threshold of these myths and legends, we are bound to encounter practitioners of different ideological leanings, whether responding from the perspective of what Soyinka calls "genuine aliens or alienated Africans." (Wole Soyinka, 1976, p.xi)

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes provides a useful theoretical framework which this study will adopt in unmasking the position of each category of readers of these myths. In Barthes' theory, myths can be deciphered from three basic positions of 'reading'. Every myth embodies a 'duplicity of signifier', "which is at once meaning

and form. I can produce three different types of reading by focusing on the one, or the other, or both at the same time." (Roland Barthes, 1976, p.128)

The first category of readers are those Barthes refers to as focusing on 'an empty signifier'. With these readers, the myth has no ambiguity and the reader is most likely going to find him/herself before a simple system, where the signification becomes literal again. We can summarize this type of focusing as that of the 'producer of myths'. The reader at this level starts with a concept and takes upon him/herself the task of seeking a form for the myth. The black experience at this level of reading is replete with examples. The following example would suffice to illustrate the point further.

In translating the Bible from English to Yoruba, the translator, Samuel Ajayi Crowder, West Africa's first black bishop, found himself at various stages at the threshold of mythology, a task made more difficult by the fact that he had to translate myths from one culture into another. Bishop Crowder's task was not a simple one, as he had to find a Yoruba equivalent for every myth from the Christian mythological framework. Thus, in translating into Yoruba the biblical myth of 'satan' or 'devil' he picked on Esu-Elegbara, the enigmatic Yoruba trickster god. John Pemberton has attempted to set the record straight by reconstructing this age-old distortion:

As the festival songs suggest that Eshu is one who deceives and harms, so too the oriki (praise names) and myths portray Eshu as the confuser of men, the troublemaker, the one who acts capriciously. So prevalent are these associations that Christian missionaries used 'Eshu' as a translation of the New Testament terms 'devil' and 'satan'. Now, even Eshu worshippers who speak a little English, as well as Yoruba Christians and Muslims, will refer to Eshu as 'the devil'. It is an indefensible corruption of the tradition. Nevertheless, Eshu is a troublemaker. His own praise names attest to it. (John Pemberton, 1976, p.26)

In performing a Christian duty, Bishop Crowder and numerous Yoruba Christians

after him, have consequently produced their own myth, have acted, to use Barthes' words, like "the journalist who starts with a concept and seeks a form for it." (Op.Cit., p.128) However, the threat of complete annihilation which Crowder's translation poses to the 'original' myth of Esu is preserved in Barthes' theory by what he describes as 'a false dilemma':

Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion. Placed before the dilemma which I mentioned a moment ago, myth finds a third way out. Threatened with disappearance if it yields to either of the first two types of focusing, it gets out of this tight spot thanks to a compromise - it *is* this dilemma. Entrusted with 'glossing over' an intentional concept, myth encounters nothing but betrayal in language, for language can only obliterate the concept if it hides it, or unmask it if it formulates it. The elaboration of a second-order semiological system will enable myth to escape this dilemma: driven to having either to unveil or to liquidate the concept, it will *naturalise* it. (Op.Cit., p.129, original italics)

The second category of readers of myths focuses on a 'full signifier'. The reader is able to recognise the meaning and the form of the myth and goes beyond this recognition to unmask the distortion which the form imposes on the meaning, and vice-versa. The reader at this level is able in Barthian terms to 'undo the signification', but rather than see the signification as the embodiment of the association of the meaning and the form, the reader receives the signification as an imposture. "This type of focusing is that of the mythologist: he deciphers the myth, he understands a distortion." (Op.Cit., p.128)

Thus, within the implications of the notion that "ideology is *inscribed in signifying practices* - in discourses, myths, presentations and representations of the way 'things' 'are' - and to this extent...inscribed in the language" (Catherine Belsey, 1980, p.42), we can situate past and existing practices in mythological discourses relating to black experience. Fraught with obvious attempts to deify 'the rapidly

changing history of wars, governments, etc' at the expense of those, to appropriate another term by Foucault, 'apparently unmoving histories' such as "the history of the balance achieved by the human species between hunger and abundance" (Michel Foucault, 1973, p.3), the black experience of myths has been limited to the following recognizable pattern:

Oba was the legitimate wife of Shango in charge of domestic affairs. She accompanied him on all his military expeditions in order to take care of his diet, which consisted of *Amala* (corn meal with quimbombo and raw meat). One day Shango went to a war that lasted a very long time. It was the war that he had with Ogun. Oba, as usual followed her husband with the provisions,.. (William Bascom, 1977, p.5)

Convinced that the ideopractical connotations latent in this and other myths are of little significance ethnologists, literary historians and folklorists, acting along the line of the second reader of myths in our theoretical paradigm and working through a maze of statistical data, Type and Motif indices, have increasingly concerned themselves with the question of the 'origin of their tales' and by so doing are able to 'undo the signification' of the various myths before them. Thus, it is not uncommon to come across assertions such as "this African/Afro-American tale origin has raged, if that is the *mot juste*, for nearly a quarter of a century." (Daniel Crowley, 1977, p.xi)

However, the pseudo-capitalist ideology inscribed in the myth of Sango, sketched above, should be clear to anyone familiar with signifying practices. Sango, the grand signifier in this myth, is the embodiment of meaning and form that gives the signified, Oba, all that she connotes ('legitimate' wife of Sango, and custodian of domestic paraphernalia), a presence which "unlike the form...is in no way abstract: it is filled with a situation." (Barthes, Op.Cit., p.119) Let me trace the history of this 'situation'. It is a history of appropriation, an appropriation of power successfully

carried out by Sango in an historical moment of feudal ascendancy in a patriarchal society, and "to the extent that it was successful, it contained the power of truth itself, charged with all its risks and benefits." (Foucault, 1977, p.125)

But in deciphering this myth, the reader has only been able to recognise a distortion and acting as the mythologist, transforms Oba into an *alibi* for Sango's pseudo-capitalist yearnings. Here the critical question can certainly be posed: "if s/he (the reader) reads it using his/her power of reflection, like the mythologist, does it matter which alibi is presented?" (Barthes, Op.Cit., p.129) It is hardly surprising therefore, that Bascom provides several 'alibis' for Sango's feudal hegemony. Thus:

The narrative continues with an episode in which Obba is confused with Oya, and ends with the following : when Obba dances, she dances holding her hands to her ears. When Yemaya (Yemoja, Shango's mother) was talking with Obba, she told her what a glutton Chango was, and the quantities of corn meal and okra stew that had to be cooked for him. They were married but Chango abandoned her. He left and spent many days away from home. Chango didn't want anything but drumming (bata) and feasting. In one of his absences, Elegua (Elegba Esu) told Obba to give a feast; he looked for Chango and took him to the drumming that Obba prepared. (Bascom, 1977, pp.4-5)

Again, if the reader does not see Sango's burgeoning feudal hegemony in the overtly domesticated Oba, it is of little importance presenting her in the first instance, "and if he sees it, the myth is nothing more than a political proposition, honestly expressed. In one word, either the intention of the myth is too obscure to be efficacious, or it is too clear to be believed. In either case, where is the ambiguity?" (Barthes, Op.Cit., p.129)

This important question leads us to the third category of readers of myths in our theoretical framework. The reader at this level usually focuses on the mythical signifier as an irreducible whole, embodied with meaning and form and receives an



'ambiguous signification'. The reader responds to all the minute components that make up the myth, to its very dynamics and *becomes a reader of myths*. At this level of reading, for example, Oba is no longer an instance or symbol, and she is definitely far from being an alibi for Sango's exploitative yearnings: she is the very *presence* of this exploitation. Thus, while the first two types of focusing can be said to be 'static' or 'analytical' respectively:

they destroy the myth, either by making its intention obvious, or by unmasking it: the formal is cynical, the latter demystifying. The third type of focusing is dynamic, it consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal. If one wishes to connect a mythical schema to a general history, to explain how it responds to the interest of a definite society, in short to pass from semiology to ideology it is obviously at the level of the third type of focusing that one must place oneself: it is the reader of myths himself who must reveal their essential function. How does he receive this particular myth today? (Barthes, Op.Cit., pp.128-9)

The primary aim of this theoretical chapter is two-fold: it consumes the myth of Esu-Elegbara (the Yoruba 'trickster' god) according to the very ends built into its structure and within this structural understanding connects the entire myth to the general history of the dispersal of black people to different parts of the world. Reading the myth of Esu in this way is a critical plunge into 'transgression' and all that it connotes. Transgression is the word that addresses centuries of distortion and partly successful attempts to 'control' the myth of Esu from liberating the harassed 'worshippers' of the enigmatic deity. This control mechanism can be traced historically to that point in history when the black experience literally became interfused with Western discourses in literature, philosophy, statecraft, religion, education and a host of other areas of human experience that have shaped and modelled the black outlook along a certain unambiguous ideological framework

pursued by the West.

The 'reputation' of Esu began its critical plunge into transgression from the moment Bishop Ajayi Crowder translated the deity as the biblical 'satan' or 'devil'. Like the myth of Sango discussed earlier, we are dealing with a history of 'appropriation' - an appropriation of power. What follows in the remaining parts of this chapter is a critical analysis of this history of appropriation and how it leads to a discussion of 'high' and 'low' discourses. Esu symbolises the latter and, seen from this perspective, the question of why the deity is avoided like a plague by past and present creative and critical myth makers in the black mythological pantheon is resolved. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have observed that:

When we talk of high discourses - literature, philosophy, statecraft, the languages of the Church and the University - and contrast them to the low discourses of a peasantry, the urban poor, sub-cultures, marginals, the lumpen-proletariat, colonized peoples, we already have two 'highs' and two 'lows'. History seen from above and history seen from below are irreducibly different and they consequently impose radically different perspectives on the question of hierarchy. (Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, 1986, p.4)

Thus, as Stallybrass and White demonstrate, while relating a general Western history of high and low discourses to the origin of modern thought and expression in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, the myth of Esu is obviously transgressive. The very ends built into its structure reveal it as such. Ogun, Sango and Obatala for example, have continued to achieve prominence in black mythological/literary discourses because they reinforce the exploitative trend of modern capitalist society or what Foucault has referred to as a conscious attempt to deify those 'rapidly changing history of governments, wars, and famines' at the expense of those apparently unmoving histories, such as the 'history of sea routes, the history of crop rotation or of gold mining etc.' (Op.Cit.,p.3) Because the history of governments,

wars, and famines are synonymous with discourses that are considered high, the history of crop rotation on the other hand, leads to transgression, and to this end black experience in critical and creative mythological discourses has responded with amazing dogmatism to the prompting of its Western counterpart.

## 2.2 A Preface to Transgression

Thus, at the root of sexuality, of the movement that nothing can ever limit (because, it is, from birth and in its totality, constantly involved with the limit) and at the root of this discourse on God which Western culture has maintained for so long - without any sense of the impropriety of 'thoughtlessly adding to language a word which surpasses all words' or any clear sense that it places at the limits of all possible languages - a singular experience is shaped: that of transgression.

(Michel Foucault)

Pierre Macherey's critical articulation of what he calls 'a real history of questions' in *A Theory of Literary Production*, while providing a theoretical base for my purpose in this section, has also helped to establish the inter-connectedness of the basic question which the section explores, with other questions of similar concern. It further serves to show that the main point of this thesis is to remove every trace of 'supra-historical vagueness', a term also appropriated from Macherey, from the concrete history of the dispersal of people of African origin to different parts of the world vis-a-vis the transgressive mythical schema of Esu (the Yoruba 'trickster' god) which provides the theoretical framework for the entire study. Before I pose the question of 'transgression' as it relates to the questions of sexuality, profanation and what Foucault refers to as the excruciating experience 'through which we announce(d) to ourselves that God is dead', it is important to recapitulate Macherey's articulation of the ontological significance of concrete historical questions to the ideological enterprise of literary criticism. The controlling theoretical assumption is that:

The question which initiates a history is neither simple nor given. It consists of several terms used to generate an inevitably complex problem, a problem which cannot be abolished by a single answer...a real history of questions reveals that they are scattered and intermittent. The present state of a question, if we are using the expression in its true sense rather than to denote an inert, definitive, suprahistorical vagueness, is actually the conjunction of several questions. There is no definitive question, and probably there has never been an isolated question. (Macherey, 1978, p.9)

If the transgressive text, for example, subverts existing or previous notions of what is normally construed as the normal or conventional text, it follows that a transgressive mythical schema is what must ultimately give the former its basic theoretical assumptions. The language of much of literary criticism has been slow in recognising this progression in the history of thoughts and rhetorical strategies. The exigency of this theoretical postulation must return to Macherey's observation: there has never been an isolated question.

Thus, the question of transgression is not definitive. Yet it can be put to rational usage if progressively employed to 'tease' out further questions and, far from being isolated, it must serve to reinforce the study of opposites: high/low, mine/yours, profane/sacred and a host of other dialectical relationships through which knowledge can liberate itself from the fetters of dogmas. 'Sexuality', Foucault proclaims, "is a fissure - not one which surrounds us as the basis of our isolation or individuality, but one which marks us as a limit." (Foucault, 1977, p.30) This 'fissure', 'an opening, long and narrow', is a term Foucault employs as a means of telling the modern world that humanity is the limit of all analytical study, a process which begins and possibly terminates at the root of sexuality. "Perhaps we could say that it (sexuality) has become the only division possible in a world now emptied of objects, beings, and spaces to desecrate." (Op.Cit., p.30) Literally speaking, this

analogy should not be difficult to grasp in a world where a meticulous process of scientific adventure has trampled on all objects, ranging from the mundane world of inanimate objects to the specialized field of animal husbandry and a whole range of anthropological and cultural discourses of 'high' and 'low' cultures. Finally, an integral part of the process of inscription of the human personality on any member of the human community is a profound knowledge of the minutest 'space' which centuries of land and sea route plundering and space explorations have traversed in a zealous movement which we tacitly recognise as civilization. 'Sexuality', as Foucault further observes, does not:

proffer(s) any new content for our age-old acts; rather, it permits a profanation without object, a profanation that is empty and turned inward upon itself and whose instruments are brought to bear on nothing but each other. Profanation in a world which no longer recognizes any positive meaning in the sacred - *is this not more or less what we may call transgression?* (Op.Cit., p.30, my emphasis)

Again, it is a profound knowledge of the ontological importance of the existence of opposites that gives Foucault's theoretical postulations their logical progression and deductive reasoning; an understanding based on the explicit recognition of the fact that to have a profane discourse, a sacred anti-thesis must exist. It is at the terminal points of sanctity and profanation that we come full-circle to Foucault's initial definition of sexuality as a 'fissure' which 'marks the limit within us and designates us as a limit'. The theoretical focus is also transformed at this stage from the realm of abstract postulations and plunges into the areas of concrete historical and cultural discourse. For, it is ultimately:

In that zone which *our culture* affords for our gesture and speech, (that) transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more scintillating. A rigorous language, as it arises from sexuality, will not

reveal the secret of man's natural being, nor will it express the serenity of anthropological truths, but rather, it will say that he exists without God; the speech given to sexuality is contemporaneous, both in time and in structure, with that which we announced to ourselves that God is dead. (Op.Cit., pp.30-31, my emphasis)

This 'rigorous language as it arises from sexuality' only serves the purpose of reinforcing the basic theoretical postulations of Stallybrass and White in relation to the dialectical treatise on 'high' and 'low' discourses, with which I concluded the first part of this chapter. 'High' discourses are sacred, or at least, upheld to be so from the perspective of their ideological postulators and share close affinity with literature, philosophy, statecraft, the languages of the Church and the University: they contrast sharply with the profane or transgressive texts of 'low' discourses, which are the exclusive preserve of a peasantry, the urban poor, subcultures, marginals, the lumpen-proletariat and colonized peoples. The history of this dialectical relationship will lead into a critical appraisal of what Foucault refers to as the 'root of this discourse on God which Western cultures have maintained for so long'. We will however, come full-circle in our understanding of the historical framework that truly produces the signifying discourse of two 'highs' and two 'lows' only when we enter into the domain of the semiological order of 'officialdom' through which the upper/middle classes in colonized societies have produced 'the Other' in the same manner as their Western counterpart within a monologic linguistic framework. But first, let me examine the movement from the perspective of its ideological precursor: Western culture.

On the plane of simple analysis, God in Western thought is a being with an infinite capacity for controlling the activities of all mortals: being immortal, God occupies a position that is literally unrivalled and often incomprehensible to the

earthly beings whose daily life and activities he controls from a vantage point that cannot be attained by even the most powerful among them. This simple definition marks the beginning of a socially, and perhaps more importantly, religiously stratified society. In what can be regarded as one of the most poetic passages in the Bible, the book of the prophet Isaiah captures this hierarchical structure, first as it exists in the kingdom above before spreading to the equally stratified territory inhabited by the earthly subjects of the transcendental signifier:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings, with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, *the whole earth is full of his glory.* (*The Holy Bible*, Authorized King James version, London, New York & Toronto, Oxford University Press, Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1-3, my emphasis)

Even for a man as holy as the prophet Isaiah, the privilege bestowed on him in beholding the heavenly splendour of the 'Most-High' is extraordinary; it epitomises more than anything, his own ordinariness vis-a-vis the more depraved humanity for and on behalf of whom he liaises with the heavenly kingdom. Thus, the apocalyptic vision must be pronounced: "Woe is me! I cried. For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the king, the LORD of hosts." (Op.Cit., Is.6, vs.5)

This ontological framework which Western culture has maintained for so long, is perhaps only rivalled by what Soyinka refers to as the habit of "taking far too literally the annunciation of the Gospel - In the beginning was the word." (Wole Soyinka, 1976, p.62) Both examples shape or inaugurate the belief of Western culture in the twin concepts of the 'ideal perfect being' and that which is other than the norm, 'the deformed or mutilated self'. To come closer to contemporary experience

and literary praxis in particular, Pierre Macherey has observed that literature served the useful purpose of carrying 'through the ideological task which religion left off':

The theme already has this value with Defoe, and it could be said that he gives others a formal model: but with Defoe, more than any other, the revelation of order has a critical value,; it must have given him pleasure to introduce, at a late moment within this ideal history, *God and the Other*. It remains that the 'history', beyond its anecdotal supports, has didactic significance: it is a complete representation, the visible body on which a theory can be inscribed. (Op.Cit., p.241)

This 'visible body of theory' or what Macherey describes further as 'the meditation on origins' is the ideological task which literature assumed, which did not seek to liberate people from the dogma of religion, but rather helped in condensing the mythological framework of religion into an arbitrary hierarchy of 'high' and 'low' discourses. It is a meticulous process through which the 'high' defines the 'low' by creating pastiches and parodies of the 'low' as fragmented and marginalized, in short produces it as 'the Other'. This defining process is only complete when we examine the general history of the sublimation and repression of discourses relating to the 'low' through which the 'high' order has tried to appropriate and control their spread. Among the numerous terrains which Stallybrass and White have marked as the domain of 'low' discourses (the base language of carnivals and fairs, the language of a peasantry, the urban poor, sub-cultures, marginals, the lumpen-proletariat and colonized peoples) two are of particular interest to the general concern of this study; the grotesque body of the carnivalesque essence and the peculiar experience of colonized people in signifying practices.

The first domain, that of carnivals, is perhaps the most sustaining example of how, through language, the middle-class in collaboration with its upper-class mentors has managed to produce, within the same culture, the 'low' as dirty, messy, a symbol



of uncouth body movements, ridiculously overindulgent in its eating habits: in short, a whole body of 'high' discourses seeks to represent the 'low' as a grotesque conglomeration of despicable inversion:

At the same time it began to be marginalized in terms of social classes and geographical location. It is important to note that even as late as the nineteenth century, in some places, carnival remained a ritual involving most classes and sections of a community - the disengaging of the middle-class from it was a slow and uneven matter. Part of the process was the 'disowning' of carnival and its symbolic resources as the culture of the Other. This act of disavowal on the part of the emergent bourgeoisie, with its sentimentalism and its disgust, *made* carnival into the festival of the Other. It encoded all that which the proper bourgeois must strive *not to be* in order to preserve a stable and 'correct sense of self'. (Stallybrass and White, Op.Cit., p.178, original italics)

Among the numerous tools which the upper/middle classes have at their disposal in carrying out this act of disavowal, literary praxis is probably the most potent. All the idiosyncratic apprehension of the bourgeoisie is consciously built into a growing body of literary texts and as Pierre Macherey further observes, Daniel Defoe, for example, "made the island the indispensable setting, the scene for an ideological motif which was only beginning to emerge: the meditation on origins." (Op.Cit., p.240) It is also one of the most profound ironies of the eighteenth century therefore, that it was while the literature of the period was struggling to 'rehearse the masses in pluralistic thought and feeling', consciously edging them to believe that 'more than one viewpoint existed', namely, that of their masters, that "bourgeois society problematized its own relation to the power of the 'low', enclosing itself, indeed often defining itself, by the suppression of the 'base' language of carnivals." (Op.Cit., p.181) Stallybrass and White have studied this interesting process of the problematization of 'low' discourses and concluded that:

when the bourgeoisie consolidated itself as a respectable and

conventional body by withdrawing itself from the popular, it constructed the popular as a grotesque otherness: but by this act of withdrawal and consolidation it produces *another grotesque*, an identity in difference which was nothing other than its fantasy relation, its negative symbiosis, with that which it rejected in its social practices. (Op.Cit., p.193, original italics)

To come to terms with this historical schema, we must understand the signifying process which Stallybrass and White have thematically represented as a 'symbiotic' process producing binary opposition between the 'official identity' of the bourgeoisie and its 'political unconscious' which when placed within a semiological order "throws into confusion all tight divisions (sic) and offers to deconstruct all the tight binary oppositions - proper/improper, norm/deviation, sane/mad, mine/yours, authority/obedience - by which societies such as ours survive." (Eagleton, 1983, p.189) Thus, at the level of 'official identity', the bourgeoisie enjoys a monologic form of discourse through which it produces mythical symbols of the 'low' as dirty, messy, uncouth and subservient to appetite. But through the 'political unconscious' of the bourgeois class which only a semiological order can unmask, the production of these abnegating symbols is revealed as a figment of the bourgeois imagination and through it we enter into a simple system by which the 'low' confronts its signifying masters in profound dialogue.

However, it is only when we enter into the mainstream of the peculiar experience of the colonized being that we truly encounter what is earlier demarcated as the discourse of two 'highs' and two 'lows'. The first 'high' is that of the colonialist who having 'just discovered' a conglomeration of primitive savages in the colonial territory approaches the subject with the enthusiasm of a reformer. Again, the role of literature in this process cannot be overemphasised. In a recent analytical study of this historical process, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin

articulate the unique role of literature in this way:

It can be argued that the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other, both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda, for instance) and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the *naturalizing of constructed values* (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc) which, conversely, established 'savagery', 'native', 'primitive', as their antithesis and as the object of *a reforming zeal*. (Bill Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.3, my emphasis)

Integral parts of the body of literature which commenced the meticulous process of reifying these 'naturalizing and constructed values' are William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and its poignant depiction of the primordial struggle between Caliban and Prospero; Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and its imposition of a brand new identity and culture on the colonized being; Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and its portrayal of the cultural and linguistic tabula rasa that should pass as the deformed or mutilated self; and, to come closer to our age, Joseph Conrad's suggestive *Heart of Darkness*. These are all part and parcel of this 'convenient package' of cultural signification through which the servants of British imperialism commenced the process of producing the colonial subject. The production of this being of the 'lowest' order has been constructed by Stallybrass and White as complementary to the same process through which:

the middle-class rejection of the indigenous carnival tradition in the late nineteenth century in Europe was a compensatory plundering of ethnographic materials - masks, rituals, symbols - from colonized cultures. In this respect Joseph Conrad was doing no more than Frau Emmy in placing 'savage rites' at the heart of European darkness in the 1890s. (Op.Cit., p.172)

I shall return to the 'true' purpose(s) of the mask-code, rituals and symbols in my discussion of 'the African/Black World view' in the next section entitled, "Esu and the Carnavalesque Essence".

Meanwhile, it is significant to note that it was the first attentive recipients of the colonialists' myth-making enterprise that were truly 'lucky' as they form what we can demarcate as the second 'high' in our parenthetical location of two 'highs' and two 'lows'. Defined as 'low' themselves they can be grouped for convenience, together with the first 'low' order in European cultural discourse, as they were educated to be nice, clean, well-behaved 'little boys and girls': they also emerged as the 'legitimate' producers of the second 'low' who were their belated Pan-African counterparts. This category of colonial subjects is in no way restricted to the Africans in the homeland but also encompasses their educated Pan-African counterparts throughout the Black diaspora.

Since the inception of modern Black literature, these educated men and women have appropriated, like their colonial masters, the theoretical framework of 'officialdom' within a monologic linguistic framework. Again, when placed within a semiotic order, we encounter the same binary oppositional disorder that yields the political unconscious of the 'high' through which the 'low' throws into confusion all the tight divisions: the 'low' will in turn confront the 'high' and its erstwhile monopoly of an occluded discourse and further engage it in dialogue. A semiotic reading of the following lines by the Black poet Phillis Wheatley of Boston written in 1773, is sufficient in illustrating this process:

T'was not long since I left my native shore  
The land of error and Egyptian gloom:  
Father of mercy! T'was thy gracious hand  
Brought me in safety from those dark abodes. (Phillis Wheatley, 1969,  
p.285)

The 'Native shore/land of error and Egyptian gloom' of Wheatley's reference in these lines is the African homeland. To recall Barthes, the signified 'Native shore'

has again been turned into an *alibi* for the signifier's ('Father of mercy' or the slave trader/the emancipationist, or both) supposedly gracious act of bringing the speaker in 'safety' to the new environment which is considered infinitely more satisfying than 'those dark abodes' of the 'native shore'. Again, we are at the threshold of myth in which one is confronted with the task of unmasking the 'true' essence of a semiological system endowed with a form and a concept. 'Grammatical exemplarity', as Barthes observes, is a basic drive behind whatever is revealed or concealed in any myth. To arrive at the root of what is revealed or concealed through language one "must pass through the difficult deconstruction of the entire history of metaphysics which imposed, and never will cease to impose upon semiological science in its entirety this fundamental quest for a 'transcendental signified' and a concept independent of language." (Jacques Derrida, 1976, p.20) The 'deconstruction of this history' is the understanding that we must use to recall the 'true' history of slavery, colonialism, emancipation, acceptance and integration which is the unspoken or truncated experience that produced the situation depicted in this poem, in the first instance. This history is the concept of the myth sketched in this poem, that is 'independent of its language'. For, through the concept, it is a whole new history that is implanted in the myth, as opposed to the empty nature of the form. 'Father of mercy! T'was thy gracious hand/Brought me in safety' is a simple system by which slavery, colonialism, emancipation, acceptance and integration are deprived of their history and changed into gestures.

The following Afro-American folktale recorded in Alan Dundes' *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel* paints a different picture of the history that is sublimated in Wheatley's poem, because it represents the perspective of a class other than that

of the speaker in Wheatley's poem:

Governor Wallace of Alabama died and went to heaven. After entering the pearly gates, he walked up to the door of a splendid mansion and knocked. A voice inside exclaimed, "Who dat?" Wallace shook his head sadly and said, "Never mind, I'll go the other way." (Alan Dundes, 1973, p.620)

The dialogue of this tale is the power of the 'low' which exploits the 'political unconscious' of the 'high' and its erstwhile monopoly of the theoretical framework of 'officialdom'. The transgressive connotations implicit in this tale can only be grasped when one examines the general history of the dynamics of race relations in the United States. The identity of the Negro voice remains an enigma, a profane discourse of the 'low' which has frightening consequences for the 'high': "Some think it is God; others think it might be St. Peter. A few Whites assume it is a doorman or other menial." (Op.Cit., p.620) There is little doubt that the tale can be subjected to a myriad of interpretations, but one thing is certainly clear, whether it is God, St. Peter or a doorman, the enigmatic Negro voice is charged with enough power to send Governor Wallace to hell; a feat which, as Dundes further observes, cannot be achieved by centuries of Black power militancy. Ultimately, the interplay of linguistic subterfuge vis-a-vis the questions of sanctity and profanity is a matter of: "History seen from *above* and history seen from *below* (which) are irreducibly different and they consequently impose radically different perspectives on the question of hierarchy." (Op.Cit., p.4, my emphasis)

Perhaps a more lucid example that is closer to my purpose in this section, is the role non-White Brazilians living in what Roger Bastide describes as 'a progressive big city' have ascribed to the enigmatic Yoruba deity known as Esu. Because of its relative importance to my general concern, Bastide's articulation of this dynamic

process is significant:

The dualism of good and evil thus has the effect of making the educated nonWhite Brazilians, living in a progressive big city and steadily rising on the social ladder, unwilling to have anything to do with the cult of Exu. To practice this cult would only justify the Whites' image of him as an inferior being with a propensity for evil. *Eager to rise spiritually*, he is of course obliged to give African tradition its due and allot a place for the Exus, *but he de-Africanizes them*, and Aryanizes them by means of Judeo-Christian thought. Inventing another false etymology, he derives the name of Exu from Exud, the rebel angel whom God struck down with lightning and hurled from the heights of heaven to the depths of Hell. This makes it easier for him to identify Exu with Lucifer. Yet *this rejection of tradition arouses a kind of guilt*. To identify Exu with Lucifer is to relegate a significant part of Africa to the realm of the diabolical, thus justifying European criticism of the black civilization. We therefore find a second tendency in Umbanda: *a desperate effort to save this god*. (Roger Bastide, 1960, p.330, my emphasis)

Bastide's articulation is another historical instance in which the signified has been turned into a red-herring or what Barthes describes as an *alibi* for the signifier's mythic imagination. Again, what is distorted is what is full, the meaning: the myth of Esu is deprived of its history and turned into mere gesture, through which 'educated nonwhite Brazilians living in a progressive big city and steadily rising on the social ladder', refuse to have anything to do with the 'true' myth of Esu. An integral part of this meticulous process of disavowal is what Bastide has subtly recognised as the de-Africanisation of the deity and the imposition of an Aryan soul on him. It is important to note, however, that Bastide's own position is closest to that of the second reader of myth in my theoretical framework: like the mythologist, Bastide merely deciphers the myth by recognising a distortion that is inherent in his recapitulation. My concern therefore is not to dwell on this distortion any more, but to focus on the mythical signifier as an irreducible whole, endowed with meaning and form, and instead of a distortion, I receive an 'ambiguous signification'. An integral

part of this ambiguity is the question mark that must be placed on the Aryanization of the myth of Esu and how the dualism of good and evil not from an African, but from a Judeo-Christian perspective, can aid a 'true' understanding of the history of Esu's myth and its descent into transgression.

In trying to develop an embracing critical umbrella for reading black texts, Henry Louis Gates has started the process of rehabilitating Esu in his African homeland, vis-a-vis other black cultures of South America, the Caribbean and the United States, by placing himself at the level of the third category of reader, in my theoretical framework. The 'ambiguous signification' which the reader must receive at this level, has functioned in Gates' theory through his deconstructive reading of the entire signifying process, from the perspective of a black world view. 'Living' the myth of Esu as a 'story at once true and unreal', Gates begins by acknowledging the importance of the linguistic concept of signification as developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, to contemporary literary criticism. But rather than dwell on this neologistic Western concept from the perspective of Western cultural discourse, Gates appropriates the term as a "homonym of a term in the black vernacular tradition that is approximately two centuries old" and declares that "signification is a theory of reading that arises from Afro-American culture." (Henry Louis Gates Jr, 1990, p.285) At the heart of Gates' theory however, is what he urges us to consider as:

received definition of the act of signifying and of black mythology's archetypal signifier, the Signifying Monkey. The Signifying Monkey is a trickster figure, of the order of the trickster figure of Yoruba mythology, Esu-Elegbara in Nigeria, and Legba among the Fon of Dahomey, whose New World figurations - Exu in Brazil, Echu-Elegua in Cuba, Papa Legba in the pantheon of the Vaudou in Haiti, and Papa LaBas in the loa of Hoodoo in the United States - speak eloquently of the unbroken arc of metaphysical presuppositions and patterns of figuration shared through space and time among black culture in West Africa, South America, the Caribbean and the United States. These



trickster figures, aspects of Esu, are primarily mediators: as tricksters they are mediators and their mediations are tricks. (Op.Cit., p.286)

While I share most of Gates' deconstructive presuppositions, my own point of divergence with his theory is in what I consider as the 'carnavalesque essence' inherent in the entire myth of Esu: it is this point of critical divergence that I intend to explore in the next section, which connects the mythical schema of this deity to the general history of the dispersal of black people to different parts of the world and how this shapes or reinforces the transgressive connotations inherent in the myth, which Gates has only tacitly recognised.

### **2.3 Esu-Elegbara and the Carnavalesque Essence**

Is literature most usefully seen as a means of access to history (Macherey), or as a way of grasping the present (Lacan and Barthes)? Perhaps the distinction is false? There is no way of grasping the present without a knowledge of history, of the present as part of the process of history. But to understand the text in its historical specificity is not the same as to set it free from its historical moorings, reading it as the work of the present.

(Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*)

I would like to bring together in this section the many facets of Esu-Elegbara, commonly referred to as the Yoruba 'trickster' god, as the deity has travelled over time and space, first among his other brother deities in Yoruba culture and other Black cultures in the diaspora. Examined against the backdrop of patterns of figuration in African and black texts, the deity makes clear his own potentialities in contemporary critical theory, when further examined against the background of the whole question of the dispersal of black people to different parts of the world.

The epigraph to this section is also employed as a means of bridging the gap between history and literature. Catherine Belsey's observation further resolves the

need for the use of Barthes' and Macherey's theory along post-structuralist and deconstructionist critical lines. The 'falsity' observed among practitioners of 'literature as simply a way of grasping the present', or 'literature as a means to history' has been foregrounded in the preceding section by fusing the two critical viewpoints. This thesis recognizes therefore, that there is no way 'of grasping the present without a knowledge of history, of the present as part of the process of history'. (Catherine Belsey, Op.Cit., p.143)

With these issues made clear, it is also possible to examine within an historical context, ways of making the present clear through literature and via the circuitous route of Esu's history. Thus, I would like to quote rather extensively in the rest of this chapter from Soyinka's critical articulation of the role the three deities, Ogun, Obatala and Sango who constitute the subjects of his primary focus in the section entitled 'Morality and aesthetics in the ritual archetype' in his *Myth Literature and the African World*, since the articulation also encompasses the role of Esu in what Soyinka calls 'the drama of the hero-god':

The drama of the hero-god is a convenient expression; gods they are unquestionably, but their symbolic roles are identified by man as the role of an intermediary quester, an explorer into territories of 'essence ideal' around whose edge war fearfully skirts. Finally, as a prefiguration of conscious being which is nevertheless a product of the conscious creativity of man, they enhance man's existence within the cyclic consciousness of time. These emerge as the principal features of the drama of the gods; it is within their framework that the traditional society poses its social questions or formulates its moralities. They control the aesthetic consideration of ritual enactment and give to every performance a multi-level experience of the mystical and the mundane. (Wole Soyinka, 1976, pp.1-2)

Nowhere is the 'aesthetic consideration of ritual enactment' and by extension the principle of checks and balances which Esu symbolizes more prevalent than in a critical examination of the deity's praise names. Holding the other deities in

dialectical struggle, Esu establishes from the beginning, the principle of rebellion against every form of convention and opposes all acts of dictatorship by men and deities alike. The enigmatic deity becomes enmeshed in contradictions in the process and his 'true' essence becomes further enshrined in profound apprehension. Instilling terror and incomprehension in deities and men, Esu easily attains the contemporary practice of reading him and his relationship with Ifa in terms of what John Pemberton describes as 'the polarity of order and disorder'. In this reading, a major act of incomprehension is evident because the reading is fraught with the age-old distortion and definition of the deity as a mere trickster, "with the capricious element in human experience, or as autonomous energy, libidinal drives." (John Pemberton, 1974, p.67) Pemberton has correctly dubbed the reading as a 'singular' interpretation of the many facets of the deity, with obvious reductionistic results. The record is set straight by a careful examination of the chant of the Ifa priest that places Esu in his proper context as the one who derides the attempts of men to restore order by comparing their actions to one who would try to mend a torn garment with 'a spider's web'.

Thus, an Ifa priest will chant:

The world is broken to pieces:  
The world is split wide open,  
The world is broken without anybody to mend it:  
The world is split open without anybody to sew it.  
Cast Ifa for the six elders  
Who were coming down from Ile Ife.  
They were asked to take care of Mole.  
They were told that they would do well  
If they made sacrifice.  
If the sacrifice of Eshu is not made  
It will not be acceptable (in heaven)  
(Wande Abimbola, 1970 Vol.II Ose Meji, chapt.5, cited in Pemberton,  
Op.Cit., p.67)

This check and balancing role and the power over life and death which Esu symbolizes in this regard, can only be understood through a careful examination of

the role of 'sacrifice' in Yoruba belief. To the Yoruba, sacrifice is the 'scene' of dialectical struggle between life-affirming principles and forces of extermination ranging from poverty, disease, famine, loss, sterility, isolation to ultimate death. Sacrifice according to Lienhardt "is essentially the conversion of a situation of death, or potential death in any of its manifestations, into a situation of life." (Lienhardt, 1961, pp.296-7) Esu's involvement in every sacrificial act is not merely central, but as the Ifa priest's chant cited above asserts, a sacrifice that excludes Esu can only lead to chaos and disorder. Thus, when a person is asked to make sacrifice with a goat, s/he is also advised 'to put the head inside the sacrifice for Esu'.

The Babalawo or diviner also makes it clear to every supplicant that Esu alone has the special prerogative to transform a situation of potential death into a life-affirming essence. John Pemberton further observes the important role of Esu through a documentation of informed opinions of Esu's unquestionable prominence: Pemberton cites Idowu's acknowledgement of the opinion that although 'there is an unquestionable element of evil' in Esu, Idowu recognises further that this popular assessment of Esu as an essentially evil deity is not shared by the Babalawo. Pemberton also records Bascom's 1969 brief discussion of Esu as 'the divine enforcer' and Abimbola's 1973 reference to the deity as 'an impartial police officer, punishing those who have disturbed the order of the universe'. And from a diasporic perspective, Dos Santos analyses Esu as 'the stern controller of sacrifice which is the essential basis of harmony between the various elements which govern life'. Finally, Idowu notes without comment that 'Esu as the approver and bearer of sacrifice to heaven is known to the babalawo as Osetura' or the one who brings comfort.

Yet, Esu is primordially present in what Soyinka refers to as 'a symbolic

struggle with chthonic presences', the goal of the conflict being a harmonious resolution for plenitude and the well being of the community, in all its ramifications. The essence of this conflict and its harmonious resolution, Soyinka also observes, is 'a common theme in traditional mask-drama'. It is also important to recall at this stage, the suspended discussion in the preceding section concerning the 'true' purpose of the mask-code in African and black texts and how this relates to the whole mythical schema of Esu. In a doctoral thesis, Harry Garuba studies the overriding importance of the mask-code in African and black drama in particular and observes that:

There are a number of ways in which one can 'read' the *mask* in African and Black drama. Firstly, for instance, we can see the mask as the *enabling conceptual metaphor* of African and Black drama itself, or as its matrix. Secondly, we can see it - to borrow a Derridean term - as the always inscribed trope of African and Black drama. Or, from another perspective, we can approach it in a purely semiotic sense as a cultural signifier invested with meaning by a culture specific code. Or, we can see it in literary-critical terms as an evolving pan-generic cultural form later acquiring the properties of a specific genre and developing through various generic stages. This pluralistic approach makes more evident the 'significance' of the *mask* as the prerequisite of meaning in African and Black drama and also clarifies other dimensions of its development which are often ignored in our reading of plays. By drawing upon these various perspectives, it is possible to arrive at a coherent discourse of the mask. (Harry Garuba, 1988, pp.70-71, original italics)

Of all the domains of the mask-code delineated by Garuba, it is the mask as 'the enabling conceptual metaphor in African and Black literature' and the mask as 'the always inscribed trope' in African and Black rhetorical strategies that is central to the general concern of this section. This thesis recognises that the other domains are not necessarily invalid; indeed the preceding section has elaborated upon the semiological order informing the mask as a cultural signifier. However, I should like at this stage to attend to a more overtly debated issue which concerns the basic difference between

the African/Black world view and its ideological counterpart, that is, Western or European perception and representation of reality through literature, via the discourse of the mask and the mythical schema of Esu.

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* is compulsive reading for anyone willing to understand the basic difference(s) in perception and representation of 'reality' (a problematic term itself) between the African and the European. Soyinka describes the phenomenon as "a difference between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by period dialectics." (Op.Cit., p.38) The former he refers to as the African world and the latter, European. Harry Garuba also establishes a table of contrasts showing the requirements of the 'mimetic-code' (European) and the 'mask-code' (African). One of his primary conclusions is that, "since the mask can change roles and move in time from the historical to the mythical, it is therefore impossible to keep the action strictly within the realm of realism." (Op.Cit., p.106) Writing from a diasporic perspective, Henry Louis Gates sees the difference in terms of differences in modes of 'signification'. This difference in Gates' theory goes back to 'tales of the Signifying Monkey which had their origin in slavery' and the attempt by Blacks to articulate their thoughts in a language that excluded their White masters. In this process, they draw from the rich repertoire of their African heritage via mythological allusions of which they were implicit even if 'unconscious' carriers. At the heart of these tales we also find the figure of Esu, represented in his perpetual 'trickster' garb. Thus, signification which Gates describes as a neologistic Western concept is primarily 'the nigger's occupation'. In obvious similarity to Harry Garuba's observation of the

mask-code as the 'always inscribed trope of African and Black drama', Gates sees the art of 'troping' itself in terms of differences between 'the master's trope' or what he calls 'the trope of tropes' and 'signifying' as the slave's trope. Signifying in this sense is not merely a trope, but one that "subsumes other rhetorical tropes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony (the master's trope) and also hyperbole, litotes and metalepsis (Bloom's supplement to Burke). To this list, we could easily add aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis, all of which are used in the ritual of signifying." (Op.Cit., p.286)

To come to terms with the aporetic connotations which Gates' theory explores among others, one merely has to read between the lines that form his epigraph to another essay, entitled "Criticism in the Jungle". The epigraph is taken from Ismael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and it testifies to the critical puzzlement of 'the master's trope' when its mythic imagination and stereotypical conception of the Blacks are confronted in philosophical, but profoundly racial terms:

Son, these niggers writing. Profaning our sacred words. Taking them from us and beating them on the anvil of Boogie-Woogie, putting their black hands on them so that they shine like burnished amulets. Taking our words, son, these filthy niggers and using them like they were their god-given pussy. Why...Why 1 of them dared to interpret, critically mind you, the great Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. (Ismael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, cited in Op.Cit., p.1)

Reed's articulation of 'the very idea of niggers writing' is what Gates refers to as 'the ironic reversal of a received racist image of blacks as simianlike'. Like the 'empire writing back to the centre' (Salman Rushdie's metaphor for the counter-discourse of former colonies which has recently been adopted as the title of a book exploring theory and practice in postcolonial literatures), Reed's articulation is chiasmic, because it reverses the order of words. The articulation is also catachrestic because its

'incorrect use of words' embodies its correctness while its litote is apparent in the tone of voice which conveys a vivid understatement not merely intended for rhetorical effects, but one further displaced in signifying terms to signal the power of the 'Signifying Monkey' as one capable of appropriating all the terms used by the master's trope in its own 'signifying rituals'. Thus, the Signifying Monkey is "he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language - is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope of chiasmus itself, simultaneously reversing in one deft, discursive act." (Op.Cit., p. 286)

The concrete historical background that informs this pattern of figuration is bound up with the whole discourse of the 'ideal perfect being' and that which is other than the norm, the 'mutilated-self'. Foucault's study in *Madness and Civilization* supplies an historical viewpoint to how this was first worked out in European culture before spreading to peoples of other cultures. It resolves the philosophical 'gulf of transition', or the progress made by Western culture in designating and confining that which is other than 'the norm'. Foucault's thesis articulates the historical framework that begins with the designation of 'the Other' as those carrying the fatal disease of leprosy. When medical advancement eventually succeeded in eliminating the fatal disease its fear was substituted by the fear of the 'unknown' symbolized by death, and the study arrives at the modern age in which madness and the madman comes to the fore as profound ways of articulating 'the Other'. In the introduction to *Madness and Civilization*, David Cooper informs us that:

The truth of madness is what madness is. What madness is is a form of vision that destroys itself by its own choice of oblivion in the face of existing forms of social strategy. (Op.Cit., p.vii)



Foucault's study is a systematic process of soliciting from history, not merely what constitutes the 'truth of madness', but perhaps more importantly how 'madness, for instance, is a matter of voicing the realisation that I am (or you are) Christ'. The prominence of literature in this hegemonic struggle is given detailed attention by Foucault and by the time it arrives at what can be regarded as the equivalence of the modern age, a symbolic war has been fought and resolved among what Foucault further refers to as "the twelve dualities that dispute the sovereignty of the human soul: Faith and Idolatry, Hope and Despair, Charity and Avarice, Chastity and Lust, Prudence and Folly, Patience and Anger, Indulgence and Harshness, Concord and Discord, Obedience and Rebellion, Perseverance and Inconstancy." (Op.Cit., p.24)

The resolution of this struggle, concerned as it is with life's images, is a symbolic 'Victory', which "is neither God's nor the Devil's: it belongs to madness." (Op., Cit., p.23) To bring this discussion on madness to a conclusion of some sort for the meantime, it is important to emphasise that it is not a mixture of '*le sublime* and *le grotesque* proclaimed by the contemporary romanticist', as observed by Auerbach that situates us in the domain of grotesque realism: the latter is a discursive unit complete in itself, while the former hankers back to the fifteenth century "domain of literary and philosophical expression", in which "the experience of madness...generally takes the form of moral satire." (Op.Cit., p.27) Among the twelve dualities that dispute the sovereignty for the soul of man, 'Faith and Idolatry' (symbolically the first in Foucault's paradigm), can be singled out for a more detailed study of how 'existing forms of social tactics and strategy' contort the reality before us. One way of looking at the phenomenon is to follow Auerbach's reading of "the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and the

most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles." (Op.Cit., p.555) Auerbach's articulation can also be used to lead the discussion back to the discourse on God, which 'Western culture has maintained for so long', as Foucault observes in another study on this hegemonic process. What is equally at stake is the mode of perception and representation of reality in which:

The connection between occurrences is not regarded primarily as a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflection. Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance, and often their interpretation can altogether dispense with any knowledge of it. (Auerbach, Op.Cit., p.555)

A primary way to start delineating an opposing African/Black viewpoint is to understand that such an 'exclusivist' heavenly presence does not exist in an African context, and the psychological exploration in character development is readily substituted for a mode of character development in relation to 'event' or 'situation'. Also, the 'externalization' and mode of representation of 'uniformly illuminated phenomena', which Auerbach observes in chapter one of *Mimesis*, contrasting the Homeric poems with the Biblical story of Abraham and his son, Isaac, and the decree of a dictatorial God whose *absence* looms larger than the story itself, has little or no place in an African context. The difference is that, to the African, even though the gods are the 'final measure of eternity', they are so, only in so far as 'humans are the equivalent of earthly transience', and as Soyinka further observes:

To think, because of this, that the Yoruba mind reaches intuitively towards absorption in godlike essence is to misunderstand the principle of religious rites, and misread, as many have done, the significance of religious possession. Past, present and future being so permanently conceived and woven into the Yoruba world view, the element of eternity which is the gods' prerogative does not have the same quality of remoteness or exclusiveness which it has in Christian or Buddhist culture. (Op.Cit., p.143)

The distinctive insight which this thesis supplies to this category of differences is a critical examination of the history of the formation of the grotesque body of carnivals, and how this leads to the 'production' of the transgressive text. The study follows a circuitous route in arriving at a concise definition of transgression, first by examining the development of transgressive figures from the perspective of European culture. The theory that I have evolved in dealing with the phenomenon in an African/Diasporic sense however, draws largely from the mythical schema of Esu. In the rest of this chapter, I examine the concrete historical process(es) which reinforce the descent of the deity into transgression through centuries of apprehension and misreading.

Thus, my examination is largely a process of historical 'deconstruction' that seeks to establish the fact that wherever they emerge, 'creation' of transgressive figures in mythical, philosophical or human terms is merely informed by a basic tendency on the part of men and women in any hegemonic process to mediate what Foucault has described as 'the movement that nothing can ever limit'. As Foucault observes, 'the movement is from birth and in its totality, constantly involved with the limit'; at the root of this movement is sexuality and its discourse takes us through the entire landscape of the discourse on God. In concrete historical terms, it culminates in what I have earlier described as the moment of the historical contact between Europe and Africa. This contact occurred at a moment when European societies had evolved along an ideological path and the struggle between classes had produced the European 'Other'. Besides the social, cultural, political and economic repercussions of this contact for Africa and the Black world, the interfusion of the African experience with the European conception of literature, philosophy, statecraft and the

languages of the Universities (domains that are conceived as the exclusive terrain of 'high' discourses), have dictated to a very significant extent the direction of modern Africa.

Peter Stallybrass' epigraph in an article entitled "Drunk with the Cup of Liberty: Robin Hood, the Carnavalesque and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England" sums up the attitude of the upper class, and their apprehension of that class of people, among whom "there is such brutality and violence, such debauchery and extravagance, such idleness, irreligion, cursing and swearing, and contempt of all rules and authority..." (Stallybrass, 1986, p.45) To this list of uncomplimentary attributes, we can easily add, 'irregularity of language' without losing sight of the fact that 'rhetoric and the regularities of language were no less the structure of the dominant social order'.

To reconstruct the concrete history which informs the formation of this attitudinal superstructure, a critical examination of the three domains of 'folk culture' in direct opposition to the 'official identity' of the upper class is pertinent. Bakhtin delineates them in the following order: 'ritual spectacles', which includes carnival pageants, and the comic shows of the market place; next to this is, 'comic verbal compositions' and this includes parodies, both oral and written. The third domain concerns what Bakhtin describes as 'the various genres of Billingsgate', encompassing aspects of folk culture such as curses, oaths and popular blazons. (M.M. Bakhtin, 1968, p.5) Interwoven and closely linked, the basic identity of these domains of folk expression is the humorous aspect of the world which they present, apart from the linguistic code of etiquette which they transgress. Stallybrass also provides a tentative morphology of areas transgressed by carnivalesque 'malformations' in a treatise that

includes the substitution of 'fast for feast', or sacredness for profanation and the transgression of 'spatial barriers', plus the substitution of the noise of the marketplace as the locus of public life, and how this encroaches on the privacy of houses. To these, he adds the transgression of bodily barriers, the inversion of hierarchy, the degradation of the sacred and the transgression of linguistic hierarchy. (Op.Cit., p.46)

A subtle articulation of the opposition provided by these aspects of folk expression to the official identity of the upper class is what Bakhtin describes further as the opposition of carnivals to :

the official feast (through which) one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order: it marked the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (Op.Cit., p.10)

Esu's presence in places as diverse as the crossroad, market entrances, market places, king's palaces, shrines within compounds and divining sessions gives him the ability and power to fulfil all these carnivalesque manifestations. To begin with the transgression of 'spatial boundaries', Esu and his chthonic activities, one must hasten to add, also permeate every aspect of earthly transience, and he does not merely invert social hierarchy but goes beyond this to prey on the dominant classes. Iconographic details also reveal that the deity deceives gods, kings and ordinary men as well as demons, witches and even death. In a true carnival sense therefore, Esu is primordially 'hostile to all that is immortalized and completed', as the following praise name attests:

Eshu, confuser of men  
The owner of twenty slaves  
is sacrificing  
So that Eshu may not confuse him  
Eshu who confused the head of the Queen

And she started to go naked.

Then Eshu beat her to make her cry. (Op.Cit., p.26)

The allusion to Esu confusing the queen in this praise name is obviously related to the popular story of intrigue, complexity and seemingly mischievous plot which the deity achieves at the expense of unsuspecting members of a royal household. The story testifies to the deity's ability and willingness to trespass upon kings as he does on gods, ordinary men, as well as demons, witches and even death. The story goes like this: in his numerous wanderings among deities and mortals, Esu arrives at a scene (obviously the palace of a king) where a queen is apparently musing about the inattentiveness of her husband, the king, towards her. Not one to miss a chance to achieve a good story, Esu instantly conceives a plot. He gives a knife to the disgruntled queen asking her to bring to him some hair from the king's beard with the promise that the quantity of hair will be used to make an amulet or charm for the queen which will restore the king's affection for her. Off goes Esu to the Aremo (crown prince and heir apparent to the throne who lives outside the palace as tradition demands) to inform him that his father, the king, will be going to war this night and he wants the prince and his soldiers to look after security in the palace. Finally, Esu goes to the king to tell him that he should be very alert this night because the queen is planning to kill him as a result of his coldness towards her. At night, the king goes to bed pretending to be asleep. As the queen approached, knife in hand, it takes little effort from the king to disarm her. During the scuffle that ensues, the prince rushes in attracted by the noise from the king's chambers. The king, knife in hand, now assuming the posture of the aggressor, is apprehended by the prince who believes that his mother is being attacked. The king, fully alert and seeing the unusual presence of his son, also assumes that the prince must be planning to overthrow him. The king

calls in the palace guards who are faced with the prince's soldiers, and a general massacre follows.

This simple tale is wide open to a myriad of interpretations. Pemberton reads into it 'complexity, intrigue, misunderstanding and disaster'. Others would observe an association of diabolical and malicious activities that has earned Esu his reputation as a notorious deity. My critical orientation, however, allows me a glimpse of the dialectics of power, including greed and the treachery that permeate absolute power and how it corrupts absolutely. The activities of these unfortunate members of the royal household are also laughable, and the story fulfils one of the three functions which Bakhtin ascribes to grotesque realism, which is 'to provide an imaginary repertoire of festive and comic elements which stood against the serious and oppressive languages of the official culture'.

The story begins from a simple premise, with 'a queen whose husband has been inattentive'. Unfortunately, the husband in this tale is no 'ordinary' husband, but the king himself. Even today, in Yoruba societies, kings seldom have only one queen, so the inattentiveness of the king to this particular queen should also trigger the suspicion that a rivalry exists between several queens struggling to gain significant attention from one man, with all the power that goes with such a recognition. Thus, the story begins with an imaginary 'coup d'etat', conceived by this queen against other queens, and Esu as 'agent provocateur' in a comic and highly imaginative manner achieves a real coup and laughs his way to the scene of another masterfully plotted tale, solely conceived for the edification of the entire society. I would like to observe on a final note, that the king in this tale did not bother to find out his son's true intention before calling in the palace guards, believing that his son was simply

in the palace to overthrow him.

A major aspect of Esu's symbolism can also be foregrounded at this point, if we take into consideration the Ifa priestess D. Lapin's disclosure to Pemberton that "Esu is a representative of ambiguity, the all important foundation of Yoruba philosophy. Esu embodies the fact that no one knows anything with certainty." (Op.Cit., p.91) Very few historians have attempted to refute the fact that the primordial African way of life is built on principles of egalitarianism, communal unity and understanding of the individual plight within the 'cosmic' totality. Historians who are attentive to iconographic details from Africa are also not likely to miss the fact that the ascendancy of feudal despotism in African societies is a recent phenomenon. The principle of checks and balances that informed the governance of the old Oyo empire, which made the Oba or king a mere figure head who must listen to other hierarchies of power symbolized by the Oyo-Mesi, the Ogboni cult and other in-built structures of power, equally made absolute rulership impossible. Esu symbolizes from the beginning the highest attainment of this 'African way' through his activities among earthly mortals and in the realm of the supernatural.

Thus, among his other brother deities, Esu also carries out seemingly diabolical acts in ways that are perhaps too light-hearted for the grave implications and results which they achieve. One version of his relationship with Obatala, the god of creation, speaks of his disagreement with Olodumare (the supreme deity) for investing in a single god the herculean task of creation. To prove his point, Esu places a gourd of highly potent palmwine in front of Obatala's hut, after a particularly vigorous day in the god's creation role. Thirsty and famished, the unsuspecting deity welcomes the gourd and its content as a gift from the supreme deity himself and



drains it to the last drop. Drunk and disorderly, Obatala resumes his task of creation and in the process creates all sorts of deformed people including the cripple, the blind and the albino. Working with the Brazilian, Zora Zeljan's *The Story of Oxala*, and Obotunde Ijimere's *The Imprisonment of Obatala*, versions of the same story, Soyinka arrives at the same conclusion that "The Yoruba asserts straightforwardly that the god (Obatala) was tipsy and his hand slipped, bringing the god firmly within the human attribute of fallibility", and "in Ijimere's version, it is Esu who decides the nature of Obatala's punishment...It is a trial of the spirit." (Op.Cit., pp.18 & 20)

It is, however, when we arrive at the terrain of the two other roles which Esu fulfils in Bakhtin's schematic morphology, characteristic of grotesque realism, that the deity's carnivalesque essence becomes inherently manifest and in an important sense, complete. These roles concern the manifestation of grotesque bodies as provider of an "image-ideal of and for popular community as an heterogeneous and boundless totality" and as "a thoroughly materialist metaphysics whereby the grotesque 'bodied forth' the cosmos, the social formation and language itself." (Op.Cit., p.10) Esu fulfils the first function through his powerful presence in 'the market place as the locus of public life', and thereby encroaches upon the privacy of houses. The juxtaposition of the aspiration of the upper class against the immediate need of the larger populace to buy and sell, amidst chaos and disorder, is spectacularly captured in the following account of the setting of this conflict.

What is known as Oja-Oba or the king's market is the locus of public activities in every large Yoruba town. Located directly across from the king's palace, activities in the market usually commence at sunset or early evening. This is why the market is also known as Oja-ale or 'evening market'. When in full session, the juxtaposition

of the setting of the market and the palace is one of outright chaos amidst buying and selling, making and losing of fortunes on the one hand, against the serene, relatively well-ordered space known as the king's palace, on the other. Uncertainty and intrigue are twin elements associated with the market and all that it connotes in Yoruba belief. In this atmosphere Esu asserts a powerful presence, and the tale is constantly told of 'a woman' who is at the market, selling her wares while Esu starts a fire in her house. She runs home leaving her goods and before she arrives at the scene of the fire, a thief runs off with her goods from the market. The market also underscores a primary belief of the Yoruba that the world of the living is never far from that of the dead, and the 'two worlds' are organically linked with 'the world' of those yet to be born. Thus, it is not uncommon for men and women to return from the market with grandiose tales about ghosts and glimpses of the deceased from other towns. People who die at an early age are believed to be wanderers on the face of the earth and they are constant visitors to market places.

As a reader of myth working along the line of the third category of readers in Barthes' theoretical framework, I receive an 'ambiguous signification' from this tale. To place oneself along the lines of the 'static' or 'analytical' positions of the first two readers is to destroy the myth, by making its intention obvious or merely unmasking it. The true purpose of the third category of reading, is to pass from semiology to ideology. Thus, a primary way to begin to read this tale, is to externalize those elements of *control* inherent in the juxtaposition of the setting of the organised violence of the market place alongside the 'enclosed, relatively well-ordered space', known as the king's palace. Having fulfilled the important role of transgressing these spatial barriers (a significant element in Bakhtin's tentative

morphology of carnivalesque essence), the story moves ahead to provide an image-ideal of and for popular community as an heterogeneous and boundless totality. The conglomeration of bodies, encompassing the grotesque boundless totality, at the same time offers the conventional or 'sacred', upper class rulership a vantage point to view the activities of the popular community. In Yoruba metaphysics, the world view is never complete without the ancestors, the gods and the unborn. In this sense, the market place as the place that affords the entire community such a coming together, is of overriding importance. Soyinka's observation sums up this relative importance in the following way:

The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn. Obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies or uncertainties, employing the same masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition. (Op.Cit., p.148)

At the scene of this dialectical struggle and controlling every aspect of its intense activity is the enigmatic deity known as Esu. The iconographic details establish him as the overriding controller of the market place, who in a grotesque, carnivalesque manner, teaches all and sundry the essence of communal existence. Profiteering, wrangling and greed are rewarded with total loss, as in the case of the woman in the tale, who is in the market (to make profit?), while Esu starts a fire in her house. 'It is the day of the thief', as the Yoruba saying goes; Esu will catch up with him in another spectacular fashion. Meanwhile, the woman has been taught a bitter lesson through the total loss of her goods and possibly her house. It is important, as Eva Krapf-Askari observes in her 1969 study of *Yoruba Towns and Cities* that Esu symbolizes all that is 'impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental'. Thus:

Eshu quickly makes himself master  
of the market place.  
He buys without paying  
He causes nothing to be bought or sold  
at the market until night falls.  
(Pemberton, Op.Cit., p.22)

However, the carnivalesque essence inherent in the myth of Esu is only complete when we examine the celebration of Odun-Elegba (the festival of Esu), particularly how the iconographic details associated with the deity and the festival pave the way to a thorough materialist metaphysics, whereby the grotesque 'bodies forth' the cosmos, the social formation and language itself. I have confined my investigation to the feasting and how this culminates in a free flow of abuse, curses, profanities and improprieties, which are the unofficial elements of speech. By carrying out the research in this manner, it is possible to transcend the current widespread adoption of the idea of carnival as an *analytical* category, which can only be fruitful if further *displaced* into the broader concept of symbolic inversion or transgression. Such speech forms, as Stallybrass and White conclude, being completely:

liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idioms, become themselves a peculiar argot and create special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally. The marketplace crowd was such a collectivity, especially the festive, carnivalesque crowd at the fair. (Op.Cit., p.28)

Celebrated in prodigious manner, Odun-Elegba truly begins, when:

a black goat is sacrificed in the shrine by the Elebi, the second-ranking Eshu priestess. The blood is poured on a blackened mud image which is the permanent Eshu figure in the shrine. The skull and the lungs of the goat are left with Eshu and the remainder is roasted in preparation for the next day's feast. Others come presenting gifts of kolanut, pounded yam, cocks and goats or pigs...The principal portion of the offering is used in the daily feasting of the celebrants and their guests. Late in the afternoon, on the sixth day of the festival, the Eshu figure

is carried to the king's market (Oja-Oba) on the head of the third ranking Eshu priestess, the Arugba (bowl carrier). She is preceded by the higher-ranking priestess, the Elemoso and the Elebi, and followed by bata drummers and other members of the compound. (Pemberton, Op.Cit., p.22)

It is also at the market place that the celebration attracts its equally prodigious following, expanding to encompass everyone present at the market, who can only ignore the chant of the Esu priestess at their peril:

People of the market, clear the way!  
We are coming through the market gate.  
My Lord is coming to the market.  
My husband, I have arrived.  
Laroye (Eshu), I have arrived.  
Baraye, Baraye, Baraye!

Pemberton has also observed that at the famous Oje market in Ibadan, no buying or selling can begin until oil has been poured over the Esuoja (market shrine dedicated to Esu). Although not included in Pemberton's exhaustive research findings, there is the equally popular Oke-Ibadan festival, which is a festival of designated abuse, curses, oaths, slang, erotic laughter and popular tricks, celebrated around the figure of Esu. Every aspect of the festival brings to light what Bakhtin describes as *a grammatical jocosa*: "whereby grammatical order is transgressed to reveal erotic and obscene or merely materially satisfying counter-meaning. Punning is one of the forms taken up by the grammatical jocosa." (Op.Cit., p.10) Oke-Ibadan festival transgresses all spatial barriers to encompass the old and the young, the sacred and the profane. Also, the prodigious feasting that characterises the festival is absolute and to give every member of the society sufficient time to enjoy the spinning of jokes, all cooking must be done the night before the festival, thus forbidding anyone to cook on Oke-Ibadan day. Groups of young men and women, going from compound to compound, are 'licensed' to appropriate and consume food being prepared on the

day of the festival, simply by sighting smoke from fire-wood coming from any kitchen. Unfortunately, most of the punning effects in these erotic jokes are unavoidably lost in translation. I have recorded and translated some of them as follows:

*Lojo Oke-Ibadan mo le foko roka*  
*Oke-Badan lanti lanti!*

(On Oke-Ibadan day, I can mix a pot of yam flour with a penis!)

*Baba da agbada bole, Oko nle*  
*Odagbada bole, Oko nle!*

(Old man's voluminous robe is spread on the ground, but I can see a rising penis!)

*Ore meji, jowojowo epon,*  
*Mon bumi, jowojowo epon!*  
*Oni o rojo, ola o re kotu,*  
*Mon bumi, jowojowo epon!*

(Two friends, flabby-flabby testicles,  
Try to curse me, flabby-flabby testicles!  
Today is not for empty talks, tomorrow, we are not  
going to court - Flabby-flabby testicles!)

*Oko Olopa kiki beliti,*  
*Mon bumi, kiki beliti!*

(Policeman's penis is imprisoned under a wad of heavy-heavy belt! Try to curse me, just a wad of belt!)

*Oni keke rora goke, Oko nle!*

(Bicycle rider take it easy as you climb that hill, I can see your rising penis!)

These erotic jokes do not merely work along Bakhtin's notion of 'grammatical jocosa', by punning in ways that violate and unveil the structure of prevailing convention and provoke laughter, they also echo Samuel Beckett's punning pronouncement: 'In the beginning was the pun'. This sets pun against official word and at the same time, as puns often do, sets free a chain of puns. Finally, carnivals, as Bakhtin concludes, "set themselves in punning relationship with official culture and

*enable a plural, unfixed, comic view of the world.*" (Op.Cit., p.10, my emphasis)

The last part of this chapter is a critical examination of the control and appropriation of these carnival pageants. The pattern of control is examined further against the backdrop of pattern of figuration in African and Black texts, which will form the object of critical focus in the rest of this thesis.

## 2.4 Difference as Otherness

This distance or gap, large enough to accommodate an authentic discursiveness, is the determining characteristic of the relationship between literature and criticism. What can be said *of* the work can never be confused with what the work itself is saying, because two distinct kinds of discourse, which differ in both form and content are being super-imposed. Thus, between the writer and the critic, an irreducible difference must be posited right from the beginning...Let us say, provisionally, that the critic employing a new language, brings out a *difference* within the work by demonstrating that it is *other than* it is. (original italics)

(Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*)

My primary purpose in this section is to examine the issue of *difference* as *otherness*. The question of representation and patterns of figuration in African and Black texts is also taken up in a treatise that examines the violence of representation as the suppression of otherness. Perhaps, one way to begin is to defuse whatever tension or critical apprehension that may exist in any 'quarters', as to the plausibility or even strangeness of the whole attempt. As Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse observe:

In the name of doing non-canonical work, scholars throughout the humanities and social sciences have been extending literary critical methods into new areas which have never been read that way before. They are linking ideology to figuration, politics to aesthetics, and tropes of ambiguity and irony to instances of ambivalence and forms of political resistance. (Armstrong and Tennenhouse, 1989, p.1)

Thus, in broaching the question of the suppression of 'difference', it is perhaps best

to begin with the mythical schema of Esu itself, along the lines of the control, suppression and appropriation of carnivals, within a specific hegemonic process. In his study of how, within the hegemonic process in early modern England, the legend of Robin Hood was contested, reproduced and constituted, Peter Stallybrass has provided a useful schematic representation of the entire process, by looking at the strategies of the dominant class on the one hand, and the strategies of the 'subordinated', on the other. The main strategy of the dominant, is first to 'produce' and then 'exclude' the subordinated. This process, Stallybrass calls 'how heterodoxy is produced by orthodoxy', and 'how heterodoxy is excluded by orthodoxy', respectively. The first strategy which explicates how orthodoxy produces heterodoxy "as a form of licensed misrule, colonizing conflict through ritual contestation organized from above and separated off in time and space from the quotidian,' (Op.Cit., p.60) functions in the myth of Esu in the following way:

The association of Esu with diabolical and malicious activities is certainly widespread in popular stories and sayings. Idowu cites Yoruba sayings which attribute to Eshu the origins of misbehaviour. The wicked are called *Omo Eshu* (children of Eshu), and neighbours will say of one who does harm to himself or to others, 'It is Eshu who stirred him'. (Pemberton, Op.Cit., p.26)

Referring to the wicked as 'Omo Esu' is in this regard the first pattern or element of control. The approach explicates how 'orthodoxy produces heterodoxy'. By producing Esu and those who behave like him as a form of 'licensed misrule', we enter a fairly simple system or pattern of appropriation by which the orthodox order seeks to control the spread of heterodoxy by producing it as that which it (the orthodox) will strive 'not to be'.

However, it is when we examine the second strategy of the dominant that the act of suppression of the 'outlaw' or subordinated becomes manifest. This is the



process through which 'heterodoxy is excluded by orthodoxy' and Stallybrass further refers to it as the strategy most frequently pursued by 'the godly sort'. It is possible to observe the diachronic and synchronic manifestations of this strategy in the myth of Esu, through the following observation by Pemberton, after examining a particular tale that seemingly represents the deity as 'agent provocateur':

It is this aspect of Eshu mythology and iconography that Wescott chooses to emphasise. As the festival song suggests that Eshu is one who deceives and harms, so too the *oriki* (praise name) and myths portray Eshu as the confuser of men, the troublemaker, the one who acts capriciously. So prevalent are these associations that Christian missionaries used 'Eshu' as a translation of the New Testament terms 'devil' or 'satan'. Now, even Eshu worshippers who speak a little English, as well as Yoruba Christians and Muslims, will refer to Eshu as 'the Devil'. *It is an indefensible corruption of the tradition.* Nevertheless, Eshu is a troublemaker. His own praise names attests to it. (Op.Cit., p.26 , my emphasis)

This particular strategy has been foregrounded in the first part of this chapter, through the use of Barthes' theory which delineates the position of three distinct readers of myth. The 'reading' above, is that of the first two categories of readers who seek to destroy a myth, either by making its intention obvious or by unmasking it; the former, as I have observed is cynical and the latter, demystifying. It is to the position of the third category of reader, who consumes the myth according to the ends built into its structure and passes from semiology to ideology, that Stallybrass refers in concrete historical term (using the legend of Robin Hood), when he observes that the strategy of orthodoxy to exclude heterodoxy, is "subject to two major weaknesses: it could not be enforced without adequate central and local policing; even when enforceable, it tended to relegate misrule to a space outside official surveillance." (Op.Cit., p.70) Again, we might recall Barthes' earlier observation that because 'myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing'; when plagued with the sort of dilemma

highlighted above, which seeks to obliterate it through language, myth finds a third way out. As Barthes concludes, "the elaboration of a second-order semiological system will enable myth to escape this dilemma: driven to having either to unveil or to liquidate the concept, it will *naturalize* it." (Op.Cit.,p.129)

This naturalization process is the strategy which the subordinated employs in confronting the mythic imagination of the dominant. Following Stallybrass, the process can be schematically represented as the ways 'heterodoxy negotiates/contests orthodoxy', and how 'heterodoxy interrogates the boundaries between Doxa and Opinion'. With the first strategy, Stallybrass testifies to the fact that "at its weakest, heterodoxy contests only the workings of orthodoxy, not its principles." (Op.Cit., p.70) In the myth of Esu, we can construct the setting of this 'compromise' and 'contest' in the manner which Esu can be appeased through sacrifice. During Odun-Elegba (the festival of Esu), sacrifices can be made by every member of the society, including the wealthy, the poor, the high and the low, and indeed: "the offerings and sacrifices depend upon the *wealth* of the giver and the demands of Esu as determined by the casting of kola where a petition of Esu has been made." (Op.Cit., p.22) This compromise Stallybrass explains, quoting Hobsbawn, is the way heterodoxy "seeks to re-establish justice of 'the old ways', that is to say, fair dealing in a society of oppression." (Hobsbawn, 1981, p.55) Another aspect of 'negotiation', is heterodoxy's way of conceding that in a pre-capitalist society, there is a tendency for the outlaw celebrated by the subordinate classes to embody the only familiar model of 'freedom' which is the status of nobility. Here we may note that the figure of Esu is worshipped with absolute awe, in ways that explicate his 'status of nobility' in a very clear, unambiguous manner. Thus, the priestess' chant:

Laroye (Eshu) appears like a graceful crown.  
Eshu, do not deceive and harm me;  
    deceive another.  
Latopa (Eshu) bless me, Eshu, bless me  
Bara, bless me, Eshu, bless me.  
All reverence to you, Latopa. (Op.Cit., p.22)

However, the compromise ends here, when we note that: "even at its weakest, heterodoxy challenges the *absolute* authority of the dominant and contests the development of new forms of exploitation, if still appealing to paternalism." (Thompson, 1971, pp.83-8) Esu's surrealistic humour is particularly clear in this regard, as we witnessed in his total opposition to absolute authority in the tale, in which the deity used the demands of a capricious queen (new forms of exploitation?), to achieve a coup d'état for the edification of the society and put an end to oppression and greed. In the same tale, the 'appeal to paternalism' did not save the dominant, as the prince, heir apparent to the throne, is equally destroyed in the catastrophic denouement.

So far, the affinity between the legend of Robin Hood and the myth of Esu, as they respond to carnivalesque essence, including the age-old attempts to constitute, reproduce and control their spread, is quite close. Esu's myth is in complete agreement with Stallybrass' assertion, that "heterodoxy does not necessarily contest or negotiate with a *unified* orthodoxy. On the contrary, it can exploit the fissures within the dominant, thus exposing 'the universe of unquestioned assumption', concealed by the naturalization of orthodoxy." (Op.Cit., p.70) However, as we arrive at the actual domain of this 'universe of unquestioned assumption', or what Stallybrass calls how heterodoxy interrogates the boundaries between Doxa and Opinion, the affinity loses its inherent unity. This is not due to any weakness in Stallybrass' theory, but one that concerns basic differences between the world views

which Esu and Robin Hood proffer or represent. It is possible to glimpse the infinite and limitless boundary open to interrogation in the Yoruba world view which Esu represents, through the following articulation of the origin of the Yoruba mythological pantheon:

We are further back in Origin, not one engaged in the transitional battle of Ogun, but in the fragmentation of Orisa-nla, the primal deity, from whom the entire Yoruba pantheon was born. Myth informs us that a jealous slave rolled a stone down the back of the first and only deity and shattered him in a thousand and one fragments. From this first act of revolution was born the Yoruba pantheon. (Soyinka, *Op.Cit.*, pp.151-2)

Literally speaking therefore, any mythic imagination informed by the Yoruba pantheon is endowed with sufficient mythological figures to build its theory on, depending on the ideological inclination of the myth-maker him/herself. The object of my present inquiry is also concerned with why within this rich repertoire of mythological figures, only three out of the numerous deities represented on the Yoruba pantheon have received significant attention in literary/critical praxis, and these are Ogun, Sango and Obatala. Because there is no straightforward answer to this dilemma, a convincing critical explanation can only be arrived at, if we examine the process of the deification of these mythological figures (as I have done with the figure of Esu), and identify the ideological implications inherent in their earthly activities. Sango's feudal hegemony has been observed in the first section of this chapter, and Soyinka's critical observation lends further credence to my reading, when he asserts straightforwardly that Sango is:

God of lightning and electricity. A tyrant of Oyo, he was forced to commit suicide by factions, through his own over-reaching. His followers there-upon deified him and he assumed the agency of lightning. (*Op.Cit.*, p.151)

With Obatala and Ogun, on the other hand, one should not hasten to make

such categorical assertion, not only because they represent 'a view of the world' that is complementary to modern liberal-humanist philosophy, but also because, depending on the position of the reader looking through the iconographic details associated with these deities, they are easily digestible as the modern antithesis of the carnivalesque essence which I have traced in the figure of Esu. Indeed, the 'friendship' between Obatala and Ogun further depends on a paradox, with the former being god of creation and the latter being god of iron and by extension also of war. The paradox becomes particularly evident when perceived against the backdrop of Soyinka's figurative articulation: "Obatala (or Oxala) is the god who turns blood into children; Ogun is the god who turns children into blood." (Op.Cit., p.19) Thus the 'ambiguous signification' which any reader of these iconographic details, and especially one willing to pass from semiology to ideology must receive, must also generate a chain of questions that could begin from the old question of traditional analysis. The reader will ultimately have to confront questions such as: "What link should be made between disparate events? How can a causal succession be established between them? What continuity or overall significance do they possess? Is it possible to define a totality, or must one be content with constituting connexions?" (Foucault, Op.Cit., p.5)

Perhaps, a logical way to begin to resolve these questions, is to externalize concrete historical moments or events that are seemingly disparate in nature and proceed from this point to analyze causal succession between them. The issue of continuity and overall significance, on the other hand, depends entirely on whether the reader is seeking to 'define a totality' or contented with 'constituting connexions'. The futility of any attempt merely to constitute connexions, can also be foregrounded

at this point, if we take into consideration the fact that this practice is not the true position of the reader who seeks to 'pass from semiology to ideology'. For the third category of reader seeks to apprehend the most radical discontinuities by understanding that they "are the breaks affected by a work of theoretical transformation which establishes a science by detaching it from the ideology of its past and by revealing this past as ideological." (Op.Cit., p.5)

From this abstract theoretical postulation, we may now proceed to externalize the concrete historical events informing the plastic art of Obatala and juxtapose them with the dialectics of power inherent in Ogun's 'Hellenistic' symbolism as god of iron and of war, whose iconographic artifacts include among others, metallic ore, and who is further described as 'the forerunner and ancestor of paleotechnic man'. Both deities and their chthonic and transient activities are to a large extent mediated by Esu in his transgressive role and willingness to substitute grotesque realism for Obatala's plastic 'refinery' and Ogun's Hellenistic 'finesse'.

The primordial fault of Obatala is his costly excesses, as he 'allowed himself to take a little too much of that potent draught, palmwine. His craftman's finger slipped badly and he moulded cripples, albinos and the blind'. His prescription which 'rigidly forbids palmwine to his followers', does not save humanity from the tragedy of this primordial error, as the issue of somatic symbolism has come to define one of the primary areas of ideological struggle. To paraphrase Stallybrass and White, cultures 'think themselves' and the opposition between the high and the low truly begins through the combined symbolism of four hierarchies: psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order. If we single out symbolic connotations associated with the human body and how this informs grotesque realism,

we are bound to encounter a system of 'occluded discourse', in which 'the low' are constituted as the malformed (victims of Obatala's excess?) who are not expected to survive in a world that is informed by the survival of the fittest theory and other such philosophical postulations that marginalize them within the social order. Sharing and to a significant extent embodying their plight, Esu carries a deformity in one of his legs and, rather than allow himself to be incapacitated by this somatic disease, he signals the process of symbolic inversion by firmly 'anchoring' one of his legs in the chthonic realm, while the other transgresses every domain of earthly transience. Thus:

In Yoruba mythology, Esu always limps, because his legs are of different lengths: one is anchored in the realm of the gods, the other rests in the human world. The closest Western relative of Esu is Hermes, of course; and, just as Hermes' role as interpreter lent his name to 'hermeneutics', the study of the process of interpretation, so too the figure of Esu can stand, for the critic of comparative black literature, as our metaphor for the act of interpretation itself. (Gates, Op.Cit., p.287)

With Ogun, on the other hand, we enter into a complex system of 'rules' thoroughly informed by the social order, the dialectics of power, and principles of economic wellbeing. It is possible to argue with Soyinka however, that Ogun is not just *an* artistic sensibility, but *the* artistic spirit itself:

The significant creative truth of Ogun is affirmation of the creative intelligence; this is irreconcilable with naive intuition. The symbolic artifact of his victory is metallic ore, at once a technical medium as it is symbolic of deep earth energies, a fusion of elemental energies, a binding force between disparate bodies and properties. Thus, Ogun, tragic actor, primordial voice of creative man is also, *without a contradiction of essences*, the forerunner of paleotechnic man. The principle of creativity when limited to pastoral idyllism, as Negritude has attempted to limit it, *shuts us off from the deeper, fundamental resolutions of experience and cognition*. (Op.Cit., p.150 my emphasis)

To come to terms with this deity whose 'symbolic artifact of victory' is 'metallic ore', an opposing sensibility to his tragic nature must follow the opposite humorous path in articulating its thesis or antithesis. The image of 'deep earth energies', which

the deity also embodies is, one must concede, the very artifact which has transformed men and women from the level of the crude tool makers which they were to a state of technological advancement, which we tacitly proclaim and recognise as civilization.

At the same time, it is also this 'energy' which informs past and present 'paleotechnic' men and women's struggle to dominate and rule 'others' like them, control their lives and wealth through acts of war. Indeed, Ogun's metallic ore has supplied the basic raw material through which humanity has transcended the stage of tilling the land with crude implements such as hoes and cutlasses, and supplied men and women with tractors, harvesters and other farming implements which has made life itself a lot more bearable than it used to be. But it is also out of Ogun's iron that man has fashioned the most lethal weapons, ranging from automatic rifles to nuclear bombs, which are equally capable of wiping out the same civilization built paradoxically on these 'deep earth energies'. The consequent result which this denouement portends for humanity is equally foregrounded in Ogun's symbolically tragic nature.

In his book, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, Thomas Ashton comes to terms with the fact that even when the artifact of 'the god of iron' has transformed the mode of existence in industrialised societies, 'fundamental resolutions and cognition' also inform us that:

in the industry with which we are here concerned the *outbreak of hostilities* meant not a diminished but an increased demand for iron in the forms of cannon, gun carriages, shot and firearms, and for steel in the shape of swords and bayonets. Contracts from the Office of Ordnance operated as *food for the Gods* and the industry grew in proportion as the need for munitions of war increased... After each war came trade depression - more intense and prolonged than that expressed by other industries - during which the ironmasters *painfully* adapted their works to the product of peace; and sometimes the process was still incomplete when the outbreak of fresh struggles brought the



call for a reconversion of ploughshares into swords. (Ashton, 1924, pp.128-9, my emphasis)

Ultimately, the object of this enquiry is not complete if we do not state clearly, the need for an opposing sensibility to that represented by the tragic spirit, and its destructive essence. The opposition concerns the question of 'hierarchies' and those of symbolic inversion between 'high' and 'low' discourses. Foucault's articulation in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 'fleshes' out these areas of opposition in the following way:

Beneath the rapidly changing histories of governments, wars and famine, there emerge other apparently unmoving histories: the history of sea routes, the history of corn and of gold-mining, the history of drought and of irrigation, the history of crop rotation, the history of the balance achieved by the human species between hunger and abundance. (Op.Cit., p.3)

Because the history of governments and wars, to which we can easily add the history of statecraft, religion, philosophy and literature are the domain of 'high' discourses, their movement has been rapid, compared to the 'transmuted' or cyclic movement of 'those apparently unmoving histories'; these concern the experience of the 'low', whose lives have been profoundly affected by the history of sea routes and perhaps, more importantly, by the 'history of the balance achieved by the human species between hunger and abundance'. The perspective that any prospective inquirer adopts therefore, is as Stallybrass and White further observe, a question of "History seen from *above* and history seen from *below* (which) are irreducibly different and they impose radically different perspectives on the question of hierarchy." (Op.Cit., p.4, my emphasis)

In the chapters that follow, this theoretical framework, which adopts the act of transgression as concept and form, will be employed in 'reading' novels and plays

from Africa and the Black diaspora in manners that link patterns of figuration in these texts to their ideological contents. If reading the texts in this way creates a *distance* or *gap*, it is that 'gap' which Macherey describes in *A Theory of Literary Production* as being 'large enough to accommodate an authentic discursiveness', which is the *determining characteristic* between literature and criticism. For, as Macherey further clarifies, what can be said *of* the work can never be confused with what the work itself is saying, because two distinct kinds of discourse, which differ in both form and content, are being superimposed.

Thus, the *irreducible difference* which this body of criticism is positing between itself and the body of texts to be examined, is that the criticism is informed by every act of transgression and grotesque realism, as they are made to represent 'cosmic, social, topographical and linguistic elements of the world'. As Macherey concludes, this difference, is indeed, not one between two points of view on the same subject, but the exclusion separating two forms of discourse that have nothing in common. Let us say, provisionally, that the critic employing a new language, brings out a *difference* within the works by demonstrating that they are *other than* they are.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Patterns of Figuration in African and Black Texts: The Context of their Social History.

#### 3.1 Introduction

A joke has been going the rounds in theological circles for some time now. It goes like this. The Pope was told by the Cardinals that the remains of Jesus had been dug up in Palestine. There was no room for doubt: all the archaeologists, scholars and experts were agreed. Teaching about the resurrection, the lynch-pin of orthodox Christian faith, lay in ruins. The Pope sat with his head in his hand, pondering his position and that of the Church he headed. He decided it would be only decent - whether or not it would be Christian no longer seemed to matter - to let the separated brethren know. So he called up Paul Tillich, the leading protestant theologian, and told him the sad news. There was a long silence at the end of the phone. Finally Tillich said: 'So you mean to say he existed after all...'

(Peter Fuller, "The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History")

My primary purpose in this chapter is to push forward the question of transgression. In the preceding chapters notions such as the subversive text, grotesque realism, transgression of spatial boundaries, and the carnivalesque essence have already developed around the concept of transgression. Coterminous with these concepts is the manner in which the grotesque, working through a materialist metaphysics, 'bodies forth' the cosmos, the social formation and language itself. These notions are no pretensions, but a body of theory around which I would like to attempt a reading of what Africans and their counterparts throughout the black diaspora have been engaged in for the last five decades in a movement that we tacitly recognise as 'black rhetorical strategy'. Writers and critics throughout Africa and the black diaspora have grappled with how a race could survive a whole range of traumatic experiences such as slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, acceptance and

integration and the creolization of men and women of African origin with people of diverse cultural upbringing as we find in the West Indian experience, for example.

But black expression having emerged from the dark ages of the profound racial death wish, a notion centred around the desire of black middle class socio-political elites on both sides of the Atlantic, to be, if not white at least less black, has not totally freed itself from dogmas. The arrival of the cultural self-assertiveness of the 1960s (desegregationist and civil right movements in America, creolization in the West Indies and the era of political independence in most parts of black Africa) did very little in changing dominant attitudes among the black elites and the cargo sense of direction perpetrated by the political leadership. A cursory glance at the theoretical starting point of black expression reveals a host of contested issues ranging from language matters to the idea of a useable past. Among writers and critics pursuing the interest of the race from different theoretical and often different ideological standpoints there is always a tendency to turn ideopractical issues into what Anthony Appiah describes as "realist legitimation of nationalism." (Anthony Appiah, 1991, p.349)

Yet it is between the mythological (metaphysical) and the ideological sensibility that we can locate primary areas of dissent. This thesis recognises, however, that a middle ground exists between this polar setting framework. There is of course, a basic difference between what I should like to describe as 'pushing theories' and 'reinforcing theory'. The latter can at best be further described as a fashionable indulgence or an ability to interpret correctly or incorrectly current critical theories. 'Pushing theories' on the other hand, is by now a commonplace expression often described as experimentation with form, appropriation of acceptable

idioms and adaptation or borrowing from sources of similar persuasion.

However, the 'division of reality' (philosophical or mundane) into two polar exclusive opposites can only be progressive if it does not degenerate into a Manichaean polarization. This is why my approach in this and previous chapters has tended to be cyclical rather than Manichaean, linear or exclusively dialectical. The point can be further illustrated in the manner with which the previous chapter has consistently insisted that it is only through a circuitous route, using the myth of Esu for example, that we can arrive at a concise definition of transgression and its practical implications for critical theory. I would like to emphasise that the same approach is pertinent if the attempt to survey the issues at stake in what Henry Louis Gates has described as 'Black literature and literary theory' is to yield any fruitful result. Yet 'canon formation' and criticism of the canonical text, which Gates' brand of theory believes to be fundamental to the development of Black literature, is one of the primary areas of dissent, especially when avant garde or 'dialectical' critics engage this brand of criticism. In the introduction to *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Gates observes that "for all sorts of complex historical reasons, the very act of writing has been a political act for the black author." (Gates, 1990, p.5) Thus, it is debatable to claim that a critic can be apolitical while discussing texts that were produced as a 'political act'.

But the process of eliciting from history what constitutes the 'political' content of many black texts is also another way of confronting the basic concern of writers and critics alike and consequently the major differences which have led to the formation of camps and different schools of thought. The critic or writer who merely tacitly refuses to recognise the political nature of his engagement is often described

as lacking in political education and commitment, while those preeminently concerned with socio-cultural factors are termed cultural anthropologists reifying cultural artifacts to the level of museum symbolism and bogged down with an inordinate ambition to "resurrect decadent ethnic myth and traditionalia." (Chidi Amuta, 1989, pp. 17-23) But most of the claims of the dialectical critic have enjoyed an unchallenged preeminence in neither the theoretical, nor the practical formulations of black expression. In fact there is a rich body of literature contesting every claim of the avant garde critic or writer in a way that has freed black literature from the threat of one-dimensionalism. Soyinka devotes his inaugural lecture entitled "Barthes, Leftocracy and other Mythologies" to a one-to-one contestation of the facts and findings of his critics, sparing neither the 'traditional aestheticians' nor the 'radical avant garde'. To Soyinka, the fundamental issue at stake "is a conflict that straddles both the metaphysical and the political". And where Chidi Amuta's insistence on situating the critic in a "socio-economic and political context" leads him to assert that the 'apolitical' critic or writer is one "often disoriented by Euro-American higher education, mystified by the captivating myths of Greco-Roman civilization and drunk with the canons of biblical morality" (Ibid., p.17), Gates, quoting Soyinka's figurative witticism, sees the heritage of each black text written in a Western language as a "double heritage, two toned". This leads Gates further to observe that the basic dilemma in this context is a relation which the individual black talent has to resolve while confronting the aspect of Western tradition it argues for or against. If this attempt to 'individualise' the problematic quantum is adroitly endorsed then Soyinka's witty recapitulation bears remarkable emphasis:

*'A o le b'ara ni tan, ka fara wa nitan ya'*. A free translation would read: 'kinship does not insist that because we are entwined, we thereby

rip off each other's thigh. The man who, because of ideological kinship, tries to sever my being from its self-apprehension is not merely culturally but politically hostile'. We could just as well substitute 'critical' for 'ideological'. (Cited in Gates, *Ibid.*, p.4)

However, the attempt at individualization is sterile and Black survival both at home and abroad has been collective rather than individual. If 'one finger brings oil', an African proverb rhetorically asserts, 'it soils the others'. The manifesto of the famous 'Bolekaja' critics, the troika, or Neo-Tarzans as they are variously described, occupies a middle-ground in the criticism of African literature in particular, and Black expression in general. *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* which many had thought would bring back to African and Black expression the much needed decolonizing spirit even if economic independence still remained an illusion was rather short lived. With a dedication page filled with a parade of 'who is who' in African and Black letters, the book portrayed itself and its stated objectives to be concerned not only with the affairs of blacks living in the African homeland alone but also with those of their counterparts in the diaspora. But the major claims of these critics when perceived against the background of their declared intention to serve as "outraged touts for the passenger lorries of African literature", becomes particularly energy-sapping when one cannot find any 'creative' originality in their reading of African culture which also includes a body of literature which they claim to be salvaging from "the reams of pompous nonsense which has been floating out of the stale, sterile, stifling covers of academia and smothering the sprouting vitality of Africa's literary landscape." (Chinweizu, et al., 1980, p.xii) Lacking a clearly discernible or vigorous theoretical framework, they reiterate several times that their basic concern is to develop a synthesis: "one which, above all, emphasises valuable continuities with our pre-colonial cultures, and welcomes inventive genius in making

a healthy and distinguished synthesis from them all." (Op.Cit., p.239) With critics on both sides of the pole that I have briefly surveyed realising that the basic problem of Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike is the tendency to sentimentalize an essentially ideopractical discourse, it becomes easy to show that the findings of the Bolekaja critics disintegrate when subjected to vigorous critical scrutiny. Their outpouring of derision on writers and critics who have not complied with their prescriptive critical model also become irreverent if after two hundred pages of critical antics the critics can come full circle to admit that their 'new aesthetics' welcomes after all, 'contributions from other cultures'. This is a strange departure from the prevailing mood of the book which seems firmly rooted in its belief that African dignity depends solely on an exclusive autonomy from the rest of the world. We were erstwhile informed that the issue at stake "is a matter of rooting out from African literature colonial attitudes, norms, world views, values and technique. It is also a matter of replacing them with others that are conducive to African dignity and autonomy in the world." (Op.Cit., p.145) Such totalizing 'rooting out' presupposes that every person inside what these critics protectively call 'our culture' has the same opinion or the same ideological conviction on every issue.

Stanly Edgar Hyman in his famous 'exchange' with Ralph Ellison on the question of "The Negro writer in America" comes to terms with the issue of culture or folk tradition at least, in regard to the theoretical framework which he proposed to use and one which he deviates from, or perhaps more precisely is trapped in, through his "archetype hunting", which as Ellison observes "leads to a critical game that ignores the specificity of literary works." (Ellison, 1973, p.57) However, it is Hyman's theoretical proposition that "there is a whole spectrum of possible relations



to a folk tradition, ranging from such unpromising connections as simple imitation and fakery, archaism or sentimentalizing, to a number of complicated, ironic, and richly rewarding connections" (Hyman, 1973, p.46), that I find particularly useful as a way of describing the attempt by critics of black literature to come to terms with the cultural factor in black expression. "Simple imitation" abounds and so does archaism and sentimentalizing, and it is only sparingly that we get a glimpse of complicated, ironic and richly rewarding connections. The Bolekaja critics typify the sentimentalizing orientation and before I analyze the practitioners of the other domains, it is important to introduce another theoretical framework into the discussion. Kwasi Wiredu's articulation in *Philosophy and an African Culture* alerts us to the crucial role awaiting any cultural or mythological theorist who strives to avoid inertia, stagnation and utopian declarations in his/her use of any myth with practical implications for critical theory. For:

as the impact of science becomes more and more felt in various areas of life, the need becomes felt among elements of the educated population of a traditional society for a new philosophy, a philosophy new not in basic intent but in the manner of its pursuit. Philosophy becomes more self-conscious because more individualized, more urgent because now more of a personal responsibility, more ramifying because now based on a more sophisticated background of knowledge, and more universalist because now sensitive not only to the ideas of one's society but also to ideas and systems from other cultures. (Kwasi Wiredu, 1980, p.144).

The pages of *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn, 1986) are filled with exchanges between four critics of black literature that lend a critical guide to my discussion of the 'self-conscious' philosophy which Wiredu proposes for "elements of the educated population of a traditional society". In four separate responses Houston Baker Jr., Harold Fromm, Mary Louise Pratt and Henry Louis Gates Jr., all grapple with the issues of "Race", Writing and Difference in a debate apparently triggered off by a

previous issue of the journal. The edition to which the critics were reacting carried fourteen articles, each discussing issues contemporaneous and classical around the enigmatic words "Race, Writing and Difference". A foreword written by Gates explains why in that issue, probably the most enigmatic of the three words "Race" is put in brackets. Gates provides another insight into what informed the decision to bracket race in his article in the autumn edition entitled "Talking That Talk":

The editors of *Critical Inquiry* and I decided to bracket the word "race" in our title after much discussion and debate, and only after an extended correspondence with Tzvetan Todorov. We decided to do so to underscore the fact that "race" is a metaphor for something and not an essence or a thing in itself, apart from its creation by an act of language. (Gates, 1986, p.203)

In a separate but related debate in the same issue of *Critical Inquiry*, Jacques Derrida warns about the danger of separating a word and its history: "A watchword is not just a name...A watchword is also a concept and a reality. The relation among the reality, the concept, and the word is always more complex than you seem to suppose." (Derrida, 1986, p.163)

Thus, the position that one assumes concerning the word 'race' will depend to a large extent on whether one is acting as a 'Debunker' or a 'Rationalist', to use Houston Baker's terms in encapsulating the phenomenon. Race, as a language-bound concept, far from being isolated is also likely to lead the critical mind to the concept's twin-elements such as "Otherness and Difference". For it is in an atmosphere of difference that a body of myth emerged, drawing inspiration from science, philosophy and literature to create the "Other". Its literary manifesto is vivid in the primordial contact between Shakespeare's Caliban and Prospero among others. Its scientific ethos is equally present in racialist genetic theories, while its philosophical antecedents are capable of producing numbing declarations about peoples of other races. For, as

Gates observes, Immanuel Kant never stopped "being a racist" or "stopped thinking that there existed a natural, predetermined relation between 'stupidity' and 'blackness' (his terms) just because he wrote *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*." (Ibid., p.209) Hegel also had few doubts in his mind that he was enriching the study of opposites while postulating the thesis that the world in which we exist is a tripartite world. The primary part of this world is Africa which in Hegelian thought corresponds "to compact metal or the lunar principle, and is stunned by the heat. Its humanity is sunk in torpor, it is the dull spirit which does not enter into consciousness." (*Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, 1970, p.24) The middle ground in this one world manifested (in philosophical terms) as three, is Asia which exists without form and is therefore "unable to master its centre". (Op.Cit., p.24) The third part is of course, Europe "which constitutes the rational region of the Earth's consciousness, and forms an equilibrium of rivers..." Thus:

Among us (Europeans) instinct deters from it, if we can speak of instinct at all as appertaining to man. But with the Negro this is not the case, and the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principle of the African race; to the sensual Negro, human flesh is but an object of sense...mere flesh. At the death of a king hundreds are killed and eaten, prisoners are butchered and their flesh sold in the markets; the victor is accustomed to eat the heart of his slain foe. (Op.Cit., p.24)

To the extent that Houston Baker saw the powerful presence of these racist theories, he is justly piqued by an attempt to bracket race and observes in Gates' acquiescence a descent from the radical path of a debunker to a rationalist. As Baker further observes "Commentators and scholars who are currently addressing issues of Otherness, difference, race in sophisticated, and expressive cultural modes of analysis in the academy" (Baker, 1986, p.184), can only confuse words and their history or make poor distinctions between them. As Derrida also warns "a 'watchword' is not

limited to a lexicon." (Derrida, 1986, p.163) Discussing apartheid as the highest stage of racism, Derrida warns of the sheer wistful thinking informing a desire to obliterate a word while keeping the benefit that accrues from the concept and the reality of the same word; a convenient arrangement to have one's cake and eat it:

The South Africans in power wanted to keep the concept and the reality while effacing the word, an evil word, *their* word. They have managed to do so in *their* official discourse, that's all. Everywhere else in the world, and first of all among black South Africans, people have continued to think that the word was indissolubly - and legitimately - welded to the concept and to the reality. And if you're going to struggle against this *historical* concept and this *historical* reality, well, then you've got to call a thing by its name. (Ibid., p.163, original italics)

The task becomes rather urgent for the 'educated elements of the traditional society' willing to struggle against any historical concept and any historical reality to develop a new philosophy.

A significant aspect of this new philosophy is the 'Vernacular' theory of literature which Gates has inaugurated in his book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), and one which this thesis extends through the concept of transgression and its allied components, especially the carnivalesque essence. In the article entitled "Talkin That Talk" Gates defines his theory as a:

vernacular theory of the Other...as I state it to be, as an example of where...I found it necessary and fruitful to turn to escape the neocolonialism of "egalitarian criticism" of Todorov and company, whose claims to "the universal" somehow always end up lopping off our arms, legs, and pug noses, muffling the peculiar timbres of our voices, and trying to straighten our always already kinky hair, and not the essays that comprise the text of "Race", Writing and Difference. (Gates, Op.Cit.,p.207-208)

The logical question follows therefore and relates to how a vernacular theory of 'the Other' can significantly grapple or at least, cope with a world in which, as Wiredu

testifies, the 'impact of science becomes more felt in various areas of life'.

In an article published in *Presence Africaine* in 1984, entitled "Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-a-vis African Revolutionary Theory and Praxis", Ayi Kwei Armah divides philosophical theories into four broad categories. These are manichaeism, linear philosophies of history, dialectical philosophies and cyclical philosophies. Manichaeism is rejected for its inconclusive attitude and its ever-present desire 'to divide reality into two polar exclusive opposites'. Manichaean theory does not seek to understand the need for a healthy coexistence between the poles it constructs but strives to destroy one pole in order to reinforce the domination of the total field by the victorious sector which is no longer just a pole. Armah cites the South African system of apartheid as a perfect example of manichaean thinking programmed into reality. Similarly, linear philosophies of history "assume that in general, history proceeds along a straight line viewed either as uninterrupted line or as a series of stages". (Armah, 1984, p.37) The main difference between manichaeism and dialectical philosophies, Armah further submits, is 'sophistication'. Having realised that manichaean philosophers like their dialectical counterparts 'resolve significant factors used in the interpretation of reality into two', Armah can see why a careless dialectician can easily slip into manichaean conceptual traps and he offers Karl Marx as an example. Derek Wright summarises Armah's argument in this long article as concerned with rescuing "the universal occurrences of revolution and communism, and of systematic thinking about them, from those Marxist monopolies which have recently become a significant variant on Western intellectual proprietorship in African ideological circles." (Derek Wright, 1989, p.268)

Cyclical philosophies on the other hand, are defined by Armah as generally

taking into account 'multiple significant factors in a situation, not just two':

The arrangement of these multiple factors follows a circular or even a spherical continuum. As a result, in principle all points are significant, for the same reason that any point on a seamless ball may be seen as the centre of that ball's surface. So it is the observer's purpose which determines which points in a cyclical schema are of practical significance at any given time. Cyclical philosophies *do not exclude dialectical philosophies* any more than the cycle of day-night, night-day excludes dawn and dusk, noon and midnight; *cyclical philosophies embrace dialectical philosophies* and include them as small but spectacularly kinetic parts of a larger, wiser whole. (Op.Cit., p.37, my emphasis)

Thus for the immediate benefit of the 'exclusive dialectician', most especially one with a keen eye for black literature, there is an urgent need for him/her to extend dialectical schema into other areas considered erstwhile to be 'outside' his/her area of practice. As the theoretical foundations of orthodox Marxism continue to encounter more complicated problematics under imperialism and the ever-present complications of nuclear threat, psychoanalysis or feminism, historical materialism according to Ronald Aronson, remains the only "Answer to Marxism's crisis". This reveals Marxism in its orthodox form as a system or philosophy pale and needing extra-Marxist distillations to cope with developments even in the Western world otherwise known as the theory's primary area of influence. Marxism's *givenness* and the tautological watchwords of *dialectical progress* have been caught in a web of intrigues or what Aronson further refers to as 'defence policies' which has united all classes in a global movement that reinforces the hegemonic struggle among nation states at the expense of global harmony. In the words of Aronson, "has not an ethnic-racial subproletariat in each capitalist society everywhere helped to fragment and redirect class unity into the twentieth century's deepest scourges, racism and nationalism?" (Aronson, 1985, p.85) It is the trail of the same discourse that Armah elaborates

when he asserts that "Marx misread the psychology of the Western industrial proletariat just as seriously as he undervalued the importance of cultural, non-material factors in the shaping of history." (Op.Cit., p.43)

Since I shall return to most of these issues in the third section of this chapter entitled "Mythology, Semiology and Ideology", the matter can rest for now. The way forward however, is to lay primary principles for a critical understanding of my discussion in the next section entitled "Patterns of Figuration in African and Black texts: The Context of their Social History." Part and parcel of this principle is a recognition of the fact that "all points are significant" while certain points "are of practical significance" in black literature and this view is in line with the cyclical imagination that informs the basic thrust of this thesis. It is also for this reason that a cyclical theorist will not hasten to make or endorse the types of categorical assertions that fill the pages of Chidi Amuta's *The Theory of African Literature*. For Amuta, "cultural nationalism, because it is predicated on a negation of racially inflicted insults and psychological injuries, has political significance mainly at a racial or at best a continental level." (Amuta, 1989, p.91) This is another example of the attempt to undervalue the importance of cultural, non-material factors in the shaping of history robed in a universalist garb as it results from the Marxist ethos. Armah understands this undervaluing technique when he asserts that "the root of the problem is that peasants as a class and peasant-based civilizations in their generality, have world-views distinctly different from those of industrially-based civilizations." (Op.Cit., p.44)

Quoting Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral has also become a convenient argument among Marxist critics of African and Black literature as examples of two

philosophers who understand the value of dialectical thinking and therefore denigrate cultural assertions. Fanon, for example, understood the exploitative trap in which both French men and Algerian peasants/revolutionaries were caught while fanatically hacking each other in the service of imperialism, during the Algerian revolution. In Fanon's study of "Colonial Wars and Mental Disorder", it is impossible for the careful reader not to see the balance in the psychiatrist's attitude towards victims on both sides of the war. Fanon's 'universal' understanding of the Negro problem is like Claude Mckay's, the West Indian born writer who added glamour and sensitive creative understanding to the Negro problem during the Harlem renaissance. But out of this universalism, a particularity or an identity in difference to which both the poet/novelist and the psychiatrist/revolutionary devoted their lives is equally vivid and clear. The concluding couplet in Mckay's sonnet "In Bondage" summarizes the basic attitude of the creative writer and the philosopher:

But I am bound with you in your mean graves,  
O black men, simple slaves of ruthless slaves.  
(Claude Mckay, 1953, p.39)

Fanon also emphasises the dangers inherent in inertia and stagnation in the native's understanding and use of culture, but that he advocates denigration of cultural self-definition, is a claim that the pages of *The Wretched of the Earth* for example, will not support. The kind of cultural assertion that without doubt, leads to stagnation and inertia is described by Fanon as "the historical necessity in which the men of African culture find themselves to racialize their claim and *to speak more* of African culture than of national culture will tend to lead them up a blind alley." (Cited in Amuta, Op.Cit., p.91, my emphasis) The point of emphasis on 'to speak more' is also to make it clear that a simple semantic understanding of the phrase does not connote 'not



to speak at all'. To be sure, what Fanon says also includes the following:

on another level, the oral tradition - stories, epics and songs of the people - which formerly were filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. The story-tellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons. The method of allusion is more and more widely used. (Fanon, 1983, p.193)

When used in this sense, Fanon concludes, the tradition of the people will take on 'cultural values' once again. When folk tradition was used for these revolutionary ends in the Algerian example, Fanon further notes, "colonialism made no mistake when from 1955 on it proceeded to arrest these storytellers systematically." (Op.Cit., p. 194) The foregoing also supports Armah's observation that the way to a true decolonization of African societies is a 're-Africanisation' of the continent. Armah's observation draws inspiration from Fanon's conclusion in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "if we want to turn Africa into a new Europe...then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us." (Op.Cit., p.254) Like Fanon, Armah sees the greatest obstacle towards this decolonization process as the Western educated African elite. From cultural manifestations to material consumption of physically perishable goods, these elites are basically high-brow in taste. Contemptuous of anything which is not Western oriented from religion to politics, the elites seek an easy way out of the basic dilemma which confronts their under-developed societies. 'Plain mental laziness', is another factor that Armah identifies as the distinguishing characteristic "made famous by Fanon's critique of the Western educated non-Western elite." Preferring imitation to innovation, the elite can be likened to "the young Christian, who used to hate African religions as superstitious antitheses to his civilized Eurocentric religion, (until s/he)

becomes an adult Marxist who still hates African world views and calls them mysticism and unscientific antitheses to his/her new-found Marxism." (Armah, Op.Cit., p.59) Finally, there is the 'primitive civilized mind-trap' which works against re-Africanisation in two ways:

First there is the ideological conviction, nurtured in ignorance, that African values are inferior to Western values. Secondly, Africans are materially poor compared to Westerners. Now, whatever else a Western education may or may not teach, it does not teach habits of solidarity with the poor. In plain words, the Western educational experience is tacitly structured to make the elite African incapable of democratic co-operation in any undertaking involving poor people. The former is trained to be a boss or a so-called leader - he makes a lousy comrade and one of the reasons is that he also sees poverty as primitive. (Armah., Op.Cit.,p.62)

But a sympathetic understanding of African culture and tradition does not support the claims of this ideological conviction, presented as it sometimes is with contemporary flavour. Pretending to understand the complexities of modern civilization, these elites proffer the untenable argument or the belief that if 'unscientific thoughts' are used to overcome the expansionist yearnings of science in the service of imperialism, then such thought systems can only be primitive, unprogressive and backward. 'Trained to be a boss', the undialectical critic and his/her exclusively dialectical counterpart approach culture from a position of superiority. Soyinka understands this point very well while discussing the colonial mentality of Ajayi Crowder, West Africa's first black bishop, and "the new black ideologues who are embarrassed by statements of self-apprehension for the new 'ideologically backward' African. Both suffer from externally induced fantasies of redemptive transformation in the image of alien masters." (Soyinka, 1976, p.xii) 'Ideopractical' discourse of African mythology, as I will try to demonstrate in the third section of this chapter, approaches mythology as "a part of both semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, and of ideology

inasmuch as it is an historical science: it studies ideas-in-form." (Barthes, 1976, p.112)

Thus, a vernacular theory of literature, when it is ideopractical, serves two important roles in its understanding of human history. First, it 'calls a thing by its name' as Derrida urges in his discussion of apartheid. In an African and diasporic sense, the phenomenon can be further illustrated in the following way: transgression of spatial boundaries which Esu champions both at home and abroad for example, testifies to the fact that a certain moment was reached in history when egalitarian principles were abandoned and feudal ascendancy and the supremacy of individual interest rather than the collective whole reigned, else why are there boundaries to transgress? The same boundary tramping analogy can be extended into a discussion of the famous concepts of the house slave and his/her field counterpart during slavery and after. A simple picture painted in Alan Dundes's *Mother Wits from the Laughing Barrel* delineates the approach of the two categories of Negro/slave to the slave owner or master, and consequently their determination to shake off the burden of oppression: 'when master is sick, the house Negro says "we are sick", while his/her field counterpart prays fervently that master should die'.

Secondly, a vernacular theory is people-oriented and by this I mean the ordinary people who form the vast majority of the population in any traditional society. These are the 'People' whose cause the character Styles in Athol Fugard's, Winston Ntshona's and John Kani's play *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* champions and refers to as 'the people who the writers of the big history books forgot to mention'. Their carnival pageants are transformed in vernacular theories into socio-cultural traits that confront the mythic imagination of the 'high' and its official status. Also the erstwhile

monopoly of an occluded discourse by the 'high' becomes dialogized as the rhetorical strategy of the 'low' signals the process of symbolic revision. Finally, when the grotesque 'bodies forth' the cosmos, the social formation and language itself, anarchy reigns but only for a moment as the power of such revision gives a character like Caliban the ability to assert that:

You taught me language: and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!  
(Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, (Act 1, sc.2, 11)

This development inaugurates the 'birth' of the transgressive text. Figuration and patterns of figuration otherwise made to look like the exclusive creation and property of the 'high' are symbolically revised and the 'low' now achieves the status of true masters of figurative language. The transgressive text also becomes tropological, to use Gates' term, revising canonical tropes of the 'high' and signifying on them. Canonical texts from the literary archives of the 'high' are plundered as Ismael Reed testifies of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Sacred words of orthodox high discourse are distilled into seemingly profane discourse as Chinua Achebe does in *Things Fall Apart*, revising the received image of blacks as simianlike, docile and subservient embodied in texts like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* among others. Finally, this language-bound discourse can only be put in correct perspective when we understand its 'two-toned' nature. Derek Walcott encapsulates the profound dilemma facing black writers in this regard, in his poem "A Far Cry from Africa", the conclusion of which has been widely quoted as a perfect illustration of the whole question of 'who, what, am I':

Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?  
(Derek Walcott, 1962, p.18)

As aesthetic consideration leads these transgressive texts to examine within a cyclical framework the socio-cultural dilemma plaguing them, the dialectics of material factors that have pruned or dictated survival strategies also find their way into the texts. The die is cast at this point and we begin to encounter issues such as class allegiance, the partisan or committed nature of the writer's art and issues of similar concern. A true realisation of what the previous chapter has described as 'two highs' and 'two lows' also becomes manifest at this point and it is the stage when cyclical views must reiterate the belief that although all points are significant, certain points are of practical significance.

It is within this framework that I should like to examine patterns of figuration in African and Black texts. A last image from Afro-American profane discourse can be further used to illustrate the source of the creative energy from which transgressive black texts draw inspiration and the resultant power of their grotesque realism. If 'Esu's functional equivalent in Afro-American profane discourse is the Signifying Monkey', then "Tar Baby is as enigmatic and compelling a figure from Afro-American mythic discourse as is that oxymoron, the Signifying Monkey." (Gates, Op.Cit., pp.286-7)

In her book *Black Feminist Criticism*, Barbara Christian observes Toni Morrison's adaptation of the enigmatic figure of 'Tar Baby' in her fourth novel of that title to tell "a story that very simply embodies the continuing dilemma of Afro-Americans" from a feminist perspective. (Barbara Christian, 1985, p.66) Enigmatic

and compelling, *Tar Baby* is still as vivid as it was on the sugar plantations of the New World and provides an historical and contemporary conceptual framework through which a modern writer like Toni Morrison can examine issues such as class, racism and sexism, systems described by Christian as "societal and psychological...that have critically affected the lives of Afro-American women." (Op.Cit., p.71) But for a cyclical vision of a 'universal' black world view, *Tar Baby* like *Esu* has functioned in Black expression from the perspective of the following representational approach articulated by Ralph Ellison:

Let *Tar Baby*, that enigmatic figure from Negro folklore, stand for the world. He leans, black and gleaming, against the wall of life utterly noncommittal under our scrutiny, our questioning, starkly unmoving before our naive attempts at intimidation. Then we touch him playfully and before we say *Sonny Liston!* we find ourselves struck. Our playful investigation becomes a labor, a fearful struggle, an agon. Slowly we perceive that our task is to learn the proper way of freeing ourselves to develop, in other words, technique. (Ralph Ellison, 1964, p.147)

Integral parts of the 'technique' which black texts have had to develop over the past five decades include the language, concept and form of subversion. Ability to interpret critically and subvert all the mythical postulations of the 'master's tropes' have been apprehended and signified upon to suit the 'varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing', with whose complexities European theories could not adequately deal. The reason for this failure or the inadequacy of European theory in this regard is, as Bill Ashcroft et al. testify, due to the fact that "European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of 'the Universal'." (Bill Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.11) Like *Tar Baby*, this body of texts still leans, 'black and gleaming against the wall of life' open to myriads of interpretations and it is the basic contention of this study that a literary theory that will adequately account for their complexity cannot afford to be Manichaeian, linear or exclusively

dialectical. The ever-growing complexity of these texts in different parts of the world testifies to their willingness to be read within a cyclical framework. Whether responding from the perspective of the apocalyptic vision of James Baldwin in the racially segregated America of *The Fire Next Time*, or the radical views of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, recording neocolonial oppression and betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the masses in East Africa in texts like *Petals of Blood* and many others, or the complex issue of creolization which many West Indian writers have grappled with and one which Edgar Mittelholzer explores in its varied diversity in *Corentyne Thunder*; all possess a definable instinct, which is to contribute to a better humanity. But out of this universalism also emerges what I have earlier described as an identity in difference. Historically, the other issues that they examine include the creative articulation of a Haitian poet, Massillon Coicou, who wrote the following lines in the early 1960s, "Why then am I a Negro? Oh! Why am I black?" and the 1950 outburst of an Ivorian poet and novelist, Bernard Dadie, "Thank you, Lord, for having made me black." (Cited in Mercer Cook, 1969, p.12)

Thus for the immediate purpose of my reading of patterns of figuration in a selection of black texts in the next section, both the synchronic and diachronic approaches are used to account for the basic synchronic linguistic and other elements that inform the existence of these texts within particular period(s) and consequently their evolution also within a diachronic linguistic framework.

### 3.2 Patterns of Figuration in African and Black Texts: The Context of their Social History

How 'black' is figuration? Given the obvious political intent of so much of our literary tradition, is it not somewhat wistful to be concerned with the intricacies of the figure? The Afro-American tradition has been figurative from its beginning. How could it have survived otherwise? Black people have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something quite other has been basic to black survival in oppressive Western cultures.

(Henry Louis Gates, Jr)

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities. Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetrated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice.

(Bill Ashcroft, et al.)

In an article published in *The New York Times* in 1968, Charles Larson testifies to the fact that "since 1950 there have been nearly 400 volumes of poetry, prose and drama published by writers from tropical Africa." (Cited in Mercer Cook, *Op.Cit.*, p.17) This figure excludes writings of similar concern by writers throughout the black diaspora and, of course, says nothing about what these writers and their successors have been engaged in since 1968. The whole point of the reference however, is to awaken the reader to the fact that the sheer quantitative presence of black writing in our modern world defies what any critic can adequately account for in a single study. Thus, I have limited my investigations to the context of the social history of these texts, a context that links the evolution of the texts to their contact with Western cultures and why the whole question of history should constitute for these writers and their people, in the words of Stephen Dedalus, 'a nightmare from which I am trying to wake'. To limit further the task of this cursory exploration, I



have also rather arbitrarily divided the phenomenon of black writing into what I would like to describe as "old perspectives" and what Abdul JanMohammed describes as "the generation of realism".<sup>1</sup>

By old perspectives, I am speaking intrinsically of contradictory notions bound up in one era, mainly those of cultural self-assertion with occasional slips into the notion of cultural death-wish, when black was simply not beautiful, when, to use the words of Stephen Henderson, devilish thoughts and devilish acts were synonymous with blackness. The two notions can be said to run into one another and acted, so to speak, as catalyst for an explosive encounter between holders of either of the two self-contradictory positions. To conceptualise further this inherent contradiction, Stephen Henderson observes that if this is the era when "the devil is black, sin is black, death is black, Cain is black, Grendel is black, Othello is black, Ergo Othello is the devil. The black man is the devil. The devil is the black man!", it is also the era when black writers knew that "to assert blackness...is to be 'militant', to be subversive, to be revolutionary." (Henderson, 1969, pp. 65 & 88)

This whole period, when blacks in the diaspora were rebelling against the idea of their forefathers being set free from the physical bondage of slavery, only to be simultaneously re-enslaved through their socio-political and economic powerlessness,

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul JanMohammed's articulation of this phase in the evolution of Black literature is characterised by what he describes as 'the generation of realism'. This is the phase that is informed by what Mohammed calls 'a general understanding of the intellectual's predicament under colonialism'. This understanding functions within the framework of a basic paradox which Mohammed describes further as the difficult choice which the writer has to make between his own culture, negated by the autocratic rule of the colonial government or acceptance of Western culture, which leaves the writer engulfed in a form of historical catalepsy. For detail see, Abdul R. JanMohammed, (1983) *Manichaeon Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Neo-Colonial Africa*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

also coincides with the period when their brothers in the homeland, having just returned from the second world war, were living through the eye-opening effects which their experience produced. A merger of the two seemingly disparate events gave birth to the first set of iconoclastic black texts in poetry, drama and prose, most of which were indistinguishable from political pamphleteering. That the militancy of these black precursors has been undermined during the second era in 'a search for realism' is merely a matter of history and one that demands a sympathetic understanding from a cyclical theorist.

The folk myth of 'Soul', often described as the 'American counterpart of the African Negritude,' encapsulates the literary manifestation of the old perspective, on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus 'Soul and Negritude' inaugurate or proclaim the arrival of black expression in the domain of figurative language. Both explore the inner recesses of black mythic sensibility to assert their authentic black identity. If Soul, in the words of Lerone Bennett, "is a metaphorical evocation of Negro being as expressed in the Negro tradition" (Cited in Henderson, p.115), Negritude distends its discourse, giving it the full authority of an historical understanding that looks back to the period of the historic contact between Europe and Africa. In the poem "Chaka" by Leopold Sedar Senghor, this historical understanding speaks the language of betrayal by an alien race welcomed by an unsuspecting, all trusting native:

I did not hate the Pink Ears. We welcomed them as  
messengers of the gods  
With pleasant words and delicious drinks.  
They wanted merchandise. We gave them everything:  
ivory, honey, rainbow pelts  
Spices and gold, precious stones, parrots and monkeys.  
Shall I speak of their rusty presents, their tawdry  
beads?  
Yes, in coming to know their guns, I became a wind.  
Suffering became my lot, suffering of the breast and of

the spirit. (Senghor, *Selected Poems*, p.72)

If the imagery and symbolism of this poem situates us in the domain of figurative language, the true manifestation of what Henry Louis Gates refers to in the first epigraph to this section, as black people having always been masters of the figurative, 'saying one thing to mean another', is expressed in the following poem entitled "Once Upon a Time," by Gabriel Okara. Although not a professed negritudist, Okara's works, at least the early ones, belong to the mainstream of the old perspective and he speaks in this particular poem of the social and political subterfuge that characterised the 'cat and mouse' relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Like Ralph Ellison's hero's grandfather in *Invisible Man*, the persona in Okara's poem has learnt and perfected how to 'overcome and undermine them with yeses', as s/he speaks calmly to his/her son or successor, who will soon be bedeviled with 'a search for realism':

So I have learned many things, son,  
I have learned to wear many faces  
like dresses - homeface,  
officeface, streetface, hostface, cock-  
tailface, with all their conforming smiles  
like a fixed portrait smile

And I have learned too  
to laugh with only my teeth  
and shake hands without my heart.  
I have also learned to say, "Goodbye,"  
when I mean "Goodriddance":  
To say "Glad to meet you"  
without being glad; and to say "it's been  
nice talking to you," after being bored.

But believe me, son  
I want to be what I used to be  
when I was like you. I want  
to unlearn all these muting things.  
Most of all, *I want to relearn*  
*how to laugh*, for my laugh in the mirror

shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!  
(Cited in Cook, Op.Cit., pp.35-36, my emphasis)

But the process of 'relearning how to laugh' is also one the terrains of confrontation between these apostles of the old perspective and their realist successors. By 'realism' I am also trying to describe a neocolonial situation: the referent's argument could be linked with the other issue raised in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* in which the authors claimed to be concerned with mapping out "new foundations for an African modernity." (Op.Cit., p.239)

Thus the old order in postulating its thesis of an authentic 'African way', has dubbed laughter, dance, rhythm and liveliness as intrinsic African qualities which can be introduced as spicy flavour to a 'soulless' technologically oriented civilization created and controlled by Europe and the West. In 'realist' circles this is regarded as an acceptance of one of the most commonplace blasphemies of racism. Postcolonial writers and critics have viewed these precursive labels as a negation of the African/Black creative genius, not only in the fields of art and creative writing but perhaps more importantly, in science, technology and invention. Recognising that the problem of their predecessors is not a failure to diagnose properly the racial issues at stake, the realists have accorded these precursors praises for their diagnosis and rejected their prescription as self-debilitating. 'The vision of Negritude', Soyinka asserts:

should never be underestimated or belittled. What went wrong with it is contained in what I earlier expressed as the contrivance of a creative ideology and its falsified basis of identification with the social vision. The vision itself was that of restitution and re-engineering of a racial psyche, the establishment of a distinct human entity and the glorification of its long-suppressed attributes. (On an even longer-term basis, as universal alliance with the world's dispossessed). (Soyinka, 1976, p.126)

At this point, we are again back to the old question of 'traditional analysis' or what Soyinka further refers to as a concern with 'origins'. Neither Senghor's preference for the term "Civilization of the Universal" nor, the historically belaboured term "Universal Civilization" which according to Mercer Cook, "has historic overtones of white monopoly", (Op.Cit., p.43) reclaims for Negritude and its apostles the simplified solution of 'Universalism' to soothe racial wounds. One of the immediate solutions to the basic dilemma presented by the issue of an abstract universal notion has been Soyinka's advice of 'tactical withdrawal' to recover lost grounds "from the full conception of Negritude", even by "writers who assisted at its origin". (Op.Cit., p.126)

Since the intricacy of the figure which is my basic concern in this section is a language-bound discourse, the full implication of either a tactical withdrawal or an endorsement of the claims of either side can only be truly arrived at after a fruitful engagement with texts of similar concern across the black diaspora. For Bill Ashcroft et al. the question of universalism, abstract or concrete, raises the larger issues of 'place and displacement,' by which it is meant that the degree of identification with cultural traits from a place of origin depends to a significant extent on the degree of 'displacement' from such a place. In the West Indies for example, where an entire population has suffered complete displacement and exile from Africa, India, China, the Middle-East and Europe, the tendency to have a more romantic attachment to the culture of the homeland from which individuals have been uprooted or displaced is infinitely greater. The same analogy suffices for the Afro-American experience and Stephen Henderson makes the point well, after examining the twin concepts of 'kinky hair' and 'straight hair' in aesthetic terms. In the 'Niggerzone of the Dozens and

Blues', Jimmie Rushing's "Mr. Five by Five" raps his woman:

*I did more for you, baby, than the Good Lord ever done.  
I did more for you, ba-a-by, than the Good Lord ever  
done:  
I even bought you some hair when the Good Lord didn't  
give you none.*

The self-hatred that informs the very idea of hiding 'kinky hair' under elaborate collections of wigs conjures for many Afro-American men and women a lot more than just a fashionable indulgence. It is the era of racial death-wish in which to go 'natural' or to leave one's kinky hair unstretched with electric combs, becomes the 'Food of Afro-American Soul'. Women like Abbie Lincoln, Miriam Makeba and Aretha Franklin who championed the cause are referred to as true Soul sisters. It is no accident either that all the imagery responsible for this debasement of the self is bound up with the whole historical discourse of the 'ideal perfect being' and that which is other than the norm, the 'deformed' or 'mutilated self'. The following traditional lyric sung by Wade Newton is another manifestation of its powerful text:

*Go on, black gal, don' try to make me shame'  
Go on, black gal, don' try to make me shame'  
'cause your hair is so short I swear to God I can  
smell your brains.*

It is this entire socio-cultural framework that informs the subversive thrust of much of black writing in the diaspora and its consequent identification with the philosophy of Negritude. Even in recent years, Bill Ashcroft et al. still assert that:

*the philosophy of Negritude has been most influential in its derivative forms in the Afro-American Black consciousness movement. Senghor's influence in America can be traced to prominent Black intellectuals of the 1920s such as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright; the latter, significantly, spent most of the later part of his life in exile in Paris. The Black power movements share many of the characteristics of the theory of Negritude in their assertion of the unique and distinctive features of Black thought and emotion. (Op.Cit., p.22)*

For the West Indian counterpart of the Afro-American with a history of absolute displacement and deracination, creolization and miscegenation are twin elements that they have to exorcise or learn to live with. Because this displacement includes for those of African descent 'the violence of enslavement', a means of escape, as Derek Walcott suggests in his celebrated essay "What the Twilight Says: An Overture", has to be deeply rooted in an imagination imbued with 'tribal rock, of poverty, of rite', which "is not only nostalgia for innocence, but the enactment of remorse for the genocides of civilization." (Derek Walcott, 1972, p.6) Thus, Walcott further advocates the language of subversion, to take absolute control of aspects of the folk culture transgressed as a result of the colonialist's mythic imagination. A simplistic binary opposition is rejected for obvious reasons, because the issues at stake remain infinitely greater than what a romantic identification with a past of innocence and pristine values can adequately cope with. To the colonialist, "the laughing nigger, steelbandsman, carnival masker, calypsonian and limbo dancer" (Op.Cit, p.7) are all permissible iconographic relics from the Negro's storehouse of culture as long as they can be transformed into commercial objects for the entertainment industry. In Walcott's words, they are "accommodating culture, an adjunct to tourism, since the state is impatient with anything which it cannot trade." (Op.Cit., p.7)

For these people of African descent therefore, a recourse to 'Africa's ways' is not so much a return to 'the source' but a search for a conceptual framework that will save the imagination from further heresies. To the man or woman of the New World, the god that will rescue his/her imagination according to Walcott "would have to be an anthropomorphic variety of his/her will". For their one 'true God' has been advertised as dead on the mythological pantheon of the colonialist. A significant part

of this heresy is also that the one God that they used to know has had his altar desecrated and transformed, in anthropological terms, into carvings, poems and costumes and placed on shelves for the attraction of tourists. Walcott's reading of Soyinka's play *The Road* and his patron god, Ogun, lends credence to Walcott's assertion that unlike Professor in the play, Ogun in his state of absolute rigidity, "is not a contemplative but a vengeful force, a power to be purely obeyed." (Op,Cit., pp.8-9) For this reason the deity is rejected because he cannot truly grasp the contemporary situation of the West Indian who exists in self-contradictory terms, as Afro-Christian, for example. What is left for the men and women of the West Indies is 'blasphemy' and the contradiction deepens as they look at life with 'black skins and blue eyes'.

The results of miscegenation and creolization have created, one might say, a divided alliance to two world views, in which the 'mulatto of style' becomes a man or woman committed to writing in the oppressor's language while looking with a keen eye on aspects of his/her ancestral African culture to endow him/her with a cultural framework that will rescue the imagination. At this point Walcott echoes Chinua Achebe's reiteration that "let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it." (Chinua Achebe, 1975, p.7). Like Achebe, Walcott concludes that if the language that results from this fusion of style and content remains or emerges 'contemptible' (one can easily substitute transgression for contempt), 'so also was the people' for whom it was created:

After one had survived the adolescence of prejudice there was nothing to justify. Once the New World black had tried to prove that he was as good as his master, when he should have proven not his equality but his difference. It was this distance that could command attention without pleading for respect. (Op.Cit., p.9)



In positing his thesis of 'difference', Walcott understands that this will ultimately lead to equality and respect and thereby render illogical the postulations of the apostles of 'civilization of the universal' or 'universal civilization' in a very subtle manner. Their poems of lament and novels of propaganda can neither supplant the imagination nor fully 'apologise on behalf of the past'. These apostles of universalism while parading themselves as 'pastoralists of the African revival' ought to know that juggling nomenclature is not what is needed, "not new names for old things or, old names for old things, but the faith of using the old names anew." (Op.Cit., p10) Finally, when 'the mulatto of style' approaches this new usage, it not merely his/her imagination that is supplanted but his/her entire consciousness will be awakened to the reality of his/her existence in ways that echo Marx's famous assertion that 'consciousness is nothing but conscious social existence':

so that mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word Ashanti as with the word Warwickshire, both separately intimating my grandfather's roots, both baptising this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian. The power of the dew still shakes off our dialects, which is what Césaire sings... (Op.Cit., p.10)

Because of its relative importance this thesis devotes the sixth chapter to this pattern of figuration/signification as it is realised in Walcott's play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. The text of the play engages and revises the ploys of universal theory while postulating its thesis of the imaginative restoration of socio-cultural psyche. Illogicality, derivation and contradiction are the basic ingredients that give the play the quality and power of its grotesque realism. Like the 'text of blackness' and the 'mystery of Jes Grew' in Ismael Reed's Afro-American novel, *Mumbo Jumbo*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 'escapes' the romantic candour of the old perspective and avoids the dialectical fixations of realism. Makak's dream is a symbolic confrontation with

the colonialist's mythic imagination just as Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka's famous play *Dutchman* remonstrates against the equally mythic imagination of the black middle class in America, urging them to come to terms with the reality of their existence.

*Dutchman* is in many ways, an act of rhetorical self-definition, a concept bound up with Baraka's basic belief that "the ability to define...is the ability to control. Who defines controls." (Baraka, 1987, p.23) Thus, the entire discourse of the play centres around the actions of Lula, a thirty year old White woman and Clay, a twenty year old Negro, to define one another in socio-cultural and consequently philosophical terms. Symbolically, the entire action of the play takes place in 'the flying underbelly of the city.' In the steaming hot summer weather, the characters are 'underground' in the subway, achieving chthonic essence as "the subway heaped in modern myth." (Baraka, 1971, p.321) Historically, most of these myths have been contested in ideological terms centuries before Clay was born and as their modern equivalent he reinforces Baraka's belief that the deculturalization of the Negro has taken place in "all seven aspects of culture - religion, history, politics, economics, social organization, creativity and ethos." (Op.Cit., p.27) Just as ignorance of who he is and who Lula is rules Clay's life, knowledge of herself and her socio-cultural relationship with Clay is of paramount importance in the character of Lula. She serves a similar purpose as the White Apparition in Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and in this sense both serve as catalyst for what the playwrights believe should lead to a realisation of a 'revolutionary black consciousness'. This notion is grounded in Baraka's assertion that "when we look at our religion, politics, economics and history, it is only on the basis of a consciousness of our revolutionary Black nationalism that we can begin to transform the colonized expression of our lives

into a truly self-determining, self-respecting expression." (Op.Cit., p.23)

Both black and non-black critics have responded to why a 'possessive exclusivity' runs the danger of leading black literature towards what Edward Said describes as "the sense of being an exclusive insider by virtue of experience", (cited in Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.22) and what Houston Baker refers to as an idealistic exercise and one that reduces black expression/aesthetics to simple "conative activities". (Houston Baker Jr, 1980, pp.132-143) Since these views directly call to mind the basic thrust of this thesis, that it is by creating an identity in difference that black literature can achieve a coherent discourse in our modern world, the following discussion of 'indeterminacy' and the theory of 'symbolic revision' should serve to show that a cyclical overview of the major works of the black literary tradition vigorously pursued, is more of ideological contestations and one to which both black and non-black critics can adequately contribute depending on their ideological convictions. The chapter on Baraka's *Dutchman* will further grapple with these issues and structure them into ideopractical discourse(s) on black expression rather than racial essence.

'Indeterminacy', a major trait of "novelistic discourse", is espoused in Bakhtin's study of the 'Epic and Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination* and this forms the major concern of the 'text of blackness' in Ismael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. Ostensibly, black expression arrives at the contemporary and turbulent terrain of postcolonialism through the art of the novel. Having run the whole gamut of what Bakhtin refers to as the pastoral and the romantic novel respectively, the postcolonial black novel incorporates 'extraliterary heteroglossia' and what Bakhtin further refers to as "the 'novelistic' layers of literary language" to achieve a dialogic imagination. (Bakhtin,

1986, p.6) Similarly, what Gates refers to as a relationship of 'signifying', and one that leads him to conclude that 'Afro-American literary history is characterized by tertiary formal revision' or a process through which authors revise and signify upon at least, two antecedent texts, is also true of both the African and West Indian axis of black literature. The following examples suffice to illustrate the point further.

It is not an accident that Chinua Achebe refers to Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as a 'sick book'. (Achebe, Op.Cit., pp.25-28) Himself having reacted to works like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, perceiving them as figments of the colonialist's imagination, Achebe's realist or liberal humanist perspective stops short of a thorough cyclical critique of the African situation as a result of the romantic self preservative reflection that informed this phase of the African experience. The same theory of 'tertiary formal revision' holds sway for the canon at this stage, as exemplified in Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King*, or Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* among others, and the many sources which they revised. These 'outward' rather than 'inward' looking reflections on the African experience are further signified upon by Armah, by asking the following set of questions in his first novel, *The Beautiful Ones*:

And yet these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of Chiefs who have sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruit of the trade.

He could have asked if anything was supposed to have changed after all, from the days of Chiefs selling their people for the trinkets of Europe. (Armah, 1969, pp.131 & 141)

In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah also rejects in historical terms a simple binary opposition as a way of encapsulating the contemporary African dilemma, because in

times past:

among us ostentatious cripples turned the honoured position of caretaker into plumage for their infirm selves. (Armah, 1979, p.99)

Taken together therefore, what have come to be recognised as 'Armah's histories' in his five novels and occasional polemics serve first and foremost as acts of rhetorical self-definition. Secondly, they culminate in what Lemuel Johnson refers to in his article "The Middle-Passage in African Literature" as a critique of "the ritual mutilation to break the Ogbanje cycle in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (and) can thus be conceptually related to that search for release from stubborn continuity which quickens the consciousness in *Two Thousand Seasons*." (Lemuel Johnson, 1980, p.76)

This pattern of figuration constitutes what Bakhtin refers to in theoretical terms as the essence of the novel to:

become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally - this is the most important thing the novel inserts into these other genres - an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)...all these phenomena are explained by the transposition of other genres into this new and peculiar zone for structuring artistic model (a zone of contact with the present in all its openendedness), a zone that was first appropriated by the novel. (Op.Cit., p.7)

This pattern of figuration and formal revision will be the object of critical focus in the next chapter of this study entitled "Ayi Kwei Armah and the Origins of the African Diaspora".

In a diasporic sense, the postcolonial 'text of blackness' achieves prodigious realisation in *Tent of Miracles* by the Brazilian author, Jorge Amado. The three hundred and eighty pages of the novel are devoted to and centre around the carnivalesque figure of the great mulatto of style, Master Pedro Archanjo, author of among other works, *Notes on Miscegenation in the Families of Bahia*, proclaiming

to the world that "if Brazil has contributed anything truly significant to world civilization, it is miscegenation - that is our gift to humanity's treasure house." (Amado, 1989, p.131) The many sources which this novel revises, plunders and signifies upon are diversely contemporaneous and classical, and just as irony, laughter, humour and self-parody ruled the life of its principal character, the entire African mythological pantheon ranging from Yoruba gods to Akan, Ewe and Ashanti legendary figures are called upon to contribute to the text's indeterminacy or openendedness. Grammatical jocosa, punning and ritual spectacles cohabit exuberantly with all the various strands of methods of appropriation and control of the discourse of 'the low' which the 'high order' unrepentantly adopts in this novel. Unwittingly, it is the entire corpus of scatological texts developed by the 'high' in empirically unverifiable discourses such as those professed by Dr. Nillo Argolo, the head of the department of Forensic Medicine at the University and his precursors in studies like "The Psychic and Mental degeneracy of Half-Breeds" and many others, that are revised and signified upon in Lidio Corro's (Archanjo's close friend and associate) "Tent of Miracles" 'where all things are possible' and where all the grotesque, the mutilated and the few (blacks, whites, and mulattoes) with unpolluted consciousness gather to celebrate life with the limited resources left them by that greedy class of people that parade themselves as their masters. In the province of the poor Exu (Esu or Eshu), 'lord of the roads and crossroads, the idler, lord of change and movement, the daredevil who loves a joke', asserts a powerful presence.

Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles* and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* are two well written novels exploring aspects of African mythology from diametrically opposed socio-cultural and, perhaps, ideological viewpoints. In *The Interpreters*, the

basic concern is the restoration of the individual's socio-cultural psyche as this becomes threatened by neocolonial contradictions. *Tent of Miracles* on the other hand explores the same theme from the perspective of an organic society in which individuals are not of primary importance, and where they are, they are often made to represent poles of opinions in the society, hence they cease to be individual but essences. Two vivid examples are Master Pedro Archanjo and Dr. Nillo Argolo. It is also in these texts that the basic 'views of the world' which the two African deities, Ogun and Esu, represent become truly realisable in creative terms.

The composite heroes of *The Interpreters*, Egbo, Bandele, Sagoe, Kola, and Sekoni and their female counterparts Dehinwa and Simi are all young Nigerians, educated and contesting the 'leadership' of their neocolonial society with rapacious forces seeking to muffle their individual voices. Fulfilment and fear of fulfilment are two paradoxical phenomena propelling these heroes and heroines into action or inaction. Critical commentaries on this novel often present the 'heroes' variously, as Soyinka's artistic realisation of psycho-passive intellectuals (Egbo, Sagoe, and Kola) on the one hand, and their socio-active counterparts (Sekoni and Bandele), on the other.

In a recent article entitled "Ogun as Touchstone in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*", Kathleen Morrison classifies the psycho-passive ones as "superior young men (who) are not so different from the frequenters of the university social affairs as they like to believe. Society will not be revitalized by the self-indulgent lives of this trio." (Kathleen Morrison, 1989, p.62) 'The exertion of the Ogun will', 'resorption within universal oneness' 'and defiance of authority' are some of the terms with which Morrison describes the character of Sekoni. (Op.Cit., p.67) These

views about Sekoni, who without doubt is the most perceptive among 'the Interpreters', are often adroitly endorsed with the persuasion that Sekoni's visionary construct or what he calls "the dome of continuity" (Soyinka, 1978, p.9), predicated as we are later informed in the novel 'heavily with hope and history,' frees him from the idealistic fixations of his colleagues. In my view, Sekoni's visionary construct is a notion that may contribute to the indeterminacy or openendedness of *The Interpreters* but nevertheless remains an individual's musing about history and historical realities in which no other person but Sekoni participates. It is also a tribute to Soyinka's 'realist' perception that Sekoni and his construct fizzles out very early in the novel. The apparent conclusion of the novel is embodied in Bandele's character as he personifies "the justice for which Ogun stands...which is transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative". (Op.Cit., p.69) By situating Bandele in this context, Soyinka makes it clear that it is not Bandele's character that is of infinite importance any more but the true essence of the god which he personifies. In this regard, the deity's ability to account for or resolve the basic dilemma with which these mortals struggle can be seriously questioned. Also this view of Ogun's rigid but restorative justice recalls Walcott's observation about the deity being inadequate in resolving contemporary issues such as miscegenation and racism facing a 'universal black world' in a postcolonial context. In contradistinction to this philosophical fixation on Ogun as 'touchstone' and the indisputable presence of an essentially 'high' discourse in *The Interpreters* is Jorge Amado's creative dimension to the whole idea of adopting mythological figures for creative and critical purposes to suit both a historical and contemporary framework.

In *Tent of Miracles* the primary focus is a celebration of the power of 'the



low' in an unabashedly carnivalesque, transgressive and grotesque propensity. The mulatto of style, Master Archanjo, signals the process of symbolic revision in his own person and consequently in the context of providing an abiding philosophical framework for all elements, educated and illiterates in his traditional society ridden with racial contradictions and ideopractical musings by both the 'high' and the 'low'. What is needed and what emerges is not 'rigid restoration' of an individual or collective socio-cultural psyche but a flexible and reflexive framework in which all and sundry, mortals and immortals, must contribute to stem the tide of what Walcott refers to as the 'genocides of civilization'. Thus:

Some said that Archanjo was Ogun's child and many thought he was a son of Xango, in whose house he held a lofty place and title. But when the shells were cast and his fortunes told, the first to answer was always Exu the idler, lord of change and movement. Xango came for his King's Eyes, and Ogun was never far away; Yemaya came too. But in the forefront was the formidable laughing Exu, the daredevil who loved a joke. No doubt about it, Archanjo was his man. (p.87)

Examined in this way, the exegesis of these patterns of figuration depends to a very large extent on whether one is looking at myth in terms of its various manifestations, as 'depoliticized speech' for example. As 'depoliticized speech' Roland Barthes observes that "semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal." (Barthes, 1976, p.142) Thus the various strands of mythical significations reinforce the formal applications of myth in ways that signal 'the ideological inversion which defines society'. What the 'world' and, in this case, the 'black world' supplies to myth is an historical reality. Because this world, like any other world, enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, it is sheer wishful thinking to attempt to turn this reality inside out or in Barthes' words 'empty it of history and fill

it with nature'. Thus the myth that operates as 'depoliticized speech' or one that removes from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance, is as Barthes further concludes 'exactly that of bourgeois ideology'. How this operates in practical and theoretical terms is the object of critical focus in the next section.

### **3.3 Mythology, Semiology and Ideology**

For our purpose knowledge of our past is a springboard, not a mattress to doze on.

Ayi Kwei Armah

This is the case with mythology: it is a part of both semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, and of ideology inasmuch as it is an historical science: it studies idea-in-form.

Roland Barthes

Having examined the basic position of 'readers' of myth in the first section of the last chapter, my purpose in this section is to complete the definition of myth in semiological and ideological terms. 'Myth', as Barthes rhetorically asserts 'is depoliticized speech' (Op.Cit., p.143). The term (de)politicized is also being used in this context as an enabling conceptual metaphor or an activity defining the whole of human relations which includes the totality of material and non-material factors. These factors are created by men and women as they struggle with nature for existence within definable socio-cultural, political and economic milieus.

Barthes describes further the act of depoliticizing speech as an 'operational movement' which embodies a defaulting process. This default in semiological terms is equally manifest in the active value which must be placed on the prefix 'de'. This rather pragmatic linguistic activity is simply another means of entering the complex terrain of patterns of signification which can be delineated between users of the

language-object which 'speaks things' on the one hand, and the metalanguage which 'speaks of things' on the other. When myth comes under the heading of metalanguage as Barthes observes further, "the depoliticization which it carries out often supervenes against a background which is already naturalised, depoliticized by a general metalanguage which is trained to *celebrate* 'things, and no longer to act them'." (Op.Cit., p.144)

If these notions of the language-object and the metalanguage do not situate us in the terrain of ideological differences yet it is because the abolition of the complexity of human acts when given the simplicity of essences (by further abolishing all dialectics) transforms history into nature. This naturalized discourse is that of the metalanguage, the simple end result of which could be resolved by asking the following set of questions:

is myth always depoliticized speech? In other words, is reality always political? Is it enough to speak about a thing naturally for it to become mythical? One could answer with Marx that the most natural objects contain a political trace.... (Op.Cit., p.143)

Only a basic shift in emphasis is necessary for one to grasp fully the practical implications of this theoretical framework for an exploration of patterns of figuration/signification in black texts. For, having established that the most natural objects contain a political trace, Barthes also explains that there are strong myths and weak myths. The distinction is that the political nature of strong myths could be latent while in weak myths 'the political quality fades like a colour'. The examples that one could explore concerning weak and strong myths both from historical and contemporary perspectives relating to black experience are legion. Meanwhile, it is important to observe that even in weak myths the political quality might fade like a colour, but, 'the slightest thing can bring back its strength brutally'. Barthes also

observes and asks if anything could be "more natural than the sea...and what more political than the sea celebrated by the makers of the film *The Lost Continent*?" (Op.Cit., p.114)

The political significance or insignificance of myth therefore, comes from its *situation*. To qualify the dynamics of this situation semiology has taught us not to look at things from the point of view of the signifier, 'of the thing which has been robbed; and within the signifier, from the point of view of the language-object, that is of the meaning'. Thus a 'false entry' (what has been described in chapter two as a 'false dilemma') would lead to a false conclusion and the reader would need to distinguish between myth as it operates on 'the right' and its opposite 'left'. 'Left-wing' myth, however, is inessential. According to Barthes:

Left-wing myth supervenes precisely at the moment when revolution changes itself into 'the left', that is, when it accepts to wear a mask, to hide its name, to generate an innocent metalanguage and to distort itself into 'Nature'. (Op.Cit., p.140)

The accuracy of Barthes' observation becomes apparent when an attempt is made to examine the descent of many 'revolutionary situations' into the bourgeois counterpart of this dynamic situation otherwise known as 'the left'. This could be described further as the change from a dynamic, constantly evolving situation to the wearing of a mask. The essential mystification thus emerges when left and right wing myths superimpose themselves on a general populace: at best they produce the quintessence of what Chinua Achebe has called 'recriminations between communist and capitalist aesthetics in our time', while at their worst, they can only lead to isolation or abandonment of the revolutionary situation itself. JanMohammed's attempt at defining a 'counter-hegemonic discourse' around the question of 'humanism and minority literatures' probes the revolutionary situation from within the matrix of the black

tradition/literature, beginning with the claim by Chinua Achebe that:

In the process of articulating the plight of their people, in depicting the trauma produced by the colonial domination, and in the attempt to redefine the direction of indigenous cultures, African writers have inevitably involved themselves in a dialectical polemic with Western cultures: 'they have found themselves drawn irresistibly to writing about the fate of black people progressively recreated by white men in their own image, to their own glory and for their profit'. (JanMohammed, 1985, p.281)

Achebe's articulation could be rephrased to mean a concern with the causes and effects of changes that occurred in the "direction of revolutionary social theory and praxis in Africa (and the black world)." (Ayi Kwei Armah, 1984, p.35) JanMohammed describes one of the many causes of this change as the tendency of minority or so-called Third World writers to dwell on 'an ironic anomaly', which he calls 'Western humanism'. "A century of such attempts (to espouse humanism) reveals the confused and painful position of these critics as the mediators between the implicit hegemonic imperatives and the ambivalent aspirations (antipathy/attraction) of their people." (Op.Cit., p.283) A simpler or straightforward manner to describe the process is JanMohammed's earlier articulation of this basic paradox: 'we are attracted to and enthralled by Western society'.

Wole Soyinka, in a recent interview, describes this attraction to do everything the Western way as "the dark ages of our post-colonial existence." (Gerd Meuer, 1991, p.1155) Ironically the situation that provoked Soyinka's contextualization has very little to do with literary praxis per se. The Nobel laureate was on the other hand, reacting to the debate concerning the likely successor to the Secretary Generalship of the United Nations. While diplomatic subterfuges rage, Soyinka has come out to oppose the suggestion of a former Nigerian military leader as a possible candidate. The premise of the writer's opposition to the leader of one of the many aberrative

regimes that still plague the African continent is quite simple:

I think as a poet and dramatist I might enjoy the irony of that situation...(the election of a former military leader as the Secretary General of the United Nations) and speaking seriously now it would lessen what I consider the trauma of the possibility of launching our own representatives of our better forgotten past onto the international circuit. (Op.Cit., p.1155)

One wonders, however, if the 'ironic anomaly' with which I began this analogy has not reached another ambivalent height if the following articulation of what, not too many years ago, Soyinka describes as "the Promethean instinct in man constantly at the service of society for its full realisation" is taken into consideration. This time and from the mythic sensibility that has always informed his writing, Soyinka endorses his favourite deity Ogun, 'the forerunner of paleotechnic man and creative essence' who was indeed as *military* as the twentieth century potential (Nigerian) candidate for the Secretary Generalship of the United Nations:

Ogun finally took over. Armed with the first technical instrument which he forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, he cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on the others to follow. For this feat the gods offered him a crown, inviting him to be king over them. Ogun refused...They implored him...Ogun finally consented. He came decked in palm fronds and was crowned king. In war after war he led his men to victory. Then, finally, came the day when, during a lull in the battle, our old friend Esu the trickster god left a gourd of palmwine for the thirsty deity. Ogun found it exceptionally delicious and drained the gourd to the dregs. In that battle the enemy was routed even faster than usual, the carnage was greater than before. *But by now, to the drunken god, friend and foe had become confused, he turned on his men and slaughtered them.* (Soyinka, 1976, pp.28-29, my emphasis)

Those who take every one of Soyinka's pronouncements seriously would not fail to acquiesce in the following articulation of the person of this great writer by a younger poet and critic Niyi Osundare in a 1986 interview: "Soyinka is a very complex person. He has very powerful socialist tendencies. He is not backward or

reactionary. It is only that we are not terribly clear about his brand of Marxism, Socialism, or whatever." (Birbalsingh, 1988, p.97) Images described by Ayi Kwei Armah in his 1967 article "African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?" as a 'new heavenly principle' otherwise known as 'Scientific Socialism' preferred to the primitive Eden of 'Utopian Socialism' often described as reactionary yearnings for a return to roots and mores forever left behind become relevant at this point. What is unclear, however, is what we are expected to do with a speech pattern 'that speak(s) about a thing *naturally* for it to become mythical'. Those who have learnt not to look at things from the point of view of the signification, but from that of the signifier might also agree with Niyi Osundare that:

There is a contradiction in the development of African (written) literature in Nigeria. Our pioneers were very hard working...They believed that poetry should be tough and inaccessible. This is not just an aesthetic failing. It came directly from an ideological failing. (Op.Cit., pp.97-98)

This is also the case with mythology; if we study it ideologically as an historical science, we should be able to grasp the 'logical contradiction' that exists in the preference for a mythological/historical warlord as 'Promethean instinct' and the rejection of its contemporary version as 'representative of our better forgotten past'. Again, one could follow Osundare to claim that 'we are not terribly clear about the past that we are speaking about'.

Wole Soyinka's mythological focus and the ideologically signifying discourse which it attracts has received much attention in this study. One of the many specific creative realisations of this pattern of articulation is also focused on in chapter five which compares Soyinka's mythic imagination with that of the Brazilian author of 'populist fiction', Jorge Amado. Works that engaged Soyinka's politics and aesthetics

in ideological dialogue in the past have come mainly from Marxist critics of African/Black literature. Marxist critics such as Biodun Jeyifo, Chidi Amuta and George Gugelberger, to name just a few of the prominent ones, have approached Soyinka's liberal humanist viewpoint with bids to 'demythologize' the writer's overriding mythic focus. Jeyifo's 1985 essay "Tragedy, History and Ideology" published in the famous book *Marxism and African Literature* supplies perceptive critical insights into the numerous connexions that exist between history and tragedy, and the ideological implications latent in privileging one over the other. Western investigation into these connexions is viewed from "three *key points* along a chronological - theoretical *spectrum*." (Biodun Jeyifo, 1985, p.95, original italics)

Beginning with the Aristotelian idea of tragedy, Jeyifo notes that in spite of its putative truth which is poetic and indifferent to history, Aristotle's conception of tragedy remains endemic in Western humanism, logic, literature, and politics. Thus because of its putative nature and ahistorical stances, the stories that emerge from the premise of the Aristotelian conception are a series of inventions which could be plucked only from 'banal' history. The second point along the Western chronological spectrum is the Hegelian dialectic of consciousness which thrives on the ground that 'whether or not tragedy uses a historical material' the emergent dialectical activity would remain an immanent consciousness which in a universal/trans-historical moment transforms itself into history. By far the most satisfying to Jeyifo of these great moments of Western investigation is the third point which is the Marx-Engels conception:

when tragedy confronts history it is on solid ground and loses its abstract, 'artistic' purity; protagonist and antagonist forces are not agents who carry an ineluctable 'tragic flaw' which destroys them. Rather they are individuals who carry the concrete goals and



aspirations of social groups. (Jeyifo, Op.Cit. p.95)

From this well defined premise, Jeyifo studies what he calls 'the nature of tragic epistemology' from which any tragedy, historical, mythical or imagined could be defined. These parameters Jeyifo maintains, might have lost their chronological perspective but they retain the theoretical dimension. Before one could object to the idea of studying African arts from this Western premise, Jeyifo articulates the ideological necessity and authentic ideological imperative that underline the demand for an irreducible 'Africanness' in any art form that would call itself African. The most persuasive of African theories that has argued the case of an 'irreducible Africanness', Jeyifo concedes, is the final essay in Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*, entitled "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the origin of Yoruba Tragedy". The essay was originally published in 1969 among essays presented to Wilson Knight by his colleagues and friends. The putative tendency emerges however, in Jeyifo's summary of the major arguments of Soyinka's essay. Jeyifo agrees that Soyinka makes a persuasive case for an 'African tragic aesthetic', but allies his agreement to the Western impetus which, in Soyinka's essay, serves more than a comparative function both in the theory and the criticism:

For what we routinely encounter is that no matter how strongly they call for indigenous tragic art forms, our authors smuggle into their dramas, through the back door of formalistic and ideological predilections, typically Western notions and practices of rendering historical events into tragedy. (Op.Cit., p.96)

Jeyifo observes further the subtle articulation of this formalistic and ideological predilection, by focusing on Soyinka's tragic play *Death and the King's Horseman*. The actions of the play centre around events that took place in the ancient Yoruba city of Oyo during the period of colonialism and the text bears Soyinka's advice to the

would-be director not to succumb to the facile tag of 'clash of cultures' but to concentrate on 'eliciting the play's threnodic essence'. (Soyinka, 1975, p.6) The fact that Soyinka's appeal has not been followed by a few critics/producers leads Jeyifo to conclude that if this play could be said to contain any threnody or lamentation, it is one in which:

Soyinka polarizes the conflict between an African, organic and whole vision of life and an alien system of discrete laws and social polity, with tragic results for the indigenous system. In other words, it is a confrontation at the level of categorical superstructures; superstructures wrested from their economic and social foundations. (Op.Cit., p.101)

Jeyifo thus studies in dialectical terms, the economic and social foundations which Soyinka totalises in terms of the complementarity that exists between the patriarchal feudalist code of the ancient Oyo empire and the framework of the invading colonial marauders. The fact that these systems complement one another is read by Jeyifo as one of the probable reasons "why Soyinka is anxious, in his prefatory notes, to tell us that 'the colonial factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical...'" (Op.Cit., pp.101-102) Any possibility of endorsing the claims of either side should however, take into consideration Soyinka's persistent outrage directed at critics who try to 'demythologize' him, not from an African perspective but from the equally mythic focus accruing from their intellectual adventure into alien cultures.

Thus the discourse which this study has used the preceding pages to build is that patterns of ideological signification within the African/diasporic experience could be studied only *within* the African/Black matrix itself with references to other sources, Western, Asiatic or whatever existing only on comparative basis. 'Demythologizing' Soyinka for example, has been difficult or impossible because each

time the attempt is made it is often within the framework of what E.R Barth refers to as "dogmatically closed systems" such as Marxism. (E.R. Barth, 1979 cited in Soyinka, 1988, p.170) Soyinka also observes and points out for the benefit of those who seek to demythologize him via the Marxist doctrine that it is not on the African continent alone that power mongers such as Idi-Amin, Mobutu Sese Seko and Jean Bedel Bokasa "at one time or the other...presented themselves on the podium of power as the heir of Marx and Lenin." (Soyinka, Op.Cit., p.158) Soyinka concludes that in a universal sense the discomfiture should be real among:

Adherents of the rigid pose of Marxism (who) dare not - repeat, dare not - believe the evidence of their eyes when the 'mushy' essentiality of power is made manifest - as was the case with Stalin, contemporaneously (such is the irony of history) with that of an obverse ideology, Nazism. (Op.Cit., p.160)

Thus the general thrust of an African/black revolutionary theory and praxis when it transcends the level of sloganeering could return at will to comparative attitudes which view situations and events in cyclical rather than manichaeian, linear, or exclusively dialectical manners. This cyclical framework which is appropriated from Ayi Kwei Armah's 1984 article entitled "Masks and Marx" defines revolutionary theory as:

a coherent set of ideas comprising logical conclusions drawn from empirical data generated by revolutionary activity. Ideas not so generated are, accurately speaking, untested hypothesis, awaiting test of praxis before they are validated as theory. For instance, the ideas of Marx and Engels constitute an interesting body of hypothesis, useful as probes, not theories. (Armah, 1984, p.36)

Chidi Amuta, writing from a defensive Marxist position, found interesting Armah's argument on the notion that revolutionary theory and aesthetics are not the exclusive preserve of any society, that African/Black societies like other human societies have experienced revolutionary changes. Amuta agrees in part with Armah

that Marxism contains "scandalous oversight (but) it needs to be pointed out that Armah is flogging a dead horse." (Amuta, 1989, p.59) Once "equipped with a dialectical scalpel" (Op.Cit., p.61) Amuta believes Marxist criticism could dissect literary texts from the oral tale to science fiction. But the critical oversight in Amuta's line of thinking remains implicit; instead of expending much energy in the defence of a system that arguably contains 'scandalous oversight' and arrive at a post-Marxist theory of African literature, which would still remain foreign to the critic and his/her people, would it not be easier to direct philosophical inquiry into the socio-political, economic and cultural moorings of his/her people, highlighting their perfections and imperfections from *within* rather from *without*? If, in the process, Marxist thoughts become useful as probes and not theories as Armah suggests, then, the result might be different. Cyclical philosophies, Armah observes further:

do not exclude dialectical philosophies any more than the cycle of day-night, night-day excludes dawn and dusk, noon and midnight; cyclical philosophies embrace dialectical philosophies and include them as small but spectacularly kinetic parts of a larger, wiser whole. (Op.Cit., p.37)

Diedre Badejo's essay "The Yoruba and Afro-American Trickster: A Contextual Comparison" begins from the premise of the 'oral ancestors' of the postcolonial text of Blackness. Badejo reads Esu-Elegbara as the one who 'guards the matrix of transcendency' but displays an inconclusive grasp by perceiving the deity further as one who does not "transcend but guards." (Badejo, 1988, p.10) Chapter two of this study focuses on the activities of the deity in its carnivalesque ramification. However, the main purpose of my reference to Badejo's article is to point out to 'adherents of the rigid pose of Marxism', to appropriate a Soyinkian phrase, that dialectical thinking already exists in the following articulation of the

### 'Yoruba and Afro-American trickster':

The existence of High John tales among the enslaved imposed a dialectic between African and European world views; between the powerless and the powerful; between the captives and the captors. As Houston Baker demonstrates, from the juncture of this dialectic evolved the Blues...a more useful definition of 'trickster' should include transcendence as well as wit over force. (Badejo, Op.Cit., p.10)

The dialectic of 'wit over force' and the 'defence of the powerless over the powerful' has been pursued in this study by 'reading' Ogun (forerunner of paleotechnic man) in binary opposition to Esu (carnavalesque manifestation), for example. This reading at the same time leads to an exposition of the opposition of carnival as the feast of the people in contrast to the official feast of the bourgeoisie which permeates the ideologically signifying fields of literature, the languages of the Church and the University, statecraft and philosophy. As Stallybrass and White observe further, when we contrast these manifestations of high discourses to "the low discourses of a peasantry, the urban poor, subcultures, marginals, the lumpen proletariat, and colonized peoples, we already have two 'highs' and two 'lows'." (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.4)

Finally, the solution to the process which Jeyifo describes as our 'routine encounter with the call for an indigenous tragic art forms, but one through which our writers smuggle in through the back door of formalistic and ideological predilections typically Western notions and practices of rendering historical events into tragedy' and posit a Marxian dialectic against, is described by Edward Brathwaite as one that could be resolved through the use of 'Nation language'. Nation language is the adoption of a traditional aesthetic model which in the Caribbean "is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean

heritage." (Edward Brathwaite, 1984, p.13) Nation language is the linguistic variety in which the people express themselves, in the same way as carnival could be described as the feast of the people:

English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in the contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound expositions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree...But it is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people. (Op.Cit., p.13)

One of the many premises of Brathwaite's rejection of the standard, imported, educated English is that it is this standard variety that gave birth to the 'iambic pentameter' among other 'formalistic and ideological' models that form the primary basis of 'high' discourses. However, the Caribbean poet like his/her black counterparts in search of a rhythm that approximates the natural and environmental experiences of his/her people would soon discover that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters". (Op.Cit., p.10) It is the form through which the hurricane could roar and one which approximates to the natural and environmental experiences of his people, that Brathwaite demonstrates in *The Arrivants*, especially in the poems that open the discourse of "Masks". "Atumpan" comes from the section entitled "Libation" and continues the process of awakening the consciousness of the people while speaking to their ancestors as well as themselves:

Kon Kon Kon Kon  
Kun Kun Kun Kun  
Funtumi Akore  
Tweneboa Akore  
Tweneboa Kodia  
Kodia Tweneduru...

Odomankoma 'Kryerema says

Odomankoma 'Kryerema says  
The Great Drummer of Odomankoma says  
The Great Drummer of Odomankoma says

that he has come from sleep  
that he has come from sleep  
and is arising  
and is arising

like akoko the cock  
like akoko the cock who clucks  
who crows in the morning  
who crows in the morning

we are addressing you  
ye re kyere wo

we are addressing you  
ye re kyere wo

listen  
let us succeed

listen  
may we succeed...  
(Brathwaite, 1973, pp.98-99)

The essential discourse that arises from an interaction of the theoretical and practical models discussed in the preceding chapters is one of cultural and ideological signification. This study has argued for a vernacular theoretical framework which is employed in the criticism of the texts of Blackness that form the objects of focus in Part Two of this thesis. A cyclical (philosophical) framework is maintained in situations as diverse as the exploration of "the origins of the African diaspora" through the writings of Ayi Kwei Armah, to "the Muse of History" contained in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and the "Anvil of Boogie-Woogie" in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and *The Motion of History*. Finally, mythology is treated as 'a part of both semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, and of ideology inasmuch as it is an historical science' while comparing Soyinka's treatment of the

Postcolonial text to the handling of the same genre by the Brazilian author Jorge Amado.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Ayi Kwei Armah and the Origins of the African Diaspora

#### 4.1 Introduction

'Listen then, sons of Mali, children of the black people, listen to my word, for I am going to tell you of Sundiata....'

In this there is nothing accidental. The griot being a historian of the black people is quite aware of present divisions among his people: but he is also aware that before the divisions there has been unity. To the griot the tribes and petty nations of the day are a mere degeneration from something better, something higher.

(Ayi Kwei Armah, "Sundiata, An Epic of Old Mali")

The account of black history by the griot or imbondi who functions as the recorder of societal norms and values, and perhaps more importantly, historical happenings of grave consequence to the entire populace underscores what Armah describes as 'the relationship of art to political power'. The man/woman who wields political power could be 'the Deed', as the griot Balla Fasseke informs Sundiata in the famous epic of Old Mali empire, but the artist is 'the Word'. The relationship that exists between 'the word and the deed' is one of mutual complementarity, a symbiotic process that separates deeds from words only to create confusion. The griot functions as the conscience of the society, while at the same time s/he edifies the political class in times of peace and inspires them in difficult times. Within this comprehensive package of the relationship of art to politics, Armah observes a mediation. The much discussed audience participation in African art is arrived at as a result of the fact that the griot or imbondi relates to his/her audience in the same symbiotic way in which s/he relates to the political class. 'Unmediated' is the term Armah uses to explain the

fact that the voice of the griot:

is the voice of an artist whose spirit is not caught in alien traps, an artist who knows precisely who his people are, what his art consists of, why he practises his art, and for whom. (Ayi Kwei Armah, 1974, p.95)

Physical and spiritual contact with the outside world or what is often regarded as clash of culture begins the mediational process in alien influence. What is clear however, is that even before this contact or clash, the black world and its socio-cultural and political moorings like any other world of its kind experienced internal divisions and conflict. Thus there is no pretension or attempt to blame any alien force for the following serious calamity that has befallen the black world in the account of the griot:

I know how black people divided into tribes, for my father bequeathed to me all his learning; I know why such is called Kamara, another Keita, and yet another Sibibe or Traore; every name has a meaning, a secret import. (Op.Cit., p.95)

The process of ideological signification which this division triggers even if it is precariously, remains balanced in the outlook of the griot, 'who is no useless parasite prattling about his single ego'. On the other hand, "the griot knows precisely who his audiences are, and they are not some tight little tribe; they are the black people." (Op.Cit., p.95)

Armah's role as a modern equivalent of these historical griots and imbongi has been designed to continue this long tradition of dismantling all 'tight little tribal' affiliations and speak directly to black people in general. Thus whether carrying out a revaluation of African independence which he regards as a mystification, or reacting to equally dated issues such as "Our language problem", Armah maintains the belief that "African writers are born to an impressive legacy of problems, from dependence

on foreign publishers to a parallel dependence on foreign languages." (Armah, 1985, p.831) The themes, images, symbols and narrative patterns of African writing could be African and the readership of these works essentially African or black, but as long as 'the languages we use outside our little ethnic homelands remain European', Africa will always be tethered to the shackles of imperialist domination.

Unlike those who have called upon Africans to write in their respective national languages, Armah agrees that although a thousand linguistic flowers would bloom, in the specific field of African literature, if this call were answered, the end result would be more chaos and misunderstanding among Africans and their black counterparts in the diaspora. Angela Smith's recent book *East African Writing in English*, opens with a graphic account of the confusion that we might expect if the call to write in national languages were heeded without removing first the major obstacles to African unity. At a conference called 'New African Writing' in 1984 Ngugi wa Thiong'o gave the keynote address:

He was unpretentious but eloquent as he praised enterprising publishers in Zimbabwe who employed people to translate from one African language to another, from Gikuyu to Kiswahili for example. He spoke with mounting intensity for a long time. Eventually he finished and the Chairman invited questions. From a darkened row at the back of the auditorium came a voice speaking Xhosa, an African language that much of the audience and Ngugi did not understand, asking an extremely long question. *Confusion was overtaken by laughter.* Ngugi laughed with the rest of the audience, guessed the meaning of the question, and answered in English. The questioner proved to be Lewis Nkosi... (Angela Smith, 1989, p.1, my emphasis)

Unlike Lewis Nkosi who understands and has just acted out the confusion that 'tight little tribal' affiliations could generate but translates this understanding as 'one of the benefits conferred by imperialism', Armah believes that the primary solution to Africa's language problem will come only:

when Africans scrap the old colonial system with its border posts, flags, anthems, the whole cancerous overload of embassies, ministries and governments - all as expensive as they are useless - and create something human and intelligent, a unified Africa, in its place. (Armah, Op.Cit., p.831)

A united Africa, Armah maintains, would then need to tackle and resolve the issue of one central language which would operate as 'the international medium, around which the smaller national and ethnic languages would orbit'.

The primary aim of this introduction to "Ayi Kwei Armah and the Origins of the African Diaspora" is to chronicle as many as possible of the critical and polemical premises informing what Derek Wright has described as 'the literary ancestry of the (Armah) histories'. All of Armah's five novels are discussed in some detail in the main body of the chapter but the ones that articulate in creative terms 'the origins of the African diaspora' are *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* and they are discussed in greater detail.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that the most significant literary ancestry to Armah's histories is the postcoloniality of Africa and the black world. Armah's entry into the literary limelight with the publication of his controversial first novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* created ambivalent responses around the book and its author. Literary theories sprang up that described the work as existentialist, Marxist, Fanonian and sometimes mythological. As a work of transition exploring the 'gap' which Anthony Appiah has described in theoretical terms as 'the Post- in postcolonialism', Armah's first novel is understandably interventional.

In an article published in 1973 entitled "Marx, Politics and the African Novel", Ben Obumsele describes *The Beautiful Ones* "as a work deriving much of its background from Marx and Fanon". (Ben Obumsele, 1973, p.110) Obumsele's

observation attempts to situate the novel in the realm of critical discourse at a time when it was probably impossible to write a positive appraisal of Armah's first novel, especially when one of Africa's foremost and respected novelists, Chinua Achebe, had described the novel as 'a sick book': "Sick not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the *human condition*. The hero pale and passive and nameless - a creation in the best manner of existentialist writing, wanders through the story in an anguished half-sleep..." (Chinua Achebe, 1975, p.25) Following the same track, Ben Obumsele's critical focus slips as he urges that the novel "is best read as a myth." (Op.Cit., p.112) Obumsele argues that the background that furnishes Armah's intensely paranoid heroes could be located between the solipsistic adaptation of Marx's theory of alienation as this informs Fanon's theory of revolution, because:

In Fanon Marx is altered in two fundamental ways: first to accommodate the subjective angle of a psychiatrist and a Sartrean existentialist, and secondly, to accord with the first loyalties of the spokesman of the black revolution. (Obumsele, Op.Cit., p.109)

The critical persecution that arose as a result of these essential discourses in ideological signification between what are now known as novels of the first and second stages in African literature, could then have drowned any voice that was not convinced of its vision and ideopractical relevance. At least, one brilliant writer of a novel similar to Armah's, Yambo Ouologuem the author of the equally controversial *Bound to Violence*, could be said to have fizzled out, creatively, under the impact of many negative public and critical opinions. Armah on the other hand, has taken the entire signifying process in his stride, regarding it as an integral part of what his second novel *Fragments* describes as the 'cargo mentality' prevalent in Africa's postcolonial situation.

In the same manner, Anthony Appiah has argued that Ouologuem's novel "like

many of the second stage (novels) of which it is a part, represents a challenge to the novels of the first stage: it identifies the realist novel as part of the tactic of nationalist legitimation and so it is - if I may begin a catalogue of its ways-of-being-post-this-and-post-that - postrealist." (Appiah, 1991, p.349) The thrust of Armah's argument and critique of the postcolonial situation among other writers of these novels of the second stage was directed at the neocolonial socio-political elites in general, and this does not exclude those described by Appiah as the writers of 'the originary African novels' such as Chinua Achebe. The earlier writers 'naturalized realism' and worse still, the younger Armahs and Ouologuem, for example, could not acquiesce in the struggle of these elites to "naturalize a nationalism that, by 1968, had plainly failed". (Appiah, Op.Cit., p. 349)

In an article published in 1969 entitled "A Mystification: African Independence Revalued", Armah made a critical assessment of the much advertised "African revolution" and concluded that its intense focus had reached an apocalyptic frenzy "since warlords began replacing prophets, and order became more a matter of guns and fear than of lies and hopes. (Armah, 1969, p.141) The conclusion of Kofi Owusu's article "Writers, readers, critics and politics" (1986) links every one of Armah's titles or plot summaries in his five novels to the precarious African present, arrived at after several years of independence: the critic agrees that it could be true that:

things did fall apart in Africa during the colonial era. It is obvious after years of political independence that the centre cannot hold. The *fragments* of the "larger meaning which has lent sense to every small thing and every momentary happening years and years ago", have not all been salvaged and brought together yet. While dispossessed Africans await the birth of the *beautiful ones* and/or the arrival of *healers*, madmen and specialists, meanwhile reign supreme. Finding *the way - our way* - and identifying those buses going *our way* - the

way - are literary as well as socio-political, problems. As less privileged Africans ask *why they are so blest*, they expect their writers to attempt within the confines of art, to provide answers, however inadequate or noncommittal. (Kofi Owusu, 1986, p.883, my emphasis)

The most important ancestry of Armah's novels, short stories, critical and polemical works remains the demand of the people or 'what they expect their writers to attempt within the confines of art'. In an essay entitled "One Writer's education" Armah articulates the gradation of his mounting consciousness. Looking back to the period when the black revolution was more than a frivolous indulgence, he observes how as a student in Harvard University in the 1960s, his perception changed from that of an expatriate scholar from an African tribe/state to that of a patriotic African affected by the assassination of the then radical leader Patrice Lumumba, of the African republic of Congo, among other catalytic events:

The assassination of Lumumba created in me the kind of deep-running sadness usually provoked by some irreparable personal loss. The reason is not really hard to find. I had long had a sense of myself not simply as an Akan, an Ewe, a Ghanaian or a West African, but most strongly as an African. It was as an African, then, that I contemplated, then understood, Lumumba's murder. (Armah, 1985, p.1752)

Against this background of an intense African gaze or focus, Armah maintains like the griot or imbongi, that while his parameters remain the 'confines of art', "In discussing philosophy and values I am merely doing my work as an African artist; examining my people's values and pointing, when I can, to our way." (Armah, 1984, p.36) Occasionally this intense gaze leads to paranoia and the venomous sting in Armah's art achieves a racist thrust. However, it is only fair to point out that Armah's venom is usually directed first and foremost, at the African/black parasites who in times past and present, collaborate with alien forces to perpetuate the domination of their societies. At least two out of Armah's five novels, *Two Thousand*

*Seasons* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, have been read persistently as racist tracts. Coterminous with Armah's intense African/black gaze or focus and a possible explanation for some of his favourite themes are what he perceives to be the definable differences between the African world view and those of the alien forces that have wandered through the African landscape. In one among several instances, Armah articulates with the venom preserved and stinging, not only what exactly is meant by 'Our Way', but perhaps more importantly, what 'Our Way' is not; all done as the writer claims, for the sake of retrieving some racial pride in the African cultural psyche:

We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of waking up sure knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any such ultimate way. We are not stunted in spirit, we are not Europeans, we are not Christians that we should invent fables a child would laugh at and harden our eyes to preach daylight and night as truth. We are not so warped in soul, we are not Arabs, we are not muslims to fabricate a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness, and call our creature creator. *That is not our way.* (Armah, 1979, p.3, original italics)

This articulation of what 'Our Way' is not, and the images, language and symbolism used in portraying the characteristics of insights that are inimical to 'our way', many would object, contain too many racial diatribes. Armah's invectives are however predicated on history and are often portrayed against the backdrop of the cultural, economic and political affronts which the African/black world has suffered for many centuries. In his study of *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*, Robert Fraser entitles the first chapter "The Context (of) Liberation and Resistance". Fraser observes how the 'American and Black revolution' or the period "when the Kennedy and Johnson administrations felt the full brunt of the Civil Rights movement" coincides with the time Armah was a "high school student, undergraduate at Harvard, from where he



graduated *summa cum laude in Sociology*. He was later at Columbia and briefly, on the staff of the University of Massachusetts." (Fraser, 1980, p.5, my emphasis) In his "One Writer's Education" article, Armah rejects the 'summa cum laude' often attached to his Sociology degree and the claim widely paraded that he was at one time or another under the direct tutelage of the Martiniquan revolutionary and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. Armah acknowledges being influenced by Fanon's ideas but most of the other claims he regards "as flattering but untrue...some of the information..is potentially misleading and part of it is simply wrong." (Armah, Op.Cit., p.1752) What emerges from these critical/polemical dialogues is that Armah prefers to practice his art within the confines of the modern equivalent of the historical "griot (who) knows precisely who his audiences are", and not a "useless parasite prattling about his single ego." (Armah, 1974, p.95) In "The Caliban complex," Armah discusses the West Indian novelist George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* and examines the African/black historical and contemporary dilemma in a global context. He explains further that what motivates him into a discussion of philosophy and the co-text to his major works remains, 'pointing when I can, to our way'.

The appropriateness of using Armah's works as a means of articulating "the Origins of the African diaspora" could be seen therefore, to come from a recognition of the historical perception of the African/black reality that pervades his writing. The general thrust of his work lends itself as a means of explicating the crucial role of 'the Other' or the 'mutilated self' through a vernacular theory of literature. In "the Caliban complex" Armah examines 'the coded message' implicit in Hegel's theory of history, among others, and its overall intention "to inject steady doses of confidence into the Western psyche":

Broken down, the message goes somewhat thus: "we Westerners are lords of the earth, deservedly. We will continue in that status because no group has made a contribution to the intellectual storehouse of the world remotely comparable to ours. The Asians, damn their eyes, have left a record of achievement we can't ignore. But we can say boldly that they only came to prepare the ground for our ascendance. *As for the Africans, we can deny them any and all achievement. As a significant factor, they do not exist.*" (Armah, 1985, p.570, my emphasis)

The task of being an artist and coming from a race which does not 'exist as a significant factor' has meant for Armah the challenge of soliciting from history what constitute precisely, not only the nature, but also the reasons and consequences of this dismissal from a world forum. *Two Thousand Seasons* for example, portrays some of the reasons why Africans could be denied 'any and all achievements' as a direct consequence of the abandonment of an 'African way' and how this would lead to the enslavement of Africans for 'two thousand seasons'. Armah returns to the historical premise in *The Healers* and analyzes in creative terms, the wars of attrition fought among the Africans themselves and articulates the factors responsible for the 'African conquest' against the background of these wars. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, and *Why Are We So Blest?* elaborate on the fact that nothing is learnt and everything is invariably lost as a result of the conquest of the African continent by alien forces. Thus the significantly few Africans who learnt the 'ways' of the enslavers/colonialists also masterminded the logic that leads the society further from the 'African way'. These elites are the direct descendants of the ostentatious cripples or inept leaders in *Two Thousand Seasons* who sold their fellow Africans into slavery in times past. In a contemporary sense they exist as the Koomsons (Minister plenipotentiary) in *The Beautiful Ones*, the Brempongs (civil servant extraordinary) in *Fragments*, and in a diasporic sense they are the middle class turn-coats in the

America of *Why Are We So Blest?*. Regarding all of them as victims of "the Western Weltanschauung", Armah concludes that a critical overview would reveal that educated Africans and their Black counterparts in the diaspora exist, "not only in New York but also in Port Elizabeth, and Durban and Mombasa; not only in London but also in Windhoek and Port Harcourt and Abidjan", to the detriment of their postcolonial societies:

For in the main, colonial and neo-colonial education, meaning the education of West Indians, of Afro-Americans and Africans within the framework of Western assumptions, proceeds on the premise that the non-Westerner has no culture or literature comparable in historical dept with Western culture or literature; and that if the non-Westerner is to become really cultured, literate and historically conscious, it will inevitably be through his assimilation into the mainstream of Western civilization. (Armah, Op.Cit., p.570)

Bearing in mind how this understanding of socio-cultural and historical issues has influenced Armah's art, I would like to return to the premise of the intense African/black gaze or focus. The 'gaze' returns over and over to the domain of the historical griot from which Armah's novels, short stories, and polemics pick up the use of 'narrative parody' to articulate a view of the world that is essentially African and black. Litotes and pastiches are also present in Armah's narrative formula, and perhaps the most latent among the narrative characteristics which this study appropriates from Gates' discussion of the text of blackness via Ismael Reed's Afro-American novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, is chiasmus. The combination of these rhetorical tropes, including ambiguity, is what Gates refers to as 'the ironic reversal of Blacks as simianlike'. Just one example should suffice in illustrating this overall pattern of creative signification and figuration.

Armah focuses on the theme of the mythical discourse of the griot in his article "Sundiata: An epic of old Mali". In the account of the griot Balla Fasseke, a

few of these narrative elements (ambiguity, litotes, chiasmus, and rhetorical troping) are already present. Another important element which the previous chapters have discussed is the various manifestations of the carnivalesque essence. In Armah's art, the aspect of carnival often expressed is the power of those marginalised and confined in any hegemonic discourse which only a dialogic interface between 'the high' and 'the low' could unmask. A final element is what in the Foucaultian sense could be regarded as the importance of the intellectual's attitude towards power, knowledge, truth, consciousness and discourse, because:

the intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat and to one side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge," "truth," "consciousness," and "discourse." (Foucault, 1977, pp.207-8)

Thus like the griot Balla Fasseke, Armah removes himself from the over-trodden path of 'banal history' which is often designed to celebrate events such as the history of sea routes, wars and change of government. The 'truth' that is often stifled in such hegemonic discourses is that of the collectivity, of those who shape history like the ugly, hideous and monstrous woman who apparently gave birth to the legendary Sundiata. In the account of the imbongi, Sundiata's father is told that he is fated to marry a spectacularly ugly woman, who will give birth to a great son:

Oh, that woman! She is ugly, she is hideous, she bears on her back a disfiguring hump. Her monstrous eyes seem to have been merely laid on her face, but, mystery of mysteries, this is the woman you must marry, Sire, for she will be the mother of him who will make the name of Mali immortal for ever. The child will be the seventh star, the seventh conqueror of the earth. (The griot Balla Fasseke's account of Sundiata's birth, in Armah, 1974, p.52)

The rhetorical trope of ambiguity implicit in the very idea of this spectacularly ugly woman giving birth to the legendary Sundiata is an integral part of a narrative

pattern. The elements of uncertainty and ironic understatement inherent in its nature articulate the overriding belief of a view of the world which the griot portrays. According to Gates, "'marking', 'loud-talking', 'specifying', 'testifying', 'calling out (of one's name)', 'sounding', 'rapping', and 'playing the dozens'" are all recognizable units within the black rhetorical trope often subsumed in the rituals of signifying. (Op.Cit., p.286) How Armah's art has been affected by this overall pattern of signification against the backdrop of the origins of the African diaspora will be the object of focus in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Armah's creative articulation of the 'African diaspora and its origins' will be discussed under the following subtitles: "'Two Thousand Seasons' of slavery and colonialism", "Banal history and the discourse of 'The Healers'", and "Intellectuals and the 'Fragments' of Postcolonialism" respectively.

#### 4.2 'Two Thousand Seasons' of Slavery and Colonialism

...cultures must be liberated from the destructive dialectics of history, and imagination is the key to this....the folk character of Anancy, the spider man, from Akan folklore...provides the key to an imaginative recrossing of the notorious 'Middle Passage' through which slaves originally crossed from Africa....

(Bill Ashcroft et.al., *The Empire Writes Back*)

The Priestess Anoa's Oracular voice articulates the discourse of 'the Way' in *Two Thousand Seasons*<sup>1</sup>. I would like to begin with the pattern of rhetorical trope that exists in this (chronologically) fourth novel of Armah. The 'signifying ritual' of the novel is perceived against the background of unprecedented violence and marked

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<sup>1</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, London: Heinemann, 1979, all page references are to this edition

departure from everything that is comparable to the mode of the conventional novel which many critics have read as "unlike anything which the general reader has ever approached before." (Fraser, 1980, p.63) The premise of Fraser's critical puzzlement is made clear by the critic after having examined in chronological order the first three novels by Ayi Kwei Armah:

Those familiar with the earlier novels are likely to be, not merely surprised, but also alarmed. While there was plenty in those previous works to challenge one's social and cultural complacency, there is nothing in their technique to disorientate someone versed in the development of twentieth century fiction...None of this, however, can be said of the peculiar handling of the intractable material in *Two Thousand Seasons* which, to the reader conversant with modern naturalistic fiction, seems to mark an entirely new departure...Wole Soyinka's difficult and convoluted study of urban *moeurs*, *The Interpreters*, seems almost tame and conventional by comparison. (Op.Cit., pp.63-4)

Fraser's critical discomfort about *Two Thousand Seasons* runs for two printed pages and one can only capture parts of the entire argument. Another aspect of the critic's concern is what he considers the marked difference between the novels Armah wrote before the advent of this strange book which is called *Two Thousand Seasons*:

The reader who turns straight from *Why Are We So Blest?* to the opening pages of *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah's fourth novel, is immediately struck by the crucial difference. Where before there was a clear narrative structure which, though flexible and involved, moved between fixed and definable points, here we are treated to a fictional panorama which apparently recedes into the far distance. Where before we enjoyed a highly distinctive evocation of a particular historical period, normally the late 1960, here we are confronted with immense and almost immeasurable tracts of time. Where before our attention was arrested by specific and intriguing personalities, here we are obliged to make our way through many pages before happening on a use of the third person singular, let alone a proper name. Most importantly, where before we searched in vain for an instance of recognizable authorial intervention, here we find the writer taking upon himself a role of obstructive commentator from the very first sentence. (Op.Cit., p.63)

At several points in Fraser's reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* he approaches and abandons critical paths through which the novel's pattern of rhetorical trope can be realised. However, because Fraser, like any other critic, has approached the novel from his own antecedents he chooses to situate the novel in what he calls "the history of recent French language fiction". (Op.Cit., p.64) Another six pages are used to invent a 'literary ancestry' for *Two Thousand Seasons* in which Fraser achieves a plausible reading of Yambo Ouologuem's controversial novel *Bound to Violence* and Andre Schwartz-Bart's *Le Dernier des Justes*. Ostensibly, the fact that Armah could be 'marking', 'specifying', 'sounding' or 'testifying' to, like the griot Balla Fasseke in the epic of Sundiata, particularly threnodic events in his society's history is set aside in order to illustrate a much preferred critical tendency: "to 'place' the writing in some literary or oral current with which one has some familiarity". (Op.Cit., p.64) But at moments when Fraser abandons his own subjective critical viewpoints he comes close to realising Armah's major intention in this novel:

Indeed almost the first thing one notes about it is that the audience at which it is aimed is envisaged very carefully. The third person, singular or plural, does not come easily to Armah's pen here, being more or less reserved for those with whom he is out of sympathy, the 'destroyers' or the 'predators'; nor has he much recourse to that constant stand-by of the 'romantic' European artist, the first person singular. In fact the verbal forms of the prose style in this book are reserved almost exclusively for first and second person plural. (Op.Cit., p.68)

Thus when read as a 'threnodic essence', explicating a view of the world in which the 'first and second person plural' rather than the 'first person singular' predominate, Armah's major argument in *Two Thousand Seasons* achieves an important value as a means of articulating the 'origins of the African diaspora'. One of the primary conclusions that could be drawn from the novel's overall aesthetic is that the trauma

of the Middle-Passage may be a political issue, but it is also socio-cultural as well as economic. Before 'things fell apart' in Africa, that is before slavery and colonialism, something collapsed first *within* the African 'system' itself which is the 'African way'. In *Two Thousand Seasons* nothing else is given the active value of a singular verbal form other than 'the way' and everything is made virtually subservient to it, including the gods and the ancestors. Anoa the priestess herself is demystified before being reinstated to the exalted position of a praise-worthy ancestor and ostensibly nothing about her approaches the familiar heroism in which mythological figures are often shrouded as the book articulates more of the effects rather than the causes of the unusual insight granted the child prodigy Anoa:

We did not have long to wait. We did not have to wait at all for the beginning of the unfolding truth of Anoa's utterance. The truth was unravelling itself even as she spoke. Under the calm surfaces of the fertile time a giddy equilibrium swallowed all lasting balance. Control became an exile. As for the guidance of the way, it was far - distant as the bones of the first ancestors. (p.18)

Armah's prose style in *Two Thousand Seasons*, especially in the prologue and the first movement which articulate the discourse of 'the way', strives to capture the precolonial structure of African societies, the demise of which the passage above laments. The image of 'spring water flowing to the desert' with which Armah opens the prologue is not merely conveying an implicit warning, but designed to portray ambiguity and helplessness at the same time. What follows this ambiguity is also not just rhetoric but a forgone conclusion, "where you flow to there is no regeneration". (p.xi) 'Loud-talking', 'marking', and 'specifying' prompt the entire discourse to crescendo levels and produce equally ironic understatements or litotes: "Hau, people headed after the setting sun, in that direction even the possibility of regeneration is dead. There the devotees of death take life, consume it, exhaust every living thing."



(p.xi) Before the prologue has run its course, it becomes clear gradually that the polarity of good and evil has attained an overwhelming proportion expressed through the jumbled but not confused layers of symbols and images. The images are designed to identify tendencies inherent in those that remain committed to the 'African way', "unforgetful of origins, dreaming secret dreams, seeing secret visions, hearing secret voices, of our purpose" (p.xv) and those whose vision is prone to being blurred, who would follow the paths of the predators and the destroyers, such as the ostentatious cripples and their askaris. In the face of the interwoven chain of calamity that is to come, the omniscient narrator explains how:

Easy then the falling slide, soft the temptation to let despair absorb even the remnant voice. Easy for unheeded seers, unheard listeners, easy for interrupted utterers to clasp the immediate destiny, yield and be pressed to serve victorious barrenness. Easy the call to whiteness, easy the welcome unto death. (p.xiv)

As a threnody, the lament continues as the novel plunges into everything that could be retrieved from what Fraser calls 'remembered history'. "We are not a people of yesterday" (p.2), but the need to articulate two thousand seasons of racial degradation and abuse of the denizens of this society has become real. In the society with which Armah is concerned in *Two Thousand Seasons*, according to Kofi Awoonor, "The ceremony of invocation and libation, brings the dead, the living and the unborn together in a communion. Like other minor deities, the ancestors can be both praised for achievement and rebuked for failure." (Awoonor, 1975, p.50) While Armah's concern in this novel is primarily aimed at apportioning blame and praise to undeserving and deserving ancestors respectively, it is also designed to point out that the living, the unborn and the departed ones cannot escape their history: "Until the utterance of Anoa the reason itself for counting seasons had been forgotten." (p.2)

Integral parts of the socio-cultural trauma that is to come bear the weight of the burden imposed by this forgetfulness. Allied to this is the society's unsuspecting openness to strangers. Thus when the beggarly predators first appeared among the people, "haggard they came, betrayed and lonely in their hunger of soul and body...we pitied them." (p.19)

Like the trauma of the Middle-Passage which it articulates, *Two Thousand Seasons* also occupies a middle-ground in Armah's fiction. The Middle-Passage motif, according to Lemuel Johnson, "is directly presented as a metaphor for dispossession, displacement and exile." (Johnson, 1980, p.70) The mythical landscape of the novel's discourse presents a people surrounded by hostile 'neighbours' on both sides: the predators from the desert to the left and the destroyers from the sea to the right. As the middle-ground in Armah's fiction however, *Two Thousand Seasons* speaks calmly to a present directly affected by past misadventures and future opportunism which many people from these troubled landscapes are bound to exhibit. Concluding the discourse of 'the way' Anoa's equally troubled demeanour warns of the treachery of those who in times past and present have led the society farther from 'the way'. The treachery of these ones also preoccupies Armah in his other works:

You too will know the temptation to be takers. Some among you will succeed too well. Their soul voided out of them, they will join the white destroyers but only in the way of dogs joining hunters. The rest - all of you, your children, their children, their children after them and generations after them again and again, all will be victims till the way is found again, till the return to our way, the way. (p.19)

As a racial epic, one of Armah's major preoccupations in *Two Thousand Seasons* is to "give due acknowledgement to the power and charm of the African oral tradition: but he will have none of the social stratification that the tales put forward."

(Okpewho, 1983, p.5) Isidore Okpewho's "Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" studies the revision of traditional norms and value which Armah and the younger members of the African/black literati have championed from perspective diametrically and ideologically opposed to those of the writers of the 'originary' African/black texts. The formal intention of many of these younger writers is not to invalidate the world views which the tales portray but to inject doses of revolutionary consciousness into the otherwise moribund conclusion their predecessors arrived at also from the premise of these tales. The power of the essential 'Other' or those occluded in the discourse of these predecessors is often forcefully projected by the younger writers. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* for example, as a work chronicling the horror and remembrance of the Middle-Passage maintains an essential focus which is one of 'programmatically replacement' of everything that came before it.

The basic tendencies which Okpewho delineates among writers who creatively adapt the oral tale/mythology clarifies some primary issues. The first tendency is called 'tradition preserved' and a second equally moribund perspective is labelled 'tradition observed'. Between the third and the fourth tendencies, the ideologically signifying approach is revealed through the use of two potentially radical outlooks; the first is called 'tradition refined' and the second, 'tradition revised'. The classic example of the tendency to refine tradition, according to Okpewho, "can be seen in the creative work of Wole Soyinka." (Op.Cit., p.2) In the act of revising tradition however, "perhaps no recent work better demonstrates this urge to review the old mythic tradition and furnish new hopes than Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*." (Op.Cit., p.3) The iconoclastic role which the early Soyinka served in confronting the colonialist's religious/mythological outlook with an African alter/native might be

reminiscent of the zealous process which Soyinka's work began, but in continuing to *revere* the tradition based on the Obatala/Ogun/Sango triad, "the new radical writers simply do not think that Soyinka has gone far enough":

Some of them have embraced the Marxist-Socialist outlook as the only solution to Africa's socio-political problems. From this point of view, the old tales are dismissed outright as indices of the intellectual infancy of the race - where the oppressors of the race would like it to remain - or else as devices by which the ruling class of the traditional society perpetually kept the masses in servitude. What is needed now is a programmatic replacement of these tales and their symbols by new ones, or at least a thorough reassessment of the parameters of the old mythology so as to reassert the rights and claims of elements of the society who have been for too long dispossessed. (Okpewho, Op.Cit., p.4)

Working within the matrix of the tradition, Armah's programmatic replacement of these tales and symbols is related to what I have described as the pattern of rhetorical trope and signification which Gates' theory elaborates. Dwelling on a mode of critique or iconoclasm that is critical of not only the enemy without but also that within, Armah's novel denigrates the pattern of remembrance that is trained to speak of "the journey of an imbecile as if the gigantic waste meant some unspoken glory for our people." (p.62) When such a line of attack is embarked upon in *Two Thousand Seasons*, a trope of ambiguity is substituted for litotes or ironic understatement to explain the fact that the success of those who came from afar to plunder the African landscape has always been facilitated and maintained by the mindless leadership of the indigenous socio-political elites. In the following particular instance, the search-light of the chronicler is directed at a figure who resembles Mansa Musa I of the ancient empire of Mali:

Have we forgotten the stupid pilgrimage of the one surnamed - O, ridiculous pomp - The Golden; he who went across the desert from his swollen capital twenty days' journey from where we lived; he who went with slaves and servants hauling gold to astonish eyes in the

desert? Have we already forgotten how swiftly the astonishment he aimed in his foolishness turned to that flaming greed that brought us pillage clothed in the idiocy of religion? Now among us, even now humans with a reputation for wisdom in the knowledge of our people who yet remember that journey of an imbecile as if the gigantic wastage meant some unspoken glory for our people. (p.62)

The expression of incredulity at what could be termed a celebration of 'banal history' continues as the aftermath of that 'moron journey' brought "the desert white men's attack on us". (p.62) It is these revellers therefore, these ostentatious cripples among the black people, that proclaim the wealth of their society to the outside world and they are the ones who bear the brunt of Armah's bitter invectives:

In the further aftermath of that stupid crossing other white men, their eyes burning with uncontainable gluttony, came roaming the sea, searching to find a road to the source of all the wealth the ostentatious travellers had displayed hundreds of seasons back. (p.62)

Armah's creative articulation is thus an invitation according to Lemuel Johnson, for us "to contemplate a multi-form Middle-Passage by the Oracular Okyeame voice with which Anoa opens the novel... *Two Thousand Seasons* provides us, accordingly, with a most comprehensive vision of the catastrophic reaches of slavery." (Johnson, Op.Cit., p.63) However, when compared to other works which have focused on the excruciating trauma of the Middle-passage, Armah's direct attack on the predatory forces might occupy a less offensive position than, for example, the 'elegantly studied ironies and memory of Robert Hayden's poetry'. The persona in the poem is obviously from another race and graphically portrays the vanity of the 'nigger kings' and consequently that of himself and his collaborators and the joint atrocities which they have perpetrated on an unsuspecting populace:

Aye, lad, I have seen these factories...

Have seen the nigger kings whose vanity  
and greed turned wild black hides of Fellatah,

Mandingo, Ibo Kru to gold for us.

And then there was one - king Anthracite we named him..

He'd honour us with drum and feast and Conjo  
and palm-oil glistening wenchies deft in love,  
and for tin crowns that shown with paste,  
red calico and German silver trinkets...

(Robert Hayden, 'Middle Passage' cited in Johnson, Op.Cit., pp.62-63)

It is to prove therefore that the African landscape is not merely peopled by 'nigger kings' like Anthracite, procuring glistening wenchies for unabashed predators offering calico and German silver trinkets in return, that Armah proffers the band of youths as the revolutionary vanguards who represent a counter-force to the framework represented by these combined predatory forces. These ones with unpolluted but troubled consciousness retire to the fifth grove where they sought and found their teacher and pathfinder, the legendary Isanusi. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, after the 'dance of love/initiation' the polarity between order and disorder, progress and reaction assume a more urgent dimension. Those on the path of progress retire to the grove while instruments of reaction like prince Bentum 'were sent beyond the seas with some white traders to their country':

a cold place where his soul, so we heard was voided out of him at once, an alien language forced into his throat, and a name to make dogs bark in derision was given him: Bradford George. That was not the end. Before it was time for him to return to Poano to the big stone place there the white men thrust on him a wife - ah, cruel ruse. (p.91)

The omniscient narrator's description of this process of cultural colonization which begins from an economic base motivated by greed continues as Isanusi, leader and inspirer of the band of youths propagating a return to the 'African way', enumerates the demands of the invading colonial power. "It was in Koranche's time - disastrous time that the white destroyers came from the sea". (p.74) Welcoming the

colonialists and endorsing their demand, Koranche proceeds to brutalize the mass of the people who dare to oppose his alliance with 'the destroyers'. Integral parts of the demands made by the destroyers include, unhindered access to the natural resources of the land such as gold, iron, silver and copper, and like every colonizing mission "there is a hunter among the white men and a trader." (p.82) The new economic system preached by the colonial power also includes abrogating the land ownership system which is communal and the general principles of 'the way' would have been obliterated "when you will call your brother not Olu but John, not Kofi but Paul, and our sisters will no longer be Ama, Naita, Idama, and Ningome but creatures called Cecilia, Esther, Mary, Elizabeth, and Christiana." (p.83) At this point in the novel, the narration also resolves one of the early ambiguities of the entire story; Anoa's prophecy of an impending doom which would come as a result of abandoning 'the way': "enslavement, the infusion of violence into every drop, every morsel of sustaining air...water...food.." (p.17)

Another historical antecedent to these events is an earlier invasion spearheaded by the Arab predators from the desert. Like the background account which it is, Armah's narrative technique in dealing with the Arab invasion and conquest is a quick re/articulation of the major strands of this phase of the African experience. The 'lecherous predators' controlled and supported an empire ruled by fear and their inglorious reign stumbled from one ruler to another:

who asks to hear the mention of the predator's name? Who would hear again the cursed names of the predator's chieftains? With which stinking name shall we begin?...Hussein, twin brother of Hassan the syphilitic. Hussein had long since given up the attempt to find his phallus into any woman's genitals...he swallowed the ninth date of his three circuits before he went to embrace his slave owner god...Faisal: He had insisted on having his favourite askari with him in the palace...Not indeed for the askaris normal duty against justice armed,

but for reasons even sweeter to the predator's lechery...Hussain had lived under a terrifying anxiety all his life: the fear that he might chance to live through one day and leave some carnal pleasure unexamined... (pp.21-23)

The revolt of gallant African women succeeds in driving the predators back to the desert only after they have gained significant converts among the people. Some that escaped from the women's revolt also stage a come-back, led by a fanatical old man: "Abdallah was his name. He brought his message to us shrieking dementedly, turn slave or perish." (p.27)

It is against these predatory forces that Armah proffers the band of youths, drawn from every part of Africa to defend the general principles of 'the way' eroded by centuries of slavery and colonialism. The forces and counter-forces even though they sometimes yield simplistic binary opposition are nevertheless sustained by vivid images and symbols; what Derek Wright describes as the "lustreless demagogic jargon - (of) 'our way, the way', 'the destruction of destruction', 'the unconnected consciousness'," (Derek Wright, 1989, p.232) is rather perceived in this study as Armah's rhetorical trope or what has been described earlier as 'the ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black wo/man as simianlike'. 'The Way' when read as dogma reinforces the precise mythological outlook or the essential plot of Armah's novel. "Automatization" and "Defamiliarization" could be said to be at work at every stage of Armah's creative articulation. Meanwhile a brief definition of the 'automatized' discourse and the accompanying framework that 'defamiliarizes' it would help to clarify the point further. For instances of 'the way' as automatized discourse I have selected passages from the books of Proverbs and the account by Matthew in the King James version of the Bible:

*'The way'* of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but he loveth



he that followeth after righteousness. Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh *the way*: and he that hateth reproof shall die. (Proverbs, 15, v.9-10)

Enter ye in the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is *the way*, that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is *the way*, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7, v,13-14)

These rather familiar articulations of 'the way' are ripe for a defamiliarizing counter-viewpoint, a function which Armah's creative dimension fulfils.

Since the term was coined in 1917 by the Russian formalist, Victor Shklovsky, 'defamiliarization' has been used by writers to reinforce the creative act of "distorting a familiar object of a routine convention to make it appear strange and unfamiliar." (James L. Resseguie, 1991, p.137) Defamiliarization, which literally means 'making strange', is an integral part of the technique which has always been available to writers as means of confronting the socio-cultural complacency of the reader. Defamiliarization has as counterparts, as far as terminology is concerned: 'disautomatization', 'deautomatization', 'deformation', and 'estrangement'. However to articulate the reader's domain further:

One reader-response theorist, Wolfgang Iser, has shown the importance of defamiliarization for the reader's interaction with a text. For Iser, the reader brings to a text knowledge of familiar conventions (Iser calls it the reader's 'repertoire'), which may be literary, social, cultural...and the text places familiar elements into new configurations for the reader to reassemble. (Resseguie, Op.Cit., p.138)

Seen from the perspective of the 'task' which the text sets for the reader, the familiar element which *Two Thousand Seasons* places into new configurations might not be comprised entirely of 'lustreless demagogic jargon' if only the reader is prepared to 'step out' of his/her socio-cultural and even literary repertoire. 'Making strange' only forces the "reader to account for automatized aspects of a narrative - e.g., worn-out rhetoric, habitualized contexts, stereotyped phrases, jaded conventions - and to ask

why these familiar elements are deformed." (Op.Cit., p.138)

'In the discourse of blackness' according to Gates, 'signifying' means modes of figuration itself. All these 'ritual' elements, including what one does "when one signifies, as Kimberly W. Benston puns, one 'tropes-a-dope'" (Gates, Op.Cit. p.286), are important if one is to account for the 'automatized' discourse which Armah defamiliarizes to propound the basic tenets of 'the way':

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces far more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destruction. (p.39)

In this group of ten short sentences alone the word 'way' is mentioned as either 'the way' or 'our way' ten times. This recurrent repetition and the numerous exclamations such as 'Hau', the ironic understatements or litotes, and the hyperboles all point to the fact that Armah is engaged in this novel in what could be best described as a 'ritualised discourse'. Apart from the quasi-biblical language employed as it is to deautomatize a familiar articulation of 'the way', another aspect of Armah's programme is the defamiliarization of the complex but equally familiar terrain of Africa's recent and the not-too-recent historical experiences.

Under the leadership of Isanusi (banished to the fifth grove for opposing the king's alliance with the colonial invaders) and Abena (a remarkable woman who refused to marry Prince Bentum renamed Bradford George and join the life of crippling ostentation) for example, the band of youths carried out a revolt and recorded a success facilitated by their thorough dedication to 'the (revised) way'. However, it is inevitable that the group should work with disreputable people like Kamuzu, a man who does nothing without a prize so as to gain deeper insight about

the destroyers and their ways of terror. The truth about Kamuzu however, is that he "does not hate the enslavement of our people. What he hates is his own exclusion from the profit of the trade...the sharpness of his anger against the king, the princes and parasites..burns his blood." (pp.159-160)

Armah's programmatic anticipation of characters like Kamuzu as caricature but one that is reminiscent of the emergent leaders of African societies after independence appeared years before the publication of *Two Thousand Seasons* in a seminal essay entitled "African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific". In "African Socialism" we are informed of the well-known technique of those described as "freedom fighters whose suits are made in Paris and whose hair raising campaigns are fought and won in scented beds and posh hotels..." (Armah, 1967, p.28) In *Two Thousand Seasons* characteristically, after the band of youths has fought and won a battle that leaves numerous casualties on both sides (apart from Isanusi "the destroyers' thrust has also left holes bitter to remembrance. Death took the fighter Oko..Suma too, and Pili are gone..." p. 201), all Kamuzu wants is "to live forever in this hard stone place; more, he wanted to become a copy of the chief of the white destroyers we have found in the place, the one they had called the governor." (p.169)

The 'deautomatized' context includes in this regard a programmatic replacement of the "wish-fulfilment socialism" or what Armah's 1967 essay describes further as a 'routine' discourse which "takes a manifestly *evolutionary* situation and...pretend that it is *revolutionary*." (original italics, Op.Cit., pp. 9 & 28) The act of 'defamiliarization' according to Resseguie, has always been such that "if the estranged point of view becomes too familiar or routine, then the process of defamiliarization must occur once more." (Op.Cit., p.144) In this context, the

estranged viewpoint that has become familiar is 'African socialism' which Armah describes as "the best articulated expression of post-World War II African (thought) on the level of political and philosophical theory..." (Op.Cit., p.8)

'African socialism' is by and large a philosophical argument which attempts to formulate a body of thought systems that would be an essential African response to centuries of slavery, colonialism and the overriding perception of the African race as an insignificant factor in a tripartite world expressed in the Hegelian dialectics among others. Itself a 'defamiliarized' context, the hijacking of the discourse and how it has been set on a course routine and automatized is the starting point of Armah's attempt to articulate the traumas of the Middle-Passage or what Lemuel Johnson has described as "that search for *stubborn continuity* which quickens the consciousness in *Two Thousand Seasons*." (Op.Cit., p.76)

'Stubborn continuity' has certainly plagued the African whether s/he lives in the homeland or in the diaspora. The notion is thus embedded deeply in history. In the black profane discourse, and especially within the African matrix, 'the child doomed to die and be re-born' is known to the Yorubas and Ibos of Western and Eastern Nigeria as 'Abiku' and 'Ogbanje', respectively. When 'stubborn continuity' is perpetually reincarnated it wears the mask of a 'wicked tormentor' and an ominous but 'evil cycle of birth and death'. (Johnson, Op.Cit., p.72) Whenever this recurrent cycle is set on a course of metaphorical evocation of racial experience(s), automatization and defamiliarization could play prominent roles in unmasking the true intent of the various stages. The cycle of fertility and regeneration is rather familiar and routine to the African/black sensibility; in Ifa divination poetry any disturbance in the ritual cycle leads to infertility, barrenness and sometimes outright sterilization

in which:

Pregnant women could not deliver their babies;  
Barren women remained barren.  
Small rivers were covered up with leaves.  
Semen dried up in men's testicles  
Women no longer saw their menstruation.  
(Wande Abimbola, cited in Johnson, Op. Cit., p.72)

Unlike the articulation of the writers of the 'originary' African texts, it is the broken or disturbed cycle or "the line of the Great Ancestors (that) has...been warped, if not actually broken" (Op.Cit., p.73), that is responsible for the debilitating African present. Isanusi, Anoa, Damfo 'the Healer' and Asamoa Nkwenta the Asante warlord, and the sage Naana of *Fragments*, who completes the normative rites of passage, are some of these 'Great Ancestors'. The Middle-Passage motif is also strongly presented when we turn to *The Healers* and listen to another aspect of Armah's persistent voice. In *The Healers* the pattern of articulation does not succumb to the pressure of political disenchantment but "insists again and again that the rites of passage - conception and birth especially - have been profaned or violated." (Op.Cit., p.73)

### 4.3 Banal History and the discourse of *The Healers*

Did you remember to tell your listeners of what time, what age you rushed so fast to speak? Or did you leave the listener floundering in endless time, abandoned to suppose your story belonged to any confusing age? Is it from the time of the poet Nyankoman Dua, seven centuries ago? Or did it take place ten centuries ago, when Ghana was not just a memory and the eloquent one before you still sang praises to the spirit holding our people together? Is it of that marvellous *black time* before the desert was turned desert, thirty centuries and more ago? Or have you let the listener know the truth: that this story now is not so old - just over a century old?...What of the place?

(Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*<sup>2</sup>)

The evocation of a premise, albeit a historical one, for the discourse of 'the Healers' above represents another instance of Armah's commitment to practice his art along the lines of the ancestral and oratorical griot who has always functioned as a recorder of events of inestimable value to the entire populace. The therapeutic nature of "the Healers'" vocation like that of the griot is predicated on a well defined, even if ambiguous relationship to political power. According to Damfo, "if we (the Healers) did have a disease, a blind fear of power...that would be our misfortune..." (p.270) It is important to understand therefore, that a 'Healer' does not necessarily cringe before or away from political power. On the other hand, his/her relationship to power and the political class is at best inspirational. Like the griot, the Healer exists in a symbiotic manner to the wo/man who wields political power. However, everyone must live and abide by the general principles of 'the way' which, while preaching communal coexistence also assigns specific role(s) to specific individuals. If absolute power could be said to corrupt absolutely, so does manipulative power.

Thus:

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<sup>2</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*, London: Heinemann, 1980, All page references are to this edition

We healers do not fear power. We avoid power deliberately, as long as that power is manipulative power. There is a kind of power we would all embrace and help create. It is the power we use in our work. The power of inspiration. The power that respects the spirit in every being, in every thing, and lets every being be true to the spirit within. Healers should embrace that kind of power. But that kind of power - the power that comes from inspiration - can never be created with manipulations. If we healers allow the speedy results of manipulation to attract us, we shall destroy ourselves and more than ourselves, our vocation. (p.270)

Armah articulates these vivid premises, those of the griot and the healer and their relationship to political power, for reasons which are of practical significance to the entire discourse of the African diaspora and its origins. The griot employs hyperbole, litotes, rhetoric and other figurative elements used in the signifying ritual, to eschew from his/her nature what could be regarded as 'banal history'. In this regard the griot in times past is not unlike the modern writer Ayi Kwei Armah, who declares unabashedly: "I am an African, an artist, a scholar. As far as our written and unwritten records go, it has been the prime destiny of the serious African artist to combine the craft of creativity with the search for regenerative values." (Armah, 1984, p.35) Armah could be seen therefore, to have entered this historical discourse to voice his conviction that 'history' and in this sense, the banal version of "history is rotten through and through". (Robert Fraser, Op.Cit., p.28)

Armah's purpose in *The Healers* could also be said to include at least a modification, if not actual revision, of the views of the writers that preceded him on the matter of 'healing' the black race's harassed socio-cultural psyche. The suggestion in the previous section that 'the line of the Great Ancestors' has been warped if not broken, could be recalled at this stage to lend credence to Armah's insistence that what ought to be addressed is the disturbance in the rites of passage and in this sense the cycle of conception and birth that have been profaned and violated by slavery and

colonialism.

When in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for example, the narrator speaks in the 'third person singular' rather than the 'first and second person plural' with which Armah articulates a similar historical violation of the rites of passage in *Two Thousand Seasons* the critical mind realises immediately that the authors hold different attitudes to their subjects. In a recent article Angela Smith asks the useful question whether the narrator in *Things Fall Apart* is a "Tribesman or District Commissioner". The contradiction or confusion in Achebe's narrator's consciousness "entirely by implication, also suggests the complexity of 'going home', and indeed of identifying home." (Angela Smith, 1990, p.61) In what is altogether a credible 'reading' of *Things Fall Apart*, Angela Smith demonstrates how the 'connection between Achebe the novelist and the District Commissioner' is governed by 'self-reflexive irony'. (Op.Cit., p.63) Ostensibly the disturbance in the line of the 'Great Ancestors' means very little to the District Commissioner and his overbearing attitude to Okonkwo's suicide, the sub-topicality of which he regards casually as "the story of this man who had killed himself...(on whom) one could write a whole chapter." (Achebe cited in Smith, Op.Cit., p.63) However as Smith demonstrates further, the reader who approaches this novel, written as it is by a great author with a Nigerian name who endows it with a title that comes from a poem by a great European poet and is able to recognise these facts, is, like the author and the District Commissioner, a potential student of primitive customs. The prevalent ideologically signifying attitude that pervades the 'originary' black text, one might conclude, proceeds from this debilitating socio-cultural framework. 'Entirely by implication' as Angela Smith observes, our authors have articulated the changing face(s) of a microcosmic world



overwhelmed by the divisive drive of civilization which, when interpreted critically, "meant education and exploitation, hospitals and haughtiness, christianity and segregated churches, money and misery, knowledge but not wisdom, progress but not partnership." (Mercer Cook, 1969, p.28) When we turn to Achebe's second novel *Arrow of God* it is almost inexcusable that Ezeulu, the sage who acts as custodian of African culture maintains an opportunistic attitude towards the world view he is expected to defend a bit more forcefully than the following lines portray. Ezeulu informs his son Oduche *inter alia*:

'The world is changing', he said to him. 'I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied "men of today have learnt to shoot without missing so I have learnt to fly without perching." I want one of my sons to join these men and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known tomorrow*.' (Achebe, cited in Smith, Op.Cit., p.61, original italics)

Rational and coherent as this line of defence might seem once it is adopted adroitly whatever is left in the cultural framework of the colonized must assume an entirely defensive position. In the ensuing struggle for followership, the end result of the interface between the dominated and the dominant cultures would be divided allegiance to two significant views of the world which has been largely responsible for the black wo/man's notorious double consciousness. While this struggle for followers is being resolved one culture must of necessity be relegated to the level of a dream and the other takes over as the 'abiding reality'. 'At the level of the dream', a man could settle down to write poetry:

swooningly extolling the beauty of black womanhood, (while) in his real life he was settling down to the practical business of wooing and marrying a Frenchwoman whose whiteness could not be gainsaid. For

the purposes of revolt, self-assertion or the symbolic, artistic level was apparently quite sufficient, while here and now on earth the colonial processes and reflexes maintained their hold. (Armah, 1967, p.19)

It is important to evoke this cultural background and its impact on the black sensibility if one is going to respond sufficiently to the issues raised in T.C. McCaskie's essay entitled "Armah's *The Healers* and Asante History". On every count, McCaskie finds Armah's novel unworthy of the self-imposed tag; "An Historical Novel". To the critic Armah's narrative strategy as an 'interventionist imagination' on the African historical experience and as a reading of Asante, Akan and African history implode and fall in upon each other in abrasive and startling ways':

In large measure this is because the structuration and the working out of the fictional apparatus are unquestionably trite, in parts almost careless. Superficial narrativity and discourse are driven forwards by the verbal and transactional intercourse of a number of two dimensional characters, and the demands of explanation are all too often met by resort to tautological afterthoughts and creaky interpolation. The effects of all this are bizarre. (McCaskie, 1990, p.45)

The careful reader of McCaskie's article soon realises that a world of difference exists between Armah the creative writer and the perception of the social historian McCaskie, who on approaching the literary text and its overbearing subversion of history 'as is' cannot conceal his distaste. However I do not think that Armah, nor indeed any other writer, would imagine in his wildest dream that he could do more than confront history 'as is' with history 'as desire'. To the social historian seeking to become a historian of literature, historical discourses could only mean one thing; history 'as is' is irreducible and neither egocentrism nor nostalgic resorts to a 'paradise lost' technique could wilfully reduce that 'immutable fact'.

The task of arguing a theoretical premise for Armah's novel is also made

doubly difficult by McCaskie who chooses to situate the work within a whole range of theoretical/ideological frameworks: Marxist, Althusserian, Fanonian, Bakhtian, Nietzschean, Foucaultian and not the least, Pierre Macherey's Marxist oriented 'theory of literary production'. However, this study recognises the extent to which Armah's notion of discourse resembles the Foucaultian conception in many ways and in that sense, discourse "is best understood as a system of possibility of knowledge." (Ashcroft et. al., 1989, p.167) Bakhtin's notion of 'novelization' as essentially anti-canonical and in that sense 'one that will not permit generic monologue' (Michael Holquist, 1986, p.xxxi) would also occupy a prominent position in Armah's programmatic articulation of Asante, Akan and African history. Thus McCaskie's charge that "Armah's historical figures satisfy very few of the canonical understandings or norms of novelistic character" (Op.Cit., p.45) is futile and irrelevant since the boundaries of canonization as an ally of history 'as is' is one of the notions that Armah sets out to interrogate in the first place.

According to Henry Louis Gates, "for all sorts of complex historical reasons the very act of writing has been a political act for the black author." (op.Cit., p.5) I think T.C. McCaskie has missed the point completely when he charges that besides the endless cultural and political permutations 'around the rhetoric of power' by those he branded 'Africanists' and the theoretical tools such as "negation, denial, subversion, disguise, resistance, and interrogation" which they employ are "always fluid, always evasive as they propound their own secret history that is so resistant to the technique of orthodox historical reconstruction." (Op.Cit., p.58) On the contrary the only reason why those who 'apologise' for what has happened to Africa and the black world through subversion, interrogation and rhetorical troping do so is that they

are first and foremost excruciatingly bored and unimpressed with the strategies of 'orthodoxy' whether it exists in history, literature, politics or religion. By dismantling assumptions about language and textuality for example, those who oppose 'orthodoxy' are able to "stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations." (Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.165) It is inevitable therefore, that matters of 'social-textual relations' must find echoes in postcolonial texts like *The Healers* even when it is being used to recall those relations as they occur in times past.

In the article "Armah's *The Healers* and Asante history" it is clear that McCaskie is not interested in the inner dynamics of these social-textual relations. Thus how 'the Healers' for example relate to the political class, the soldiers on the field of battle and the general populace, which is a major theme in the novel, is completely ignored in order to proffer the article's overriding judgement: "desire can never prevail against the lived epistemologies of history 'as is'" (Op.Cit., p.56) There are many 'crucial enabling devices' in *The Healers* but McCaskie's essay revolves around just one of them, the Anantahene Asamoah Nkwanta. Towards the end of the essay, the prime reason for this concentration on one out of the many enabling devices in the novel becomes clear. Armah is guilty of a rebellion against 'orthodoxy' and charged with substituting a putatively wrought text driven by desire for the carefully prepared history of Africa 'as is' by orthodox social historians. Thus Armah's Africa "is a cultural construction that takes sides against the rhetoric of power, and that actively 'argues' on its own terms." (Op.Cit., p.59) Reduced in this way Armah's other themes in *The Healers* such as "the inevitable concomitants...slavery, the rise of an oligarchic ruling class, fragmentation into jostling ethnic sub-groups (which) acts as blight on the whole texture of the

community's life" (Fraser, Op.Cit., p.92) have no place in McCaskie's 'reading' of Asante, Akan and Africa's social history. The ultimate purpose of 'the Healers' which is "to wean society away from enslavement to these false idols" (Fraser, Op.Cit., p.92) is never mentioned because Armah has committed a '*faux pas*' by enabling Asamoia Nkwanta to articulate a 'possible Africa' based on the following premise:

The whites have better guns than we have. In fact we are dependent on them for our weapons. But the whites fear the forest, because they know the forest fights for us, against them. They may plan to invade Asante, but they cannot plan to fight a long war here in our forests. The clearest way to defeat the whites is to oblige them to stay long in the forest, fighting a long, long war. Then when we have trapped them in our net and they cannot retreat, all we need do is hold them till the forest finishes them. (cited in McCaskie, Op.Cit., p.59)

However when the dynamics of social-textual relations, one of which is how to wean the society back from enslavement to false idols indigenous or foreign, are critically examined in *The Healers* Armah's deautomatizing discourse assumes a patriotic thrust. No 'recorder' of Asante, Akan or African history 'as is' recorded the existence of a class of people known as 'healers'. The inspirational role 'the healers' play along with those of the griot is also the main subject of Armah's novel. Their purpose, like those of the band of youths in *Two Thousand Seasons*, is to formulate a body of thought systems around the subject of weaning the society back to the basic tenets of 'the way'. Becoming a healer and possessing the instinct to be one is an enabling device which Armah weaves around the conditions of commitment to 'the way' espoused in the earlier novel.

The young Densu displays this essential healing attribute from the beginning of the novel and it is not surprising that by the time the story ends he has become a revolutionary fighter with healing instincts. Uncomfortable with the idea of wrestling an opponent to submission for the sake of satisfying an individual ego, Densu

abandons the field of contest even when his chances of winning are as bright as anyone else's. When eventually the child willing to grow into an adult 'healer or thinker' starts asking questions they are the sort of questions that many had taken for granted, questions that are at the heart of the society's imminent openness to alien contamination and defeat. Ostensibly he got no answers from them:

The older people, most of them, had not given much thought to that kind of question really. When Densu asked them what the games were for, some said they did not understand the question itself. Others asked Densu a question to answer his: They asked, because at Esuano the remembrance of a larger community had become a faint remnant from a forgotten past. There were people who knew stories of a time when the black people were one. Even when found, they were rather silent, as if the question raised in their minds a regret that overwhelmed their tongues. (p.6)

As the events unfold it becomes clear that the cause of the society's overriding sense of complacency is the ascendancy of a feudal oligarchy. The inordinate ambition of people like Ababio and their preparedness to stop at nothing in order to eliminate whoever opposes their way to corrupt power is soon revealed as a malaise just developing among the people. At the height of the carnage and when asked to account for the lives he has unjustly impaired or terminated during his short reign as king at Esuano "Ababio said almost purring the words: 'how can a king be a murderer? If a king wants a man killed, that man becomes a traitor. And traitors are not murdered. They are executed - for the benefit of the people.'" (p.301)

Thus it is reductionistic to leave the sort of inner dialogue within the Akan/African system above untouched and concentrate on one enabling device. Just as Wole Soyinka claimed for *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* "is not a racist tract; the central theme is far too positive and dedicated and its ferocious onslaught on alien contamination soon falls into place as a preparatory exercise for the

liberation of the mind." (Wole Soyinka, 1976, pp.111-112) Because a whole racial socio-cultural psyche is involved in *The Healers* it is important that Armah should creatively articulate these social-textual relations that are of little significance to the recorder of history 'as is'; the difference between the two viewpoints is the irreducible difference between the discourse of 'the healers' and 'banal' history.

#### 4.4 Intellectuals and the "Fragments" of Postcolonialism

VAGINA SWEET...But..MONEY SWEET PASS ALL...To the left there are others, a bit harder to make out at first. WHO BORN FOOL...SOCIALISM CHOP MAKE I CHOP...COUNTRY BROKE. The man feels the last of his innards come down and when he has finished enjoying the relief it gives him, he wipes his bottom, pulls up his trousers and jumps down, buttoning up on his way out. Near the door the large challenge assaults him again: YOU BROKE NOT SO? That, and the two companion statements following, make him smile. PRAY FOR DETENTION...JAILMAN CHOP FREE. (original capitals)

(Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*<sup>3</sup>)

At least one of Armah's five novels to date carries in its title the ironic understatement which the preceding sections have been trying to describe. *Why Are We So Blest?*<sup>4</sup> is one among three novels by Armah that chronicles the 'fragments' of the postcoloniality of Africa and the Black world. Our 'blessedness' exists in the novel in the most ironic sense of the word. The threnodic focus of the story could be described as a graphic portrayal of apparent and potentially patronising attitudes towards African/black intellectuals by philanthropists and equals alike. In this (chronologically third) novel of Armah, the writer moves from the ancient/historical

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<sup>3</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, London: Heinemann, 1970. All page references are to this edition

<sup>4</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?*, London: Heinemann, 1975. All page references are to this edition

terrains of *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* to the contemporary scene of the black world's postcoloniality. 'Why we are so blest' is probably not as defined, neither is it as emphatic as 'the way's' didactic thrust, but one of the novel's many ironic understatements exists in its definition of what it means to be an 'Africanist':

'One who specializes in Africa,' he said. 'Africa is now an area justifying advanced study, you know.' His smile ended in a little frown. He sounded uncertain. He was the first American I had seen without a lot of confidence. He said he would be one of my teachers at Harvard. (p.119)

With these words Modin Dofu, the nineteen year old prodigy from a West African state, meets Professor Henry Jefferson, an Africanist. The meeting happening after Modin has just been taken through a course on 'blessedness' upholds the major irony of the entire story. 'Why Are We So Blest?' is the title of an editorial in the *Sunday Times* celebrating America's Thanksgiving Day or what in the words of another character, Ron, constitutes the editor's and 'Mike the Fascist's way of disseminating the simple message that "there's no nation like America, and Ayn Rand is the American philosopher." (p.97) Integral parts of Armah's narrative viewpoint in this novel are the attempt to chronicle the extent to which America and its Commonwealth, as an alternative force, represent a thesis or antithesis to the British Commonwealth for example or even the Arab form of colonialism with which Africa and the black world are infinitely familiar. Armah situates the entire discourse in the black cultural psyche as it operates abroad rather than at home in order to defamiliarize the notion of blessedness, using the American Commonwealth. Thus:

very little of the story is set in subsaharan Africa, but is polarized between two locations: the East Coast of America and the Muslim Maghreb...The problem is not so much one of physical as of moral equilibrium. For although the plot is brought to a climax in the torrid vastness of the Saharan wastes, the ethical judgements brought to bear on it derive from America in the years of racial confrontation. (Robert



Fraser, 1980, pp.39-40)

'Mike the Fascist' searches frantically through the jumbled facts and figures in the Thanksgiving Day editorial for what its author refers to as the framework of the 'vulgar imagination'. Automatized and routine, Modin Dofu reminds Mike that "anyone who can write a whole article on Thanksgiving and leave out the mass murder of the so-called Indians is a street-corner hustler, nothing better." (p.99)

Again, the premise for what follows and the antecedent of the dialogized polemics in *Why Are We So Blest?* could be found in Armah's 1967 article "African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific". The authorial viewpoint interrogates the validity of the extent to which a significant section of the emergent intellectuals who set Africa and indeed the black world on a course of postcolonial relation to the rest of the world have come to recognise in the American Commonwealth a "oneness with whatever has been pure in the Western tradition: the perfect symmetry of the Olympic ideal, the unsullied wholeness of that Christian Eden ignorant of the fall from Grace." (p.99)

The Olympus instinct propelling these intellectuals to action or inaction has been extracted from the 'savage paradise' of the exterminated Indians and made complex by the European ancestors of the Americans. According to Mike, the modern framework "has two poles now, and many gradations and permutations in between." (p.100)

Those who realise the American dream to the full and are therefore truly 'blest' occupy one pole, while the ones who never had any 'luck with their plum' are 'the blest among the blest'. This convenient package of ideological signification is the realisable American setting of *Why Are We So Blest?*: it has "got heavens - and hells, as you say - built into it. After all it wouldn't be Graeco-Christian if it didn't." (p.100)

The symbols and images which Armah employs in articulating what one might call the gradation of consciousness from Greek mythology is equally revealing. 'Olympus' (the highest mountain in Greece, believed in Greek mythology to be the dwelling place of the greater gods) and 'Tartarus' (an abyss under Hades where the Titans were imprisoned and the wicked punished)<sup>5</sup> explains more than anything else the status of the truly blest and those who are 'the blest among the blest'. The irony might be profound but it is not just rhetoric that is involved when Mike refers to this gradation that begins with Olympus, below which as he says 'there are plains of mediocrity'. Mike calls this disproportionate framework a 'superior arrangement' "to just a primitive paradise" which his ancestors wrenched from the Indians and remoulded in their own image.

Armah's deautomatizing intention is equally vivid in the pseudo-biblical language of the entire discourse. Within the framework of the narrative parody of the novel the biblical 'passover' is substituted for the American 'crossover'. Armah's narrative parody and grim ironies are intended to show that the new world economic but also socio-cultural order preached by the American Commonwealth attracts many gregarious imbibers or 'crossovers'. A few of them are generously referred to as "most of these foreign students - Africans, Asians, Latins (who) talk all the time about what they'll do to overturn the system once they get out of here." (p.101) In Mike's candid view, the prefrontal leucotomy which American formal education is expected to perform for these ones is designed to guarantee that "nobody goes through the struggle...so that they can fall back into the communal dirt." (p.101)

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<sup>5</sup> I have derived both definitions from *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, 8th Edition, London and Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1988, pp. 877 & 1134 respectively

But there is a young man who is in grave danger of inflicting not only bodily harm but mental fatigue on himself by resisting the lobotomizing effect of American formal education. "You're shutting me out again, Modin" (p.103), his frigid American girlfriend Aimee complains. To Mike however, the scholarship scheme that brought Modin Dofu from an impoverished West African state to America is just one among numerous manifestations of Olympian justice. Mike is so engrossed in the Olympian mythology that he very often refers to other arrangements as either impractical or quixotic. Modin's counter-viewpoint intended to persuade Mike that even in the Greek mythology which he favours and upon which his American ideal is built, other 'mythological instincts' exist more fulfilling to men and women interested in frameworks different and apart from the flight to Olympus, meets with a kind reminder. Thus, it could be true that Prometheus stole fire from Olympus to give to mankind but the American dream has been consciously designed to ensure that once you are a part of the dream the Promethean instinct must of necessity become forbidden. The Olympian logic of this rather automatized discourse is clear as the following dialogue between Mike and Modin reveals:

'Even staying in your mythology, you shut out the Promethean factor.'  
'I guess that's a reverse crossover. No. I didn't want to shut it out. But it's unique. Besides who has the idiotic ambition to go through the crossing twice: first a heroic, then a Promethean crossing? That's insane.' (pp.101-2)

Modin Dofu's refusal to be fixated on one mythology coupled with his desire to steal 'fire' from Olympus (symbolised by American formal education in the context of the novel) meets with abysmal failure partly because, as Mike informs him, 'no one has the idiotic ambition to make the crossing twice'. Heroism has already come to Modin within the framework of Olympian justice and in the mythology he would be 'a

crossover': "one of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero. Part man, part god. Therefore more interesting than either." (p.101)

Armah's grotesque realism in *Why Are We So Blest?* however recognises more than one mythology. The cycle of regeneration and fertility well known to the black cultural psyche at home and abroad is equally against social and philosophical fixations. In Armah's second novel *Fragments*<sup>6</sup> Naana's healing vision which many critics have erroneously referred to as disturbed reveries recognises the danger inherent in 'stubborn continuities' and prescribes for the individual and collective psyches stunned by the traumas of the Middle-Passage the virtue of 'return'. In *Fragments* as in the other novels by Armah the socio-cultural context of 'the return' is the ever present search for a return to 'the African way' articulated in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Thus when in *Fragments* Naana's grandson, Baako, goes the same way as Modin Dofu in the name of Olympian justice, like 'the Healer' in waiting Naana pronounces the traditional vision that guarantees the prodigal's return to the demands of 'the way':

EACH THING that goes returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns round. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return. (p.1)

In his search for abiding "Myth of Origins" within the black profane discourse Henry Louis Gates locates in Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey the exegesis of 'the return' as part and parcel of "the inner workings of black culture (including) its linguistic and musical resources." (Henry Louis Gates, 1988, p.xi) Gates describes

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<sup>6</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments*, London: Heinemann, 1974. All page references are to this edition

his fascination with black language as stemming from his father's enjoyment and absolute control over its manipulation. This mastery over language rituals extends to an ability to 'analyze them, to tell you what he is doing, why and how.' If Naana's articulation above could be situated within the ritual setting of that pattern of language usage at home, the framework of that reference abroad is summarised by Gates and both look to the trauma of the Middle-Passage and its manifestation in the black world's postcoloniality. Thus:

It is amazing how much black people in ritual settings such as barber shops and poll halls, street corners and family reunions talk about talking. Why do they do this? I think they do it to pass these rituals along from one generation to the next. They do it to preserve the traditions of the "race". (Gates, Op.Cit., p.xi)

Modin Dofu has got much of this 'racial' self-preservation in him as he insists on knowing whether or not within the framework of Olympian justice African people (he insists on calling them Africans) forcibly brought to America are also 'blest':

'Are the African people here also blest?'  
'We call them Negroes, chum.'  
'Africans. Are they also outside the scope of your article?'  
'Not if they have class. Look, the piece is titled 'Why Are We So Blest?' The guy didn't set out to write about the underprivileged.'  
(p.99)

This parody of the entire notion of 'blessedness' also underscores the basic premise from which the novel derives its title. After the debate with Mike on blessedness Modin returns to his room only to resort to 'seconal tablets' seeking solace from sleep in order to exorcise the mounting nausea created by the monotonous refrain that refuses to leave his head: "A playful voice took its time skipping through my head chanting a disjointed question: Why-are-we-so-blest? I wanted to drive it out of my head but it just grew louder." (p.103)

When the setting of the story leaves the East coast of America and moves to

the Muslim Maghreb a familiar pattern of depiction in Armah's art is also manifest: *Two Thousand Seasons* took us mentally through the desert by the image of spring water flowing to the desert, whereas in *Why Are We So Blest?* we are 'transmuted' to the desert physically. Once in the chaotic landscape of the Maghreb, a thin disguise for French genocidal campaigns and aborted revolutionary aspirations in Algiers, the focus of the novel and the premise of its resolution centres around the freelance translator and older 'version' of Modin called Solo, and Modin's white American girlfriend Aimee Reitsch. Once Modin is in Congheria, still under the burning desire to participate in a real revolutionary movement, his dream which is the sole reason for flunking out of his honours classes at Harvard is callously aborted by the officials of the revolutionary Maquis. Modin and Solo represent what one might call the subdued consciousness and paradoxically they both suffer from similar types of mediation: Modin and Solo represent the 'idiotic aspirations' or those who are prepared to go through the 'crossing twice'. Their aspiration is mediated by two similar forces of reaction. Both Modin and Solo have suffered from sterile and unrewarding relationships with white women and in the particular instance of Modin the relationship lasts until he meets with an untimely death at the hands of marauding OAS terrorists in the desert wasteland.

'Scholarships' according to Mike are just one aspect of Olympian justice and the arrangement must be good. Rising from the plains to live on Olympus is itself an herculean task and none but an idiot makes the crossing twice. Having risen to the enviable position of 'part man, part god' it is only human to accept the 'honoured' position of 'the blest among the blest'. The sexual metaphor of *Why Are We So Blest?* sustains the interplay of the 'part man, part god' discourse; in the following example

Aimee insists that Modin's ability to 'cure' her frigidity is a feat no man she knows could achieve and Modin's success is therefore altogether Christlike: in Aimee's own words what has taken place is not an awakening but a resurrection. It is significant to note that in a slightly reversed fashion Modin performed the same feat with the sexually starved wife of Professor Jefferson:

She said: 'I thought you wanted to wash me out.'  
'That's what I'm doing.'  
'You're exciting me.'  
'Just being conscientious.'  
'God, I never thought I'd beg anyone to stop exciting me. This was just dead tissue before.'  
'Dormant.'  
'Dead, Modin, dead.'  
'Dormant. It wouldn't be alive now.'  
'This wasn't an awakening, Modin. A resurrection that's what it was.'  
(p.95)

To examine the practicality of a myth of origins and the discourse of postcolonialism it is important to pay special attention to the overall pattern of signification in *Why Are We So Blest?*. The Maquis for example, as the body responsible for structuring the aspirations of practitioners on the field of struggle so that anarchy does not overtake the entire society, plays a different sort of inhibiting role in this arrangement. Driven to the depth of despair at the beginning of the novel and recuperating in a hospital after a mental breakdown, Solo encounters one of the men who took part in the actual fighting and has been crippled as a result, asking him an extremely disquieting and persistent question: "'who gained? who gained? who gained?'" And the sound of it never died before it reproduced itself and rose again. '*A quoi est - ce que tu penses?*'" (p.25)

The crippled man's furious and disjointed questions do not merely supply a link between those who 'rise from the plains to live on Olympus' but perhaps more

importantly provide a unifying 'factor' for Armah's deautomatizing discourse which chronicles the intellectual's role in Africa and the black world's postcoloniality. The intellectuals would fall within two distinct categories: schizophrenia, ostracism and despair await those who attempt to make the crossing twice. The Modin Dofus and Solos of *Why Are We So Blest?*, the Baako Onipas and the Ocrans of *Fragments*, and the Man and the Teacher of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* would fall within this category. Baako finds out on arriving back home after four years' sojourn to Olympus that there is a marked difference between making the crossing and returning empty handed and those who have taken time to return with the dazzling articles 'which we have taken no care nor trouble to produce'. Civil Servants extraordinary like Brempong who crossed learn nothing but return loaded with the material profit that is expected to accrue from the sojourn, and have scenes like the following awaiting them:

V.I.P. CAR PARK  
NO ENTRY

By Order

As the big car slowed to a purring stop, Brempong's welcomers started a soft stampede to get to it, but the fat woman stopped it. 'Move back you villagers,' she said, pushing hard against those in her way. 'Don't come and kill him with your T.B. He has just returned, and if you don't know, let me tell you. The air where he has been is pure, not like ours. Give him space. Let him breathe!' She pushed till she had created some space around the hero. An old woman ventured into the space and began to ask a question: 'But hear shall we...' But the fat woman drove her back into the crowd, then whirled around, stripping off her large *Kente* stole in a movement of unexpected swiftness. She laid the glittering cloth on the asphalt leading to the back door of the limousine and called out, 'come, my been-to: come my brother. Walk on the best. Wipe your feet on it. Yes its *Kente*, and its yours to tread on, Big Man, come!' (pp.84-85)

It is the sheer perplexity of scenes like this that leads Armah's creative articulation of Africa's postcoloniality to crescendo level. Baako, overwhelmed by the depth of



this neocolonial contradiction, describes the affliction as 'cargo mentality': "The expectancy, the waiting for bounty dropping from the sky through benign intercession of dead ancestors, the beneficent ghosts...no doubt at all about that in Melanesian Cargo Mythology." (p.228)

The 'Cargo' motif is even stronger in *The Beautiful Ones*; driven to the depth of despair in the face of an opulent display of sterile materialism the Man is moved to wonder "if anything was supposed to have changed after all, from the days of Chiefs selling their people for the trinkets of Europe." (p.149) However, it is Modin's summation in *Blest?* that links the colonial framework to the postcolonial as it will be seen in the subsequent chapters of this study; the 'post' in postcolonialism is the gap between the colonial framework in which enlightenment and civilization served as the prime disguise for imperial domination. If these two notions were 'factors' then, the game in postcolonial 'factorship' according to Modin has substituted 'enlightenment and civilization' for modern designs in this sense, progress and development. As a significant 'factor' the intellectual's role has also assumed a preeminence which is as debilitating as the role of those Chiefs who sold their people during slavery and colonialism for the trinkets of Europe:

Factors then, scholarship holders, B.A.s, M.A.s, Ph.Ds now, the privileged servants of the white empire, *factors then, factors now*. The physical walls stand unused now. The curious can go and look at them, as if slavery belonged to past history. The distinction has reached higher, that is all. The factor's pay is now given in advance, and sold men are not mentioned, not seen in any way. Their price is given the factor for some mythical quality of his dead spirit. His murdered intelligence is praised. The easier for the givers of these scholarships, this factor's pay, to *structure* the recipient's lives into modern factorship. (p.161 original italics)

However Armah's overriding concern in *The Beautiful Ones* is designed to

show how the distinction between slavery, colonialism and postcolonialism, especially the ways individual and collective lives are structured into 'modern factorship,' has only reached higher. The narrative parody that accompanies this high level postcolonial factorship is reinforced by images and symbols that leave the subtle mythological framework of 'Olympus, Tartarus and blessedness' of *Blest?* for 'the gleam' or attractions of the Atlantic-Caprice among other tall buildings 'beaming' with lights that attract the rich and drive the poor to fits of despair. In the postcolonial arrangement the controlling ideology which is 'African Socialism' is revealed as a pack of lies and thunderous words or at best "a crude attempt(s) to amalgamate selected elements of the socialist tradition and the African experience." (Armah, 1967, p.8)

Armah parodies the wish-fulfilment socialism oscillating between 'two poles of perfection, Eden and Heaven' in *The Beautiful Ones* through the juxtaposed sets of imagery and symbols; the gleam at the top cynically subsumes the decadence, ignorance, poverty, disease, death and decay below and they all combine to structure individual and collective lives into significant or insignificant factors. In this arrangement the written 'Word' or the pseudo-biblical language of the text is designed to articulate another automatized view of the world; "*The last shall be the first. It is even so.*" (p.104, original italics) One of such 'last' becoming first by sheer postcolonial contradiction and expediency is the 'Minister plenipotentiary and hero of socialist labour, the honourable Joseph Koomson.' Koomson's rise from an ordinary dock worker hauling loads along the wharf to the position of a minister through political party sycophancy and opportunism has led him to possess the proverbial 'flabby soft hands', "ideological hands, the hands of revolutionaries

leading their people into bold sacrifices." (p.131) The crucial question remains, "should these hands not have become tougher than they were when their owner was hauling loads along the wharf?" (p.131)

Koomson's odyssey might be exceptional and intriguing but he is just one among many who has been to 'Olympus' and is satisfied with the status of 'part man, part god' articulated in *Blest?*. At the very top of this arrangement is 'the old man himself', the President, who as we are informed by his minister plenipotentiary "does not believe in it (African socialism)." (p.136) As the chronicler's focus achieves a crescendo level the reader is confronted with the praise singing mentality which the 'old man' believes in and which seems "to be all the news these days. Osagyefo (redeemer) the President bla bla. Osagyefo the President bla bla bla. Osagyefo the President bla bla bla bla." (p.127)

The parody becomes dialogized when towards the end of the novel minister Koomson, forced to flee the capital as a result of a military coup d'etat that has overthrown the corrupt and inept civilian administration, encounters an obstacle in the person of a boatman whom Koomson had employed and who in times past revered and feared the powerful but corrupt minister. As a result of the coup "there was fear in the boatman's voice still, but it was not the fear of the weak confronting the powerful." (p.173) In the summation of the novel's lonely and agonized hero, the Man, this boatman "falling back upon the ancient dignity of formal speech" might not be admirable for demanding his own share from the proceeds of Koomson's corrupt earnings but perhaps more importantly the Man acknowledges the boatman's relief and realisation that "in front of him there was no longer a master but another man needing help." (p.174) It is the power of 'the low' and their ability to confront the

political unconscious of 'the high' in profound dialogue that the boatman acts out when he informs Koomson that the minister might have been to Olympus and back but, "Ah, as for me I have been here (the plains). This is my humble place. It is you who have come some way. So my mouth is closed, as my ears are open, in order that I may hear what you bring with you." (p.174) If the language of the boatman and the dialogue he seeks to hold with Koomson could be regarded as crude, the habitues of the 'Nim tree' where 'irritation' is automatically suppressed present the same dialogue from a different viewpoint also designed to articulate a postcolonial framework that has become automatized and routine. The Man:

moves under the shade of a nim tree, smiling at the loco workers already there. Between lip smacks, the talk is the usual talk, of workers knowing they have been standing at their fingertips, never going in. Between sighs and bits of laughter, *phrases that are too familiar pepper the air*. 'He's only a small boy...' 'Yes, it's the CPP that has been so profitable for him..' 'Two cars now..' 'No, you're way behind. Three. The latest is a white Mercedes. 220 Super.' 'You will think I am lying, but he was my classmate, and now look at me.' 'Ah, life is like that,' 'Ei, and girls!' 'Running to fill his cars. Trips to the Star for weekends in Accra. Booze. Swinging niggers man.' 'Girls, girls, fresh little ones still going to Achimota and Holy Child..' 'Those Holy Child girls!' 'Achimota too!' 'He is cracking them like tiger nuts.' 'Contrey, you would do the same...' 'True..money swine.' 'money swine.' (p.110, my emphasis)

For these habitues of the nim tree driven to fits of despair by the display of sterile materialism around them symbolized and controlled by the attractive but unattainable 'gleam' of the Atlantic hotel, socialism means only one thing, "CHOP MAKE I CHOP". (p.106) Their pathological scribblings on the walls of the office latrine do not merely create pathos but underscore the ultimate alienation of workers in a society where postcolonial contradictions have assumed bizarre dimensions. The lonely hero of the book complains to his friend Teacher in a chain of disquieting questions that the demands and desires of 'the loved ones', his wife and children, are driving him

mad. In the same pseudo-biblical language of 'the first becoming the last' the Man articulates the 'part man, part god' status of those who have risen from the plains to live on Olympus: "But Teacher, what can I want? How can I look at Oyo and say I hate long shiny cars? How can I come back to the children and despise international schools? And then Koomson comes, and the family sees Jesus Christ in him. How can I ever feel like a human being?" (pp.92-93)

A similar postcolonial wasteland where individual and collective lives are sacrificed for the morbid ambition of the few climbing and wriggling their way to the giddy heights of 'the gleam' is depicted in *Fragments*. As in *The Beautiful Ones*, cargo mentality and direction in *Fragments* is predicated on a revolving postcolonial paradox symbolized by the proverbial bird, 'Chichidodo'. A cruel joke with which the Man's wife taunts his refusal to take a bribe encapsulates the paradox: "Ah you know the chichidodo is a bird. The chichidodo hates excrement with all its soul. But the chichidodo only feeds on maggots, and as you know the maggot grows best inside the lavatory. This is the chichidodo." (p.45) In *Fragments*, Baako's grandmother Naana places the chichidodo metaphor in perspective and sees it in terms of violation and profanation of the cycle of birth and conception. The tradition of bringing a child 'outdoors' on the eighth day underscores the metaphor and the modern interpretation and misuse to which it is being subjected. The ceremony is designed in the tradition to welcome a 'stranger' who has just arrived in the world of 'the living' from those of 'the unborn'. Within the postcolonial framework of the new dispensation 'outdooring' a child has been turned into a profitable trade amidst feasting and soliciting contributions from generous donors.

This perversion of tradition reaches unspeakable heights when in order to

coincide with the day workers' salaries are paid the ceremony is brought back from eight to five days. The octogenarian Naana does not conceal her disgust at what is not just a violation but a reversal of the ritual cycle, done as Naana claims 'to satisfy a new god': "Five days. The child is not yet with us. He is in the keeping of the spirits still, and already they are dragging him out into this world for eyes in heads that have eaten flesh to gape at." (p.138) The Middle-Passage motif and the link between slavery, colonialism and the postcolonial game in 'factorship' is summarised by Naana still dwelling on the child no sooner born than it is mummified or turned into the proverbial 'chichidodo' by capricious members of a society driven by the desire to accumulate wealth and property even if another life is sacrificed in the process. Sparing neither the ancestors who trigger the process of violation and profanation of the ritual cycle nor their modern siblings Naana reveals her ageing but firm mind:

What is the fool's name, and what the name of the animal that does not know that? The baby was a sacrifice they killed to satisfy perhaps a new god they have found much like the one that began the same long destruction of our people when the elders first - may their souls never find forgiveness on this head - split their own seed and raised half against half, part selling part to hard-eyed buyers from beyond the horizon, breaking, buying, selling, gaining, spending till the last of our men sells the last woman to any passing white buyer and himself waits to be destroyed by his great haste to consume things we have taken no care nor trouble to produce. (p.284)

Armah's writing however contains its fair share of aesthetic and artistic defects. I have attempted to highlight a few of the disquieting faults in the conclusion to this chapter. But my overriding concern in the preceding sections has been designed to provide an accompanying critical framework within the black profane discourse that would account for Armah's creative articulation of 'the African diaspora and its origins'. Naana's overview and the socio-cultural angst it contains explain the peculiar mood of those who believe that the disturbance in the 'line of the

Great Ancestors' is primarily responsible for the 'precarious black present'. While those responsible for the 'disturbance' from without receive blame so do their counterparts from within or those who according to Naana, 'split their own seed and raised half against half'.

## Conclusion

'Armah is to us what Faulkner was to the American South: a Jeremiah without Jehovah.' Though the prospective vision respects the deep-seated religious conscience and metaphysical urges of the race, it is not pronounced on the authority of any well-advertised pantheon. Here the fancy is at its freest.

(Isidore Okpewho, "Myth and Modern Fiction")

Armah's work could be said to perform two important functions for the open-ended discourse of the African diaspora and the forces that aided the dispersal of peoples of African origin to different parts of the world. As the saying goes, 'it takes two to have a cultural misunderstanding'. If the traditional Hollywood image of the African is a 'sambo personality', 'pop-eyed' and controlling affairs in the jungle, sometimes chanting 'bwana, bwana, me see big iron bird', it is only fair to point out that the unrelieved images of the European as destroyer and the Arab as predator exist in those pejorative terms themselves. The most negative criticism that one could make on the writing of Armah is that it has acted out and broadened these areas of cultural misunderstanding.

The traditional African image of the European as a 'born too smart, over-inquisitive personality' could be seen to have been extended by Armah into the equally stereotypical symbol of 'inquisitiveness for destructive purposes.' As for the Arabs 'he' (never with a 'she') has always existed in the African imagination as the

'lecher from the desert'. Again Armah has not done much to relieve this received image of the Arab but extends it to further pejorative terms as a deadly scavenging force 'blasting everything that come against it with destruction'.

The elevation of these areas of cultural misunderstanding and stereotype formations is by far the most negative criticism that any critic could raise about Armah's writing. This chapter, concerned as it is with the 'origins of the African diaspora' and the excruciating trauma of the Middle-Passage, has not dwelt on these areas because another aspect of my overriding concern is to respond to the question raised in Gates' introduction to *Black Literature and Literary Theory*:

If Western literature has a canon, then so does Western literary criticism. If the relation of black texts to Western texts is problematic, then what relationship obtains between (Western) theories of (Western) 'literature' and its 'criticism' and what the critic of black literature *does* and reflects upon? (Gates, Op.Cit., p.3, original italics)

My primary concern in this thesis is far from a discussion of canonization and the socio-cultural politics it entails. Rather I am concerned with the discourse of 'blackness' as it exists in black texts from historical and contemporary perspectives. This chapter on Armah's writing chronicles some of the origins of this discourse and attempts to point to the fact that 'the relationship that exists between (Western) theories of (Western) literature and its criticism has got a direct bearing on what the black writer and critic does and reflects upon'. It is probably important, as Isidore Okpewho, observes that a framework which would chronicle 'the origins of the African diaspora' should be at its freest and not pronounced on the authority of any well advertised pantheon.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Jorge Amado, Wole Soyinka and the Postcolonial Text of Blackness

#### 5.1 Introduction

Of Brazilian authors I have only read, in translation, one novel by Jorge Amado who is not only Brazil's leading novelist but one of the most important writers in the world. From that one novel *Gabriella* I was able to glimpse something of the exciting Afro-Latin culture which is the pride of Brazil and is quite unlike any other culture.

(Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*)

Chinua Achebe's observation about the accomplished Brazilian author, Jorge Amado, points to what I would like to describe as the politics of 'Otherness', marginalization and control of the discourse of 'the low' on which the previous chapters have elaborated. The issue concerns the fact that literature is implicated in politics, economics and culture. The questions that one could raise following Achebe's observation are legion, and the major one remains why Brazil's leading novelist and one of the most important writers in the world should be unknown to the English speaking world of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka? Does the fact that Amado is primarily a novelist have anything to do with the other issue raised in Michael Holquist's editorial comment on Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* that "literary systems are comprised of canons" and "novelization is essentially anti-canonical? It will not permit generic monologue?" (Michael Holquist, 1986, p.xxxi) Amado's novels<sup>1</sup> have fulfilled this role by insisting that dialogue must exist "between what a given system will admit as literature and those texts that are

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge Amado's twenty-one novels and their passionate concern for social justice are written in Portuguese. The discussion in this chapter is however, focused on the English translation of the works.

otherwise excluded from such a definition of literature." (Op.Cit., p.xxxi)

A crucial parallel could be traced between Amado's relative lack of popularity in Achebe's English speaking postcolonial world and the following observation by the Indian critic Tapan Raychaudhuri on another writer of genius consigned to oblivion because of the same problem noticeable in Amado:

The Western impact on Bengali life...produced a supreme genius, (Rabindranath) Tagore, whom Chaudhuri describes as India's greatest poet of all times and one of the world's twenty greatest writers. The latter fact (Rabindranath's lack of popularity) is not appreciated, because it is virtually impossible to translate Tagore into any European language and no one will learn the language of people without any economic or political power. (Cited in Albert Gerald, 1990, p.38)

The historical parallel which this chapter explores in relation to Jorge Amado is more in line with the later part of Raychaudhuri's comment that 'no one will learn the language of a people without any economic or political power'. By placing Amado side by side with Wole Soyinka<sup>2</sup> in an exploration of the postcolonial nature of the text of blackness, the study postulates its reading of postcolonialism on the one hand, and links this with the issue raised by Anthony Appiah that "the novels of (the) first stage (in colonized societies) are...realist legitimization of nationalism: they authorize a 'return to tradition' while also recognizing the demands of a Weberian rationalized modernity." (K.A. Appiah, 1991, p.349) Appiah's view on the postcolonial subject is worth pursuing at some length because of the distinctive insight it supplies to the belaboured issues of postcolonialism and European postmodernism by asking the useful question, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?"

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<sup>2</sup> Wole Soyinka has without doubt proved to be one of the most prolific writers in the world writing in the English language today. Awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1986, his position in the body of works representing the counter-discourse of erstwhile colonies which today form the English speaking world or what used to be known as the British Commonwealth can therefore not be over-emphasized.

An integral part of Appiah's primary starting point is the interrogation of the philosophy of Max Weber as one among several sources upon which European idea of modernity is built. Weberian logic characterizes traditional authority as that which is in opposition to what it calls rational authority, with rationalization being coterminous with modernity and that which opposes the 'rational' being premodern and often represented as the essential 'Other'. The problem with this line of thinking has always been the tendency to insist on "the significance of this characteristically Western process for the rest of humankind." (Op.Cit., p.343) Max Weber, like others before him (Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel for example), from this premise proceeds to postulate a manichaeian view of modernity similar to the tripartite world created and favoured by Hegel:

A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that *in Western civilization, and in Western civilization alone*, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value. (Max Weber, cited in Appiah, Op.Cit., p.343, my emphasis)

The manichaeian nature of Weber's theoretical postulation will only become clear when one makes an attempt to isolate the term 'cultural phenomena' which possess universal significance and value when they occur in Western civilization alone.

Appiah's essay provides such interrogation of cultural artifacts and the burden which history has imposed on them. A sculpture exhibited at the Centre for African Art in New York in 1987 is Appiah's object of focus. The piece of art work is described as 'Man with a bicycle' {Figure 1}. Its origin is Yoruba, South Western Nigeria, and it is very much a product of the twentieth century. Purchased in 1977 'Man with a bicycle' has probably reached its final destination at the Newark

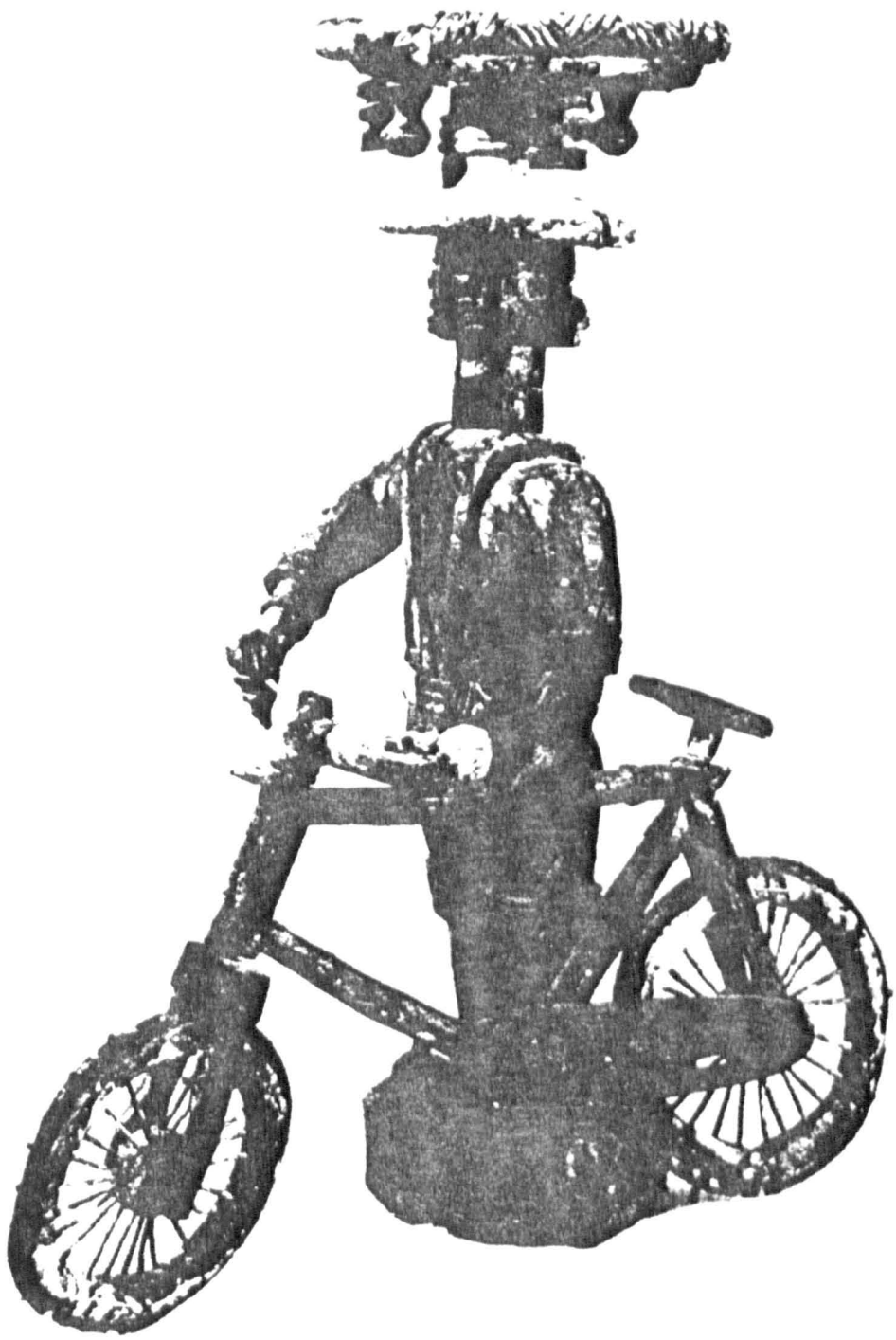


FIG. 1.—*Man with a Bicycle*, Yoruba, Nigeria, 20th century. Wood, 35 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Collection of The Newark Museum, Purchase 1977 Wallace M. Scudder Bequest Fund and The Members' Fund. Photo: Jerry Thompson, 1986.

Museum. The exhibition catalogue published by the Centre for African Art describes 'Man with a bicycle' in the same language that returns to the mainstream of Weberian logic: "The influence of the Western world is revealed in the clothes and bicycle of this neo-traditional Yoruba sculpture which probably represents a merchant en route to the market." (Cited in Appiah, *Op.Cit.*, p.341) It requires a slight shift in emphasis for it to become clear that 'Man with a bicycle' is not just a man (Yoruba) any more but one influenced by the Western world, and the question remains, what is the 'true' meaning of this influence? The distinction is part of what Appiah refers to as an extension of 'the great divide' and the analogy of its discourse "will allow us to explore the articulation of the postcolonial and the postmodern." (*Op.Cit.*, p.341)

Roland Barthes' example of 'Western influence' on the traditional object becoming neo-traditional could be found in the magazine, *Paris-Match*:

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (Barthes, 1976, p.116)

The 'rationality of this rationalization and the projection of its inevitability' already possess a Weberian emphasis: Barthes like Appiah deconstructs this logic by reminding us that as readers we are 'faced with a greater semiological system'. To arrive at a coherent understanding of this system or the discursive units involved in 'Man with a bicycle' and 'the Negro giving the French salute' therefore, we can either have our own radical post-Weberian conception following Appiah, or follow Barthes, to interrogate the form (the signifier), the concept (the signified) and a third term which is the correlation of the first two, the signification.

Both Appiah's and Barthes' theoretical focus relies on history. For Barthes whether "as a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history, (that of 'Man with a bicycle') or that of the Negro." (Op. Cit., p.117) Appiah on the other hand perceives this history (of the Man or the Negro, among others) as the primary starting point of the entire postcolonial discourse. Appiah speaks of the kleptocratic elites or those who consequently became "the national bourgeoisie that took the baton of rationalization, industrialization and bureaucratization in the name of nationalism", (Op. Cit. p.349) from the colonialists. At best these elites could be regarded as mediators between the colonialist's articles of industrialization, rationalization and bureaucratization and the harassed denizens that constitute Yambo Ouologuem's 'niggertrash' in *Bound to Violence*; at worse, they fit neatly into what Appiah has described as a 'comprador intelligentsia'.

Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues also observe that the emergence of a genuine postcolonial voice must out of necessity subvert all the mythical postulations of these elites. Works with firm theoretical bases have pointed to the obvious fact that between colonialism and postcolonialism there exists a space that needs to be cleared. This 'space clearing' gesture championed by the elites is what Appiah has usefully characterized as the true meaning of "the *post* - in postcolonialism (which is) like the *post* - in postmodernism." (original italics, Op.Cit., p.348) The narrow conception of modernity and its Weberian thrust is also in this sense coterminous with the violent disruption of colonized societies. The art and culture of the colonized are characterized as primitive and were "to be judged by putatively *universal* aesthetic criteria, and by these standards it was finally found possible to value it." (Op.Cit., p.347, original italics) Like arrivants after the event, acting under the guise of

nationalism, the neocolonial elites attempt (with debatable degree of success) to clear the space created by holders of these universal aesthetic theories and the valuation of art objects by cultural anthropologists 'seeking an Archimedean point outside their culture for a critique of a Weberian modernity'.

In the particular instances of the postcolonial 'texts of blackness' that would form the primary objects of focus in this chapter, it is important to stress that the writers like the process they depict are caught in the 'space-clearing' gesture described above. Soyinka writes from a vantage point and belongs to the mainstream of those described by Appiah as postcolonial intellectuals in Africa who "are almost entirely dependent for their support on two institutions: the African University, an institution whose intellectual life is overwhelmingly constituted as Western, and the Euro-American publisher and reader." (Op.Cit., p.348) This description suffices for Wole Soyinka and the situation which this chapter explores around his first novel, *The Interpreters*.

The second novelist Jorge Amado, belongs to a society that is twice removed from reality in the important sense of a hegemonic world order. Colonized by Portugal and a significant member of the Portuguese speaking world, Amado's Brazil like "the entire Portuguese speaking world has suffered some form of economic and political dependency." (Maria Luisa Nunnes, 1987, p.xii) Allied to this dependency is what Nunnes describes further as an 'accompanying cultural imperialism'.

It could be seen from the above therefore that both Wole Soyinka and Jorge Amado have entered the postcolonial discourse from two diametrically opposed standpoints and produced in their works, fundamentally different views. The divergent views of the authors on decolonization and postcolonialism could be tested further by

using their individual society's mythological assumptions which possess striking similarities, but, in the handling of the two writers, produce spectacularly different results. Then, on an almost equal basis, the most pervasive institution through which Western culture has stamped its presence with the air of the inevitability of Weberian rationalization on the colonized being, Western education and university life, is given prominent representation in *Tent of Miracles* and *The Interpreters*. Binary opposition and class differentiation in postcolonial societies is measurable wherever we encounter a massive presence of high culture and mass culture, and the opposition between the two "is available in domains where there is a significant body of Western formal training." (Appiah, Op.Cit., p.347)

Thus it is perhaps not mere accident that the protagonist in Amado's novel like the composite heroes of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* inhabit or haunt (in Amado's hero's case) the university environment as a primary means of articulating this conflict and opposition. Amado's hero Pedro Archanjo, is probably better described as a street corner Socrates, devoted anthropologist, cult priest, dean of the demi-monde, bon viveur and indefatigable apostle of miscegenation. The description fits partly because Archanjo unlike 'The Interpreters' does not approach anyone or any issue from a position of superiority. The *Times Literary Supplement* notes with respect Jorge Amado's 'grand scale, long, lavish, highly coloured and exuberant' but creative articulation of the discourse of 'the low' in *Tent of Miracles* and other works. *The Washington Post* on the other hand welcomes Amado's joyous, exuberant, almost magical description of festivals and what the paper describes as 'puppet shows, African rituals and local legends,' but summarises the plot as comprising 'fascinating customs, strange and wonderful characters'.



However, Gerald Moore writing for *The New African* describes Soyinka's *The Interpreters* as "the first African novel that has a texture of real complexity and depth." Eldred Jones who once described the novelist, playwright and poet as "W.S. our W.S.,"<sup>3</sup> which an ingenious transcriber has decoded as "Wole Soyinka our William Shakespeare" attributes *The Interpreters'* reputation for being difficult to a combination of factors: according to Jones, Soyinka "brings to *The Interpreters*<sup>4</sup> from his poetry a cryptic, image laden style, from his drama a sense of setting and character, and from his essays a fluency of exposition and critical observation." (p.1)

In *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, Jones also endorses Gerald Moore's review in *The New African* about the complexity and depth of the novel. This study's primary starting point in its reading of Soyinka's novel, however, is the belief that at the heart of this complexity and depth there exist other features that call for 'close reading'. *The Times'* review acknowledges the fact that '*The Interpreters* is concerned with a group of young Nigerian intellectuals'. The review goes on to say that these intellectuals are merely trying to make something worthwhile out of their lives in a 'society where corruption and consequent cynicism, social conforming give them alternate cause for despair and laughter'. While corruption and social conformity could be seen as crippling situations, the question remains whether the intellectual's role in such an atmosphere should be devoted solely to cynicism, despair and laughter?

As there is no straightforward answer to this question, I would like to continue

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<sup>3</sup> The reference is from the dedication page of Professor Jones's book *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, London: Heinemann, 1973

<sup>4</sup> See Eldred Jones's introduction to Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, London: Heinemann, 1972. All page references are to this edition of the novel.

a theoretical study of postcolonialism and how the concept's influence as a situation informs the articulation of the postcolonial 'text of blackness'. The attempt is to explicate further the socio-cultural factors informing the intellectuals' collective apathy and the consequent resort to laughter, cynicism and despair in a situation that demands positive action and commitment.

## 5.2 Postcoloniality and the Text of Blackness

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa.

(K. Anthony Appiah)

This study agrees with Anthony Appiah that the same dynamics at work in the creation of the so-called neo-traditional art works such as 'Man with a bicycle' are present in the entire discourse of the postcolonial 'text of blackness'. The importance of speaking first about the producers of these art works and then about the case of the African/Black novel for example, is to show that "to focus exclusively on the novel (as theorists of contemporary African cultures have been inclined to do) is to distort the cultural situation and the significance of postcoloniality within it." (Appiah, Op.Cit., p.346)

When for instance, the African novel was described as having 'emerged' at the close of the 1960s, postcolonial writers and critics began their counter-discourse by asking "what the fiction is supposed to be emerging from and what into?" (Chinweizu et al., 1980, p.97) The appearance of Charles Larson's *The Emergence of African Fiction* in 1972 among other works by Western critics of African/Black

literature could be said to have produced an uproar among indigenous writers and critics alike. It gradually became clear that the continent's literature is only said to have emerged when it appears to have produced the equivalent of a 'comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers'. Concerning Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah for example, Larson draws one of the primary conclusions of his controversial book:

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. (Charles Larson, cited in Chinweizu et al. *Op.Cit.*, p.97)

A critique of Larson's line of thinking and the Weberian logic that produced it is what the Nigerian critic Omolara Ogundipe Leslie describes in her observation that by his utterance, Larson betrays:

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 "civilized" 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. (Leslie, cited in Chinweizu et al., *Op.Cit.*, p.97)

No one can pretend not to understand the source(s) of this socio-cultural discourse with all the tendencies for overreaction on both sides of the 'great divide'. Ayi Kwei Armah's celebrated essay "Larsony or Fiction as criticism of Fiction" directed at 'the skilful Western interpreters of African literature' in general and the American critic Charles Larson, in particular, summarises what Armah calls "the other pet assumptions of Western racism; Africa is inferior; the West is superior."

(Ayi Kwei Armah, 1976, p.1)

Armah succeeds to a very large extent in clearing himself and his writing from the charges of Anglo-American ape-manship pursued by the 'Western interpreter' of African literature. When Charles Larson, for example, traces the source of the complex structure of Armah's second novel *Fragments* to an indebtedness and borrowing which Armah owes to James Joyce, the novelist aptly bounces back with the notion that the Western critic in this particular instance has "leapt beyond the bounds of normal racist thinking and into pure, undisguised superstition." (Op.Cit., p.6) The 'plain truth' Armah reveals is that:

I have never read a single work by Joyce. Nothing at all, not even a fragment. For the benefit of anyone curious to know where I did get the organizing idea for *Fragments* from, it grew out of a conversation with my elder brother concerning the quality of life at home. (Op.Cit., pp.6-7)

However, one important factor accounts for the antagonistic stance which lies at the heart of the discourse and counter-discourse between the 'Western interpreter' and the African/Black writer and critic. The factor could be summarized as the ability of the West to attract and repel the latter with an almost equal sense of admiration and antagonism. Thus one of the issues with which this chapter grapples is how this essential ideological discourse is made to acquire mythical dimensions on both sides of the divide. The attack launched on Wole Soyinka among other writers and critics of the so-called Ibadan/Nssuka school of African literature by the troika of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike could be used to illustrate the point further. At the heart of the 'Bolekaja' critics' attack is the belief that many African writers in English, especially Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark and Christopher Okigbo, are guilty of "old fashioned, craggy, unmusical language, obscure and inaccessible

diction; a plethora of imported imagery; a divorce from African poetic tradition; tempered only by lifeless attempts at revivalism." (cited in Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.128)

The mystification inherent in the argument of the Bolekaja critics is evident in 'their advocacy of the works of Chinua Achebe for their simplicity, directness and relation to oral tradition'. A possible critique of their endorsement of the work of Chinua Achebe could be found in Anthony Appiah's observation that this brand of elites' "enthusiasm for nativism was a rationalization of their urge to keep the national bourgeoisies of other nations, and particularly the powerful industrialized nations, out of their way." (Appiah, Op.Cit., pp.349-350) Appiah's view appears plausible because one cannot find anything inherently different between the liberal humanist perspective of {a} Chinua Achebe and that of {a} Wole Soyinka for example, that is, if we choose to leave aside for the moment the issues of simplicity/obscurity or directness/inaccessible diction and many others.

While the argument of the Bolekaja critics could be regarded as suffering from an overdose of the 'possessive exclusivity' tendency or what Edward Said has described as "the sense of being an exclusive insider by virtue of experience," (cited in Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.22) these critics also tend to miss the fact that systems of patronage and production that have been institutionalized, coupled with "the historical facts of colonialism inevitably lead to a hybridization of culture." (Op. Cit., p.129) It is this inherent oversight on the part of the troika that gives Soyinka the opportunity 'to make an effective rejoinder to the group's attack on his work in his article Neo-Tarzanism: the poetics of pseudo-tradition'. The summary of this shift in emphasis is that while the Bolekaja critics are happy to be fixated on tradition,

Soyinka's idea of 'African reality' and African traditional literature extends the discourse into the postcolonial terrain in which cultural artifacts such as 'Man with a bicycle' and the 'Negro giving the French salute' could be used as illustration:

Referring to their account of the African poetic landscape as a 'landscape of elephants, beggars, calabashes, serpents, pumpkins, baskets, towncriers, iron bells, slit drums, iron masks, snakes, squirrels...a landscape portrayed with native eyes to which aeroplanes naturally appear as iron birds', Soyinka offers a scathing rejection of this as a representation of the modern African experience, failing to see how it proves more acceptable than "the traditional Hollywood image of the pop-eyed African in the jungle - Bwana, bwana, me see big iron bird." He points out that his African world embraces 'precision machinery, oil rigs, hydro-electricity, my typewriter, railway trains (not iron snakes), machine guns, bronze sculpture etc.'" (Ashcroft et al. Op.Cit., p.129)

One approach to Soyinka's critique of the arguments of his opponents is what Ashcroft and his colleagues describe as the entire discourse and counter-discourse comprising what could be regarded as an extension of the old fashioned dispute about what did or did not constitute good poetry. The essential difference in this particular instance, however, has been the insertion of the word 'African' here and there in a plea for authenticity and legitimization. While the issue of good or bad poetry and the largely formal issues which it raises rages, other postcolonial writers and critics, especially the younger ones, have delved into the more ideopractical problems confronting not only Africa but the affairs of peoples of African origin throughout the black diaspora. Integral parts of their findings are that, far from been pre-occupied by elitist discourses like cultural exclusivism or nostalgic nationalism, they argue that the immediate problem facing their postcolonial society is how to resolve the issues of imperialism in its neo-colonial form and the continuing stratification and inherited elitism of post-independence societies. A resort to ancestor worshipping within this general framework could only be efficacious if "the call to the ancestors as well as

the ancestors themselves is seriously called into question." (Jonathan Ngate, cited in Anthony Appiah, *Op.Cit.*, p.350)

The articulation of this pattern of probing of the ancestors themselves leads to a relationship which the Afro-American critic Henry Louis Gates describes as the production of the postcolonial text of blackness, characterised by "Talking texts and signifying revisions." (Gates, 1986, p.297) Gates' idea of "talking texts" establishes a relationship whereby individual authors explore the narrative space or gap created by their precursors to explicate their own peculiar insight into issues diversely historical and contemporary and one in which postcolonial writers begin by questioning, for example, the so-called black experience itself. Reading the Afro-American matrix in this way, Gates observes the signifying revisions implicit in, for instance, 'Sterling Brown's regionalism and Toomer's lyricism, Hurston's lyricism and Wright's naturalism and equally, Ellison's modernism to Wright's naturalism'. (*Op.Cit.*, p.295) However, it is Ismael Reed's relation to these authors in the Afro-American tradition that provides the primary focus of Gates' essay. Reed's creative articulation in *Mumbo Jumbo*, for example, possesses an 'inner dialogization' which is characterised by 'parody-as-hidden-polemic' or the 'use of two autonomous narrative voices'. According to Gates:

Reed's relation to these authors in the tradition is *double voiced* at all points, since he seems to be especially concerned with employing satire to utilize literature in what Northrop Frye calls 'a special function of analysis, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatism, oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede the free movement...of society.' (*Op.Cit.*, p.296, my emphasis)

The striking similarities which the two texts of blackness under discussion in this chapter bear to the claims which Gates has made for Reed's writing are crucial.

In my reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles* I would consider not only the *double voiced* nature of the two works, but also their 'double edgedness'. By 'double voiced' and 'double edged', I mean the process whereby authors are aware of resistance from without and possibly from within to the particular viewpoint which their works portray and wear down this resistance through the use of 'parody-as-hidden-polemic'. This process, concerned as it is with the 'free movement of writing' itself, could also be described in Bakhtinian terms as follows:

When parody becomes aware of substantial resistance, a certain forcefulness and profundity in the speech act it parodies, it takes on a new dimension of complexity via the tones of the hidden polemic...A process of inner dialogization takes place within the parodic speech act. (M.M. Bakhtin, cited in Gates, Op.Cit., p.296)

Wole Soyinka, for example, is aware of formidable resistance to the individual and collective views of his composite heroes in *The Interpreters* and by decidedly explicable means or what Bakhtin describes as 'a certain forcefulness or profundity' imbues these views with a 'new dimension of complexity'. The parodic speech act at this point also assumes the manner of inner dialogization. I have entitled my discussion of Soyinka's novel "'As', 'The Word' are companions to 'Shit'" by which I have tried to link the philosophical strands that pervade Soyinka's articulation in this novel and related works to a profound awareness of the formidable resistance to this author's overall aesthetic or general viewpoint. One cannot miss for example, the quasi-Biblical language of this subtitle itself with the first word coming from the pessimistic conclusion Soyinka draws in one of his plays that has often been described as a remarkable part of his postwar writing, *Madmen and Specialists*. In *Madmen*, the decadent and unchanging situation brought on the author's society by a cannibalistic



and megalomaniac military dictatorship attracts the author's fierce pessimism; thus we are informed: "As, Is Was Now, As Ever shall Be". (Soyinka, 1974, p.271) 'The Word' on the other hand, comes from Soyinka's play *The Road*, published the same year as *The Interpreters*. Professor champions the articulation of 'The Word' and describes his philosophical pastime as 'elusive', 'Deep. Silent but deep.' However, a search through the pages of the text of *The Road* does not reveal, in my opinion, the practical implication of Professor's quest for 'The Word'. The inner dialogization of the text which Professor leads with the hangers-on in the 'Aksident store - all parts availabul' who are incapable of comprehending the general thrust of the elusive 'Word' is in this sense comparable to Sagoe's choice in *The Interpreters* of an inept messenger like Mathias as the sole recipient and heir apparent to his elusive 'Viodancy - the philosophy of Shit'.

I have traced the companionship in these philosophical outlooks to what I earlier described as an awareness of substantial resistance which comes to Soyinka's writing, probably first and foremost, through the Christian mythological framework. This background is important and facilitates easy access to the sources of Soyinka's parodization of certain speech acts and the consequent complexity of his hidden polemic. Soyinka is also caught in the 'space clearing gesture' which I have described, and part of the postcolonial nature of his discourse is arrived at from the relation which his writings have to the forces of tradition in his society and the contemptuous gesture of the colonialist towards this tradition, while seeking to impose the cultural authority of its own modernity on the colonial subject. Because the discourse of novels like *The Interpreters* is also riddled with pleas for legitimation, authenticity and nationalism, they are often described as novels of 'the first stage' in

colonised societies. These novels are often driven by a "representative tendency to read Africa as race and place into everything." (Appiah, Op.Cit., p.352) The nationalistic instinct of the project undertaken by Soyinka and other writers of these novels of the first stage is clear from the following articulation of the world view which they vehemently oppose:

But there again we come against the Yoruba proverb: *Bio s'enia, imale o si* (if humanity were not, the gods would not be). Hardly a comparable idea to the Judeo-Christian theology of 'In the beginning, God was', and of course its implications go beyond the mere question of sequential time... (Soyinka, 1976, p.10)

Novels of the second postcolonial stage however, "far from being a celebration of the nation, then,...are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only the Western *imperium* but the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie." (Appiah, Op.Cit., p.353, original italics) For complementarity, Appiah reads as integral part of these novels of the second stage Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* and concludes that "Africa's postcolonial novelists, novelists anxious to escape neocolonialism, are no longer committed to the nation." (Op.Cit., p.353) Because of its delegitimizing framework, antagonism towards the Western *imperium* and equal hostility to the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie, I situate Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles* within the parameters of novels of the second stage. Like his counterparts in Africa, Amado has chosen instead of the nation, not an older traditionalism but the condition of blackness and the economic, political and socio-cultural situations of those who live within this condition. Through the novel's 'inner dialogization' and the constant reminder to the reader that 'if Brazil has contributed anything truly significant to the world, miscegenation is our only contribution to humanity's treasure house of culture', the novel joins in the belief that if we are to

identify with anyone, it is with the "*la negraille*" or those described in Yambo Ouologuem's novel as "the niggertrash, who have no nationality." Possessing all that could be regarded as postcolonial reality, postnativist politics, a transnational rather than a national solidarity - and possibly pessimism, *Tent of Miracles* like *Bound to Violence* interrogates the frontiers and boundaries of the postcolonial situation itself. Both Amado's and Ouologuem's novels maintain similar convictions in the conclusion that "Postcoloniality is after all this: and its post-, like that of postmodernism, is also a post- that challenges earlier legitimating narratives. And it challenges them in the name of the suffering victims of 'more than thirty African republics'." (Appiah, Op.Cit., p.353)

It is within these similar but equally divergent positions that I would like to examine the discourse(s) of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles* and the postcolonial situation which they depict.

### 5.3 'As', 'The Word', are companions to 'Shit': The Discourse of Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

Although *The Interpreters* is a first novel, it comes in Soyinka's works after a number of remarkable plays and a corpus of distinguished poems which had cleared the hurdles of a literary apprenticeship. In 1965, the year of the novel's publication, also saw the first production of *The Road* at the Commonwealth Arts festival in London, and of two radio plays, *Camwood on the Leaves* (March), and *The Detainee* (September) on the B.B.C. By that year, *The Strong Breed*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *Brother Jero*, *The Lion and the Jewel* and *A Dance of the Forests* had all appeared.

(Eldred D. Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*)

Between Professor's morbid obsession with 'the Word' in *The Road*<sup>5</sup> and the

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<sup>5</sup> Wole Soyinka, *The Road* in *Collected Plays 1*, London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. All page references are to this edition

rather pessimistic philosophy of 'As' in *Madmen and Specialists*<sup>6</sup> to Sogoe's excremental symbolism otherwise described as the 'Voidancy' philosophy, this study articulates its reading of the discourse of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. The first part of my subtitle to this section establishes the companionship that exists between the three philosophical strands and, far from being compartmentalising, the demarcation attests to the unity of Soyinka's overall aesthetics and the logicity of their conception. As the epigraph to the section also suggests, *The Interpreters* is a novel with a difference. The novel comes from a persistent but also consistent line in the career of a writer who by the time of the novel's publication 'had cleared the hurdles of a literary apprenticeship'.

However, I would like to begin a reading of *The Interpreters* with a discussion of two out of the novel's numerous philosophical antecedents or counterparts, the philosophies of 'As' and 'the Word'. Examined against the backdrop of the claim made in chapter two of this study that the entire discourse of Ogun and its handling by Wole Soyinka is informed by 'the social order, the dialectics of power and principles of economic well-being', one might begin with 'the Word', and recognise it not merely as a religious essence but as an instrument of social order or conditioning. In his review of George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, Ayi Kwei Armah traces the historical discourse of 'the Word' as the root cause of the 'Caliban complex' or the intellectual dependency which very often possesses Africans and their counterparts in the diaspora. The Caliban complex, Armah maintains, is informed by 'the Hegelian power play' which is the philosophical background informing "the

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<sup>6</sup> Wole Soyinka, *Madmen and Specialists* in *Collected Plays 2*, London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. All page references are to this edition

Western confidence game unleashed against Africa" for many centuries. (Armah, 1985, p.571) The ascendancy of Western hegemony:

turns essentially on the possession of a single intellectual resource which Westerners, from the time they acquired the technology of literacy (from where?) have, in grateful but uncomprehending mimicry, raised to the status of divine power: the word. Not just any old word. The written word. (Op.Cit., p.571)

Like this Western colonization of 'the (written) Word' and the people whose domination and oppression the service of 'the Word' is consequently employed, Professor in *The Road* raises to tyrannical heights his sole possession of the elusive 'Word'. In Professor's handling, 'the Word' is not merely prevalent but also recurrent. He employs it at every crucial moment when knowledge of who he really is, is about to dawn on the hangers-on in the 'Aksident store - all parts availabul'. Perhaps next to 'the Road' itself, 'the Word' is the most deautomatized context in the play. Soyinka employs this essential Christian metaphor as he does 'the Word' to explicate a postcolonial situation. The automatized Western/Christian framework can be found in Saint John's gospel and the discourse of 'the Road' to 'righteousness cum destruction' is articulated in Matthew among other books in the Bible. In the account by John, the annunciation of the gospel begins from the vivid premise of 'the Word' and the emphasis is not just on any word but the written 'Word':

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. (Saint John's gospel, Chapter 1, vs.1 & 2)

Matthew's account on the other hand gives the discourse of 'the Road' a note of urgency as it makes clear the ultimate purpose of choosing the road that individuals must follow:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in

thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew, chapter 7, vs. 13-14)

To defamiliarize the Biblical framework Soyinka poses the Yoruba mythological framework which puts humanity firmly before and possibly above the gods and consequently in charge of creating and if need be subverting the 'Word'. The Yoruba belief that "'*Bio s'enia, imale osi*' (if humanity were not, the gods would not be)" according to Soyinka, is "hardly a comparable idea to the Judeo-Christian theology of 'In the beginning God was', and of course its implication goes beyond the mere question of sequential time." (Soyinka, Op.Cit., p.10)

However, as the dialectic of *The Road* unfolds so does its essential reinforcement of new areas of conflict within the play's understanding of the discourse of 'the high' and 'the low'. The Christian framework might have been deautomatized in order to articulate a postcolonial situation but the newly legitimized narrative or dialogue of the play portrays a hierarchy of consciousness that begins with Professor's use of 'the Word' and his activities on 'the Road'. Ostensibly, the reader is left with the not-too-easy task of extricating what precisely constitutes Professor's known and unknown credentials from the series of allusions suggested by his morbid quest for 'the Word'. Like the writer of the book of Revelation in the Bible perceiving humanity in the smouldering inferno of hell fire "saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" (Revelation 8, v.13), Professor's understanding of 'the Other' is as a being open to exploitation. Part two of the play opens one hour after the funeral service takes place of victims of a road accident fraught with implications of Professor's sabotaging activities on 'the Road'

or at least those of his agents, Kotonu and others. Professor's thoughts however, are neither with the victims of the accident nor their families but are deeply engrossed in his morbid experimentation with human life:

Prof: And you brought no revelation for me? You found no broken word where the bridge swallowed them?

Samson: How could we think of such a thing Professor?

Prof: A man must be alert in each event. But the store then? Surely you brought new spare part for the store?

Samson: Sir...

Prof: You neglect my needs and you neglect the Quest.... (p.194)

From his many conversations with Samson the reader gets to know that Professor's needs are material as well as spiritual. The material need is met through the sale of spare parts in the 'Aksident store - all parts availabul', constantly replenished with motor parts clandestinely removed from scenes of accidents before the police arrive. When such acts of fraud and gross disrespect for human life are interspersed with what the prefatory note describes as Professor's "part psychic, part intellectual grope...towards the essence of death", the question remains, what is the whole purpose of Professor's 'Quest'? As a religious rite imbued with what the preface also calls the ritualised worship of 'Agemo...a religious cult of flesh dissolution' the reader is expected to appreciate that the 'Agemo phase' includes a passage of transition from the human to the divine essence (as in the festival of Ogun). What is difficult to understand is why the path towards 'flesh dissolution' should involve so much 'badgering' (to borrow Samson's word) of the human body and soul.

The play employs the ritualised discourse of the mask-idiom which as the preface observes, 'will be strange to many people'. The claim made in the preface that the poem entitled 'Alagemo' should be of help is understandably approached by

the reader who requires better insight into what 'flesh dissolution' is all about. The first four lines of the poem provide the summation of the rite of passage, in this sense the transition from life to death:

I heard! I felt their reach  
And heard my naming named.  
The pit is there, the digger fell right through  
My roots have come out in the other world. (p.150)

The 'Agemo' phase thus involves, as Murano demonstrates later in the play, the suspension of life. Murano walks the landscape of the play mute and unspeaking since according to the preface 'it was during the Agemo phase that a lorry knocked him down. Murano limps because as a result of the accident that maimed him his left leg has become shorter than the right which makes him 'the one person in the world in whom the Word reposes.' (p.186) Professor explains further:

When a man has one leg in each world, his legs are never the same. The big toe of Murano's foot - the left one of course - rests on the slumbering chrysalis of the Word. When the crust cracks my friend - you and I, that is the moment we await. That is the moment of our rehabilitation. When that crust cracks. {Growing rapidly emotional, he stops suddenly, sniffs once or twice, wipes his misted glasses, returns briskly to his table} (p.187)

Professor's monologic discourse continues throughout the play. His many tirades about the exegesis of the elusive 'Word' are in reality a series of monologues, so called because Professor does not seem to communicate with anyone especially when and where 'the Word' is concerned. The only person that seems to understand him is Murano who happens to be mute. Professor maintains a condescending attitude towards all others who are not as fortunate as himself to find 'the Word' or at least embark on a quest similar to Professor's 'intellectual grope towards the essence of death'. The unfortunate ones such as Samson, Kotonu, Say Tokyo Kid and the other habitués of the 'Aksident store' are open to spiritual and material exploitation as far



as Professor is concerned. In the spiritual sense Professor informs Samson that the problem with him and others like him is that "those who are not equipped for strange sights - fools like you - go mad when their curiosity is pursued. First find the Word. It is not enough to follow Murano at dawn like a vulgar housewife. Find the Word." (p.187) Professor's condescension towards 'the low' reaches an unprecedented height when, on being asked a simple question, he makes clear the hierarchy of consciousness which the entire play pursues:

Kotonu: Do you think something may have happened to Murano?

Prof: What can happen to Murano? A shadow in the valley of the shadow of!  
Are you so conceited that you spare your concern for him?

{A short silence. Samson sidles up to Professor.}

Samson: Professor.

Prof: En-hm.

Samson: May I ask something? A little personal?

Prof: Why not? Even God submits himself to a weekly interrogation.

Samson: Thank you sir. Now, it is only a matter of interest. You mustn't be offended sir, because I really want to know. I mean...is it true...that is, what I want to find out is...

Prof: In short, you want to know whether people are right when they say I am mad. (p.205)

Perhaps next to Say Tokyo Kid, the timber driver who earns extra pay leading a band of thugs for politicians, Samson the self-proclaimed 'Champion Tout of Motor Parks' is the most outspoken among 'the low' or those Professor patronisingly describes as 'my habituals' and he receives the most scathing attacks from Professor.

Ostensibly it is Samson who reveals much about Professor's personality including his past and present activities. The path towards the most deautomatized context in the play is articulated through Samson's account of Professor's past roles in the Christian Church. As a lay-reader in the Church Professor's authoritarianism underscores an integral part of the play's narrative parody. To articulate this context Samson's language, like that of the other habituals in the 'Aksident store,'

degenerates into what a critic once described as 'a crude animal jabber' that is reminiscent of Brother Jeroboam's assistant, Brother Chume in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. In *The Road*, it is a matter for history that Professor mishandled Church funds but even more intriguing is the reason Samson gives as to why Professor could not have gone to prison for this act of fraud:

Salubi: I only know there was the matter of Church funds. Did he go to prison?

Samson: You think they just put somebody in prison like that? Professor his very self? Of course you don't know your history. When Professor entered Church, everybody turned round and the eyes of the congregation followed him to his pew - and he had his own private pew let me tell you, and if a stranger went and sat in it, the Church warden wasted no time driving him out.

Salubi: Dat one no to Church, na high society.

Samson: You no sabbe de ting wey man dey call class so shurrup your mout. Professor enh, he get class. He get style... (p.162)

The framework which Samson struggles to describe becomes clear after we have followed this rather one-sided dialogue with Salubi. Salubi, who prefers to be described as 'a uniformed private driver - temporary unemploy' (p.152), observes in the crude animal jabber reminiscent of 'the low' that what goes on in the Church is not religion but a theatrical performance tending towards the absurd among members of 'a high society'. In this play within a play the control of 'the Word', not just any word but the 'written Word', gives every participant a level of authority that varies according to social class. The general populace which comprise 'the low' are reduced to the level of mere observers of a struggle which excludes them in many ways. In Samson's words, "I tell you the whole neighbourhood used to come and watch him (Professor), they would gather in this very bar and watch him through the windows, him and his hundred handkerchiefs spread out on the pew in front of him." (p.162) The day Professor fought with the bishop marks the climax of this struggle of the

titans. In his own world among 'the low' Salubi expects that a fight between two men would include a bit of rough-handling and slapping, but as Samson informs him the orchestrated fight between the bishop and Professor could never 'descend to such bushman taxi-driver stuff':

Samson: My friend, they did have a fight but it was a duel of gentlemen. Look. I'll tell you what happened. Just because the bishop thought he had B.A., B.D...

Salubi: How much?

Samson: B.D. Bachelor of Divinity stupid. But B.D. or no B.D. the man just couldn't knock oratory like Professor. In fact everybody always said that Professor ought to preach the sermon but a joke is a joke, I mean, the man is not ordained. So we had to be satisfied with him reading the lesson and I'm telling you, three quarters of the congregation only came to hear his voice. And the bishop was jealous. When the bishop came on his monthly visit and preached the sermon after Professor's lesson, it was knock out pure and simple. Before Professor open in mout' half de Church done go sleep. And the ones who stayed only watched Professor taking notes. (p.163)

Like the entire play, the automatized context of the Church inherent in the narrative parody above remains among other things a discourse in ideological signification. The struggle which the dialogue between Samson and Salubi describes is one primarily between the conventional literati symbolized by Professor and the not-so-qualified intellectual, Bachelor of Divinity, in the case of the bishop, who consider themselves the only true ideologues of 'the written Word'. After his expulsion from the Christian Church it is pertinent to note that Professor remains a 'right wing' member of 'the high society' of Salubi's description, while leading and contesting the control of 'the Word' with the bishop and the Church within the deautomatized framework symbolized by the Alagemo phase and the myth of Ogun. The occlusion of the rest of the society from this struggle is equally in line with the hierarchy of consciousness which the play parodies. 'The low' is represented mainly in the pidgin or what is sometimes described as 'broken English'. 'The high' on the

other hand remain at liberty to articulate their thoughts in a fluent standard variety which does not communicate anything to the people they all seek to control. My graphic representation of this process of ideological signification in figure 2 shows that 'the Word' occupies centre stage and its manipulation and control remain the essential domain of 'high discourse'. This form of discourse it should be emphasised is also official and monologic:

ALAGEMO & OGUN {Deautomatized}	THE CHURCH/UNIVERSITY {Automatized}
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THE WORD-  
High discourse  
{Official & Monologic}

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ANIMAL JABBER  
Low discourse  
{Occluded & Carnavalesque}

Figure 2.

Both the automatized (the Church) and the deautomatized (Alagemo and Ogun) contexts in *The Road* are right wing myths occupying the top of a social hierarchy. 'The low' through their language and a general inability to grasp the basic tenets of 'the Word' are forced to occupy the bottom of this socio-political and economic hierarchy. Discussing Soyinka's poetry under the subtitle "Myth, Pan-Africanism and the liberation struggle in Wole Soyinka" in his book *Ideology and Form in African Poetry* Emmanuel Ngara describes Soyinka's language and traditional aesthetics in this way:

I will add my voice to the voices of those African critics who have decried Soyinka for his inability to communicate...The second issue is that of his use of African myths. This might first give the impression that Soyinka is a traditionalist. However, the embracing of Ogun as his central symbol in *Idanre and other poems* does not signify an African nationalist consciousness on the part of the author...For the use of such a myth to signal a nationalist or revolutionary consciousness it has to rise from the poet's acceptance of his own culture and a reaction against the dominant ideology of the ruling class or colonial power...Soyinka's search for a myth was really a means of placing him in the tradition of such poets as Yeats, Eliot and other Western poets. (Emmanuel Ngara, 1990, pp.95-96)

The contest between 'Madmen and Specialists' is of a slightly different sort from that which adherents of 'the Word' pursued in *The Road*. The obvious similarity between *Madmen and Specialists* and *The Road* is the murder of two men at the end of both plays. In *The Road* Professor is stabbed in the back by Say Tokyo Kid while in *Madmen* Old Man, who is very much the leader of the 'madmen,' is shot and killed by Dr. Bero, 'the specialist' in this play. If the death of a raving Professor at the hand a street corner hustler or timber lorry driver and part-time thug for politicians could be justified, one does not find the same easy justification for the kind of bizarre contest that goes on between 'Madmen and Specialists' in the later play. The fact that the specialist is Dr. Bero and he happens to be the son, while the leader

of the madmen Old Man is the father complicates the matter further. The inclusion of Dr. Bero's sister Si Bero in the struggle between father and son and the fact that the entire play's actions take place around their family house make the drama appear like a family vendetta as one of the mendicants once claimed. On closer examination however, the perceptive reader is likely to come to terms with Soyinka's overriding intention in *Madmen and Specialists* which is to put before the reader 'a political proposition'. The politics of the play is structured and revolves around the two specialized words 'Madmen and Specialists'. In the introduction to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, David Cooper informs us that:

The truth of madness is what madness is. What madness is is a form of vision that destroys itself by its own choice of oblivion in the face of existing forms of social strategy. (David Cooper, 1978, p.vii)

Foucault's study of the interwoven terms 'Madness and Civilization' pursues this 'choice of oblivion' at length and one of its primary conclusions is that the truth of madness is also 'a matter of voicing the realisation that I am (or you are) Christ.' (Foucault, *Ibid.*, p.24)

In *Madmen and Specialists* Old Man could be seen to have made 'the choice of oblivion in the face of existing forms of social and political strategy' by putting himself forward as the new Christ of 'As'. On the surface 'As' is a morbid philosophy propounded by Old Man which the specialist and his cohorts wielding political power do not understand fully but would like to adopt as a rallying cry for their military regime obsessed with 'control and practice'. It is the infinite possibilities around the issue of 'control' suggested by the philosophy of 'As' that appeals to the totalitarian regime in which Bero serves as 'director of intelligence'. In the pessimistic language of the mendicants 'As' means "Practice...As Was the

Beginning, As Is, Now, As Ever Shall Be, World without." (p. 272) As if to link the total alienation of the automatized Christian framework to the postcolonial discourse of the play, Aafaa the spastic, the priest among the mendicants or madmen, states the objectives of the new god 'As', including the history of the strategic confrontation which has always existed between the (Christian) religious priesthood and the political state. The only time a Christian priest appears in the play he is shown to be a cringing coward utterly incapable of grasping the dastardly thrust of the modern state which has locked father and son in a deadly battle for 'control' of the body and soul of the innocent lot who, according to Dr. Bero, are better advised to stay in their little worlds. The struggle which *Madmen* articulates is predicated upon the following ideological interface between the political and the spiritual priesthood which Aafaa's speech parodies:

In the beginning was the priesthood, and the priesthood was one. Then came schism after schism by a parcel of schismatic ticks in the One Body of Priesthood, the political priesthood went right the spiritual priesthood went left or vice versa the political priesthood went back the spiritual priesthood went fore and vice versa the loyalty of homo sapiens was never divided for two parts of a division make a whole and there was no hole in the monolithic solidarity of two halves of the priesthood. No, there was no division. The loyalty of homo sapiens regressed into himself, himself his tick-tock self, self-ticking, self-tickling, self-tackling problems that belonged to the priesthood and political while they remained the sole indivisible one. Oh, look at him, Monsieur l'homme sapiens, look at the lone usurper of the ancient rights and privileges of the priesthood {the cripple makes an obscene gesture. Aafaa registers shock.}, look at the dog in dogma raising his hindquarters to cast the scent of his individuality on the lamp-post of Destiny! On him practise, Practise! Practise! As Was the Beginning\_\_ (pp.272-273)

Thus 'As' is the new god that has acquired the powers of the old god. The chant of the mendicants "Even as it was so shall it be,...Even as it was at the beginning of the act..." (p.244), is an integral part of the Christian myth on which the transition from

the old to the new dispensation is firmly anchored. Defamiliarizing the Christian framework comes easily to Soyinka's writing and many African writers as Soyinka testifies in *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Within the framework of the African/black view of the world in which these writers operate it is not unusual for gods to die and:

When gods die - that is fall to pieces - the carver is summoned and a new god comes to life. The old is discarded, left to rot in the bush and be eaten by termites. The new is invested with the powers of the old and may acquire new powers. In literature the writer aids the process of desuetude by acting as the termite or by ignoring the old deity and creating new ones. Sembene Ousmane, Yambo Ouolougouem, Ayi Kwei Armah are among the leading practitioners of this method. (Soyinka, Op.Cit., p.86)

In *Madmen and Specialists* Soyinka does not ignore the old deity in this sense the Christian 'spiritual priesthood', but aids the process of its desuetude by acting as the termite. The representative of the old deity is symbolically simply called Priest. When Dr. Bero returns home from what is repeatedly referred to as 'out there' and what we may infer to mean the political battlefield or the scene of the Nigerian civil war<sup>7</sup>, the Priest, friend to Bero's father could not wait to hear what turns out to be scandalous news from 'out there'. The first and only encounter between Priest and Bero reveals the former as grossly naive and assuming, while Bero did not hesitate to bring the Priest and Si Bero, whose naivety is of a slightly different sort, up to date about Old Man's idea which has yielded the morbid philosophy of 'As':

Si Bero: Pastor, I think Bero is a little tired...

Priest: ...Strange man, your father, very strange, you didn't run into

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<sup>7</sup> Wole Soyinka was, for his attempt to form what he called the 'third force' aimed at neutralizing the genocidal instincts of the Federal and the Biafran sides during the Nigerian civil war, imprisoned without trial by the Federal authorities. *Madmen and Specialists* is one of his post war/detention writings and in the language of the play's intense pessimism the young man Dr. Bero and his cohorts in power have truly turned cannibalistic.



him *out there*, did you? I'm really anxious to know if he still intends to legalize cannibalism.

Bero: He does.

Priest: I knew it. A stubborn man, once he gets hold of an idea...But human flesh, why, that's another matter altogether.

Bero: But why, Pastor. It's quite delicious, you know.

Priest: Just what I say. It's...what did you say?

Bero *{reaches out and pulls out the Priest's cheek}*: This. Delicious.

Priest *{struggles free}*: You're joking, of course.

Bero: No. Your friend will confirm it when he comes.

Priest *{increasingly horrified}*: You mean he...

Bero: No, not him. He never meant anything. At least not that way. But we found it delicious just the same.

Priest: You?

Bero: I give you the personal word of a scientist. Human flesh is delicious. Of course, not all parts of the body. I prefer the balls myself. (pp.239-240 my emphasis)

Pattern of ideological signification is understandably more difficult to construct in this play in which 'madmen' mingle freely with 'specialists' as they both seek to control the lives of those like the Priest, Si Bero, and the 'Earth Mothers' Iya Agba and Iya Mate, on whose shoulders rest the only glimmer of hope in the play. The spiritual but cultic undertone of the Earth Mothers' vocation represents a last desperate attempt to bring the 'specialist' back to the path of nature and acceptance of traditional wisdom. But, secure in the knowledge and arrogance of his 'scientific' acquisition, Bero displays an open disregard for the old women and the fact that they flee the scene unable to impart whatever they stood for to Bero symbolizes that their alternative path to political or cultural redemption is firmly closed.

However, an integral part of the play is the action that takes place 'out there' which is not represented on the stage. 'Out there', Bero and his colleagues operate a totalitarian regime. Symbolically Bero also wears a uniform and carries a swagger stick which he does not hesitate to use (pp.232 & 263), and his introduction to the centre stage of politics has convinced him that his new vocation as head of the

Intelligence Unit is more satisfying than his previous work as a medical practitioner.

With unconcealed pride he informs his 'simple minded' sister Si Bero that "You are everything once you go out there":

Bero:...{He shrugs} The head of the Intelligence section died rather suddenly. Natural causes.

Si Bero: And that's the new vocation?

Bero: None other, sister, none other. The Big Braids agreed I was born into it. Not that that was my recommendation. They are all submental apes. (p.237)

The 'Big Braids' are probably the self-made 'Generals' in the Nigerian army who directed the affairs of the nation during the war. Reference to them as 'submental apes' could come from Dr. Bero but it is actually Soyinka's view about his jailers who fought a war that he (Soyinka) did everything possible to prevent.<sup>8</sup> Bero and the 'big braids' are now in an important sense committed to a political and philosophical framework in which "Victory is neither God's nor the Devil's: it belongs to madness." (Foucault, *Ibid.*, p.23) Because of the great disquiet which it signals, the actions of the 'madman/Old Man' come to us through the other characters

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<sup>8</sup> Soyinka's prison notes have since been published in a book called *The Man Died*, (London: Heinemann, 1972). Apart from the series of invectives hurled at Intelligence chiefs or specialists like Bero such as the one called Mallam D in the book, Soyinka makes very little attempt to hide his distaste and above all feeling of intellectual superiority for the rank and file of the Nigerian army. In *The Man Died* the wedding of the then head of state Yakubu Gowon which took place during the war is described in the following way: "I could perhaps even absorb the elitist arrogance which went into the wedding extravaganza of this nonentity in the baffling process of history, I could ignore the later idiocies I uncovered - the deliberate corruption of impressionable school children whose precarious powers of evaluation had been exploited by the national education machinery to induce them to compete for souvenirs from this hubristic insolence, I could forgive the competitive slavishness of the Lagos state government and the naivety of its head, Mobolaji Johnson, ...who considered it a duty to immortalize this better forgotten disgrace by altering the name of a major street to Yakubu Gowon street in honour of the wedding." (p.231) In a more subtle, less abusive and creative manner, the volume of poems called *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, (London: Rex Collins, 1972) returns to the theme of the military involvement in Nigerian politics and focuses on the civil war in particular.

and in the end become a serious 'interruption' to the entire action of the play. The following dialogue between Bero and Si Bero is yet another instance when the 'unseen' action of the madman interrupts the main action of the play:

Si Bero: But at least tell me why? In God's name why?

Bero: No, not in God's name - in the name of As!

Si Bero: What?

Bero: The new god and the old - As.

Si Bero: What are you trying to be, Bero - evil?

Bero: Does it sound that bad? It was no brain-child of mine. We thought it was a joke. I'll bless the meat, he said. And then - As was the beginning, As is Now, As Ever shall be...World without...We said Amen with a straight face and sat down to eat. Then, afterwards...

(p.241)

Earlier Bero boasts about his claim that human flesh is delicious and authenticates the claim as 'the personal word of a scientist' (p.240). When eventually the specialist/scientist confronts the madman the former is shown to be in search of the strange knowledge which belongs neither to God nor the Devil but to madness. The path to this knowledge leaves the specialist confused and unable to understand why when the victims of 'As' (like the mendicants) "were provided a Creed...they talked heresy. Same as you (Old Man)" (P.263)

At several points in *Madmen* the actions of the mendicants including those of Bero and Old Man are not merely grotesque but unintelligible. Accused by Bero of 'corrupting unformed minds' Old Man's response draws sustenance from the specialist's ignorance and a general inability to grasp the socio-political and emotional state of those whose minds he has branded unformed. Thus for those harbouring 'unformed minds in deformed bodies' according to Old Man, "Creed, heresy, bread, or pleurisy (the specialist's specialised word for torture) are mere words"; no matter how high sounding the words may be, they do not address the emotional state or social existence of 'the low' under a system that runs deep with oppressive

experimentation. The visit of the head of state to the house of the disabled with his 'gushpillating wife' (p.258) which the mendicants' parody testifies to the fact that Dr. Bero and the 'Big Braids' are unconcerned about the state of existence of people with 'unformed minds in deformed bodies'. The more serious aspect of the play however is the pursuit or the lack of it, of the elusive philosophy of 'As', the sole reason why Bero the specialist has incarcerated his own father:

Bero: ...{Again pause.} What exactly is As, Old Man?

Old Man: As?

Bero: You know As, the playword of your convalescents, the pivot of whatever doctrine you used to confuse their minds, your piffling battering ram at the idealism and purpose of this time and history.

What is As, Old man?

Old Man: You seem to have described it to your satisfaction.

Bero {thundering. Moving suddenly, he passes his swagger stick across the Old Man's throat, holding it from behind and pressing}: I'm asking you! What is As? Why As!

Old Man {gasps but tries to smile. He cranes up to look him in the face.}: In a way I should be flattered. You want to borrow my magic key. Yours open only one door at a time.

Bero: WHY AS!

Old Man: And rusty? Bent? Worn? Poisonous? When you're through the lock is broken? The room empty?

Bero: What is As?

Old Man: But why? Do you want to set up shop against me? Or against...others? {He rolls his eyes towards the mendicants.} I think we have a conspiracy.

Bero: What is As?

Old Man: As Was, Is, Now, As Ever Shall be...

Bero {quiet menace}: Don't play with me, Old Man.

Old Man: As doesn't change.

Bero {increases pressure.}: From what? To what? (p.263)

At this crucial point in the play leading to the stage when, out of sheer desperation, Bero shoots the Old Man, very few readers or members of the audience are likely to miss the fact the dialogue between Old Man and Bero is too strange to be taking place between a father and his son. I have argued earlier on that Soyinka's purpose in *Madmen* is to place before the audience/reader a 'political proposition'.

As a proposition, political or social, the audience/reader that would respond to every component of the play must recognise the entire proposition as a 'discursive formation'. It is as a discursive unit therefore, and understanding the notion of discourse "in the Foucaultian sense ...as a system of possibility of knowledge" (Ashcroft, et al., *Ibid.*, p.167) that I grapple with the two problematic terms in the play, 'madness and specialisation'. 'Madness' according to Foucault:

No doubt...has something to do with the strange paths of knowledge... Erasmus, in his dance of fools, reserves a large place for scholars: after the Grammarians, the Poets, Rhetoricians, and Writers, come the jurists; after them, the "philosophers respectable in beard and mantle"; finally the numberless troop of the Theologians. *But if knowledge is so important in madness, it is not because the latter can control the secrets of knowledge; on the contrary, madness is the punishment of a disorderly and useless science.* If madness is the truth of knowledge, it is because knowledge is absurd, and instead of addressing itself to the great book of experience, loses its way in the dust book and in idle debate, learning becomes madness through the very excess of false learning. (Foucault, 1971, p.25, my emphasis)

Old Man's 'madness' in *Madmen and Specialist* could be seen in this sense to serve as the 'punishment of a disorderly and useless science' which is the glowing pride of the specialist, Dr. Bero. The knowledge that is so important in Old Man's madness, mainly the philosophy of 'As', might be of great significance to Bero and the 'Big Braids' but the fact remains that this insight does not 'control the secrets of knowledge'. Old Man's 'knowledge in madness' has been arrived at out of a paranoid study of human frailties. Accused by Bero of developing 'As' as a 'piffling battering ram at the idealism and purpose' at a particularly vulnerable time and history, Old Man could only reply that his work among the disabled was a carefully chosen path: "I asked to be sent where I would do the most good. I was and I did." (p.263) However, what is readily observable to the essential reader/audience about *Madmen* and its entire conception is the near absence of myth in the play. The play vacillates

around the edges of mythology but settles in the end for a courteous respect for tradition, symbolized by the role of the Earth mothers, Iya Agba and Iya Mate. The only way to make some sense out of this mythological absence/silence is to understand that:

By the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. What is necessarily a profanation in the work of art returns to that point, and, in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt. Henceforth, and through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable...in relation to the work of art; it is now arraigned by the work of art, obliged to order itself by its language, compelled by it to a task of recognition, reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason. (Foucault, *Ibid.*, p.288, original italics)

The 'culpable world' is part and parcel of Soyinka's postcolonial discourse. In *Madmen and Specialists* the art work and 'the world' it parodies are swamped in madness, while in *The Interpreters* both the work of art and the world it arraigns are swamped in mythology. When madness interrupts a work of art according to Foucault, 'it opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer.' It is probably sheer coincidence that what 'interrupts' *The Interpreters* is another 'void', in this sense Sagoe's voidancy, the philosophy of shit. *The Interpreters* however, "shifts dazzlingly between satirical vignette and caricature, and the exploration of spiritual depths through stream-of-consciousness and the evocation of myth." (L. R. Early, 1977, p.162) To put the series of satirical vignette and caricature together and make them yield Soyinka's intended exploration of spirituality and evocation of myth, the reader must be able to grapple with the complexity of *The Interpreters*. The issue of the novel's complexity alone according to Early, "has led some critics to regard it as an anomaly among African novels." (*Ibid.*, p.162) However, when read or

perceived as the work of a complex writer making a very 'high' theoretical and thematic proposition, the outcome might not succeed in removing the novel's complexity but will, at least, reduce the burden of understanding imposed on the reader as a result of this complexity.

Thematically, the novel's post- like the post- in postcolonialism replicates what Frantz Fanon describes as 'National Consciousness' including its 'Pitfalls'. Swayed by its achievements in putting an end to what Fanon calls "definite abuses: forced labour, corporal punishment, inequality of salaries, limitations of political rights..." (Fanon, 1983, p.119) under colonialism, the native led by the educated classes will stop at nothing until the claim for nationhood is endorsed by the colonial power. When eventually the drive for nationhood becomes a reality, national consciousness faces the crucial test of whether or not the hopes and aspirations of the nation are "the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people.." (Ibid., p.119) One of the major pitfalls of 'national consciousness' is soon revealed to be "the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps." (Ibid., p.119) In a practical sense one of these 'tragic mishaps' is the Nigerian civil war which led Soyinka to write *Madmen and Specialists*. Another manifestation of the 'void' which *Madmen* as a play swamped in madness reveals is predicated on an historical premise:

The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an under-developed middle class...It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace. In its wilful narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country...The university and merchant classes which make up the most enlightened section of the new state are in fact characterized by the

smallness of their number and their being concentrated in the capital, and the type of activities in which they are engaged: business, agriculture and the liberal professions. (Fanon, *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120)

In a novel preoccupied with 'choice', the historical background evoked by Fanon dictates the choice(s) made by the major characters. *The Interpreters* is also primarily about the university and merchant classes or those who make up the 'national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime.' This class of people, as Fanon observes, are 'characterized by the smallness of their number and their concentration in the capital'. Thus one of the novel's basic issues revolves around "Egbo's uncertainty whether to assume the claims of his past, in his native village, or to resume his bureaucratic job in modern Lagos." (Early, *Op.Cit.*, p.163) However, Egbo's alienation from his native village like most of his counterparts, is complete and total and one wonders why many critics still dwell on the possibility of his 'assuming the claims of his past.' The careful reader is not likely to miss the fact that Egbo is hardly aware of what these claims are and how does a man assume claims that he is completely unaware of? Egbo's consequent cynicism and opaque recollection of his grandfather is reminiscent of what Lemuel Johnson describes in reference to another work as 'Soyinka's deadliness, early and late,' and the ways it "echoes the comic drama of autocratic self-indulgence and sado-masochism which distinguishes the 'armpit' scene in *The Lion and the Jewel*." (Lemuel Johnson, *Op.Cit.*, p.65) Thus as Egbo "began to wonder and to set the warlord of the creeks against dull grey file cabinet faces of the Foreign Office" (p.12), he also offers the following illuminating account which is the reader's only guide to his past and the people that make up this past:

'In such a setting,' it was Kola talking, hardly taking his attention off the sketch book '...controlling every motion of the place in a rigid



grasp, to all purposes a god among men...that is how I anticipate your old man. And a wholly white head of hair.'

'Blind too by now, I imagine?' Egbo made it a question turning to the paddlers. They hemmed and stuttered, uneasy. Vaguely Egbo sensed a code of taboos, and with it returned a feeling of remoteness. 'But I am his son,' he protested. 'You are not talking to a stranger.'

But still the paddlers kept silence. Egbo persisted, 'I was a child when I saw him last and his sight had begun to fail. Can he see at all now?' The elder of the paddlers took refuge in a proverb; 'when asked why they wore leather shields over their thoughts, the counsellors replied, "the king says he's blind".' (p.11)

Egbo is hardly aware that it is his own 'political unconscious' that is exploited by the elder of the paddlers who 'took refuge in a proverb', as he realises rather sadly that the would-be successor and descendant of the warlord of the creeks, with his own mouth 'says he is blind'. Egbo blunders to the very end as "the spectre of generation rose now above him and Egbo found he would always shrink, although incessantly drawn to the pattern of the dead." (p.11)

Technique in *The Interpreters* on the other hand has often led critics to offer ambivalent responses to the novel. The language which is an integral part of a stylistic innovation is at first glance characteristically Soyinkian in its dense, cryptic and poetic nature. However, there are far too many interruptions between this serious language on the one hand, and an accompanying mode of expression designed as it is to accommodate what L.R. Early describes as the novel's dazzling 'shifts between satirical vignette and caricature,' on the other. Understanding who makes these satirical gestures and who they are directed at soon becomes an important element towards understanding the more complex relationship between the signifier and the signified. To paraphrase the narrator in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, within a culture in which 'words' are literally eaten, 'proverb is the handy palm-oil which like eating yams,' makes it easy for words to be wholly consumed. Proverb is also a means of

escape; every character operating under the African socio-cultural framework is fully aware of the importance of words and proverb becomes the only way to retrieve whatever has been hurriedly uttered in an instance of polemical interface between individuals which could later be regretted as social, political or even economic tactlessness. Even the drunken Chief Winsala is aware of this unwritten rule of language which happens to be cultural and political as well as economic. Sent by Sir Derin - the Morgue to collect a bribe from Sagoe before he could be offered a job in the corrupt Newspaper organisation, "Independent Viewpoint", even in his drunken stupor Chief Winsala remembers that the 'windy' approach is most suited for this type of discourse. The result is the following, complete with the narrator's intervention:

'Anyway the thing is this. You know yourself that you are not experienced for this job. The editor told us at the meeting that you are trained as...er... something like building or something like that...oh yes, surveyor.'

And he allowed himself a long pause; it was a mark of expertise, a deprecation pause, enough to let the victim's inadequacy sink in. Although where he got the surveyor idea...Sagoe shrugged. It did not matter anyway. 'And then of course, you annoy the Board very much especially our Chairman. But...er...matters can still be repaired...well, it is all in your hands, you get my meaning?'

Winsala signalled another drink. Then he spread out his hands and grinned. '*Se wa s'omo fun wa?*' (p.84, original italics)

*The Interpreters* might not be the most reputable African novel as far as the use of proverbs is concerned but resolution of the chain of dialogues it constructs between 'the interpreters' and their adversaries often resort to tradition/proverbs and at times crude caricature, in order to retrieve scenes and episodes from degenerating into outright chaos. When Winsala reaches this point in his grim discussion with Sagoe he stops speaking English altogether. What would have followed 'the grin and outspread hands' in the logic of the English language would be 'are you going to agree to give us a bribe?' Even in its literal meaning provided in the glossary 'se wa

s'omo fun wa' is retrievable, dignified and above all proverbial. The expression means "‘will you act as a dutiful son should?’, i.e. look after the elders." (p.260) For a bribe of fifty pounds Winsala declares that ‘the job is there’, but only fifty pounds can secure it. When Sagoe asks straightforwardly earlier on how much he will have to pay as bribe to secure the job Winsala cannot help commending his apparent lack of diplomacy: "He took the schnapps laughing. ‘The Englishman has not left much of his diplomacy on you. You are more like American, straightforward.’" (p.84) The moment Sagoe tries something remotely diplomatic Winsala resorts to tradition and proverb once again: "'My boy, it never does to try your elders. When a cub yields right of way to an antelope, first look and see if Father Leopard himself is not a few trees behind.'" (p.85) When eventually a deal is struck Winsala seals it with another proverb this time indicating contentment: "'That is more sensible. When the Sanitary Inspector looks under the bed he's looking for kola, not *tanwiji* (Yoruba term for mosquito larva).'" (p.85)

*The Interpreters* is certainly not unique in its self-imposed postcolonial task of recording the socio-cultural and political thoughts of a people in a language that is not primarily theirs. Faced with a similar language problem at about the same time that Soyinka wrote his novel, Gabriel Okara carried out one of the most unparalleled linguistic experiments in African fiction in his novel, *The Voice*. Unlike Soyinka who translates the thoughts and expressions of people who never learnt or spoke English into standard or, at least, broken/pidgin English Okara transliterates the thoughts of his Ijaw characters into English. The result is at first glance sheer incredulity, but with hindsight the careful reader soon comes to terms with Okara's transliteration which turns out to be a mode of discourse consciously designed to project the socio-

political thoughts of his people in a language that is not theirs and still leave their own cultural and linguistic pride unscathed. In *The Interpreters* on the other hand:

One might retort that the novel begins in a language, Sagoe's, in which nothing serious can be said; and ends with another, Egbo's, in which nothing can be resolved. I do not think we can make sense of the book until we see that the challenge of the form involves challenging the characters as well as the reader, and results in an interpretation of life and consciousness in a "language" the interpreters cannot command. (Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 1981, p.219)

The 'language' the interpreters cannot command is in my opinion, the language of tradition which includes proverbs. Obsessed with a politics of 'difference' and individualism the interpreters are more at home in expressing a collective cynicism which they all share in varying degrees. Allied to their cynical outlook is their abiding naivety and subconscious belief that Western education has conferred a leadership role on them. The members of the group of interpreters are Sagoe, a journalist, Sekoni, engineer and sculptor, Lasunwon, a lawyer, Kola, artist and painter, Egbo, Foreign Office functionary and Bandele, University teacher. The only 'authentic' female member of the group Dehinwa is described by Sagoe as "the tightest arsed Confidential Secretary I've ever laid." (p.106) Dehinwa works in an unspecified office and shares the common attribute of having gone overseas for higher education with the rest of the group.

The culpable world dictates the group's social and intellectual stances towards political and economic issues. This world like that of *Madmen* is equally swamped in Sekoni's madness and 'opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer' with Sagoe's philosophy of shit. Yet the issue of who among these composite heroes is qualified to be called 'interpreter' has pre-occupied critics. L.R. Early would argue that "the label 'interpreters' is most appropriate to Sagoe and Kola, in

their efforts to maintain a moral balance in the moral chaos of the modern age." (Ibid., p.163) Early's view is probably in contradistinction to Kinkead-Weekes' observation that the key to the art of interpreting could be resolved if we take a critical look at the beginning and the end of the novel. Significantly for Kinkead-Weekes the novel 'begins in a language, Sagoe's, in which nothing serious can be said, and ends with another, Egbo's, in which nothing can be resolved.'

I 'read' the novel from a standpoint which takes Sekoni and Sagoe as central symbols in Soyinka's overall aesthetics; like Professor's obsession with 'the Word' in *The Road* and Old Man's madness which produced the philosophy of 'As' in *Madmen*, idealism, reactionary or progressive, is too often swamped in madness. Sagoe's voidancy also brings my reading closer to Kinkead-Weekes' view and my own belief that an integral part of the essential Soyinka operates in a 'language in which nothing serious can be said'. For between Sekoni and Sagoe, Soyinka parodies a socialist cliché which believes that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the real task is to change it.' Soyinka swamps in madness the socialist (Sekoni) attempting to change the world while the philosopher (Sagoe) is left with the postcolonial task of interpreting a culpable world. The philosopher is only too painfully aware of the road to the mad-house; like Ayi Kwei Armah's Akan bird metaphor 'chichidodo', the philosopher is the quintessence of "the chichidodo that hates excrement with all its soul. But the chichidodo only feeds on maggot and you know the maggots grow best inside the lavatory. This is the chichidodo." (Armah, 1970, p.45) The analogy becomes even clearer when the philosopher's (Sagoe) musing is placed side by side with Sekoni's socialist ideal that is swamped in madness:

'Because the good knight must be saved, they roast the Sheikh. Don't mind me, Mathias, I know I am feeling sorry for myself, and over nothing. *People like Sekoni end up on the pyre anyway*, but damn it, I didn't have to help them build the faggots.'

Mathias drained his bottle. 'Na so life be oga.'

'*Silence*, Mathias. *Silence*. I have known all kinds of silence, but it's time to learn some more.' (p.98, my emphasis)

Sekoni, qualified engineer, had looked over the railings every day of his sea voyage home. And the sea sprays built him bridges and hospitals, and the large trailing furrow became a deafening waterfall defying human will until he gathered it between his fingers, made the water run in the lower channels of his palm, directing it against the primeval giants on the forest banks. And he closed his palms again, cradling the surge of power. (p.26)

Sagoe and Sekoni thus provide the key to the novel's major shifts in time, especially the shift from social commentary to mythic manifestations triggered first and foremost by Sekoni's sculpture, the Wrestler. From the moment "Metal on concrete jars (his drink lobes" (p.7) (Sagoe's oddity of a sentence which opens the novel and serves as launch-pad for a pattern of articulation in 'which nothing serious can be said'), we are invited to witness a pattern of commentary which becomes the true essence of the hedonist:

This was Sagoe, grumbling as he stuck fingers in his ears against the mad screech of iron tables. Then his neck snapped as Dehinwa leapt up and Sagoe's head dangled in the void where her lap had been. Bandele's arms never ceased to surprise. At half-span they embraced table and chairs, pushed them deep into the main wall as dancers dodged long chameleon tongues of the cloudburst and the wind leapt at them, visibly malevolent. In a moment only the band was left.

The 'plop' continued some time before its meaning came clear to Egbo and he looked up at the leaking roof in disgust, then threw his beer into the rain muttering.

'I don't need his pity. Someone tell God not to weep in my beer.'

Sagoe continued to rub his neck. 'You are a born hangwoman, leaping up like that. It could snap a gorilla's neck.'

'I had to think of my hair.'

'Her hair! My neck to her hair. Why don't you use wigs like all fashionable women?'

'I don't like wigs.'

'If you go around wearing your own hair people will think you are bald.'

Separate only by the thigh-high bamboo wall giving the so-called 'party privacy'-try our Club Cambana Cubicles etc etc-Egbo watched the rising pool in which his polluted beer dissolved in froth....

'Well, I made a choice. I can't complain.'

Bandeled looked up at him.

'Oh I was only having a chat with me and this talkative puddle.' (pp.7-8)

Without Sekoni's stuttering explosions which insist on situating all of these scenes in a social context virtually every one of 'the interpreters' is contented with offering criticisms that are devoid of positive action. Before we witness Sekoni's first serious argument with the rest of the group which leads to the articulation of his 'dome of continuity' analogy, he has established a voice for himself as one who would not acquiesce in sterile social comments. In the first of these instances he makes clear his belief that both social and culturally motivated choices are themselves historically determined phenomena. Thus in response to the question directly addressed to him, "If the dead are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being, should they not be as they are, dead?", he retorts that:

'T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions disrupts the d-d-dome of c-c-continuity which is wwww what life is.'

'But are we then,' Egbo continued, 'to continue making advances to the dead? Why should the dead on their part fear to speak to light?'

'Ththat is why wwe must acc-c-cept the universal d-d-dome, b-b-because ththere is no d-d-d-direction. The b-b-bridge is the d-d-dome of rreligion and b-b-bridges d-d-don't jjjust g-g-go from hhere to ththere; a bridge also faces backwards.' (p.9)

Ostensibly, it is Sekoni's madness, the cause of which is his ability to stand up to the system, that opens the window to the novel's other pre-occupation: the exploration of spiritual depths and the evocation of myth. Sekoni's protest against a system that is all too prepared to swap his engineering skill for a less demanding but unfulfilling position 'signing vouchers and letters and bicycle allowances' is the novel's first and only serious sign of rebellion against the organised fraud prevalent in the postcolonial

state. The experimental power station he builds at Ijioha with indigenous raw materials is classified as 'junk' by the Chairman of his board with the aid of the Chairman's self-appointed 'expatriate expert': "Hot from his last lucrative 'evaluation', came the expatriate expert. Expatriate, therefore impartial." (p.28) The Chairman's substitute for Sekoni's power station is a replacement from abroad and one that is supplied by "his subsidiary company registered in the name of his two-month-old niece." (p.28) The company becomes 'the sole contractor for Project Ijioha.'

If Sekoni's good intentions as an engineer are thwarted by the postcolonial powers-that-be, the strength of the artist in him, idealistic but unpretentious, remains an absolute challenge to the rest of 'the interpreters'. Kola who does nothing else but sculpt and paint, is simply nonplussed as he admits that "'You should have watched Sekoni at work. And then, the result. God when you think that that man has done nothing but mess around with power stations...'" (p.100) Sekoni's visionary construct 'The Wrestler' is a combination of foresight and hard work as we are informed that:

Sekoni began sculpting almost as soon as he returned. His first carving, a frenzied act of wood, he called 'The Wrestler'. He had not asked Bandle or anyone to sit for him, but the face and the form of the central figure, a protagonist in pilgrim's robes, was unmistakably Bandle. Taut sinews, nearly agonizing in excess tension, a bunched python caught at the instant of easing out, the balance of strangulation before release, it was all elasticity and strain. And the rest, like the act of his creation which took him an entire month and over, was frenzy and desperation, as if time stood in his way. Kola had an extension shed erected for him against his own studio, and watched with growing respect Sekoni turn the wood into some wilful spirit whose taming was a magic locked in energy. (pp.99-100)

However, *The Interpreters* is also written in two parts, a technique of contrastive juxtaposition which derives from a habit Soyinka has "in his plays of using a two-part structure to transform our view of what we have been watching: a first part satiric,



comic and done in human terms; a second part tragic, mythic, and aware of forces and perspectives beyond human terms." (Kinkead Weekes, Op.Cit., p.229)

Soyinka's contrastive juxtaposition returns once again to the domain of Fanon's historical evocation of an under-developed and wilfully narcissistic middle class. Besides the thematic juxtaposition in parts one and two, another aspect of the novel's contrastive analysis is the artificial demarcation it erects between the young 'interpreters' on the one hand, and the irredeemable lot made up of phoney intellectuals, corrupt Chairmen of governing boards, including their 'experts' and Managing directors. The latter group would include Professor and Mrs. Oguazor, Ayo Fasheyi and Dr. Lumoye of the University Teaching hospital. The others are Sir Derinola - the Morgue, Chief Winsala, the Chairman of Sekoni's governing board and the Managing director of "Independent Viewpoint". Sagoe's 'philosophy of the egoist' observes in 'voidante' terms the major characteristics of a board filled with 'Compensation Members':

And this helped. In Sagoe's system, a Board which, with true Voidante piety locked a lavatory away for private self-communion could not be wholly soulless. With a new measure of respect for his accessors, Sagoe once again approached the board-room, filled, as with all boards, with Compensation Members...Lost elections, missed nominations, thug recruitment, financial backing, Ministerial in-lawfulness, Ministerial poncing, general arse-licking, Ministerial concubinage...Sagoe occupied the first few minutes fitting each face to each compensation aspect, and found that one face stood out among them...Sagoe stared, but he was new in the country and had not heard of the famous cranium of The Morgue, and the ever-growing catalogue of myths which surrounded it. (p.77)

Like 'the interpreters' the essential Soyinka is probably strongest and most pointedly bitter when it interrogates the boundary of conflict between those who wield and abuse political and economic power and those whose 'superior intellect' in Soyinka's opinion, qualifies them to rule but who nevertheless remain alienated and

marginalized by the postcolonial system. The sympathy which works like *The Interpreters* extend to the latter group is clear and the hallmark of Soyinka's artistry is his ability to employ parody, caricature and satire to make every act of the other group appear ridiculous. Sagoe's voidancy philosophy is, among other things, assigned the task of ridiculing figures like Sir Derinola, the corrupt judge who presides over the governing board of "Independent Viewpoint", Chief Winsala, and in general voidancy is also trained to articulate the gullibility inherent in a postcolonial and culpable world, such as that exhibited by the Oguazors among others. Kola once described by Egbo as a 'godless dauber' (p.24) is the painter who also 'lectures on Art at the Institute' (p.45), and he is the one appointed the task of tormenting Ayo Faseyi, the cardiologist at the Teaching Hospital. Faseyi's problem stems from his paranoia concerning his 'expatriate wife' Monica Faseyi, who, as we are informed, "was always in disgrace." (p.39) The group of 'interpreters' often converge at night clubs and social functions to voice their collective, cynically expressed and considered opposite views to those held by others within the novel's postcolonial landscape. The convergence of Sagoe's philosophy of shit for example, culminates in his paranoid diagnosis of the nation's ailment; "Next to death, he decided, shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country." (p.108) Understandably the discovery of "Over twenty yards (of)... huge pottage mounds, twenty yards of solid and running, plebian and politician, indigenous and foreign shit...Right on the tarred road" (p.108) should be a matter of concern for any citizen of a sane society. However when Sagoe reports the discovery to his colleagues including his own feeble intervention aimed at getting a junior government minister to do something about it, the following are their cynical responses:

'All right, all right. Now, Kola, this is what happened. I meet this man at one of these politician parties, thrown to keep newsmen in a good humour. And the man says to me, you young men are always criticising. You only criticise destructively, why don't you put up some concrete proposal, some scheme for improving the country in any way, and then you will see whether we take it up or not.'

'So you jumped at it.'

'Only to get rid of him. I told Honourable the Chief Koyomi - he is the one by the way who kneels and kisses the hand of every Minister - I told him you should do something about the sewage system, it is disgraceful that at this stage, the night-soil men are still lugging shitpails around the capital. And in any case, why shouldn't the stuff be utilised? Look at the arid wastes of the North, I said. You should rail the stuff to the North and fertilise the Sardauna's territory. More land under cultivation, less unemployment.'

'Sounds economically sound,' Egbo conceded. 'Bande, you are the economics man, what do you...oh, I forget, he isn't talking.'

'Wait, I haven't finished. In return I proposed the North should send its donkeys down so that we use them for the conveyance of the stuff within the town. That releases more men for the new industries springing up from the new land programme.'

'One practical difficulty,' Egbo objected, 'the night-soil tribe won't stand for it. It seems they consider it their vocation.'

'Well if they are so in love with the stuff they can go on the farm and turn it with the sod. I told Chief Koyomi special trains would be run, coupling sealed wagons of local contribution at every station, night collection rail-rolling to the North, fertilising less productive land. In a year, I told him, the country's farm products would be doubled.' (pp.238-9)

When this piece of hilarious cynicism appears in the Minister's speech 'word for word', as readers we are made to witness the calibre of people to whom the task of steering the postcolonial 'ship of state' has been entrusted. At the same time, the spurious solution to a national tragedy proposed by Sagoe, and taken seriously by the other 'interpreters', raises the larger question of whether "one sees what the interpreters see, but does one not also question the quality of their vision?" (Kinkead-Weekes, *Ibid.*, p.222) Driven to the depth of despair with the death of Sekoni, the group retires inward in varying degrees of admission of guilt. Kola withdraws into painting, Egbo retires 'to the rocks...where unseen he shed his bitter and angry tears' (p.155), Bande is left with the task of consoling Sekoni's father Alhaji Sekoni,

while Sagoe constantly gets drunk and becomes inconsolable unless Dehinwa agrees to read sections of his voidancy philosophy to him. Apart from its 'exploration of spiritual depths and evocation of myth' the remainder of the novel focuses partly on the activities of 'others' such as Lazarus, the Oguazors, Joe Golder, Simi the seductress, Monica Faseyi and Monica's mother-in-law, the older Mrs. Faseyi, who detest her son's cowardice; everyone of these characters are also 'interpreters' and they are engaged in the act of interpreting the postcolonial situation in their own individual and different ways.

Lazarus for example, emerges as Soyinka's understudy of the fraudulent beach divine that is reminiscent of *The Jero Plays*. The only difference in this instance is that the parody of Christian mythology in *The Interpreters* is consciously designed to defamiliarize an automatized framework in order that its deautomatized counterpart, in this sense the mythic conception of aspects of every member of 'the interpreters' on Kola's pantheon, could be legitimized. From the moment the group picks him up in their first reunion after Sekoni's burial, Lazarus and the activities of his church dominate the novel for at least twenty pages. Apparently Lazarus is claiming to have 'risen from the dead' while his organisation is fronting a converted thief, Noah, as the essence of its priesthood. Aware of his limitations Lazarus admits: "My name is Lazarus,'...in lace-fringed robes, all white, 'my name is Lazarus, not Christ, Son of God.'" (p.164) Ostensibly Lazarus and his apostles, especially the young Noah, serve a dual purpose to the novel's exploration of spiritualism and evocation of myth. In a literal sense the depiction reinforces what is described as "knowledge of the new generation of interpreters" which gives the journalist Sagoe 'a story'. In a mythical and spiritual sense on the other hand it is an opportunity not to be missed for Kola

to fill "another heavenly space on his canvas":

Kola shook his head, 'No. I might paint him, but not on the Cross or any such waste of time. I was thinking of him as Esumare. Intermediary. As the Covenant in fact, the apostate Covenant, the Ambiguous Covenant. When Lazarus called him Noah, I thought about it then. He does possess that technicolour brand of purity.' (p.178)

An integral part of the novel concerns the nature of 'apostasy' and Egbo, who knows so much about apostates because he happens to be one, offers the strongest objection to a possible misconception of Noah's brand of apostasy. Kola agrees with Egbo that Noah's apostasy is both apparent and real, but what they both have to resolve is whether the brand of heresy afflicting Noah is the Judas or Jesus type. Noah emerges on Kola's pantheon as the slave Atunda in Yoruba mythology, the "faceless creature...the treacherous servant rolling the stone that would crush his master (Orisa-nla, the principal deity)." (p.227) When in the end Kola also paints the albino Lazarus as Esumare on the pantheon, the matter is partially resolved and, like Joe Golder, the Afro-American homosexual singer painted as Erinle or animal spirit, the abiding attribute of 'the new generation of interpreters' remains the 'ambiguous covenant'.

Conversely, the novel's exploration of spirituality rests on the fact that Sekoni is dead but the challenges of the 'committed' life he leaves behind constantly confound the interpreters. The power of art Kola admits could be clearly seen in Sekoni's *Wrestler* which, rather than depicting a situation of revolutionary immanence, shows that we are constantly struggling with the forces of nature. Kola's pantheon is a failure, not only because the artist himself says so, but perhaps more importantly because the entire conception is immanent and unmediated in its attempt to explain the wilful narcissism of 'the interpreters'. Egbo in whom, along with *Bandele*, the myth of Ogun reposes offers the following primary objection to Kola's

depiction in a conversation with Joe Golder:

'I cannot accept this view of life. He has made the beginning itself a resurrection. This is an optimist's delusion of continuity.'

'I think it is clever.'

'I said nothing about that.'

'It works. What more does one demand?'

'My friend has very uneven talents. Look at that thing he has made of me for instance, a damned bloodthirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo. Is that supposed to be me? Or even Ogun, which I presume it represents?'

'What is wrong with it?'

'It is an uninspired distortion, that is what is wrong with it. He has taken one single myth, Ogun at his drunkennest, losing his sense of recognition and slaughtering his own men in battle; and he has frozen him at the height of carnage.' (p.233)

The 'truth' which Egbo seems to be arguing against is predicated on another precarious premise; by the time *The Interpreters* ends "Egbo is still faced with 'a choice of drowning' and Sagoe is still the joker, talking of burning the Book to please Dehinwa." (A.R. Gurnah, 1982, p.81) The coherence which Kinkead-Weekes observes in the language of the novel that begins with Sagoe's use of language in which nothing serious can be said and Egbo's in which nothing can be resolved, is an integral part of another precarious premise: the 'truth' which the interpreters are unable to acknowledge is their wilful narcissism which is expressed in abstract terms on Kola's pantheon. Egbo discovers this much just before he confronts the picture of himself on the pantheon and acknowledges: "'We were all wrong, all disgracefully wrong. Kola left the heavenly bodies out of his Pantheon or he would have known Noah for what he is. Noah's apostasy is not the wilful kind, it is simply the refusal to be, the refusal to be a living being, like the moon.'" (p.231) Noah's low social status could have turned him into an object of study but neither his narcissism nor his apostasy appear to be wilful as Egbo finds out. He is one among many in the postcolonial wasteland whose refusal to live arises out of genuine confusion as a

result of being chased from pillar to post; we first meet him as a thief being pursued by a blood-thirsty mob, next as a figure of Lazarus' church's priesthood and finally driven to an untimely death by Joe Golder's homosexual lewdness.

Consequently one may reject in critical terms modes of exploration, spiritual or physical, that refuse to probe deeper the plight of people like Noah who as opposed to 'wilful narcissists' such as 'the interpreters' are characterized by the 'largeness of their numbers'. The concern of readers who offer such rejection is based on two viewpoints; the first concerns the use of mythology itself while the second opinion seeks to have the artist on the side of those who are deprived and marginalized rather than have him/her on the side of groups like the interpreters who have "one slippery foothold in the centres of actual power and another in the teeming world of petty crooks, prostitutes, and urban workers just below it." (Lewis Nkosi, 1981, p.72) Concerning myth Andrew Gurr cites Soyinka's claim that "Yoruba myth is a recurrent exercise in the experience of disintegration, and this is significant to the isolation of Will among a people whose mores, culture, and metaphysics are based on seeming resignation and acceptance", before observing that Soyinka's conception of tragedy from this premise only leads to "stasis" or "acceptance of an ordained status quo. Man is smaller than his fate. The cosmos has an underlying frame of order. Art thus exists as an explanation, 'a statement of man's penetrating insight' into the underlying frame of order." (Andrew Gurr, 1981, p.143) Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the other hand would like to see the writer socially mediating in the truth before him or at least, engaged in the creative articulation of the struggles of the masses. These views appear justifiable when at the end of *The Interpreters* nothing is resolved, not only because of Egbo's language that ends the novel, but perhaps more

importantly because the impotent actions of 'the interpreters' do not retrieve any aspect of their wilfully narcissistic behaviour. Egbo for example merely manages to spit on Dr. Lumoye for scandalously promoting gossip about his affair with a female undergraduate. Bandele like the others takes in Oguazor's moral affectation, "the whole centry is senk in meral terpitude" (p.249) and those of the Professor's accomplices such as Faseyi and Mrs. Oguazor and manages to look:

round the circle, calm, his body lax again. He was looking at them with pity, only his pity was more terrible than his hardness, inexorable. Bandele, old and immutable as the royal mothers of Benin throne and cruel as the *ogboni* in conclave pronouncing the Word. 'I hope you all live to bury your daughters.' (p.251)

The most sympathetic reading of the feeble actions that end the novel agrees that Part two of the novel "has sought to subsume the purely human judgement into deeper terms; and if we can say that the human failure of the interpreters is all the worse because of the superior potential they have squandered, the verdict is intensified since we have learnt to see that potential as god-like." (Kinkead-Weekes, *Ibid.*, p.236) There are others who view the squandered potentialities and the general failure of 'the interpreters' in larger terms and are quite prepared to extend the inability of the characters to engage in positive action to the writer who after all, is the creator of the culpable world in which these 'superior' men and women struggle. According to Ngugi:

Confronted with the impotence of the elite, the corruption of those steering the ship of State and those looking after its organs of justice, Wole Soyinka does not know where to turn. Often the characters held up for our admiration are (apart from the artists) cynics, or sheer tribal reactionaries like Baroka...Soyinka's good man is the uncorrupted individual: his liberal humanism leads him to admire an individual's lone act of courage, and thus often he ignores the creative struggle of the masses. The ordinary people, workers and peasants, in his plays remain passive watchers on the shore or pitiful comedians on the road. (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o cited in Nkosi, *Ibid.*, p.71)



Thus unlike Soyinka's famous persecutors, and I mean the 'Bolekaja critics', arguing relentlessly about 'what did or did not constitute good poetry', I have attempted to show that the creative and critical issues at stake in the articulation of the 'postcolonial text of blackness' are cultural as well as ideopractical. For those who have argued that the establishment of concepts such as 'the postcolonial' are 'not designed to set up new metanarratives,' the concern remains that 'truth must be conceived as local' and the persuasive argument that they extend to texts like *The Interpreters* is that "'knowledge is no longer the subject but the servant of the subject'(Lyotard)...A socially mediated truth, simply put, has at least as much legitimacy as one that is abstract. The difference, however, is that the former is 'anti-colonial' (Derrida)..." (Cited in Ashcroft et al. Ibid., p.166) This study adopts a method of contrastive juxtaposition to articulate these cultural/ideopractical issues further and places alongside the 'abstract unmediated truth' and the 'wide knowledge of the subject' displayed in *The Interpreters*, its socially mediated counterpart, in this sense Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles*.

#### **5.4 Colonialism's Last Word: The Discourse of Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles***

Today I can add that cacao also produced a literature. In the complex of Brazilian letters and within the limits of the literature of Bahia, there is a genre with its own well defined characteristics, with its own unmistakable brand, born of cacao, bearing a certain flavor of blood in its pages, a certain bitter aftertaste of death. It is the literature of cacao, a product of the cacao civilization, its finest product.

(Jorge Amado, Foreword to *The Violent Land*)

verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract "formal" approach and an equally abstract "ideological" approach.

(M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel")

The discourse of Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles* is neither 'authoritative' nor

'absolute'. The novel carries out a dialogic investigation of events and characters in a bid to push forward the epistemological needs "of a world dominated by heteroglossia." (Bakhtin, 1986, p.427)<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the authoritative mode of discourse which unites centripetal or centralizing forces, Amado's novel articulates the power of centrifugal or decentralizing forces and emerges as a de-normalizing or double-voiced discourse.

The starting point for Amado is *The Violent Land* and the project at this stage resembles what Bakhtin describes as the "set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, physiological" (Ibid., p.428), that govern the operation of meaning in any utterance. In *The Violent Land* however, we do not witness the collision of centripetal and centrifugal forces as such, rather in this early novel Amado sets out to explicate the domination of the entire field of discourse by centripetal or centralizing forces. Thus Amado explains:

In a series of novels I have tried to tell the stories of those cacao lands and how a culture was implanted there, and of how that culture gained strength and originality. In *The Violent Land* I told the beginning of that great adventure: the thrust into the forest where men struggled with one another as enemies. It was the epoch of the cacao colonels, indomitable, titanic men of unlimited courage, for whom life had no value. It was worth exactly the price of a swig of rum, sufficient pay for the hired gunman who hid behind a guava or breadfruit tree, waiting for his designated victim to come into the sights of his repeating rifle. (Jorge Amado, 1989, p.ix)

However, *The Violent Land* is not an 'ennobled discourse' or one that 'makes respectable' the savage deeds of centripetal forces. The cacao colonels are crucial

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<sup>9</sup> All the 'specialized' terms employed in this section, dialogism, authoritative, absolute, heteroglossia etc, are used in the Bakhtinian sense(s). While dialogism for example, refers to a process whereby all things are understood as part of a greater whole, constantly interacting and possessing the potential of conditioning one another, heteroglossia means "the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text." (Ibid., p.428)

examples of such centripetal or centralizing forces. The leading colonels in the novel are the Badaro brothers, Sinho and Juca, and their arch rival Colonel Horacio about whom "his jaguncos or hired ruffians, were in the habit of saying that Colonel Horacio was a real man and that it was worth while working for a boss like him."<sup>10</sup> Colonel Horacio da Silveira is a man about whom many tales are told, the most famous being how he acquired his fabled reputation as the leader of the 'opposition'; in the landscape of the story's setting political opposition is synonymous with socio-economic struggle:

Yes, many were the tales that were told of the colonel. It was said that before becoming leader of the opposition political party, and in order to obtain that post, he had sent his thugs to lie in wait for the former party leader, a merchant of Tabocas, and they had done away with his rival for him. Later he had put the blame on his political enemies. Today the colonel was the undisputed lord of the region, the largest plantation-owner in those parts, and he was planning greatly to extend his holdings. What did it matter what stories they told of him? He was respected by labourers alike, by sharecroppers and those who worked the little groves; he had countless retainers. (p.43)

The Badaro brothers on the other hand constitute what could be described as the government of the day. They are laws unto themselves and like Colonel Horacio they have at their beck and call numerous jaguncos or hired ruffians. For "the Badaros were a power before which the law and religion alike bent the knee." (p.92) Like his fabled masters, Negro Damiao is Sinho Badaro's "trusted man, a crack shot and as devoted as a hound to his master." (p.61) As for the Badaro brothers themselves, the difference between them is comparable to the difference between a rattlesnake and a python; one is fast and the other slow, but they are both capable of eliminating their enemies. The following is one among many instances in which the brothers define

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<sup>10</sup> Jorge Amado, *The Violent Land*, Samuel Putnam (trans), (London: Collins Harvill, 1989), p.43, All page references are to this edition

themselves including how they differ from one another:

Juca made no reply. He respected his brother, who was perhaps the only person in the world whom he feared. Sinho Badaro lowered his voice.

'It is only that I am not, like you, an assassin. I am a man who does things out of necessity. I have had people done away with, but, as God is my witness, I have only done it when there was no other way out. I know, that is not going to help me any when the day comes to settle accounts up there,' and he pointed to the ceiling, 'but it means something to me at least.' (p.60)

The balance of centripetal forces represented by Colonel Horacio and the Badaro brothers is however mediated by their love for the acquisition of the cacao plant. The control of the 'small tropical American evergreen tree' is what transforms individual lives and next to the magical plant in the novel's schematic representation of forces and counterforces is the Forest of Sequeiro Grande which possesses "good cacao land, the best in the country." (p.111) Significantly the forest of Sequeiro lies between the Badaros' estate and that of Colonel Horacio. In the same breathless awe and reverence with which the cacao plant itself is held, Horacio speaks of the forest of Sequeiro and the impending struggle that will ensue over the 'good cacao land' to his young attorney Virgilio:

'No one yet has gone into it to do any planting. The only person who lives there is a crazy man who works cures. On this side of the forest is my property, and I've already bit off a chunk of it. On the other side is the Badaro plantation, and they've done the same. But very little on either side. That forest means everything, doctor. Whoever gets it will be the richest man around Ilheos. He will also be master, at the same time, of Tabocas, of Ferradas, of trains and ships.' (p.111)

The hallmark of Amado's art is the ability and desire to externalise the concrete economic imperatives that propel men like Horacio and the Badaro brothers to action or inaction and a refusal on the part of the author to 'constitute connexions' between the centripetal forces. The end product is a discourse that achieves the

divorce between an abstract 'formal' approach and one that is also free of the equally futile abstract 'ideological' approach. Thus the literature which *The Violent Land* is an integral part of is a product of the economic, social and political struggles of these centripetal forces. The literature as Amado explains is 'born of cacao' and it bears a certain flavour of blood in its pages. Cacao, according to Amado, is the finest product of a civilization that is built upon a gradation of products. Significant among these products are forests like Sequeiro that are decapitated and the list would also include those men and women, and the flavour their blood that fill the pages of the texts of this literature. Significantly Colonel Horacio explains this hierarchy of products to his attorney, Virgilio, and his petrified wife, Dona Ester:

'That forest,' he said, speaking to his wife and the attorney, 'is going to be mine, if I have to drench the earth in blood. You may as well get ready, doctor; the row's about to start.' Then, discovering Ester's fear: 'You can go to Ilheos; that'll be better.' But it was the things that were happening that held his interest. 'Doctor, you're going to see how we get rid of a bunch of bandits. For that's all the Badaros are, bandits.'

'Over there, doctor,' said Horacio, pointing to the far distant horizon, which was barely visible, 'over there lies the forest of Sequeiro Grande. One day it's all going to be in cacao. I'm as certain of that as I am that my name is Horacio de Silveira.' (p.114)

The hierarchy of 'factors' is probably incomplete without a glimpse of the others who people the various strands of the novel's socio-cultural and economic stratification. Uppermost on the pyramidal structure are the Colonels, their lawyers, doctors, and mistresses, and the members of the ruling oligarchy, all of whom constitute the centripetal forces in the novel. Before these centralizing forces the law and religion virtually bend both knees. What could be regarded as the middle ground within the framework of the novel's economically determined, socio-cultural and political structure is represented by the uncritical class of people known as the Jaguncos or

hired ruffians. This middle-class allies itself with the centripetal forces to the detriment of its own economic, social and cultural well-being. A classic example of members of this underdeveloped middle class is Sinho Badaro's trusted killer, Negro Damiao, who is devoted as a hound to his master. For a crumb of the corruptly earned riches of his master Negro Damiao is prepared to put an end to anyone's life: "his profession was killing. Damiao did not even know how it had all begun. The colonel sent him out; he killed." (p.64) For his hound-like devotion to his master's bidding Damiao receives tokens of gratification such as the time a newspaper carried a story on the trusted killer: "'Take fifty milreis from the strong-box,' Sinho Badaro directed, 'and give them to Damiao. His name is in the newspapers.'...As for Damiao, he went off to Palestina to spend the money on whores." (p.63) The only time Damiao has the temerity to challenge his master's orders his unformed mind disintegrates in many fragments and he heads for madness. Damiao achieves a realisation of what his vocation actually means when he listens clandestinely, to a conversation between his master and his brother, Sinho and Juca Badaro. Damiao before whom many women 'would hide inside the house to wait for their husbands' becomes aware suddenly of what he is:

Damiao always laughed at this fear on their part; he was even proud of it: it showed how widespread was his fame. But today, for the first time, it occurred to him that what they were fleeing was not a brave black man, but a black assassin.

A black assassin. He repeated the words in a low voice, slowly, and they had a tragic sound to his ears. The friar had said that no one should kill his fellow men, for it was a mortal sin, and one would pay for it by going to hell. Damiao had thought little of it. But today it was Sinho Badaro who had said those same things about killing. (pp.71-72)

However, if the revolutionary possibility represented by centrifugal forces is not well articulated in *The Violent Land*, Amado's *Tent of Miracles* is devoted to

articulating the potential of these denormalizing forces in all their carnivalesque manifestations. *The Violent Land* on the other hand highlights the plight of these 'formally low creatures', or the workers who have endured centuries of oppression at the hands of centripetal forces. Because the colour of one's skin is also an important determinant of individual placement on the societal pyramid of social stratification, significantly the vast majority of these 'formally low people' are either negroes or mulattoes. The only way they can escape a life-time of poverty and frustration is to develop their muscles and become hit-men for the centripetal forces struggling against each other at the top. Crucial examples of those who have crossed the society's proverbial line of reaction are Negro Damiao and the back-country mulatto killer Viriato. Damiao like Viriato realised long ago that becoming a hired assassin is their only route to success. In the words of an old Negro, "'the capaangas (hired assassins or backwoods negroes) are better off,' he said. If you are a good shot,' he added, turning to the native of Ceara, 'your fortune's made. Down here the only folks that have money are those that are good at killing, the assassins'." (p.103)

The arrival of another negro on a cacao plantation offers an opportunity for the old man who claims to have been a lad in the days of slavery to explain the rudimentary economic structure: "My father was a slave, my mother also. But it wasn't any worse then than it is today. Things don't change; it's all talk." (p.104) For the newly arrived negro from Ceara things could not have been made clearer as the following constitutes the pattern that he should expect for a life-time on the plantation, raising cacao for the colonels:

'Bright and early tomorrow,' he said, 'the clerk down at the store is going to send for you to make up your kit for the week. You haven't any tools to work with, so you'll have to buy some. You'll have to buy a scythe and an ax, a knife, and a pickax; and all that's going to

set you back something like a hundred milreis. Then you're going to have to buy flour, beer, rum, coffee, for the whole week. You're going to have to lay out another ten milreis for food. At the end of the week you'll have fifteen coming to you in wages -' the man from Ceara did a mental sum, six days at two and a half, and agreed - 'that'll leave a balance of five milreis, but you won't get it; you'll have to leave it there to apply on what you owe for the tools. You'll be a whole year paying off that hundred milreis without seeing so much as a penny of your wages. Oh, maybe at Christmas time the colonel will advance you ten milreis to go spend on the whores in Ferradas.' (p.103)

If *The Violent Land* could be said to have failed or done little to organise the decolonizing potentiality of 'the low' to revolutionary ends it is because Amado is concerned with the equally important issues of 'origins' in this early novel. The story is in the best tradition of colonial adventures and the violence that often accompanies them which are well described in Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*. As Amado observes further in *The Violent Land* his primary concern is with telling "the beginning of that great adventure; the thrust into the forest where men struggle with one another as enemies." (p.ix) As the struggle for the forest of Sequeiro Grande fades from legend into oral tradition, cacao remains the crop that gives birth to the emergent culture of Bahia including the strength and originality of that culture. Thus if the novel is not explicit about the pattern and form of the struggle against centripetal forces it is clear on the issue of the origin of the discourse which Amado describes as the complex web of Brazilian letters and the limits of the literature of Bahia. Not surprisingly the writer describes his affinity with the story of the novel in the following romantic terms:

No other of my books, however, is as dear to me as *The Violent Land*; in it lie my roots; it is of the blood from which I was created; it contains the gunfire that resounded during my early infancy. Today the cities have grown; the country is so well cared for that it is like a garden. But I know that cities and plantations alike were built on the blood of men. Generous blood. Never have the cacao trees flourished



so rapidly, never have they borne fruit so early as here, in these lands of killing and death. (p.ix)

While modern day Brazil remains the subject of Amado's general focus, it is the state of Bahia in the eastern part of the country and the literature of this eastern state that constitutes Amado's primary focus. The state of Bahia is very often the setting of the essential Amado novel, and in *Tent of Miracles* the struggle against centripetal forces within the state of Bahia is carried out along the lines of decolonizing forces described by Fanon. According to Fanon, "decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies." (Frantz Fanon, 1983, pp.27-28) Amado sets out the premise for the meeting of two forces, one centripetal or centralizing and the other centrifugal or denormalizing, very early in *Tent of Miracles*. Thus there are two well defined institutions in the novel, two universities existing side by side; one is orthodox and belongs to centripetal forces and the other popular and is the exclusive preserve of centrifugal forces:

*The Tent of Miracles, Ladeira do Tabuaó No. 60, is the main building of this popular university. There's Master Lidio Corro painting miracles, casting magic shadows, cutting rough engravings in the wood; there's Pedro Archanjo, who might be called the chancellor of the university himself. Bent over the old worn-out type and temperamental printing press in the ancient, poorly furnished shop, the two men are setting type for a book about life in Bahia.*

*Not far away on the Terreiro de Jesus is the School of Medicine, where students learn other cures for illness and other ways to care for the sick. And they learn other things as well - bad rhetoric, and how to spout sonnets, and theories of dubious value.<sup>11</sup>*

The text of the novel insists that both centripetal and centrifugal forces must exist as

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<sup>11</sup> Jorge Amado, *Tent of Miracles*, Barbara Shelby (trans), London: Collins Harvill, 1989, p.9 (original italics) All page references are to this edition.

equals and the struggle that takes place is not one between masters and servants, but one which could be described in grotesque terms as the age-old struggle between sanctity and profanity or the desires of the 'sacred upper class' against the wishes of the popular community. With the struggle polarized in this way, Amado's art achieves the divorce from an abstract formal approach and the equally abstract ideological approach. What results is a radical restructuring of the important sense of hierarchy in which the upper class does not view the popular community from a vantage position at the top of a spiral structure any more. While keeping the economically determined situation in focus Amado changes, in a series of novels, the graphic representation of his society to the following recognisable pattern:

CENTRIFUGAL FORCES \_\_\_\_\_ CENTRIPETAL FORCES  
 {De-normatizing} {Centralizing}

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Economic determinism  
 {Cacao/Sequeiro Grande}

Figure 3

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Jaguncos {hired ruffians}

The discourse of *Tent of Miracles* is a postcolonial one. The novel's primary focus is on the life and works of the "ardent defender of miscegenation, of the mingling of the races, Pedro Archanjo (who), according to the North American scholar and Nobel Prize winner James D. Levenson, is 'one of the founders of modern ethnology'." (p.200) Pedro Archanjo published four monumental books, *Daily Life in Bahia* (1907), *The African Influence on the Customs of Bahia* (1918), *Notes on Miscegenation among the Families of Bahia* (1928), and *Bahian Cookery: Origins and Precepts* (1930). These books form the basis of Amado's insight into the life of the great apostle of miscegenation and chancellor of the popular university. Amado has however displaced the facts surrounding Archanjo's life and those of his close associates into a postcolonial discourse complete with the basic tenets of grotesque realism including the ways 'heterodoxy negotiates/contests orthodoxy' and how 'heterodoxy interrogates the boundaries between Doxa and Opinion'.

*Tent of Miracles* opens with the orthodox intervention into Archanjo's life and work: "*of how Fausto Pena, a poet with a B.A. in social science, was entrusted with a mission and carried it out.*" (p.11, original italics) Fausto Pena is a honest scholar truly appalled by the interventionist techniques of the modern state, including the state's appetite for commercialization and its impatience with anything that cannot be subjected to material benefit. With the following words Pena invites the reader to peruse the novel's three hundred and eighty pages declaring them as "the results of my researches into the life and works of Pedro Archanjo. The job was entrusted to me by the great James D. Levenson, and paid for in dollars." (p.11) James D. Levenson could be regarded as the catalyst to the change or great leap in perception that now surrounds Archanjo's life and works in modern Brazil. Levenson is the

American dream personified. He was awarded the Nobel prize for his contributions to social science and the humanities when he had barely turned forty years of age. The meeting point between Levenson and the Brazilian poet Fausto Pena is the Nobel laureate's latest anthropological project; Levenson has asked Pena "to collect data which would give him insight into Archanjo's character and personality, since he planned to write a few pages about him as an introduction to the English translation of his works." (p.12) But as Levenson's intervention turns out to be typically reductionistic, Fausto Pena realises what he owes his own society and a world that is badly in need of knowing how men and women of different races and creeds have used their combined efforts to contest/negotiate the boundaries between doxa and opinion. Like the cataloguing mentality of the District Commissioner in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and his proposed book about "the pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger," Levenson has summarised Archanjo's books in an English translation into a one volume monumental encyclopedia "on life among the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America; *Encyclopedia of Life in the Tropical and Underdeveloped Countries*." (p.15) The embittered Fausto Pena realises that out of his own researches 'Levenson used only the photograph when he published the English translation':

In his introduction, Levenson barely analyzes our Bahian's books and gives very little space to his life - just enough to prove to me that he did not cast so much as a passing glance at my text. In his preface Archanjo is promoted to "distinguished professor, a member of the teaching faculty of the School of Medicine," under whose auspices he supposedly carried out his research and published his books. Imagine that if you can! Who it was who foisted off such whopping lies onto Levenson I don't know, but if he had at least glanced through my original notes he would never have fallen into such gross error - from runner to professor, ah! poor Archanjo, that's all you needed! My name is not mentioned even once, and there is no reference to my work in James D. Levenson's book. (p.16)

Fausto Pena accepts a prosperous bookseller and publisher on the Rua da Ajuda, Mr. Dmeval Chave's invitation to publish his own research findings on the life and works of Pedro Archanjo, 'in the circumstance' of this great reduction and distortion. The result of Pena's research is the text of *Tent of Miracles*. Pena insists on a properly made out contract because like his ancestral counterpart Mr. Chaves suffers from a lapse of memory 'when it comes to paying author's royalties': "In this he is merely following a local tradition: our friend Archanjo was the victim of one Bonfanti, also a bookseller and publisher, who had a shop in the Largo da Se long ago, as we shall see." (p.16)

Fausto Pena does not deny Levenson's intervention its singular achievement, including the ways and manner in which his arrival in Bahia 'on that sweet April afternoon began the apotheosis of Pedro Archanjo'. The cream of Bahian society gathered on that faithful afternoon to welcome a great American scholar; "'Oh yummy, yummy, is he a doll! A living breathing doll!' cried Ana Mercedes, taking one step forward so that like a slender tropical palm she stood out from the mass of reporters, teachers, students, society women, men of letters, and idlers gathered in the spacious salon of the big hotel waiting for James D. Levenson to face the press." (p.17) Everything, except Pedro Archanjo, is on the list of questions for the learned social scientist's opinion, including who among the many beautiful Bahian women would win the 'living breathing doll, Nobel laureate' to herself and who among the many journalists would ask the most intelligent and engaging question. The girl reporter from the *Morning News* Ana Mercedes wins the first contest, and the arrogant editor and literary critic of the *City News* Julio Marcos wins the second contest. As the poetess-reporter took the professor from Columbia University by the

hand, Ana Mercedes announced in many ways that "she had no intention of sharing Levenson with anyone else and the other women knew they might as well throw in the sponge." (p.19) However, if Ana Mercedes is successful in charming her way into the learned social scientist's heart the arrogant newspaper editor Julio Marcos and his 'devastating' question do not meet with a similar success:

"I'd like to hear...the illustrious professor's opinion of the work of Marcuse. Isn't it true that after Marcuse Marx is hopelessly dated?" Gazing tenderly at Ana Mercedes's navel, a well of deepest mystery, a flower in a field in a dream, James D. Levenson took a drag on his pipe and replied in guttural Spanish, with the rudeness that suits artists and scholars so well:

'That's an idiotic question and only a fool would venture an opinion on Marcuse's work or discuss present-day Marxism in the framework of a press conference. If I had time to give a speech or a class about it that would be something else again; but I haven't got time and I didn't come to Bahia to talk about Marcuse. I came here to see the place where a remarkable man lived and worked, a man of profound and generous ideals, one of the founders of modern humanism - your fellow citizen Pedro Archanjo. That, and only that, is what brings me to Bahia.' (p.20)

It is a tribute to James D. Levenson's liberal humanist favour that the life and works of Pedro Archanjo are at least, being forced on the 'intellectual agenda' of his society. Fausto Pena notes and understands this singular achievement of Levenson's visit: "Fame, public recognition, applause, the admiration of learned men, glory, success - even worldly success with write-ups in the society columns...all this came to Pedro Archanjo...It all began with the arrival in Brazil of the famous James D. Levenson." (p.21) However Levenson's visit only highlights everything that Archanjo did not stand for, including the unsurpassed appetite of the postcolonial state for commercialization. The declaration of the year 1968 as the commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of Archanjo's birth is seized upon by many rival groups as a viable business venture and every available 'talent' is set to work on how best to

distort Archanjo's life into the familiar pattern of an industrious son carrying on the great deeds of his worthy ancestors. The leading group is the 'Doping Advertising and Publicity, S.A.' which has prepared the following resume and sent it to all elementary school teachers in Salvador:

The immortal writer and ethnologist Pedro Archanjo, not only the pride and glory of Bahia and Brazil but internationally famous as well, whose centennial we are celebrating this year under the auspices of the *City News* and Crocodile Rum, was born in Salvador on December 18, 1868, orphaned son of a hero in the War with Paraguay. Answering the call of duty, his father, Antonio Archanjo, bade his pregnant wife farewell and went off to die in faraway Chaco, in an unequal struggle against a treacherous enemy. A worthy heir to the glorious tradition of his father, Pedro Archanjo early in life began to struggle to rise above the limitation of the disadvantaged environment into which he was born. He began to study literature and music.... (pp.201-202)

The other side of Levenson's visit and the unhealthy rivalry which the centenary is generating are part and parcel of the bid to appropriate the discourse of decolonization and the grotesque realism inherent in Archanjo's life and works. Fausto Pena and others like Professor Calazans set out to debunk the cynical and analytical 'reading' of Archanjo's work by different groups of business oriented critics and opportunists. Ostensibly Professor Calazans and his colleagues, Professors Ramos and Azevedo, work to save Archanjo further profanation out of intellectual motivation and Fausto Pena out of artistic integrity. Both the artistic and the intellectually motivated sides have studied Archanjo's works and arrived at the conclusion that the modern state is indeed building Pedro Archanjo a monument "but the Archanjo they're building it to isn't our Archanjo but another, far prettier man." (p.193) For Professor Calazans "using Archanjo's name in ads struck him as disgusting profanation, but it was even worse to use his work and misrepresent it in order to extol certain aspects of colonialism, as a certain well-remunerated writer of

essays and articles had done." (p.192) The Archanjo that Professor Calazans knows and about whom he has carried out extensive research is not the 'pretty man' being currently promoted by the Doping Advertising Agency. The 'biographical data submitted to Doping, S.A by Professor Calazans' and one which the agency has decided not to use makes it clear that Pedro Archanjo, the ethnologist and chancellor of the popular university, "taught himself to read and attended the School of Arts and Trades, where he acquired the rudiments of several subjects, including the printer's trade." (p.201) In the memory of those who knew and respected Archanjo he remains the:

Poor, mulatto, autodidact. Shipped as a cabin boy on a freighter while still a young lad. Lived for some years in Rio de Janeiro. On his return to Bahia he worked as a typesetter and taught children to read and write before being employed by the School of Medicine. He lost that job, after nearly thirty years of faithful service, because of unfavourable repercussions from one of his books. An amateur musician, he played the guitar and the *cavaquinho* (four-stringed guitar). He participated intensely in the life of the people. He remained a bachelor but was said to have had many love affairs, including one with a lovely Scandinavian girl, a Swede or a Finn, no one seems to know which. (pp.200-201)

The debate that surrounds Pedro Archanjo's 'after-life' underscores the postcolonial nature of *Tent of Miracles*. The tendency of centripetal forces to misrepresent Archanjo's works in order to extol certain aspects of colonialism is one of the major critiques which the author, Jorge Amado, sustains throughout the novel. However the critique is only complete when the reader delves, as Fausto Pena has done, into the works of the autodidact Pedro Archanjo who "by the example of his own life...has shown..how a man who was born into poverty, fatherless, in an unpromising environment, was able, while carrying out the humblest tasks to overcome all obstacles and rise to the peaks of knowledge." (p.201) Each one of his



four books forms an important index of prevalent attitudes and opinions in his society at the times they are written. Consequently the books emerge as the parameter which the novelist sets up to investigate the boundaries between doxa and opinion.

Like Frantz Fanon's classic of pre-colonial, colonial and neocolonial attitudes and theories *The Wretched of the Earth*, Archanjo's books are understandably described as the Bahian books. The starting point for the apostle of miscegenation is *Daily Life in Bahia* (1907). According to Fausto Pena, by the time the discourse of colonialism which Archanjo's books contain arrives at the terrain of the later work that brought the author so much trouble, especially *Notes on Miscegenation in the Families of Bahia*, virtually every prevalent attitude in this colonial world 'dominated by heteroglossia' has been explained:

The most I can do is add my praise to the universal chorus. I will say I found the books pleasant reading: many of the things Archanjo refers to are a part of daily life in Bahia even today. I was most amused by the next-to-the-last book (he was about to publish another when he died), the book that brought so much trouble down on his head. Now, when I hear certain acquaintances of mine bragging about their blue blood, family trees and escutcheons, noble ancestry and other nonsense, I just ask them what their family name is and then look it up on Archanjo's list. He was so serious, so painstaking, such an ardent seeker after the truth. (p.13)

The longest section of *Tent of Miracles* entitled "Of Pedro Archanjo Ojuoba's civic battle and how the people occupied the square" (pp.206-326), along with a preceding section called "In which the author tells of books, theses, and theories, of professors and troubadours, of the Queen of Sheba...poses a conundrum and ventures a rash opinion of his own" (pp.141-183), both explain Archanjo's humanity. Pedro Archanjo emerges as a man passionately loved by his admirers and hated with similar passion by those like the head of department of forensic medicine of the Medical School of Bahia, Professor Nilo Argolo. Professor Argolo is the author of *The Psychic and*

*Mental Degeneracy of Metizos: for example those of Bahia* (1904). Archanjo's third book *Notes on Miscegenation in the families of Bahia* (1928), "of which 142 copies were printed" (p.159), is a revision of the professor of forensic medicine's earlier book. Significantly the period between 1904 and 1928 spans "two decades (of) bitter dispute...behind the scenes at the school of Medicine concerning the race problem as a whole and Brazil in particular." (p.159)

Professor Nilo Argolo de Araujo and the autodidact runner Pedro Archanjo both of the Medical school at Bahia are at the forefront of the debate on the race problem in Brazil in particular, and the world in general. In the handling of the two characters Professor Argolo and the unlettered Archanjo, Jorge Amado resorts to extra-literary heteroglossia or what Bakhtin refers to as "the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text." (Bakhtin, *Ibid.*, p.428) In the same vein, the two characters fulfil Bakhtin's description of 'an idea system' in which "every word/discourse betrays the ideology of its speaker; great novelistic heroes are those with the most coherent and individuated ideologies. Every speaker, therefore is an ideologue and every utterance an ideologeme." (*Ibid.*, p.429) Thus when Professor Argolo's and his 'high-born, truculent wife's' combined cynicism and open reluctance to admit that negroes and mulattos are human beings are added to those of dyed-in-the-wool racists by conviction such as Professor Oswaldo Fontes, the novel achieves what I have described earlier as an impending collision between centripetal and centrifugal forces. On his part, Professor Fontes "thought mulattos a despicable subhuman breed and only grudgingly conceded that Negroes were monkeys who somehow had the gift of speech; but despite his convictions he did feel sorry for the servants in the Argolo

household." (p.163) The abiding attribute of the fascist group is their passionate hatred of one another which they foist on others that are unfortunate or considered to be 'below' them as far as class and social status is concerned.

The centrifugal forces' responses to their ideologically signifying masters are both intellectual and popular. If Professor Argolo's 'every word/discourse' betrays the ideology of a centripetal force, Archanjo's utterances on the other hand, reveal him as an ideologue allied to a denormatizing force that has been described as centrifugal. Archanjo has a trusted associate and friend in the one man editor, publisher, printer, and painter in Lidio Corro, the manager/proprietor of the "Tent of Miracles" where all things are possible. "Lidio's help in choosing the materials (for Archanjo's books) was invaluable, and also in making suggestions that were almost invariably good ones, for he was an astute man and a careful listener." (p.153) Like Archanjo, Lidio Corro is both an ordinary and a mythological character. Accordingly in Lidio Corro's "Tent of Miracles, Rua Tabuao, 60,...anything could happen and did." (pp.94-95) The "Tent" is the site of the popular university of Bahia where Archanjo is chancellor and Corro probably the undisputed principal. Signifying revisions of the theories and postulations of the automatized educational establishment is just one among many activities which the Tent/University undertakes. Significantly the popular university is just a "Tent" big enough to contain Corro's aged printing machines and painting paraphernalia. Whenever it is not carnival time or when the groups of revellers and popular poets are not drinking cachaca (white rum, firewater) in the Tent, "two strong mulattos, two laughing compadres...Master Lidio Corro painted miracles and Master Pedro Archanjo taught grammar and arithmetic to children, and French to three or four older pupils" (p.336):

To Lidio, *Life in Bahia*, written by his compadre Pedro Archanjo, that prince of good fellows, and printed on his own printing press, was quite simply the most important book in the world. He had made huge sacrifices in order to print it, but turning a profit from it was the last thing in his mind. What he did want to do was rub it in the faces of "all those grammar-crapping ass-holes" who thought mulattoes and Negroes were inferior beings occupying a place somewhere between men and animals. Unbeknownst to Archanjo he had sent copies to the National library in Rio, to the State Public Library, to authors and reporters in the South, and to some institutions abroad. The only problem had been getting hold of the addresses. (p.164)

However the denormalizing or centrifugal force which Pedro Archanjo and Lidio Corro represent within the world of *Tent of Miracles* is not complete until the reader examines the sense of direction which the two carnivalesque figures provide for the popular community. Archanjo's belief that the modern Brazilian is essentially 'mestizo' or that Brazil is a society of people of mixed parentage is supported by the following historical framework described by Maria Luisa Nunes in her book *Becoming True to Ourselves: Cultural Decolonization and National Identity in the Literature of the Portuguese Speaking World*:

By the end of the eighteenth century, the fusion of Indians, Africans and Portuguese was accomplished, and during the last half of this century Brazilian nativism was a strong current among the population. Basically, this was what the Portuguese royal family found when it arrived in Brazil in 1808 fleeing from Napoleon's invading army. (Maria Luisa Nunes, 1987, p.34)

Supported by the historical fact that there is hardly a family in Bahia unaffected by miscegenation or the mestizo culture, the popular poets that gather in the "Tent" are merely bemused by the sense of colour and its gradation into a pyramidal structure favoured by characters like Professor Argolo and his truculent wife. One of the primary conclusions of Pedro Archanjo's book *Daily Life in Bahia*, is a message poignantly addressed to those two leading lights of the Medical school Professors Argolo and Fontes; "the very sentence, his martial buglecall to arms, his truth, the

sum of his knowledge: 'The face of the Brazilian people is a mestizo face, and its culture is mestizo.'" (p.154) It is only when Archanjo's intellectual/historical responses to the ideological issues at stake are grasped that the significance of the comic elements and carnival pageants in the novel serve the purpose of denormalizing an automatized societal structure. The following, chosen at random, are some of the comic elements provided by the popular poets who frequent the "Tent of Miracles":

Popular poets, especially Lidio Corro's customers, never missed a chance to comment on the dispute between the professor and Master Archanjo. It was a first rate theme:

There's been some changes made  
At the Terreiro de Jesus....  
I'd like to introduce my readers  
To a book that makes you think.  
It tells about life in Bahia  
And the author's Master Archanjo  
His talented pen wrote the words  
And his courage provided the ink. (p.157)

Another story, told in verse to the accompaniment of snickers around the Terreiro de Jesus, was rude, off-color, and undoubtedly apocryphal. It was a mean act of vengeance on the part of Mundinho Carvalho, one of the students whom the monster (Professor Argolo) had failed:

To avoid black rhymes  
I'll sing in blank verse  
At things that happened one day:  
Dr. Nilo Argolo  
Our noble professor  
Can't stand darkies, you know,  
So he made countess Dona Augusta  
Shave off all her pubic hair;  
It was lovely, but oh, so black. (p.166)

*Daily Life in Bahia* is the epic struggle of a society undergoing the traumas of decolonization: "Archanjo's descriptions of folkways and customs were important, but still more important were his arguments against racism, his declaration of racial democracy." Supported by his other treatises such as *The African Influence on the Customs of Bahia* (1918), *Notes on Miscegenation among the Families of Bahia*

(1928), and *Bahian Cookery: Origins and Precepts* (1930); Archanjo's monumental works otherwise known as the Bahian books offer complete theoretical and practical guides on the themes of colonization and decolonization. Significantly Lidio Corro always refers to Archanjo's books as 'our books' and proclaims in Barthian terms 'the death of the author': "'Compadre, guess where I sent our book today! To the United States - to Columbia University in New York City. I found the address in a magazine.' (He had already sent copies to the Sorbonne and the University of Coimbra.)" (p.164)

*The African Influence on the Customs of Bahia* (1918) represents Pedro Archanjo's views and studies of African mythology. Archanjo's third published book follows two theoretical frameworks; the first is described in Maria Nunes' *Being True to Ourselves* and the second is from Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*:

Certain contemporary critics believe that the discovery by the Europeans of primitivism at the beginning of this century was one more facet of imperialism. By primitivism, I refer to the inspirations from Africa and other so-called primitive areas that were the source of avant-garde artistic movements during the early twentieth century. (Maria Nunes, *Ibid.*, p.xiii)

It has been argued that 'the demarcating imperative' divides up human and non-human, society and nature, 'on the basis of the simple logic of excluding filth' (Chase 1984: 194; Kristeva 1982:68). Differentiation, in other words, is dependent upon disgust. The division of the social into high and low, the polite and the vulgar, simultaneously maps out divisions between the civilized and the grotesque body, between author and hack, between social purity and social hybridization. These divisions...cut across the social formation, topography and the body, in such a way that subject identity cannot be considered independently of these domains. The bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low' - as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating. Yet that very act of exclusion was constitutive of its identity. The low was internalized under the sign of negation and disgust. (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.191)

The first theoretical proposition by Maria Luisa Nunes matches the conviction of Professor Nilo Argolo, the scientific mentor of the medical association. The professor of forensic medicine's received definition of the African influence on the customs of Bahia is an integral part of the pseudo-scientific theory which he associates with the mental degeneracy of half-breeds such as the Negroes and Mulattoes of Bahia: "The contents of the thin pamphlet, a report presented at a scientific convention and later printed in a medical review, were revealed in the title: 'The psychic and mental degeneracy of half-breeds, for example, those of Bahia.'" (pp.111-112) However as Maria Nunes observes both Professor Argolo and his scientific conviction are reminiscent of 'one more facet of imperialism' and the meticulous process through which the twentieth century notion of primitivism emerges as figment of the bourgeois imagination.

The section entitled "In which we are told of carnivals, street fights, and other magical events, with Mulatas, Negresses, and a Swedish girl who was really Finnish" (pp.77-115), introduces the reader to the 'Afoxe pageants' or Afro-Brazilian Carnival group. Like Derek Walcott's response to the issue of an African heritage/mythology, the search of the New World black is for a flexible and reflexive framework that would assist the harassed Negro sensibility to stem the tide of the social and cultural genocide perpetrated by 'civilization'. In his essay "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," Walcott evaluates the impact of Soyinka's powerful play *The Road* and the god Ogun that controls the play's frenzied activities, on a West Indian audience and performers alike:

When we produced Soyinka's masterpiece *The Road*, one truth, like the murderous headlamps of his mammy-wagons, transfixed us, and this was that our frenzy goes by another name, that it is this naming, ironically enough, which weakens our effort at being African. We

tried, in the words of his Professor, to "hold the god captive," but for us, Afro-Christians, the naming of the god estranged him. Ogun was an exotic for us, not a force. We could pretend to enter his power but he would never possess us, for our invocations were not prayer but devices. The actor's approach could not be catatonic but rational; expository, not receptive. However, Ogun is not a contemplative but a vengeful force, a power to be purely obeyed. Like Professor, only worse, we had lost both gods, and only blasphemy was left. (Derek Walcott, 1972, pp.8-9)

In *Tent of Miracles* the characters experience a dilemma similar to that faced by their West Indian counterparts. Jorge Amado sets up, in response to the arduous task of decolonization, the entire African mythological pantheon and the numerous gods which they contain as potential avenues of liberation for centrifugal forces in the novel. The gods, like the characters, have to contend and struggle with the powerful 'centripetal God of Christendom' and the wrath of the automatized society. Thus as the Afoxes "spread like wildfire through the streets, corrupting and degrading everything they touched", the police are quick to come "to the rescue of beleaguered civilization, morals, the sanctity of the family, the social order, the regime, and the Great societies with their floats and pageantry for the fastidious elite..." (pp.82-83) Enforcing the authority of the police on the Afoxes is just one among the numerous avenues open to 'beleaguered civilization' to control its spread. For a brief spell "the afoxes were banished to outer darkness along with the drums, the samba, and the 'exhibitionism of clubs whose members dressed up in African costumes.'" (p.83)

However, as Stallybrass and White observe, the stream of protest that greets the presence of the Afoxes is part and parcel of the age-old reaction dictated by 'a demarcating imperative' through which 'human and non-human, society and nature have been divided up on the basis of the simple logic of excluding filth'. In 1903 it was probably enough for thirteen Negro and mulatto Afoxes to parade the streets of



Bahia in marvellous succession "wearing LOVELY TUNISIAN COSTUMES as a proof that civilization on THE BLACK CONTINENT IS REAL AND NOT UTOPIAN, as evil tongues would have it." (p.82, original capitals) The response from beleaguered civilization is swift and predictable; the automatized society responds with all the disgust it feels at a source of 'differentiation' which does not even serve commercial purpose at least, as in 1903:

The daily press protested "the manner in which the carnival holiday, that great feast of Christendom, has become Africanized among us." A violent systematic campaign was waged against the afoxes, and the great lords of commerce, the learned doctors and the wealthy squealed in horror as each year saw new triumphs for the "African revellers" and dismal failure for the Great Carnival Societies - Ancient Greece, Louis XV, Catherine de Medici. "The authorities must put a stop to this drumming and these voodoo rites which are spreading their shocking din and clatter through the streets. Why, we might as well be back in the jungle or down on the Old Plantation. Masked riffraff in skirts and turbans, singing those abominable sambas, are totally incompatible with our present state of civilization!" cried the *News Journal*, the powerful spokesman of the conservative classes. (p.82)

As the events of 1903 mature into the twentieth century's equivalent of anti-colonial struggle, the demarcating imperative also assumes the character of forces and counter-forces struggling to maintain 'social purity' on the one hand, and those who are in favour of 'social hybridization' on the other. The two universities, the conventional 'centripetal' school of medicine and the popular 'centrifugal' Tent of Miracles, play prominent roles in maintaining the differences between the two forces: "The Tent of Miracles was a kind of Senate, a gathering place for the notables among the poor, a numerous and important assemblage. Iyalorixas, babalaos, the erudite and the superstitious, singers, dancers, capoeira experts, masters in every art and vocation mingled there, each bringing his own very special talent." (p.109) It soon becomes clear that in delving into mythology and in displacing the "African Influence on the

Customs of Bahia" into carnival and all that it involves, Jorge Amado is concerned with evolving 'a liberating device' necessary for combatting the dastardly thrust of centripetal forces. This device, as Derek Walcott claims, 'cannot afford to be catatonic but rational'. It is at the time that these forces are assuming their generic characteristics that "Pedro Archanjo, a boy of twenty-odd years, acquired a mania for jotting down stories...Pedro Archanjo was full of notions...and it was certainly no accident that he had been chosen, young as he was, to assume a high position in Xango's house: he had been raised up and consecrated as Ojuoba, the Eyes of the King." (p.109) However, the mature Archanjo must choose between being merely exotic like the Ogun of Walcott's description or becoming a force that would participate fully in his people's liberation. The choice that Archanjo makes is of great importance and gives him the flexible and reflexive framework which enables him to declare his support for racial democracy and the Bahian/Brazilian mestizo culture, several years later. Out of the numerous gods on the African mythological pantheon, Archanjo's choice is the god that represents for him and his people 'a device' and in so doing becomes a force to be respected; the god is the 'formidable laughing Exu (Exud or Esu), the daredevil who loved a joke.' The ardent defender of racial democracy, Archanjo's room:

smelled of Brazil: cherry leaves and rum aged in a cask of perfumed wood. In one corner of the garret was an unusual altar, with the tools and symbols of African divinities instead of Christian saints: it was Exu's peji with his fetish, his ita. The first drink of cachaca was always Exu's. Some said Archanjo was Ogun's child and many thought he was a son of Xango, in whose house he held a lofty place and title. But when the shells were cast and his fortune told, the first to answer was always Exu the idler, lord of change and movement. Xango came for his King's Eyes, and Ogun was never far away; Yemanja came, too. *But in the forefront was the formidable laughing Exu, the daredevil who loved a joke. No doubt about it, Archanjo was his man.* (p.87 my emphasis)

Having deautomatized the Christian saints by substituting them for African divinities Archanjo signals the commencement of a profane discourse and ritual inversions which carnivals habitually involve. It is remarkable that different gods on the African pantheon constitute various aspects of Archanjo's personality. However the profanation which Archanjo leads others to carry out in *Tent of Miracles* requires 'the formidable laughing Exu, the daredevil who loved a joke' to be at the forefront. Like the Afro-American interpretation of Esu and the thousands of toasts of the Signifying Monkey, Jorge Amado has provided a Brazilian interpretation of the African deity; Esu is the "mischievous, restless divinity, messenger of the other gods. Sometimes erroneously identified with the Devil." (p.378) Pedro Archanjo Ojuoba inherits in *Tent of Miracles* all the qualities attributed to Esu including how a *daredevil* is interpreted as the devil himself and the ways patterns of ideological signification attached to both the 'daredevil (Esu)' and his incarnate, Archanjo, become enshrined, in postcolonial terms, in profound misinterpretations and distortion. Fausto Pena, before 'he takes his leave' describes how an attempt to turn the story of Archanjo's life into a postcolonial play on the theme of liberation degenerates into the following interpretations:

We disagreed on both the contents of the play and the character of Pedro Archanjo. Estacio Maia, declaring himself to be an uncompromising partisan of black power, wanted to make Pedro Archanjo a Black Panther and have him come out on the stage reciting speeches and slogans a la Stokely Carmichael, advocating separatism and undying hatred between the races. A kind of Professor Nilo Argolo turned inside out: blacks on one side, whites on the other, frozen in mortal enmity, no mixing or fraternizing allowed! I never was able to find out how our violent advocate of negritude, Brazilian style, would have disposed of the mulattoes..... Idasio refused to go along with his notions, and so did Teninho Lins. The latter, a serious fellow who enjoyed a certain prestige among his fellow students, insisted on portraying Archanjo as a striker par excellence. He wanted to show him fighting against the bosses, the

trusts, and the police; to make the class struggle the central theme of the play. "The race problem, comrades, is a consequence of the class problem..." "Folklore and the class struggle was his prescription for a play that would be both militantly progressive and popular.".....

As for Ildasio, I must admit that his position seemed to me to be closest to the real Archanjo, that is, if there is one "archangelic" truth (to use a word that's "in" this year) out of all the Archanjos who have turned up during the centennial. We even see him on the city walls announcing Coca-Coco: "The only custom we didn't have in Bahia in my day was drinking Coca-Coco.".....

The censors vetoed our play, and I am told sent the authors' names to the police..... (pp.186-189)

The issues which plague Fausto Pena and the other playwrights did bother the historical personage, Pedro Archanjo, in his life-time and some of them he never quite resolved. Archanjo is a man of unwavering conviction on most subjects, and if he has little problem in knowing who his enemies are he sometimes finds it hard to convince a few not-too-close associates as to why he believes in certain things. One of such people is Professor Fraga Neto, the Marxist Professor of Parasitology, who has an up-hill task defending why he had to quote passages from Archanjo's book *African Influence on the Customs of Bahia* in his doctoral thesis. What bothers Professor Fraga Neto about the autodidact runner is how Pedro Archanjo, who as Fraga Neto patronisingly concedes is 'after-all a man of science', is able to reconcile his knowledge of science with his belief in *candomble* ('the great annual celebration of the Afro-Brazilian cult. Term is also applied to voodoo ceremonies in general', p.378):

'Because you do believe in it, don't you? If you didn't, you surely wouldn't lend yourself to that performance of singing, dancing, and all those other capers, letting people kiss your hand and all that. Oh, it's a very good show you put on. I'll grant you that. The friar practically drools over it. But you'll have to agree, Master Pedro, that's it's all primitive. Superstitious barbarism, fetishism, barely the initial stage of civilization. How can you do it?'

Pedro Archanjo remained silent for a time. Then he pushed away his

empty glass.....

'You want to know whether I believe in it or not? I'm going to tell you something I've never told anyone except myself, and if you tell anybody I'll have to say you're lying.'

'Don't worry, I won't.'

'For years and years I believed in my orixas just as much as Frei Timoteo believes in his saints, in Christ, and in the virgin. At that time all I knew was what I had learned in the streets. Later I went in search of other sources of knowledge, and though I learned many things that were good, I lost my faith. You, Professor, are a materialist, you say. I haven't read the authors you like to quote, but I'm just as much a materialist as you are. Maybe more, who knows.'  
(pp.312-313)

Conversely, Jorge Amado's postcolonial discourse is built on the historicism which Fanon describes as the notion of 'Spontaneity' including its strength and weaknesses. Pedro Archanjo Ojuoba's historical personage establishes/begins the process of decolonization by leading 'the peasants spontaneously' and thereby "gives concrete form to the general insecurity; and colonialism takes fright and either continues the war or negotiates." (Frantz Fanon, 1983, p.92)

## **Conclusion**

I have examined in this chapter the works of two remarkable writers of what have been described as the postcolonial texts of blackness. Jorge Amado's Brazil like Wole Soyinka's Nigeria are societies still undergoing the socio-economic and political traumas of postcolonialism. Jorge Amado has probably over-simplified the process of decolonization, but his books are certainly not filled with unbridled optimism. Rather the books proclaim that decolonization is realisable if the writer is only willing and able to overcome what Bakhtin has described as the divorce between 'an abstract formal approach and an equally formal ideological approach'. However because of the many works 'swamped' in madness, Soyinka on the other hand betrays a

pervasive pessimism and the abiding cynicism displayed by the composite heroes of *The Interpreters* for example, is probably closest to those expressed by the lights of the medical school of Bahia, Professors Argolo and Fontes, struggling on the sides of centripetal forces in *Tent of Miracles*.

Finally, the mythological thrust of Soyinka's and Amado's works, as this thesis has insisted following Roland Barthes, has been treated 'as a part of semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, and of ideology inasmuch as it is an historical science: it studies ideas in form.' Thus while Ogun in his state of absolute rigidity leads "the Interpreters" on the path of their abiding cynicism, the formidable laughing Esu provides Amado's hero, Pedro Archanjo, with the flexible and reflexive framework which is a prerequisite necessary for combatting what Derek Walcott describes as 'the genocide of civilization'. Walcott observes further that not very long ago 'the New World black' had the tendency to try "to prove that he was as good as his master, when he should have proven not his equality but his difference. It was this distance that could command attention without pleading for respect." (Ibid., p.9) Significantly Amado's hero in *Tent of Miracles* insists on his difference as he contests every space between doxa and opinion with his ideologically signifying masters. If the respect which Archanjo's life and work attracts as a result of proving his difference did not come to him while he was alive, it has at least guaranteed his name a respectable place in the annals of his society's history; it would be difficult to claim the same position of historical respectability for the composite heroes of *The Interpreters*.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Muse of History: Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*

#### 6.1 Introduction

It is this refusal to be unduly upset by events, to joke about tragedy, and to find melodrama in the croaking of a frog that makes the rural West Indian proletarian take himself less seriously than his politicians want him to.

(Orde Coombs, Introduction to *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*)

Civilized to the marrow of their bones. The idea of the barbarous Negro is a European idea.

(Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*)

Derek Walcott's celebrated essay "The Muse of History" according to Orde Coombs is "a eulogy to the fruit born of the pain of the Middle-Passage." (Orde Coombs, 1973, p.xv) The Middle-Passage motif and its realisation in polemical terms is very often the focus of Walcott's essays. Like 'the flavour of blood and the certain bitter after-taste of death' which the Bahian/Brazilian chronicler, Jorge Amado, uses as 'slapstick' for his postcolonial discourse, the essential Walcott often resorts in creative and critical terms to the 'double-voiced, two-toned' nature of the sources of his artistic inspiration. Ostensibly the potential Walcott reader must be aware of the dynamics of this 'double-voiced, two-toned' discourse if s/he is to achieve the open-ended result which Diana Lyn describes in the following way:

It is necessary for those who read Walcott to recognise at the outset the duality of his being, and if he is to progress in his understanding of Walcott's works he must take an intelligent position between contraries, since conflict and dividedness are at the heart of this "mulatto of style." (Diana Lyn, 1980, p.50)

Walcott's 'Muse' is therefore understandably informed by a complex history

which makes "the themes and style of his poetry (and plays) relate closely to the personal circumstances of birthplace, place of work and the fact of being a West Indian." (D.S. Izevbaye, 1980, p.70) Walcott is however, a writer who largely as a result of style (language), might appear at odds in explaining the effects of his peculiar 'personal circumstances' but one who remains unambiguous about the traumas that a dual heritage and the problematic issue of choice thrust upon him and his people by two diametrically opposed ancestors. Consequently Walcott's essays like his plays and poems act out an often forgotten fact that is the primordial cause or singular event which produced the traumas of the Middle-Passage: during slavery, the extreme reaction which Derek Walcott seems to hold is the tenable realisation that a relationship existed between the buyer or white slave trader and the slave seller who was black. This relationship could be summarised in one sentence, 'the slave buyer might have proposed but it was the slave seller who disposed'. Walcott poses the modern West Indian dilemma, within the framework of the harassed psyche of men and women who were produced as a result of this aberration of a relationship, by saying:

to the ancestor who sold me, and the ancestor who bought me I have no father. I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper "history," for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my memory cannot summon any filial love, since your features are anonymous and erased and I have wish and power to pardon. *You were when you acted your roles, your given, historical roles of slave seller and slave buyer*, men acting as men, and also you, father in the filth-ridden gut of the slave ship, to you they were also men, acting as men, with the cruelty of men, your fellow tribesman not moved or hovering with hesitation about your common race any longer than my other bastard ancestor hovered with his whip, but to you, inwardly forgiven grandfathers, I, like the more honest of my race, give a strange thanks. I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the



halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice, that exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my inheritance and your gift. (Derek Walcott, 1974, p.27, my emphasis)

I quote Walcott's conclusion to his essay "The Muse of History" in full because in my view, the twenty-seven paged article and its conclusions hold the key to the discourse that receives powerful echo in this mulatto of style's poetry and drama. The discourse which "The Muse of History" highlights is concerned with mapping out the major strategies and the colonising spirits of two world views, in this sense the views of the slave buyer and the slave seller. Often presented as an interpolated subject between these two dominant world views is the discourse of the West Indian nature of this whole experience which begins with the theme of the 'father in the filth-ridden gut of the slave ship'. In another equally important sense the mode of presentation as Diana Lyn observes, assumes the form and context of 'conflict and dividedness'. Neither side of the argument nor its modes of presentation invalidates the other and the essence of 'fleshing' out these modes of presentation is to awaken the reader to the fact that the differences exist at a more significant level and one that directs us towards the fundamental opened resolution of these conflicts and dividedness.

The first level which dialogizes the amorphous relationship between the slave buyer, the slave seller and the interpolated subject is reminiscent of the essential Walcott either describing an automatized context or defamiliarizing the views of the slave buyer or the slave seller in order to explicate the inherited hybridization or peculiar insight of the 'interpolated subject'. Whenever deautomatization is in progress Walcott speaks of "the truly tough aesthetics of the New World (which) neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force." (Op.Cit., p.2) On the second equally important level whenever the

themes of conflict and dividedness are presented, the poet/playwright delineates a process of cultural and ideological signification which is the object of critical focus in the third section of this chapter and one that is focused on the controversial 'revolutionary consciousness of Walcott's *Makak*'.<sup>1</sup> I have argued in chapter one of this study about the ways and manner in which *Dream on Monkey Mountain* represents Walcott's exercise in creative or artistic exorcism, and that the text of the play is dedicated to exorcising all those forces that have conspired to exploit or plague the black race. I would like to emphasise that the discussion on pp.26-35 is one reading of the play employed in that particular instance to contrast the intellectual/spiritual reflexes which Africans or people of African origin in the diaspora have allowed themselves in their relationship to their African homeland. The rest of this chapter focuses in part on the *modus operandi* serving as background to the two-toned, double-voiced discourse that has been described as the theme of conflict and dividedness on the one hand, and the context in which the relationship between the slave buyer, the slave seller and the interpolated subject become dialogized on the other. The next section of the chapter entitled "The Muse of History and the West Indian character: From Adam through Caliban to Crusoe" articulates further the major sites of these slightly divergent themes and consequently the need to recognise differences in the modes of their presentation. The third section engages the text of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in its varied complexities along with plays

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Brown argues in his essay "The Revolutionary Dream of Walcott's *Makak*" that *Makak*'s dream is revolutionary because the ability to dream confirms the hero's revolutionary potential. (Lloyd Brown, 1978, pp.58-62) In a recent doctoral thesis Neloufer De Mel contends that "the play does not end on such positive, clearly defined terms...In the final analysis not one of the characters in the play is presented as being able to think of, let alone forge a new order to overcome the deprivations of their lives." (Neloufer De Mel, 1990, pp. 311-12)

and poems of similar concern that achieve the distinctive quality of the author's articulation of West Indian postcoloniality.

## **6.2 The Muse of History and the West Indian Character: From Caliban through Crusoe to Adam**

This 'original relation' ought not to be confused, as Derek Walcott, in the different but contiguous situation of West Indian displacement, points out, with a naive 'return' to (European) origins. The establishment of this new 'Adamic' relation with the world does not represent a simple return to innocence: 'The apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience' (Walcott 1974: 5). The relation between the people and the land is new, as is that between the imported language and the land. But the language itself already carries many associations with European experience and so can never be 'innocent' in practice.

(Bill Ashcroft et al, *The Empire Writes Back*)

Derek Walcott is usually compared in themes and style to the Nigerian playwright, poet and critic, Wole Soyinka. Harry Garuba traces the similarities in the two writers' conception of postcolonial reality through the various stages of their career as playwrights and arrives at the conclusion that "besides similarities which have to do with themes and technique, there are also similarities in the use of language." (Harry Garuba, 1985, p.76) Garuba contends further that a critical overview of Soyinka's and Walcott's seminal essays "The Fourth Stage" and "What the Twilight Says: An Overture" would reveal that "what both playwrights are saying in...complex convoluted sentences is basically the same: a return to the source." (Op.Cit., p.76) In a recent doctoral thesis Neloufer de Mel agrees more or less with Garuba but extends the discussion into what she perceives as differences in modes of appropriation, including the complex issue of the availability or non-availability of a cohesive appropriable cultural heritage. Thus Neloufer de Mel argues that while

"Soyinka had recourse to a viable indigenous Yoruba culture which he was able to posit as an alter/native tradition to the coloniser's,...the epistemic violence that took place in the Caribbean left Walcott with no such tradition that could be easily recouped." (Neloufer de Mel, 1990, p.321)

The similarity between Soyinka's and Walcott's postcolonial discourse thus ends at the complex historical terrain of the Middle-Passage. For Soyinka, 'recouping tradition' begins and ends with reconstructing a pre-colonial African reality that has been disrupted by the colonial intervention and projecting the society in a postcolonial sense, into a reconciliation with what is usually described as the 'clash of cultures' brought about by the colonial interregnum. The convergence of postcolonial reality however, does not exist for Walcott along the same lines as it does for Soyinka. In the peculiar situation of the West Indian s/he negotiates a triangular route of historical reconstruction while in the case of the African the reconstruction is one between a precolonial reality that clashes in cultural terms with its colonial counterpart. Writing as far back as 1962, G.R. Coulthard describes the literature of the Caribbean islands, whether in Spanish, French or English, as possessing "a community of themes and of subject matter which is no doubt due to similarities in historical and social development, and to similar ethnic composition." (G.R. Coulthard, 1962, p.40) Coulthard is concerned in his book *Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature* with mapping out the historical route which the West Indian writer has to travel before s/he can arrive at a coherent discourse of West Indian postcoloniality. Difficult to ignore are the powerful attitudes that developed in Caribbean literature between 1920 and 1960, attitudes that crystallized in Coulthard's words into the following recognizable pattern:

First, the feeling that the Caribbean Negro is somehow constricted in the moulds of European thought and behaviour patterns which are not fitted to his nature. Linked with this is the interest in African cultures, past and present, both in Africa and their remains in the West Indies. Second, the feeling that European civilization has failed, by becoming excessively concerned with power and technical progress and not sufficiently concerned with the production of happiness for the human individual. Third, the rejection of Christianity as an agent or ally of colonialism; and finally, the attack on European civilization for the brutality and cynicism with which it enslaved and exploited the Negro, while still maintaining high sounding principles of freedom and humanitarianism. (Coulthard, *Op.Cit.*, p.52)

The highest point in the crystallization of these dominant attitudes which loads the dice heavily against Europe, is the development of the first philosophical and literary movement known as Negritude, that spread across the black world during the 1940s and 1950s. Spearheaded by French African intellectuals like Leopold Sedar Senghor, Birago Diop, and their counterparts in the Caribbean such as Aime Cesaire, Leon Damas and W.E.B. DuBois of the United States, Negritude took the four prevalent attitudes articulated by Coulthard as its cardinal points and sought to correct the wounds inflicted by slavery and colonialism on the black race in a universal sense. The 'paradise lost' theme which Negritude incorporated into its discourse, and perhaps more importantly its attack on Cartesian logic or reason, pushed its love/hate binary opposition onto an inevitable crescendo which has its origins in the following manifesto-like sounding poem by Martinique's Aime Cesaire: "Because we hate you and your reason, and we turn to/the precocious dementia of flaming madness/of persistent cannibalism." (Cesaire, cited in Coulthard, *Op.Cit.*, p.58) This provoked attack on European civilization and culture is however replaced with a simplistic binary opposition whenever Africa is mentioned in the writings of the Negritudists. The fact that the African has invented neither the tricycle nor the aeroplane is celebrated in the following poem by Cesaire and a reckless abandon to the whims of

nature is proclaimed as a triumph for the black race:

Hurrah for those who have never invented anything  
for those who have never explored anything  
for those who have never tamed anything

but they give themselves up, entranced, to the essence of all things  
ignorant of surfaces, but gripped by the movement of all things  
not caring to tame, but playing the game of the world

truly the elder sons of the earth  
open to all the breaths of the world  
brotherly space for the breaths of the world  
river-bed without drainage for all the waters of the world  
spark off the sacred fire of the world  
flesh of the flesh of the world alive with the movement of the world. (Cited  
Coulthard, Op.Cit., p.59)

An important exception to Negritude's reckless abandon is Frantz Fanon who constantly pushed the discourse of liberation almost perverted by Negritude and its apostles, back to the premise of logic and reason. To Fanon the Negro should derive primary consolation (not liberation) from the fact that:

The scientists...have admitted that the Negro is a human creature: physically and mentally he has developed analogously to the white man, the same morphology, the same histology. On all fronts reason has secured our victory. But this victory was making a fool of me. In theory it was agreed: the Negro is a human being. But what good was that to me? Too late. Between them and me stood a world - the white world. For they were not capable of wiping out the past. (Frantz Fanon, cited in Coulthard, Op.Cit., p.60)

Fanon's 'scientific' approach to the whole issue of the Negro's humanity is on par with the theories of liberation and decolonization which are the hallmarks of his writing. Consequently Fanon's works provide the theoretical basis upon which the later rejection of Negritude and the conclusion of its apostles are often anchored. Against the background of Negritude's overt suggestion that "white civilization has gone wrong and has taken, from a human point of view, a wrong turning into excessive materialism, pragmatism and technomania" (Coulthard, Op.Cit., pp.60-61),

postcolonial black writers have posited their own deautomatizing framework which for Soyinka for example, begins with the "tiger-tigritude duiker-duikeritude quip," as the basis for a flat rejection of "the narcissistic impulse of Negritude and its hankering back after an imagined mythological past of innocence and pristine purity." (Garuba, *Op.Cit.*, p.63)

For Derek Walcott on the other hand, the issue at stake includes the need to re-articulate the claims and counter-claims of 'the father who bought me and the father who sold me.' The similarity which Walcott perceives between himself and the activities of the 'black (French) Jacobins of Haiti' and their counterparts throughout Africa and the diaspora who formulated the basic tenets of Negritude remains the shared feeling of elation, exuberance, conflict and divisions. These feelings culminate in the realisation of a poet who at nineteen is "madly in love with English, but in the dialect-loud dusk of water-buckets and fish-sellers, conscious of the naked, voluble poverty around me, ...felt a fear of that darkness which had swallowed up all fathers." (Derek Walcott, 1972, p.11) A break-down of the colour-line has also convinced Walcott, articulating in retrospect these cultural but profoundly racial and ideological formations, that the tragedy of "those first heroes of the Haitian Revolution...lay in their blackness." (*Op.Cit.*, p.12) Thus the contrast ought to be sustained between 'a black French island (Haiti) somnolent in its Catholicism and black magic' and Walcott's own island of St. Lucia "which triangulated itself medievally into land-baron, serf and cleric, with a vapid, high-brown bourgeoisie." (*Op.Cit.*, p.11) According to Edward Baugh "Walcott himself belonged to the brown bourgeoisie, and both his social position and racial identity were crucial in helping to determine his particular creative angst." (Edward Baugh, 1978, p.9) Ostensibly the process of 'Un-

Naming' or the defamiliarizing discourse which Walcott proffers to the automatized context of Negritude for example, is essentially an interventionist argument inserted into a recurrent theme that "has remained; one race's quarrel with another's God." (Walcott, *Ibid.*, p.13) Of equal importance is the perspective of Derek Walcott at nineteen years of age, a budding poet, elated and exuberant and of the Walcott who looks back twenty years later in "What the Twilight Says: An Overture" and proffers the following explanations for his precocious but pointedly postcolonial viewpoint:

I repeat the raging metaphysics of a bewildered boy in this rhetoric. I can relive, without his understanding, a passion which I have betrayed...He saw history as hierarchy and to him these heroes, despite their meteoric passages, were damned to the old darkness because they had challenged an ordered universe. He was in awe of their blasphemy, he rounded off their fate with the proper penitence, while during this discipleship which he served as devotedly as any embittered acolyte, the young Frantz Fanon and the already ripe and bitter Césaire were manufacturing the home-made bombs of their prose poems, their drafts for revolution, in the French-creole island of Martinique. They were blacker. They were poorer. Their anguish was tragic and I began to feel deprived of blackness and poverty. (Walcott, *Ibid.*, p.12)

Ostensibly the 'Topos of Un-Naming' to appropriate Kimberly Benston's phrase,<sup>2</sup> which Walcott carries out starts from the premise of the transformation between 'a bewildered boy of nineteen' and the adult Walcott who looks back twenty years later

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<sup>2</sup> In an article published in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Kimberly W. Benston examines the confines, both linguistic and political, informing the need to assert that "I yam what I am" via "the topos of un(naming) in Afro-American literature." The theoretical starting point of Benston's thesis is the need to deconstruct certain notions in history and perhaps more importantly to level distinctions of class. Thus "several years ago - so the story goes - Malcolm X was engaged in a heated debate with a prominent black academic. Sensing that they had reached a moment of absolute impasse, Malcolm paused briefly, then queried his protagonist: 'Brother Professor, do you know what they call a black man with a PhD?' 'No. What?' came the reply, to which Malcolm answered simply: 'Nigger'." By upbraiding the Professor Malcolm X has begun the process of un(naming) and returns his adversary 'to the debasing ground of the Middle Passage and slavery.' For detail see Kimberly W. Benston, "I yam what I am: The topos of un(naming) in Afro-American literature," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, H.L. Gates (ed), New York & London, 1990, pp.151-172



and begins this process of 'Un-Naming'. The need to Un-Name certain notions and concepts is both pragmatic and theoretical and as I hope to have shown, the process begins from the premise of Negritude's simplistic binary opposition of the 'black equals good and white equals evil' syndrome. All attitudes and propositions, theoretical and practical, are tenable but they have to be examined on their individual merits and it is the process of examining propositions that Walcott addresses in "What the Twilight Says: An Overture." Thus it is not only the framework of the father who bought me alone that is deautomatized, but also the idea of looking at the other ancestor (who sold me) who is guilty of complicity in the imperial process as an ally that remains equally untenable. The West Indian situation is made more complex by a process of creolisation that began with "the annihilation of the Caribs and the atrocities of slavery." The process "energize(s) one field of historical activity which eventually results in the contemporary Caribbean mixing of all peoples, returning them to an original 'shared' ancestry." (Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., pp.150-151)

This 'energized field of historical activity' return Walcott and other West Indian writers at random to crucial moments in the imperial adventure beginning with the primordial contact between the 'have' and the 'have not'. Abiding paradigms of this contact have been formulated around the symbolic figures of Shakespeare's Prospero and Caliban on the one hand, and Daniel Defoe's Crusoe and Friday on the other. 'The myth of the noble savage' Walcott argues in "The Muse of History" is an invention, a special creation of the 'Old World' which betrays its yearning for innocence. Consequently Walcott refuses to be fixated on the claims and counter-claims of this mythical depiction which in any case 'never emanated from the savage', preferring instead a return to the theme of complicity between the slave buyer and the

slave seller, which in the conclusion of "The Muse of History" remains the primary basis leading to the "monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice." (Op.Cit., p.27) It is a result of the historical act or the 'soldering of two great worlds' and not the mythology produced by it Walcott further argues, that leads to the 'Topos of Un-Naming' in the New World and its resultant 'truly tough aesthetics, which neither explains nor forgives history'. In "What the Twilight Says" Walcott speaks of 'the manic absurdity' which is the overt suggestion by separatists who prefer that 'thought' should be given up "because it is white." (Op.Cit., p.31) This absurdity begins with language and Walcott sees it as the basic paradox that must be resolved before the New World poet can perceive the need for Un-Naming which has been the focus of so much of Walcott's writing. Thus:

New World poets who see the "classic style" as stasis must see it also as historical degradation, rejecting it as the language of the master. This self-torture arises when the poet also sees history as language, when he limits his memory to the suffering of the victim. Their admirable wish to honor the degraded ancestor limits their language to phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge. The tone of the past becomes an unbearable burden, for they must abuse the master or hero in his own language, and this implies self-deceit. Their view of Caliban is of the enraged pupil. They cannot separate the rage of Caliban from the beauty of his speech when the speeches of Caliban are equal in their elemental power to those of his tutor. The language of the torturer mastered by the victim. This is viewed as servitude, not as victory. (Op.Cit., pp.3-4)

Consequently Walcott's overall aesthetics cannot be realised if the reader cannot come to terms with its basic proposition which remains an un-naming (but not innocent 'Adamic re-naming') of certain concepts and principles. The result of the complicity between the slave seller and slave buyer and the interest of men and women who were produced and often constricted as a result of their ancestral acts Walcott insists,

dictates the need for this Un-Naming. Thus a convergence of postcoloniality itself as far as Walcott is concerned remains the need to re-examine issues that are both social and political, and within the framework of the deracinated psyche of the West Indian it is simply a matter of 'democratic vista' that "a political philosophy rooted in elation would have to accept belief in a second Adam, the re-creation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals." (Walcott, Op.Cit., p.5)

It is important to delineate at this stage positions that are seemingly opposed to Walcott's in order to examine the authenticity of Walcott's call for 'a belief in a second Adam.' I have examined Wilson Harris' position as regards West Indian postcoloniality and his belief in the power of the imagination briefly in the introduction to this thesis (pp.32-35). It is through 'the transforming power of the imagination' Harris believes, that "what appears to have been irretrievably lost may be recuperated - indeed in the very energy involved in violent and destructive acts reside the seeds of creativity." (Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.150) Thus for Wilson Harris, the deracinated history of the entire Caribbean region which began with the annihilation of the Carib or the islands' original inhabitants, ought to be the singular event that signals the region's claim to 'cross-cultural creativity and philosophy'. Consequently "Harris sees language as the key to these transformations. Language must be altered, its power to lock in fixed beliefs and attitudes must be exposed, and words and concepts 'freed' to associate in new ways." (Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.151) The critical divergence between Walcott and Harris even at this point obviously resides in the fact that Harris would like to see language or the ways language is used remarkably altered. In this sense, Harris is unlike Walcott who maintains that "the language of exegesis is English" and feels slightly irritated with

"the black critic who accuses poets of betraying dialect." (Walcott, Op.Cit., p.31)

Even more divergent on the issue of language alone is Edward Kamau Brathwaite who devotes much of his writing to describing the quality and stress of West Indian folk language/dialect which he proclaims as 'Nation language' and the only medium through which the hurricane could roar. Brathwaite for example, would not acquiesce in Walcott's view of himself as "legitimately prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton, but my sense of inheritance was stronger because it came from estrangement." (Walcott, Op.Cit., p.31)

The only path towards a convergence of the postcolonial views of the Walcott-Harris-Brathwaite troika remains a critical examination of the writers' attitudes towards the past or the historical framework which they react to or against. In his 1974 article "Timehri" or 'rock signs, paintings, and petroglyphs' Brathwaite makes it clear that his initial failure to integrate in the mother country (England) remains a vivid pointer to the fact that 'home' was somewhere else. His search soon took him to Africa and by borrowing the power of the imagination which Harris is fond of, on returning to the West Indies the writer discovered that he "had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean. The middle passage had now guessed its end. The connection between my lived but unheeded non-middle-class boyhood and its great tradition on the eastern mainland had been made." (Brathwaite, 1974, p.34)

Wilson Harris on the other hand, uses the figure of Ananse, the trickster or spider man in Akan folklore, as 'the key to an imaginative recrossing of the Middle Passage'. Harris' view matures into the position advocated in his book *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (1983), and its major proposition that cultural heterogeneity rather than monoculturalism is the only means by which dialogue could

exist "between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs or bridges of community." (Harris, cited in Ashcroft et al, Op.Cit., p.152) It is within the framework of his advocacy of cultural heterogeneity that Harris supplies the parallel and consequently the 'bottom line' in postcolonial attitudes, especially one which has to do with the vexed issue of a useable past: "There are, he points out, two kinds of relationship to the past - one which derives from the past, and one which is a dialogue with the past." (Ashcroft et al, Op.Cit., p.151) This demarcation of 'relationships to the past' offers a meeting point in which postcolonial writers converge, in spite of differences in their attitude towards what should or should not be regarded as the language of exegesis. As Harris points out, two divergent viewpoints remain valid; there are positions that derive their sustenance from the past and those who believe that the past should be radically deconstructed or at least, subjected to profound dialogue. Derek Walcott, like Wilson Harris and Edward Brathwaite, relates to the past from this deconstructive perspective and Walcott's call for 'a belief in a second Adam' is arrived at after an examination of what he describes as 'the great poetry of the New World' which unlike the pastoral idyllism of Negritude or the nostalgic yearning of the Old World, "does not pretend to such innocence, its vision is not naive." (Walcott, Op.Cit., p.5) "To be born on a small island, a colonial backwater," Walcott asserts in "What the Twilight Says", "meant a precocious resignation to fate." (Op.Cit., p.14) Natural disaster which is never lacking in the colonial backwater of Walcott's upbringing, interacts very freely and actively with its equally disastrous historical counterpart to produce what Walcott further describes as "a nature with blistered aspects." (Op.Cit., p.14) Walcott

launches a discourse that is in no way designed to celebrate 'the precocious resignation' which these gradations of disasters induce but one which works through the 'topos of Un-Naming' to proffer its postcolonial but distinctive viewpoint. Like Jorge Amado, the Brazilian/Bahian chronicler who uses the small tropical American evergreen tree, cacao, as the base point that produced a literature, Walcott's own 'distinctive aftertaste of blood' is equally built against the backdrop of the West Indian landscape. Thus the poetry of the region is like its fruits:

Its savor is a mixture of the acid and the sweet, the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience. In such poetry there is a bitter memory and it is the bitterness that dries last on the tongue. It is the acidulous that supplies its energy. The golden apples of this sun are shot with acid. The taste of Neruda is citric, the *Pomme de Cythere* of Cesaire sets the teeth on edge, the savor of Perse is of salt fruit at the sea's edge, the sea grape, the "fat-poke," the almond. For us in the archipelago the tribal memory is salted with the bitter memory of migration. (Op.Cit., pp.5-6)

Makak (Macaque or Monkey), folk-hero of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* typifies Walcott's creative articulation of a second Adam and the hero's mythological habitation, Monkey Mountain, is the second Eden of this spiritual landscape. The play reiterates Walcott's commitment to jolting the 'tribal memory salted with the memory of migration'. Furthermore the text of the play completes the 'topos of Un-Naming' as concepts such as 'the back to Africa' crusades of the 1940s and 1950s are re-named through a subtle process of un-naming which employs irony, allegory and metaphor. This process cyclically examined should yield a realisation of Derek Walcott's overall aesthetics which is my primary focus in the next section.

### 6.3 Makak (or Macaque) and the Signifying Monkey: The Second Adam in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*

Reading strategies which have produced such analysis of specific texts and authors also have wider implications for post-colonialism as a general discursive practice. Some contemporary critics have suggested that post-colonialism is more than a body of texts produced within post-colonial societies, and that it is best conceived of as a reading practice. They argue that the post-coloniality of a text resides in its discursive features, and that modes of representation such as allegory or irony are transformed as a practice by the development of a post-colonial discourse within which they construct counter-discursive rather than homologous views of the world.

(Ashcroft et al, *The Empire Writes Back*)

Postcolonialism is not a universal phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> The dilemma of the postcolonial text and the mode of experience it articulates are both social as well as political, often concerned with economic/material dispossession, and the postcolonial text is above all historical. Suggestions that 'postcolonialism is more than a body of texts produced within postcolonial societies' therefore return us to the domain of the old argument about what does or does not qualify as black/African literature, for example. That old argument has now been partially resolved and critics are fairly satisfied that works by non-blacks about black life cannot qualify as black literature; the difference as Walcott observes further is that 'the muse of history' and servitude to it often "produce a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters." (Op.Cit., p.2) Walcott's observation, it should be noted, is

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<sup>3</sup> The controversy concerning what does or does not qualify as a postcolonial text and by extension postcolonial discourse itself, has begun and will probably rage for some time. In his 1988 article Stephen Slemon argues that the resurgence of allegorical reconstruction is producing a transformation of history and in his view, this development has displaced postcoloniality into a 'reading' rather than 'cultural' practice. For detail see Stephen Slemon, "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol.XXIII, No.1, 1988, pp.157-169

specifically concerned with the nature of West Indian postcolonialism which as the preceding sections have demonstrated, is remarkably different from the postcolonial situation in Africa, for example.

In an article entitled "Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History" published in 1988, Helen Tiffin argues that at the heart of the contemporary practice which seeks to appropriate the postcolonial text as postmodern and reading strategies that regard the peculiar insight of the postcolonial text as aspects of "the importance of text and word" are simply "means of control into European "post-structuralism." Such strategies, Tiffin concludes "invoke a neo-universalism which reinforces the very European hegemony so many of the works from India, the African countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the South Pacific and the Caribbean have been undermining or circumventing." (Helen Tiffin, 1988, p.171) Postcolonial history Tiffin observes ought to be rehabilitated from these modes of appropriation and control, because it is the 'western master narrative of history' itself which writers have challenged from two different kinds of postcolonial circumstances:

In the case of India and the African countries, the nations of the South Pacific, and the indigenous peoples of North America, New Zealand and Australia, writers were and are able to challenge European perspectives with their own metaphysical systems. In areas like the Caribbean, or for the non-indigenous peoples of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, there are no such formulated systems which may be recuperated to challenge the imported or imposed European one, and *here writers have had to act subversively through what Michael Dash has termed "the counter culture of the imagination".* (Tiffin, Op.Cit., p.173, my emphasis)

One of such acts of subversion that works through 'the counter culture of the imagination' is Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. The text of the play pays homage to a whole range of discourses from slavery to the myth of the Negro's



docility and works through concepts such as Garveyism and black power to the trauma of the Middle-Passage. Without a formulated system which may be easily recouped, Walcott works through a 'dis/mantling narrative' technique in which:

the 'counter culture of the imagination'..promotes polyphony, eschews fixity, monocentrism and closure, interrogates concepts such as history and textuality, opposes oral to written formulations, but does so by inhabiting the absences or the oppositional 'positions' in the imperial textual record, and from these absences or oppositions interrogating its presence or fixity. (Tiffin, Op.Cit., p.176)

Aspects of *Dream on Monkey Mountain's* polyphonic or 'double-voiced' technique include the dirge or lament that opens the play's actions. As the play plunges into dialogue with history and textuality, the prologue establishes the triangular pattern of inquiry which revolves around three main symbols; an African drum, the moon which is symbolic of the "rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad"<sup>4</sup>, and a volcanic mountain that is reminiscent of Monkey Mountain or the second Eden of the West Indian landscape that stands between these symbols of Africa and the West. Thus 'an African drum which glows like the round moon above it' juxtaposes the imaginative framework of the 'slave seller and the slave buyer' respectively and below the moon 'is the stark silhouette of a volcanic mountain':

Reversed, the moon becomes the sun. A dancer enters and sits astride the drum. From the opposite side of the stage a top-hatted, frock-coated figure with white gloves, his face halved by white make-up like the figure of Baron Samedi, enters and crouches behind the dancer. As the lament begins, dancer and figure wave their arms slowly, sinuously, with a spidery motion. The figure rises during the lament and touches the disc of the moon. The drummer rises, dancing as if in slow motion, indicating, as their areas grow distinct, two prison cages on either side of the stage. In one cell, TIGRE and SOURIS, two half-naked felons are squabbling. The figure strides off slowly, the CONTEUR and CHORUS, off-stage, increase the volume of their lament. (p.212)

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<sup>4</sup> Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1972, p.228. All page references are to this edition

The theoretical starting point of the play, however, involves the thorough interrogation of 'the myth of the noble savage'. In "The Muse of History," Walcott argues a case for a pragmatic return to "a political philosophy rooted in elation (which) would have to accept belief in a second Adam." (Op.Cit., p.5) This political philosophy empowered to re-create an entire order from religion to the simplest domestic rituals, would yield in creative terms, the 'topos of un-naming' which the preceding section has elaborated on. There is no need whatsoever, according to Walcott's essay, for a revival of the myth of the noble savage "for that myth never emanated from the savage but has always been the nostalgia of the Old World, its longing for innocence." (Op.Cit., p.5) However this myth which forms the background to the pious resignation or what Walcott describes as "a precocious resignation to fate" in "What the Twilight Says," must first be acted out in creative terms. Thus in re-creating the entire epistemic order Corporal Lestrade articulates the framework of the noble savage automatized by religion in the following way; the Biblical concept of 'In the beginning was the Word' is substituted, even at this stage in the play, for a deautomatized context:

In the beginning was the ape, and the ape had no name, so God call him man. Now there were various tribes of the ape, it had gorilla, baboon, orang-outan, chimpanzee, the blue-arsed monkey and the marmoset, and God looked at his handiwork, and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had straighten their backbone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. Now if you apes will behave like gentlemen, who knows what could happen? The bottle could go round, but first it behoves me, Corporal Lestrade, to perform my duty according to the rules of Her Majesty's Government, so don't interrupt. Please let me examine the Lion of Judah. {Goes towards Makak} What is your name? (p.217)

Complementing Makak (Macaque or blue-arsed Monkey) in his noble savage role which is one among many other roles that Makak represents in the play, are

Souris or Mouse, Tigre or Rat and Moustique or Mosquito. The prologue fleshes out the framework which depicts the savagery of these characters and the unmistakable animal quality inherent in their characters is only complete when we see them caged in different prison cells. The following dialogue between Souris, Lestrade and Tigre establishes the precepts of savagery, including the legal and religious framework governing these sites of stereotypical conceptions:

{The Corporal bends down and removes a half-empty bottle of rum from the bag, and a white mask with long black sisal hair}

CORPORAL: I must itemize these objects! Can you identify them?

SOURIS: O God, O God, Tigre! The king got a bottle! {Souris and Tigre grope through the bars, howling, groaning} O God, just one, Corporal. My throat on fire. One for the boys. Here, just one swallow, Corp.

TIGRE: Have mercy on two thieves fallen by the wayside. You call yourself a Catholic?

{Inchoate, animal howling, leaping and pacing}

CORPORAL: Animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers, stop turning this place to a stinking zoo!

SOURIS: Zoo? Just because you capture some mountain gorilla?

{The corporal with his baton cracks Souris's extended wrist} (p.216)

Besides grappling with the myth of the noble savage in all its automatized ramifications, the prologue serves the equally important function of establishing the characters' later roles as we enter the deautomatized contexts of the play. The second Eden and its Adamic connotations according to Walcott, both possess 'the tartness of experience'. This tartness becomes evident in the following slightly defamiliarized song by Tigre:

{Singing softly}

Oh, when the roll  
Is called up yonder  
When the roll  
Is called up yonder,  
When the roll  
Is called yonder,  
When the roll is called up yonder,  
I ain't going!

{CHORUS: When the roll...}  
{Spoken} And nobody else here going, you all too black, except possibly the Corporal. {Pauses, points} Look, is the full moon. (p.217)

'Up yonder' in Tigre's song is a direct reference to the Christian heaven or paradise and the 'roll call' probably refers to the moment of 'rapture' which in Christian belief means the act of transporting a person from one sphere of existence to another, especially from earth to heaven. Symbolically Tigre claims that he is not interested in that rapture and the 'spoken voice' which responds to his potential blasphemy makes it clear that none of the other prisoners 'will be going up yonder' either simply because 'they are all too black', with the possible exception of the corporal. This pseudo-religious framework should be linked to the political and legal processes which Lestrade refers to as 'the rules of her Majesty's Government'. Thus religion, politics and the law are in varying degrees bound up in this context alone, as indeed in the rest of the play to achieve a coherent picture of the play's account of the myth of the noble savage and ostensibly the interrogation of history and racist genetic theories which are integral parts of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Each of these major themes is however presented in its automatized and deautomatized contexts to achieve a coherent picture of Walcott's distinctive 'counter culture of the imagination'. Thus within the prologue itself, while the myth of the noble savage is being portrayed and the automatized Christian framework reified, the premise for Makak's role as the quintessential second Adam or the one whose subversive claims would dis/mantle a whole range of historical discourses is equally being established. The constant reference to Tigre and Souris (who like Lestrade later became integral participants in Makak's dream) as "two fallen thieves by the wayside" (p.216), portrays Makak's Christ-like essence and the two thieves

reminiscent of the biblical ones crucified with Christ. Walcott's portrayal of a second Adam however, contains 'a tartness of experience' and consequently its Eden, far from being innocent, becomes the field of socio-cultural, economic and political struggle. Stripped of his pristine innocence the Adam of the second coming like his biblical counterpart in the concluding notes of Walcott's autobiographical poem, *Another Life* was "blest with a virginal unpainted world/with Adam's task of giving things their names." (Walcott, cited in R.D. Hamner, 1977, p.37) Deautomatized, the primordial Adam who signs a pact with the snake/devil also becomes in Walcott's profane discourse a symbol of this New World malaise as he is portrayed in the image of the Old World creating in an Adamic sense, the New World. Walcott's poem "New World" in *Sea Grapes* gives powerful echo to this reading of the link between the first and the second Adam:

Adam had an idea.  
He and the snake would share  
the loss of Eden for a profit.  
So both made the New World. And it looked good.  
(Cited in R.B. Hamner, Op.Cit., p.37)

The time-play between the first and the second Adam is therefore an important index of attitudes and opinions, and the ways views of the world and of one another have interacted in times past and present between the Old and the New Worlds. If the symbol of the New World or its second Adam is Makak, the sixty years old charbonnier 'ugly as sin', the Old World is represented by the Apparition described variously on the cast list as 'the moon, the muse, the white Goddess, and a dancer'. All the attributes of the Old World fit partly because, as the catalyst to the play's major conflicts, its background role needs these powerful images to project the playwright's commitment to jolting the imagination. The constant reference to 'Her

Majesty's Government,' and Makak's 'defiance' of the authority the British crown stands for in his dream, make him at other levels the Adam of the New World challenging the representative of the old. Besides being drunk and disorderly, breaking up Alcindor's cafe, Makak is also accused among other things of having:

a dream (in) which he claims to have experienced, a vile, ambitious, and obscene dream...

{The JUDGES mime: See no evil. Hands to their faces in horror} elaborating on the aforesaid dream with vile words and with a variety of sexual obscenities both in language and posture! Further, the prisoner, in defiance of Her Majesty's Government, urged the aforementioned villagers to join him in sedition and the defilement of the flag, and when all this was rightly received with civic laughter and pious horror...

{The JUDGES mime: Speak no evil. Their hands to their mouths} the prisoner, in desperation and shame, began to wilfully damage the premises of Felicien Alcindor, urging destruction on Church and State, claiming that he was the direct descendant of African kings, a healer of leprosy and the saviour of his race.

{Pause. Silence}

*You claimed that with the camera of your eye you had taken a photograph of God and all that you could see was blackness.*

{The judges rise in horror}

Blackness, my lords. What did the prisoner imply? That God was neither white nor black but nothing? That God was not white but black, that he had lost his faith? Or...or...what...

MAKAK: I am an old man. Send me home, Corporal. I suffer from madness. I does see things. Spirits does talk to me. *All I have is my dream and they don't trouble your soul.* (pp.224-225, my emphasis)

Walcott's note to the prospective director of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* establishes the fact that it is only through a forceful projection of the imagination that the play's derivative, illogical and seemingly contradictory discourse could be fully realised. By describing the play as a dream, "one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal characters as in that of its writer" Walcott "delineates the innermost character of a people, the essence of what it means to have been born West Indian." (Robert D. Hamner, Op.Cit., p.35) The major source of the play's 'subversive manoeuvres,' according to the playwright:

is metaphor and it is best treated as a physical poem with all the subconscious and deliberate borrowings of poetry. Its style should be spare, essential as the details of a dream. The producer can amplify it with spectacle as he chooses, or, as in the original production, switch roles and limit his cast to a dozen or so. He will need dancers, actors, and singers, the same precision and vitality that one has read of in the Kabuki. He may add songs more recognisable to his audience once he can keep the raw folk content in them. (p.208)

Thus the audience/reader must come to terms with the dream elements in the play and recognise them as integral parts of Walcott's 'assault' on the imagination imbued with 'the subconscious and deliberate borrowings of poetry' and the poetic licence that they often carry. The character of Makak for example, according to Walcott, comes from the following socio-cultural and historical viewpoint:

In the West Indies...the slaves kept the strength of the stories about devils and gods and the cunning of certain figures, but what was missing in the folklore was a single heroic warrior figure. My Makak comes from my own childhood. But there was no kings, no tribal chief, no warrior for a model in those stories. So the person I saw was this degraded, humble, lonely, isolated figure of the woodcutter. (Walcott, in "Meanings", cited in Neloufer De Mel, 1990, p.289)

This creative and radical adaptation of the figure of 'the woodcutter' operates on several levels of meaning. On one level it epitomises the theme of economic/material dispossession as we encounter Makak, a figure reminiscent of the emancipated slave, sixty years old ugly as sin and who in his own words "live all my life like a wild beast in hiding. Without child, without wife...Is thirty years now I have look in no mirror." (p.226) On another equally important level, the figure of Makak and the projection of his dream returns to haunt or, in theoretical terms, to exploit the political unconscious of 'the high' in a subtle attempt to dis/mantle crank theories and assumptions about race, culture and history.

Symbolically, Makak's name is inter-changeable with Monkey and the site or location of the play's second Eden is Monkey Mountain. Within the automatized

framework of the colonizer's mis-naming the animal/savage connotations associated with Makak and the other principal characters, Tigre (rat), Souris (mouse), Moustique (mosquito) are reinforcements of the myth of the noble savage. However, as Walcott observes in the passage above his own use of this animal symbolism operates on a deeper level of 'meaning' not unconnected with 'the strength of the stories about devils and gods and the cunning of certain figures'. Some of these figures have been read in their literal senses by the playwright himself but many others, I would like to argue, enhance the pattern of cultural and ideological signification of his entire discourse in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. In Afro-American profane discourse according to Henry Louis Gates "there are thousands of 'toasts' of the Signifying Monkey, most of which commence with a variant of the following formulaic lines":

Deep down in the jungle so they say  
There's a signifying monkey down the way.  
There hadn't been no disturbin' in the jungle for quite a bit,  
For up jumped the monkey in the tree one day and laughed,  
'I guess I'll start some shit.' (H.L. Gates, 1990, p.288)

Thus in adopting the figure of the Monkey, Walcott has made a subtle recourse to what Gates describes further as "the ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black as simianlike, the Signifying Monkey (or) he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language - is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope for chiasmus itself." (Op.Cit., p.286) In coming down from Monkey Mountain Makak has acted like the proverbial monkey 'who guessed he'll start some shit.' Ostensibly the definition of the Signifying Monkey is not complete if it is not linked with its ancestral homeland or 'the order of the trickster figure of Yoruba mythology' otherwise known as Esu-Elegbara in Nigeria. However, Walcott's adaptation of these folk elements is not



along the pattern of works merely informed by the past but one that holds the past itself in profound dialogue. Integral parts of these dialogues are the amorphous relationship between the slave buyer and the seller on which the preceding sections have elaborated and the ways they constitute the distinctive features of West Indian postcoloniality. Other features of this postcolonial discourse include the triangular rather than linear pattern of inquiry and the need for a theoretical framework that would recognise the narrow confines of the 'topos of un-naming,' however, triggered by the colonizer's mis-naming.

Besides these metaphoric, ironic, metonymic and allegorical aspects of the play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* has also got a 'story line' other than these 'out of this world' symbolisms that have been validly read into it. When the play opens with a prologue Makak is being led to spend the night in jail by Corporal Lestrade the mulatto, enthusiastic custodian of the law, who arrests Makak for being drunk and disorderly and breaking up Felicienne Alcindor's cafe. In jail Makak meets the two habitual felons Tigre and Souris who join Corporal Lestrade in elaborating on Makak's offence. They mime a court scene in which Makak is tried, convicted and sentenced with the corporal acting as prosecutor and defence put together, while the felons act as judges. After a whole range of exercises variously commanding Makak to 'turn about,' 'go on his knees,' 'stand up! sit down! or up on the bench!' (pp.222-

3) Lestrade declares that the aim of the exercise is to:

prove that the prisoner is capable of reflexes, of obeying orders, therefore of understanding justice. Sound body. Now the charge!

{Drum roll}

{To the sound of martial drums} His rightful name is unknown, yet on Saturday evening, July 25th, to wit tonight, at exactly three hours ago, to wit 5:30 p.m., having tried to dispose of four bags of charcoal in the market of Quatre Chemin, to wit this place, my lords, in which aforesaid market your alias, to wit Makak, is well known to all and

sunday, the prisoner, in a state of incomprehensible intoxication, from money or moneys accrued by the sale of self-said bags, is reputed to have entered the licenced alcoholic premises of one Felicien Alcindor, whom the prisoner described as an agent of the devil, the same Felicien Alcindor being known to all and sunday as a God-fearing, honest Catholic. {He rests the bottle down} When some intervention was attempted by those present, the prisoner then began to become vile and violent: he engaged in a blasphemous, obscene debate with two other villagers, Hannibal Dolcis and Market Inspector Caiphas Joseph Pamphilion, describing in a foul, incomprehensive manner.... (pp.223-4)

At this level of depiction alone and through the character of Corporal Lestrade, Walcott engages in the sort of satire that other postcolonial writers saw as the best way to ridicule enthusiastic but rather naive and half-baked perpetrators of colonial rule and legality in newly independent states. The depiction is reminiscent of Wole Soyinka's portrayal of the Nigerian village school teacher, Lakunle, in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Besides the numerous 'to wits' which punctuate his speech and phrases like 'sale of self-said bags', or 'is reputed to have', Lestrade repeats the phrase 'all and sunday' twice in this passage, and the combination of these misnomers makes him the quintessential Lakunle figure who cannot rout or effectively challenge the forces of reactionary tradition no matter how hard he tries. In other instances Lestrade's syntax consists mainly of verbose and legalistic jargon carefully chosen for its 'high-sounding' qualities rather than any apparent conviction in the meaning it portrays. In the following example, Lestrade seeks to convince his equally ignorant judges, Souris and Tigre, that his frame of reference is correct and the prisoner cannot but remain mortified under the legal process that has accused and would soon pronounce judgement on him:

My noble judges. When this crime has been categorically examined by due process of law, and when the motive of the hereby accused by whereas an ad hoc shall be established without dychotomy, and long after we have perambulated through the labyrinthine bewilderment of

the defendant's ignorance, let us hope, that justice, whom we all serve, will not only be done, but will appear, my lords, to have itself, been done....{The judges applaud} Ignorance is no excuse. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Ignorance of one's own ignorance is no excuse. This is the prisoner. I will ask the prisoner to lift up his face. Levez la teteous!

{Makak lifts up his head. The CORPORAL jerks it back savagely}  
(pp.221-2)

This play within a play becomes another sad commentary on postcolonialism itself, and the grotesque theatrical act through which a bewildered prisoner is arraigned by a confused and semi-illiterate prosecutor before applauding judges who are bemused at "how a man like that (Lestrade) can know so much law" (p.220), would complete the comment that Walcott is making on this aspect of West Indian postcoloniality.

Scene one opens with Makak acting the role of the woodcutter. As the cell of the prologue changes to Makak's hut on Monkey Mountain "we hear a cry far off, echoing. MOUSTIQUE, a little man with a limp, a jute bag over his shoulder, comes into the morning light around the hut, puffing with exhaustion." (p.231) Moustique is Makak's trade partner in the charcoal business. Unlike Makak, Moustique is a man without a dream. Thus at the beginning of the scene we see him upbraiding Makak for his lacklustre attitude towards the only source of their livelihood which is woodcutting. Apparently Makak has had a bad night in which his recurrent dream about a whole range of issues has never come to him in stronger terms. Moustique is unimpressed and at the suggestion by Makak that he should go to the market alone because Makak feels that he is going mad, Moustique cannot help spelling out to his partner what they stand to lose if they miss going to the market: "Going mad? Go mad tomorrow, today is market day. We have three bags at three-and-six a bag, making ten shillings and sixpence for the week and you going mad? You have coffee?" (p.232) Moustique's depiction as the pragmatic aspect of Makak believing

in market forces rather than the precarious and rough edges of a dream, is sustained throughout the play and in the following exchanges he brings back to Makak in jeering terms, the reality of their existence:

**MAKAK:** {Rising} This morning, early, the moon still up, I went to pack coals in the pit down the mountain. I will tell you...I see this woman singing, and my feet grow roots! I could move no more. A million silver needles prickle my blood, like a rain of small fishes...and I behold this woman, the loveliest thing I see on earth, floating towards me, just like the moon, like the moon walking along her road. Then as I start to move, she call out my name, my real name. A name I do not use. Come here, she say. Come, don't be afraid. So I go up to her, one step by one step. She make me sit down and start to talk to me.

**MOUSTIQUE:** Makak.

**MAKAK:** {Angrily} Listen to me, I not mad. Listen!

**MOUSTIQUE:** I have all day. {Exasperated}

.....

**MAKAK:** That Makak is not my name. And I tell her my life, and she say that if I want her, she will come and live with me, and I take her in my arms, and bring her here.

**MOUSTIQUE:** {Looking around} Here? A white woman? Or a diablesse?

**MAKAK:** We spend all the night here. Look, I make something for she to eat. We sit down by this fire. And, Moustique, she say something I will never forget. She say I should not live so any more, here in the forest, frighten of people because I think I ugly. She say that I come from the family of lions and kings.

{Drum roll}

**MOUSTIQUE:** Well, you lucky. {Rises wearily} Me and Berthilia have three bags of coal to try and sell in the market this morning. We still have eighteen shillings for Alcindor for the shovel, and Johannes promise us a bag of provisions in exchange for half a sack. You had a bad dream, or you sleep outside and the dew seize you.

**MAKAK:** Is not a dream.

**MOUSTIQUE:** {Exasperated} Is not a dream? Then where she? Where she gone? {Searches mockingly} Upstairs? Gadez! You had a dream, and she is here {Touches his own head}, so, bring her to market. Sun hot, and people making money.

**MAKAK:** I tell you is no dream

**MOUSTIQUE:** You remember one morning I come up and from the time I break the bush, I see you by the side of the hut, trembling and talking, your eyes like you crazy, and was I had to gather bush, light a fire and make you sweat out that madness? *Which white lady? You is nothing. You like me. Small, ugly, with a foot like a "S." Man together two of us is minus one. Now where you going?.....*

**MOUSTIQUE:** The misery black people have to see in this life.....  
(pp.234-238, my emphasis)

Thus Makak is left with the difficult task of convincing this pragmatic side of his life to partake in his dream.<sup>5</sup> Moustique is never convinced and he remains, throughout the play, the jeering aspect of Makak's consciousness which has to be exterminated before Makak can enter into the revolutionary phase of his dream. However, Moustique plays the role of the doubter to the end. Convinced by Makak of the need to come down from Monkey Mountain and end decades of hibernation and obscurity, Moustique turns the whole thing into a hilarious joke declaring that the exercise:

Is the stupidest thing I ever see  
Two jackasses and one donkey,  
Makak turn lion, so let him pass,  
Donkey gone mad on pangola grass,  
Haw haw haw haw haw haw hee,  
A man not a man without misery,  
Down the mountain!  
{Sound of the jackass braying} (p.242)

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* is in two parts. Part one consists of the prologue and three scenes all of which are focused on the various stages in the development of Makak's dream. Walcott establishes in this first part the West Indian nature of the play or what the note on production describes as a style that 'should be spare, essential as the details of a dream.' The play works through a Brechtian model that destroys 'the suspension of disbelief' or, in the words of the playwright, introduces political issues to the audience/reader 'with the same precision and vitality that one has read of in the Kabuki.' The first major political proposition in the play comes from Jean Paul Sartre's prologue to Frantz Fanon's classic of neo/colonial politics;

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<sup>5</sup> In his essay "The Revolutionary Dream of Walcott's Makak," Lloyd Brown argues that Moustique is really Makak's alter ego which embodies a self-hatred. The history of black/white relationship in the Caribbean informs Brown's reading and the combination of "Moustique's and Makak's ugliness and Blackness make the White woman (and by extension, the white world) in- accessible - and therefore more desirable." (Lloyd W. Brown, 1978, p.60)

the precarious physical and spiritual state of the colonized being is the subject of Fanon's thesis and the prologue by Sartre establishes the process that leads to the consequent dissociation of the self:

Thus in certain psychoses the hallucinated person, tired of always being insulted by his demon, one fine day starts hearing the voice of an angel who pays him compliments; but the jeers don't stop for all that; only, from then on, they alternate with congratulations. This is a defence, but it is also the end of the story. The self is dissociated, and the patient heads for madness. (p.211)

The patient (Makak) in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* however, does not simply head for madness. The play, unlike Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* for example, is not swamped in madness but restricted to the edges of subversive un-naming. Following Michel Foucault, I argued in chapter five that the knowledge that is so important in Soyinka's play does not control the secrets of knowledge but that it is rather the punishment of a disorderly and useless science (pp.251-260). It is true however, that culture, religion, politics, material/economic dispossession and above all history have combined to render Makak psychotic but the pursuit of a disorderly and useless science that would facilitate his descent into madness proper was merely broached but not embarked on. Makak's 'creator' Derek Walcott, has argued in "What the Twilight Says" that the pursuit of the 'a useless and disorderly science' is reminiscent of a period when "the New World black...tried to prove that he was as good as his master, when he should have proven not his equality but his difference." (Op.Cit., p.9) Restricted to the edges of subversion and un-naming the discourse of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* achieves the imaginative thrust that has been described as the creation of belief in a second Adam and consequently the second (West Indian) Eden. Scene two of Part one or what is often described as the healing scene, continues on the strength of the imaginative re-creation of a counter-culture with

Makak and Moustique defamiliarizing the automatized social, cultural and religious viewpoints erstwhile pursued with vigour by all and sundry in the society. The scene opens as members of a sisterhood followed by pallbearers carrying a shrouded sick man in a bamboo hammock and the Baron Samedi figure of Basil, a tall frock-coated man in black silk hat, his face halved by white make-up, arrive at a country road. "The bearers turn and rest the SICK MAN down. Around him the SISTERS kneel and pray, swaying, trying to exorcise his sickness." Moustique arrives in his state of characteristic pragmatism and sets the stage for the deautomatizing framework which transforms the entire scene:

MOUSTIQUE: {Crosses himself, prays swiftly, then in the same whisper}...And give us this day our daily bread...and is that self I want to talk to you about, friend. Whether you could spare a little bread...and lead us not into temptation...because we are not thieves, stranger...but deliver us from evil...and we two trespassers but forgive us brother...for thine is the kingdom...for our stomach sake, stranger.  
FIRST PEASANT: {Keeping the whisper} Where you come from, stranger...now and at the hour of our death, amen.  
MOUSTIQUE: {Whispering} From Monkey Mountain, in Forestiere quarter...and forgive us our trespasses...amen, is me and my friend an old man...in the name of the father...and we was sleeping in a hut by the road there, when we see you all coming, with all those lights, I thought it was the devil. (p.244)

Moustique learns that the sick man has been bitten by a snake and developed a fever as a result which neither a priest nor a doctor has been able to cure. Basil, the carpenter and cabinet maker, is travelling with the group according to the First Peasant "just in case...amen." (p.246) If Makak has got a dream Moustique reasons, an attempt at healing a man who has been given up as dead would be an excellent way to launch such a dream. He persuades the group to give Makak a try since they seem to have tried every other means in any case. Just at the point when he is prepared to abandon the attempt saying to Moustique "let us go on, compere. These

niggers too tired to believe anything again. Remember, is you all self that is your own enemy," (p.250) Makak is told that the sick man has begun to sweat: "The CHORUS picks up the sibilance. In the dancing and drumming to "Death, Oh me Lord!" Moustique takes over and, mounting a box, shouts above the celebration. MAKAK, dazed at his own power, is kneeling." (p.250) Not one to miss a chance at improving his own desperate economic situation Moustique sees a way out of their misery in Makak's new found power and launches him as the quintessential deliverer of his people:

Ah, ah, you see, all you.  
Ain't white priest come and nothing happen?  
Ain't white doctor come and was agony still?  
Ain't you take bush medicine, and no sweat break?  
White medicine, bush medicine,  
not one of them work!  
White prayers, black prayers,  
and still no deliverance!  
And who heal the man?  
Makak! Makak!  
All your deliverance lie in this man.  
The man is God's messenger.  
So, further the cause, brothers and sisters.  
    {He opens his haversack and holds it before him} (p.251)

The dialectics of the healing scene operates on literal and allegorical levels both of which are central to the play's understanding of postcolonialism. The two levels are embodied in the persons of Makak and Moustique; significantly the latter cannot rise beyond the literal while Makak's every act and deed are essentially metaphorical. Unable to understand why Makak would not want him to receive anything from the people for the sick man's healing, Moustique resorts to the following tirade:

MOUSTIQUE: {Picking up the hat} So what you want me to do? Run behind them and give them back their money? Look, I tired telling you that nothing is for free. That some day, Makak, *swing high, swing low*, you will have to sell your dream, your soul, your power, just for bread and shelter. That the love of people not enough to pay for being



born, for being buried. Well, if you don't want the cash, then let me keep it. 'Cause I tired begging. Look, look at us. So poor we had to sell the donkey. Barefooted, nasty, and what you want me to do, bow my head and say thanks?

MAKAK: You will never understand. {Makak kneels again}

MOUSTIQUE: What you kneeling again for? Who you praying for now? {Makak says nothing} If is for me, partner, don't bother. Pray for the world to change. Not your friend. Pray for the day people will not need money, when faith alone will move mountains. Pray for the day when poverty done, and for when niggers everywhere could walk upright like men...Look, turn your head, old man, look there, and that thing shining there, that is the ocean. Behind that, is Africa! How we going there? You think this...{Holds up mask} this damned stupidity go take us there? Either you let me save money for us, or here, at this crossroads, the partnership divide. (pp.254-255, my emphasis)

The Makak/Moustique relationship is indeed at a crossroad at this point in the play. As Makak's alter ego every utterance by Moustique could as well stand as Makak's subconscious speaking and urging him to recognise the economic viability of his dream. Poverty stricken as he is Moustique's tirade is not entirely unreasonable. However, if Moustique represents that aspect of Makak urging him 'swing high, swing low,' to sell his dream for bread and shelter, the illogicality, derivation and contradiction in the play are further heightened in scene three of part one as we encounter Makak's bourgeois alter ego, Corporal Lestrade, engaged in a different sort of campaign altogether.<sup>6</sup> In the character of Lestrade, Walcott invests many of the inner conflicts and dividedness of the West Indian character, a conflict appropriately described in "What the Twilight Says" as the ambiguity inherent in having to look "at life with black skins and blues eyes." (Op.Cit., p.9) Frantz Fanon's phrase for the general malaise is "black skin, white mask" which is the

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<sup>6</sup> In his article Lloyd Brown observes further how Walcott sets out to dramatise a progression "by the relationship between Makak and those who inhabit and share his dream. Moustique, his coal-vending partner in real life, and Corporal Lestrade, the Mulatto policeman who takes him in custody for the night, enter the dream as Makak's alter egos." (Op.Cit., p.61)

subject of his book by that title. The contradiction deepens in Fanon's treatise which articulates the racial-death-wish: "I wish to be acknowledged not as black but white. Now - and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged - who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love, I am loved like a white man. I am a white man." (Frantz Fanon, cited in Neloufer, Op.Cit., p.63) Fanon's syllogistic diagnosis is true of Makak's infatuation with the White Apparition as it is of Corporal Lestrade's socio-cultural angst and paradoxical commitment to the colonial legal system. Lestrade's speech that opens scene three is reminiscent of the theme of the White Man's burden and represents another characteristic of divided man:

{CORPORAL in wig and gown enters the spotlight}  
{Infuriated} My lords, behold! {Arms extended} Behold me, flayed and dismayed by this impenetrable ignorance! This is our reward, we who have borne the high torch of justice through tortuous thickets of darkness to illuminate with vision the mind of primeval peoples, of backbiting tribes! We who have borne with us the texts of the law, the Mosaic tablets, the splendours of marble in moonlight, the affidavit and the water toilet, this stubbornness and ingratitude is our reward! But let me not sway you with displays of emotion, for the law is emotionless. Let me give facts! {He controls himself} It was market Saturday and I, with market and Sanitation Inspector Caiphas J. Pamphilon, was on duty at Quatre Chemin crossroads. I was armed because the area was on strike. (p.256)

With these words Lestrade sets the stage for probably the most 'people centred' scene in the play. Contrary to the Corporal's claims and pious anger towards the populace, the people in this market scene are ordinary citizens trying desperately to make a living. Their apolitical nature is perhaps closest to Orde Coombs' articulation of the rural West Indian proletarian who refuses to be unduly upset by events and one that is prepared to joke about tragedy: "He understands, even if his leaders do not, that West Indian mothers raise their sons knowing that they will lose them to cities around the world...History and economics have determined this and no talk of black power

can change that." (Orde Coombs, 1978, pp.xii-xiii) Corporal Lestrade seems to understand the people but his understanding is only a thin veneer for the horror it masks; Lestrade's tour of the market with market Inspector Pamphilion explains the source of the corporal's discomfort:

CORPORAL: Well, the law is complicated and people very simple.

{To a VENDOR} Morning. That's a nice pawpaw, sir.

VENDOR: *Oui, mon* corporal. {They move on}

CORPORAL: You see?

INSPECTOR: That was a melon.

CORPORAL: I know. But in the opinion of the pistol, and for the preservation of order, and to avoid any argument, we both was satisfied it was a pawpaw.

INSPECTOR: I am beginning to understand the law.

CORPORAL: And if you know how much I would like to do for these people, my people, you will understand even better. I would like to see them challenge the law, to show me they alive. But they paralyse with darkness. They paralyse with faith. They cannot do nothing, because they born slaves and they born tired. I could spit. (pp.260-261)

However, it is Moustique who dies at the end of part one and his death introduces a major turning point to Makak's dream and the entire play. Moustique precedes Makak into the Quatre Chemin market where Lestrade and Pamphilion are on patrol, and on arrival makes an unsuccessful attempt at selling Makak's dream. Identified by Basil, the carpenter and cabinet maker as Moustique and not Makak, Moustique dies telling the people the truth about themselves. He summarises his attempt to sell Makak's dream to them as the postcolonial game in 'modern factorship' that is reminiscent of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?*. If the people could change their spiritual and political allegiance with complacent ease and accept other camouflages like himself, Moustique reasons with them, what indeed is stopping them from accepting him?:

{Pushing BASIL aside} You know who I am? You want to know who I am? Makak! Makak! or Moustique, is not the same nigger? What you want me to say? "I am the resurrection, I am the life"? "I am the

green side of Jordan," or that "I am a prophet stoned by Jerusalem," or you all want me, as if this hand hold magic, to stretch it and like a flash of lightning to make you all white? God after god you change, promise after promise you believe, and you still covered with dirt; so why not believe me. All I have is this {shows the mask}, black faces, white masks! I tried like you. Moustique then! Moustique! {spits at them} That is my name! Do what you want! (p.271)

The death of the Makak/Moustique partnership at the end of scene three effectively ends the first part of the play and projects Makak's dream into what is often described as the revolutionary phase of Makak's consciousness. What is clear is that the play's Brechtian model or the abolition of the 'suspension of disbelief' has been further radicalised and part two begins on the following cultural and material framework. According to Jean Paul Sartre, the premise of socio-cultural ape-manship established by the colonizer reinforces a whole spectrum of bewitching situations and creates a behavioural pattern in which, following Fanon, individuals struggle to ensure that if they are not white, they should strive to be, at least, less black:

Let us add, for certain other carefully selected unfortunates, that other witchery of which I have already spoken: Western culture. If I were them, you may say, I'd prefer my mumbo-jumbo to their Acropolis. Very good: you've grasped the situation. But not altogether, because you aren't them - or not yet. Otherwise you would know that they can't choose; they must have both. Two worlds; that makes two bewitchings; they dance all night and at dawn they crowd into the churches to hear mass; each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brother and becomes our accomplice; his brother do the same thing. The status of "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent. (J.P. Sartre, Op.Cit., p.277)

Part two acts out and resolves these conflicts and bewitchings. Preference for either 'my mumbo-jumbo' or their Acropolis and the pragmatics of the choice made by individuals is acted out in the conflict-ridden psyche of each of the characters, especially that of Corporal Lestrade. The mulatto's confidence and belief in the legal system he serves has been shaken tremendously at the end of part one. As the play

progresses he becomes increasingly bitter about the socio-cultural and political arrangements of the society and by extension the guilt of his middle-class allegiance. The premise for his onslaught and ferocious attack on anything white when he eventually joins, or to use Tigre's word, 'dissolves' in Makak's dream has been well established in the opening scene. He would be prepared to free Makak from jail if it were not for the fact that he has:

got the white man's work to do. Besides, if he crazy he dangerous. If he is not, a night in jail will be good for his soul. {Goes over to the old man's cell} Is chow time, King-Kong. Hey. Food, food, old man. TIGRE: Bring me damn supper, Lestrade! I have me rights, you know!

CORPORAL: Your rights? Listen, nigger! according to this world you have the inalienable right to life, and three green figs. No more, maybe less. You can do what you want with your life, you can hardly call this liberty, and as for the pursuit of happiness, you never hear the expression, give a nigger an inch and he'll take a mile? Don't harass me further. I didn't make the rules. {To MAKAK} Now, you. Come for this plate!

{MAKAK gropes forward}

TIGRE: So what? Is against the law to be poor?

CORPORAL: Here, hold this. {Turns to TIGRE} Don't tell me about the law. *Once I loved the law. I thought the law was just, universal, a substitute for God, but the law is a whore, she will adjust her price. In some places the law does not allow you to be black, not even black, but tinged with black.* (pp. 279-280, my emphasis)

Unfortunately, Lestrade happens to be 'tinged with black' and it has taken a life-time for him to realise that 'in some places' the law does not allow this. Lestrade who refuses Makak's offer to pay him with the money he has hidden somewhere on "Monkey Mountain" in return for releasing him from jail, is thus the Corporal who has been thoroughly brain-washed or one who believes that cultural authority belongs to the colonizer: "Bribery! {Pulling the old man through the bars} Listen, you corrupt, obscene, insufferable ape, I am incorruptible, you understand? Incorruptible. The law is your salvation and mine, you imbecile, you understand that." (p.280) At

the end of the scene it is Makak who stabs and wounds Corporal Lestrade making it possible for himself and the two habitual felons to escape from jail. Lestrade's interpretation of Makak's act is equally important to understanding the play and to the treatment of the theme of conflict and dividedness as he directs his questions to the audience:

{Clutching the towel to his wound, rises. Single spot} Did you feel pity for me or horror of them? Believe me, I am alright. Only a flesh wound. Times change, don't they? and people change. Even black people, even slaves. He made his point, you might say. {Drawing out a knife} But this is only what they dream of. And before things grow clearer, nearer to their dream of revenge, I must play another part. We'll go hunting the lion. Except...{Takes down a rifle}...They're not lions, just natives. There's nothing quite so exciting as putting down the natives. Especially after reason and law have failed. So I let them escape. Let them run ahead. Then I'll have good reason for shooting them down. Sharpville? Attempting to escape. Attempting to escape from the prison of their lives. That's the most dangerous crime. It brings about revolution. So, off we go, lads! {Drums. Exit chanting} (pp.286-287)

The play enters a new phase of its defamiliarizing discourse at the point when Makak, with the assistance of Souris and Tigre, 'returns to Africa'. Corporal Lestrade and the Baron Samedi figure of Basil the cabinet maker soon join the party and, in Tigre's words, all 'mix themselves in Makak's madness or dissolve in his dream' (p.289). The abolition of 'the suspension of disbelief' continues as Makak argues that it is only their minds or imagination that could take them to Africa. However it is incumbent on every one of them to renounce sources of reaction or allegiance capable of sapping their revolutionary potential. One of these sources of reaction is, in Souris' words, their childhood conception of a whole range of concepts, from God to the Africa of their minds: "When I was a little boy, living in darkness, I was so afraid, it was as if I was sinking, drowning in a grave, and me and the darkness was the same, and God was like a big white man, a big white man I was afraid of." (p.290) For Tigre,

however, going to Africa is not such a bad idea, but the question he finds difficult to resolve is what great vehicle is going to convey everyone back to Africa? Tigre's worries represent a parody of the dilemma of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and its famous Black Star Line of the 1940s: "We will need money to go there, uncle. To buy a boat. A big, big boat that will take everybody back, or otherwise, is back into jail. Back where we were!" (p.291) For Makak on the other hand the question has never been more easily resolved as he reiterates:

Once, when Moustique asked me that, I didn't know. But I know now. What power can crawl on the bottom of the sea, or swim in the ocean of air above us? *The mind, the mind*. Now, come with me, the mind can bring the dead to life, it can go back, back, back, deep into time. It can make a man a king, it can make him a beast. Can you hear the sea now, can you hear the sound of suffering, we are moving back now...{the CHORUS chants, "I going home} Back into the boat, a beautiful boat, and soon, after many moons, after many songs, we will see Africa, the golden sand, the rivers where lions come down to drink, lapping at the water with their red tongues, then the villages, the birds, the sound of flutes. (p.291, my emphasis)

Makak's emphasis on the mind/imagination underscores the derivative thrust of his dream. From the point when Makak and the other participants 'arrive in the Africa of their minds' the remainder of the play become a series of confession or 'the class suicide' which individuals must commit in order to reconcile themselves to their revolutionary black-selves. As Corporal Lestrade demonstrates, recanting past allegiance involves self-parody and self-disgust. Ostensibly all the images that have been exorcised from or projected into the mind in the process of becoming 'black faces wearing white masks' must be confronted for what they are. Faced with the intricacy of recanting his allegiance Lestrade, for example, highlights the images that have taken root in a mind which according to Basil 'was never his' (pp.296-7) Given

ten seconds to recant, Lestrade eventually yields to the pressure of dissolution of the mind:

{Flatly, like an accustomed prayer} All right. Too late have I loved thee, Africa of my mind, *sero te amavi*, to cite Saint Augustine who they say was black. I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart of the forest at the foot of Monkey Mountain {The creatures withdraw} I kiss your foot, O Monkey Mountain. {He removes his clothes} I return to this earth, my mother. Naked, trying very hard not to weep in the dust. I was what I am, but now I am myself. {Rises} Now I feel better. Now I see a new light. I sing the glories of Makak! The glories of my race! What race? I have no race! Come! Come, all you splendours of imagination. Let me sing of darkness now! My hands. My hands are heavy. My feet...{He rises, crouched} My feet grip like roots. The arteries are like rope. {He howls} Was that my voice? My voice, O God, I have become what I mocked, I always was, I always was. Makak! Makak! forgive me, old father. (pp.299-300)

Lestrade's account represents in the first instance, the return of the prodigal son. Secondly, the Corporal's tirade is as much a return to the past as it is a dialogue with this past. The automatized Negritudist premise of pristine African values features prominently in the speech, just as the agonized imagination of a mulatto dialogizing history constantly returns to deautomatize concepts like racial purity, among others. Thus while Lestrade recognises the 'splendours of the imagination' inherent in Negritude for what they are, he is aware that it is the reification of those splendours that conjures the duality of his own identity. Thus Lestrade exclaims in admiration and revulsion "The glories of my race! What race? I have no race!" Minutes before Lestrade calls for Makak to be apotheosized, Makak examines further the paradox or perhaps more precisely the ironic manifestation of the play's assault on the imagination: "Soon, soon it will be morning, praise God, and the dream will rise like vapour, the shadows will be real, you will be corporal again, you will be thieves, and I an old man, drunk and disorderly, beaten down by a Bible, and tired of looking up



to heaven." (p.304) Before this return to the daily life experiences of the characters, the last scene of the play concentrates on the apotheosized Makak and the consequences thereof: "Bronze trophies are lowered. Masks of barbarous gods appear to a clamour of drums, sticks, the chant of a tribal triumph. A procession of warriors, chiefs and wives of MAKAK in splendid tribal costumes gather, chanting to drums." (p.308) If the previous scene is dedicated to confessions and recantation of past allegiances, this later scene is devoted to interrogating important moments in history. Thus besides the procession of warriors, chiefs and wives of Makak, others who are apotheosized with him include Basil and Market Inspector Pamphilion "who shall do unto others as to him it was done." (p.310) Finally, while Makak is praised as "Inventor of history" and his feet kissed by Corporal Lestrade, the Corporal becomes Makak's able assistant pronouncing the legal or judicial framework that would be operative in the new dispensation. It is in this new role that Lestrade presents the following speech before the tribal assembly:

Wives, warriors, chieftains! The law takes no sides, it changes the complexion of things. History is without pardon, justice hawk-swift, but mercy everlasting. We have prisoners and traitors, and they must be judged swiftly. The law of a country is the law of that country. Roman law, my friends, is not tribal law. Tribal law, in conclusion, is not Roman law. Therefore, wherever we are, let us have justice. We have no time for patient reforms. Mindless as the hawk, impetuous as lions, as dried of compassion as the bowels of a jackal. Elsewhere, the swiftness of justice is barbarously slow, but our progress cannot stop to think. In a short while, the prisoners shall be summoned, so prepare them, Basil and Pamphilion. First, the accused, and after them the tributes.

{The prisoners are presented}  
Read them Basil! (p.311)

The list that Basil proceeds to read to the assembly turns out to be a corrosive parade of slave traders, abolitionists, colonialists, explorers, philosophers and writers, all of whom can definitely not be branded as enemies of the black race. The list thus

appear to be another manifestation of Walcott's defamiliarizing discourse or presentation of black power militancy in its extreme and rigid state. This extremism is only comparable to Makak's declaration of his hatred minutes later as "deep, black, quiet as velvet." (p.315) This extreme state of reaction enables Moustique to present Makak's madness as his own defence, when he is brought in 'bleeding and broken' but apotheosized, to confront Makak: "Now you are really mad. Mad, old man, and blind. Once you loved the moon, now a night will come when, because it white, from your deep hatred you will want it destroyed." (p.315) Moustique's rhetoric at this point matches that of Derek Walcott himself who complains in his essay "What the Twilight Says" of the overt suggestion of the black critic urging the writer to succumb to "the manic absurdity...to give up thought because it is white." (Op.Cit., p.31) Against this background of un-naming the list read to the assembly by Basil operates on the same reason/unreason, natural/un-natural continuum of Negritudian poetry:

**BASIL:** They are Noah, but not the son of Ham, Aristotle, I'm skipping a bit, Abraham Lincoln, Alexander of Macedon, Shakespeare, I can cite relevant texts, Plato, Copernicus, Galileo and perhaps Ptolemy, Christopher Marlowe, Robert E. Lee, Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake, The Phantom, Mandrake the Magician. {The TRIBES are laughing} It's not funny, my Lords, Tarzan, Dante, Sir Cecil Rhodes, William Wilberforce, the unidentified author of The Song of Solomon, Lorenzo de Medici, Florence Nightingale, Al Jolson, Horatio Nelson, and, but why go on? Their crime, whatever their plea, whatever extenuation of circumstances, whether of genius or geography, is, that they are indubitably, with the possible exception of Alexandre Dumas, Sr. and Jr., and Alexis, I think it is Pushkin, white. Some are dead and cannot speak for themselves, but a drop of milk is enough to condemn them, to banish them from the archives of the bo-leaf and the papyrus, from the waxen tablet and the tribal stone. For you, my Lords, are shapers of history. We wait your judgement, O tribes.

**TRIBES:** Hang Them!

**BASIL:** It shall be done. The list continues *ad nauseam*. {His voice fades under a medley of screams and a drum roll of execution} So much for the past. Consider the present. Petitions, delegations, ambassadors, signatories, flatterers, potentates, dominions and powers,

sects, ideologies, special dispensations, wait politely on him fearing revenge. {Reads from a ledger} An offer to the Pope.

{MAKAK shakes his head}

TRIBES: No!

CORPORAL: Unanimous negative. {He throws away the letter}

BASIL: An invitation to be president of the United States?

{MAKAK shakes his head}

CORPORAL: Unanimous negative..... (pp. 312-313)

The offers which also include 'an apology in full from the Republic of South Africa,' 'an offer to revise the origins of slavery and floral tributes from the Ku Klux Klan' are all rejected and in a very practical sense the roads towards flexibility or resolution are firmly shut. The execution of the White Apparition, who after all is the catalyst to Makak's dream, marks the highest point of the trials. Described variously as 'the wife of the devil, the white witch,' 'the mother of civilization and the confounder of blackness,' the Apparition is the Freudian enigma representing the mythical repression or manifestation (or both) of infantile sexuality as the root of neuroses in the adult black male.<sup>7</sup> The Apparition's effect on Makak is stereotypical and in the words of Corporal Lestrade, like one who guards the margins of discourse, she stands for everything that is unattainable to the black man from religion to politics, especially in a world dominated by heteroglossia or where centripetal and centrifugal forces often collide, to use the Bakhtian phraseology. Thus the Corporal's pathetic plea: "She, she? What you beheld, my prince, was but an image of your longing. As inaccessible as snow, as fatal as leprosy. Nun, virgin, Venus, you must

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<sup>7</sup> John Drakakis observes in Freudian terms that "the unconscious is the primal scene of an Oedipal drama (< Oedipus complex) whose stages correspond to the growth of the human subject from infancy to maturity, but whose effect must be repressed and redirected in order for successful socialization to occur. *If, as Lacan says, the unconscious is structured linguistically then what is repressed must actually be a representation.*" John Drakakis, "Contemporary Approaches to Literature," Wynne-Davies, Marion (ed) *Guide to English Literature*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1989, p.42, my emphasis.

violate, humiliate, destroy her; otherwise, humility will infect you. You will come out in blotches, you will be what I was, neither one thing nor the other. Kill her! kill her!" (p.319) When Makak obeys and beheads the Apparition, in a practical and theoretical sense his dream is complete and according to Lloyd Brown "he now returns to that other reality represented by the jail cell. But as we have already seen, the very capacity to dream has confirmed his revolutionary possibilities." (Op.Cit., p.62)

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* ends with an epilogue and like all epilogues, it is indeed a short scene at the end of a literary work. In the epilogue we are formally re-introduced to Makak whose real name is Felix Hobain. Makak's friend and partner in the charcoal business, Moustique, comes to bail him from jail. Moustique emerges at the end of it all as the quintessential pragmatist able to speak to Lestrade (also back to his role as the dedicated guardian of the rule of law) and describes his friend as a man who does not "know why he born, why he suffer, and that is what happen..." (p.325) Lestrade on the other hand does not emerge unscathed from the whole experience. At least, his enthusiasm could be seen to be radically diminished and his perception of the law altered. Commenting on Moustique's opinion that Makak be left where he belongs on his West Indian island, Lestrade retorts that "here is a prison. Our life is a prison. Look, is the sun." (p.325) Tigre and Souris are also back in their cells, and while Tigre screams at the Corporal; "My breakfast, Lestrade. I want my damn breakfast. And I want blood. Meat, you understand?" (p.326), Souris the reformable thief commends Makak to the life outside the jail house with the words, "walk with God, grandfather. Walk with God." (p.326) Makak responds in the same Christ-like manner, reminiscent of a man whose place is guaranteed in the history of

his society:

{Turning to them} God bless you both. Lord, I have been washed from shore to shore, as a tree in the ocean. The branches of my fingers, the roots of my feet, could grip nothing, but now, God, they have found ground. Let me be swallowed up in the mist again, let me be forgotten, so that when the mist open, man can look up, at some small clearing with a hut, with a small signal of smoke, and say, "Makak lives here. Makak lives where he has always lived, in the dream of his people." Other men will come, other prophets will come, and they will be stoned, and mocked, and betrayed, but now this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of this world. Come, Moustique, we going home. (p.326)

I present this 'close reading' of Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* because in my view, this is the only way to realise in critical terms, the derivative, illogical and seemingly contradictory thrust of the entire discourse. A second reason for this resort to an 'orthodox critical model' is a response to the author's "Note on Production" which recommends that the play 'is best treated as a physical poem with all the subconscious and deliberate borrowings of poetry.' It is in these lights that I carried out the preceding critical observations and the conclusions that follow.

## Conclusion

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?  
(Derek Walcott, "A Far Cry From Africa")

Derek Walcott began writing *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in 1959 but the play was not produced until 1967. The eight years between the writing and production of the play were important periods in the relationship between Africa and the black

diaspora. The significance of the period is manifest in the establishment of the discourse that has crystallized into what is now commonly referred to as postcolonial on the one hand, and the development of what has also been recognised "as a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions" (Craig Owens, cited in H. Tiffin, *Op.Cit.*, p.169), on the other. As the counter-discourse of erstwhile colonies of European colonial powers commenced in earnest, with the attainment of independence by majority of those colonies, the construction of the major sites of postcolonial discourse became an accompanying trait of what is often described as 'the Empire writing back to the centre.'

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* Walcott responds to this postcolonial discourse in all its varied dimensions and constructs the West Indian site of its manifestation. The play respects the meta/physical urges of the Middle-Passage but insists, as I have shown, that the discourse is not a one-way traffic. The poet/playwright's construction of West Indian postcoloniality revolves around the drafts for revolution and home-made bombs of prose poems written by the young Frantz Fanon and the already ripe and bitter Césaire. These drafts as I have shown, are either revised or signified upon. In an interview with Edward Hirsch in 1979, Derek Walcott explains at length the need for this dialogization of the triangulated discourse, that is one between what I have described as the framework of the slave buyer, the slave seller and the interpellated subject:

West Indians are always being seduced by opportunities to be re-imperialised. And unless we recognise this very clearly we will always be putting ourselves under another yoke. Within my own experience, I have been British; I have been a citizen of the Caribbean federation; now I am supposed to be either a Trinidadian or a St. Lucian but with a British passport...and there is the danger, the same seduction in

saying that I am an African and should be in Africa, or that my whole experience is African. This can be simply another longing, even a slave longing, for another master. There is no West Indian who is black, or even one who is not black, who is not aware of the existence of Africa in all of us. I was writing against the African influence during a period when the political nostalgia seemed to be a deceit because it meant that if one was lifting up a spade or fork, all one had to do was to throw it down and turn and look toward Africa and say, well, I shouldn't be digging up the ground in St. Lucia, or I shouldn't be doing whatever job I am doing in any one of the islands. I should really be in some sort of pastoral idealized place where I won't have to work, or where I may be working for Mother Africa. The fact is that every West Indian has been severed from a continent, whether he is Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, or black. To have the population induced into mass nostalgia to be somewhere else seemed to me to be about as ennobling as wishing that the population was in Brooklyn, or Brixton...It would be equally abhorrent to me to say "I wish we were English again" as to say "I wish we were African again." *The reality is that one has to build in the West Indies. But that is not to say one doesn't know who one is: our music, our speech - all the things that are organic in the way we live - are Africa.* (Derek Walcott, 1979, p.285, my emphasis)

Thus within the context or framework of the proverbial 'poison' that runs into the poet/playwright's veins from the blood of the ancestral slave seller and slave buyer, he constructs an identity in difference. This identity in a postcolonial sense, is essentially West Indian and its validity remains unquestionably tangible. Another writer who is 'poisoned by the blood of both' but who writes from a slightly divergent position is Amiri Baraka. The next chapter of this thesis examines the constituent site(s) of the postcolonial situation within the framework of the Afro-American, or what I call "The Anvil of Boogie-Woogie in Baraka's *Dutchman* and *The Motion of History*."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Amiri Baraka and the Anvils of Boogie-Woogie: From *Dutchman* to *The Motion of History*

#### 7.1 Introduction

So come/ quick cattle/ train, lick/  
the long/ rails: choo-/ choo chatanoo-/  
ga, pick/ the long/ train to town.

Come/ come bugle/ train/  
come quick/ bugle/ train, quick/  
quick bugle/ train, black/ boogie-/  
woogie wheels/ fat/ boogie-/  
woogie wagons/ rat tat tat/ on the flat/  
out whispering rails/ on the quick/ click/  
boogie woogie/ hooeeee/ boogie woogie/  
long long/ boogie woogie/ long long/  
hooey long/ journey to town.  
{Edward Brathwaite, "Worksong and Blues," *Rights of Passage*}

...what I write is urged out of my blood.  
There is no white man who could write my book,  
Though many think their story should be told  
Of what the Negro people ought to brook.  
Our statesmen roam the world to set things right.  
This Negro laughs and prays to God for light!  
(Claude McKay)

According to Ed Bullins, the purpose of the Black Theatre<sup>1</sup> is "to control people's minds, to educate them, and to persuade them." (Ed Bullins, 1969, p.x) The Black Theatre's role is also one that is consciously designed to reconcile the deracinated psyche of Afro-Americans to the path of socio-cultural and political

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<sup>1</sup> The term Black Theatre is often used interchangeably with the development of the Black Arts Movement of the mid-1960s. In his book *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism"*, Werner Sollors calls the period "the more and more ethnocentric phase of Black cultural nationalism." (W. Sollors, 1978, p.5) It is important to start the discussion at this point because of the crucial historical synthesis it supplies to Amiri Baraka's overall aesthetics and the progress of his views as an artist.



fulfilment. For Ed Bullins and many of the emergent spokeswo/men of the Black Arts movement the theatre has often been seen as having championed the restorative process which reconciled many disturbed and purposeless black lives to themselves and their black community. Ostensibly, Ed Bullins for example, sees the black theatre as a means towards rediscovering the self in its more creative perspective, and perhaps more importantly this theatre forces a reunion between the individual and his/her immediate community. Prior to his personal contact with the Black Arts movement Ed Bullins describes himself as 'a very frustrated and evil cat':

I wasn't at peace with myself, as an artist, as a person. And I think many of us came into Black Arts in similar states of agitation and hostility and madness. It was a purging experience to go through, to start a theatre on nothing and make it work, to put all our energies and lives into it and to have our people-our Black people-appreciate it was a gas, to have our people, not the supposedly distinguished or knowledgeable, not the Jackie Robinsons of the world or the Adam Clayton Powells, or anything like that, but our people...Moving my whole art back into my original reference which is my people, my community fulfils me and makes me want to work. It makes me a peaceful, creative brother who wants to build, to create for the Black people and nation, where before I was like a very, very disturbed cat - I was a misfit, a Western, Negro/artist misfit. (Op.Cit., pp.ix-x)

Bullin's creative angst matches Houston Baker's critical articulation of what he calls 'Race theorizing by whites' which "has led black men to formulate plans for African (de)colonization, separatist groups, and black nationalist organizations." (Houston Baker, Jr., 1990, p.15) Predicated on a whole range of cultural discourses, Baker's argument remains the unabashed defence of a black value system on the one hand, and the framework of the counter-discourse which emerges as the full-scale attack which black Americans have launched on the culture theorizing of white America on the other. Thus, according to Baker "cultural nationalism has been a phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s." (Op.Cit., p.15) Cultural nationalism however, is a product of the age-old tendency that construes culture as a surrogate for race and in its modern

form, this allusion is synonymous with what Baker further calls the "institutional connotations of such words as industry, democracy, class, and art." (Op.Cit., p.4)

In his introduction to the 1990 edition of *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture* first published in 1972, Houston Baker reiterates that the frame of the essays was provided by black cultural nationalism as codified in the black arts and black aesthetics movements. The primary motivating principle behind the black arts movement itself remains the explicit intention "to change all sounds, definitions, and codes of 'art' as traditionally conceived in order to produce a 'revolutionary' art of 'the people'." (Op.Cit., p.xiv) The path towards a realisation of this overt (black) intention was made possible by the think-tank of the white establishment itself: "the Yale reconstructionist critics constructed an empowering myth of nonreferential analysis based on the absence of BLACKNESS, or of BLACKNESS *as absence*." (Op.Cit., p.xvi, Original capitals & italics) The primacy of "the text" which the reconstructionist critics advocate achieved there and then a theoretical closure that restricts the critic to the narrow confines of the text:

After establishing that there is nothing outside the text, however, the reconstructionists felt they could simply read off their jobs of work as nonideological, intellectual enterprises that provided more exacting and specifically literary accuracy for their uses of "the text." What they actually achieved, however, was the legitimation of a new mode of *theory* by what was, arguably, a black, socially activist, critical avant-garde. That is to say, because the reconstructionists implicitly endorsed melanin as an acceptable criterion for their labelling as "black critics," their advocacy of theory, ironically, sanctioned "theory" as a revolutionary (i.e. *black endorsed*) way of reading the word, the text, and the critic. Their movement was not motivated so much by conservative complicity, I think, as by a too unself-conscious acceptance of graduate school tutelage.... (Op.Cit., pp.xvi-xvii, original italics)

Baker's critical construct matches Ed Bullins' *joyous* celebration of the arrival of black theatre as the plays of "our people" and the banishment of the 'Jackie

Robinsons of the world or the Adam Clayton Powells, or anything like that' from the domain of black discourse. One of the primary conclusions of Houston Baker's introduction to the 1990 edition of *Long Black Song* is a recognition of the fervent and shortsighted nationalism of the essays but this shortsightedness as the author claims, "may even today contain seeds of a necessary commitment to black salvation in our land of crack babies, teenage pregnancies, sublime black middle-class (in)difference, and black intellectual complicity with the worst deficits of a traditional white academy." (Op.Cit., p.xix) While this modern complicity could be regarded as a polemical aside, the focus of *Long Black Song* and probably that of this introduction to black American postcoloniality remains the inter-play of cultural and ideological signification that begins with the cultural nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s.

C.W.E. Bigsby's 1967 study of *Confrontation and Commitment: A Study of Contemporary American Drama 1959-66* would supply the basic parallel that fuels the conviction of Houston Baker among others that reconstructionism is simply ahistorical. The terms demanded by the apostles of reconstruction, which includes the well known proposition that art should exist for art's sake and be invariably concerned with universal themes and 'attitudes' completes Baker's picture of the emergence of the credo of textuality. Bigsby's study could not comprehend why the Negro playwrights of the 1960s for example, often "fail to establish that sense of universality which is the essence of drama and which Miller has insisted must constitute the core of valid social drama, 'The social drama...is the drama of the whole man'." (Bigsby, 1967, p.116) The enormity of injustice, prejudice, and the racial barrier notwithstanding, Bigsby maintains that Negro writers "tend to slip back into that mixture of sentimentality and violence which has been a mark of earlier

partisan theatre." (Op.Cit., p.115) Ostensibly the Negro writer is guilty of slipping back into what the theatre has abandoned in Britain and America where "the violent protest of a committed theatre has for the most part given way to a drama which is more truly metaphysical than social." (Op.Cit., p.115) Thus:

there has arisen in the United States, since 1959, a new, socially-committed theatre which in many ways harks back to the simplicities of the thirties. For the Negro playwrights of the sixties have tended all too frequently to embrace the moral absolutism of thirty years ago. Relying on the stereotype and facing social injustice with anger they have tended to create not valid drama but fantasies of revenge. They have, however, generated an enthusiasm for the theatre itself which has long been absent from the American scene. For just as Langston Hughes had founded Negro theatres in the thirties and early forties, theatres like the *Suitcase Theatre* in Harlem, the *Negro Art Theatre* in Los Angeles and the *Skyloft Players* in Chicago, so LeRoi Jones, the most violent of the new Negro dramatists, has founded the *Theatre of the Black Arts*-a Harlem theatre which later distinguished itself by becoming the headquarters of a secret Negro extremist group. (When raided in March 1966 it disgorged rifles, pistols, meat hooks and ammunition as well as revealing a target range in its basement.) (Op.Cit., p.115)

Biggs obviously believes in a Negro art that atrophies as a result of its refusal to transcend the persistent parochialism of cultural nationalism. The central theme of his study of "Contemporary American Drama 1959-66" remains the advocacy of a theatre that is preoccupied with the human condition. Biggs recognises that "the past of a Negro is blood dripping down through leaves, gouged-out eyeballs, the sex torn from its socket and severed with a knife," but contends further that "this past is not special to the Negro. This horror is also the past, and the everlasting potential, or temptation of the human race." (Op.Cit., p.127) It cannot be overemphasised that Negro intellectuals and artists disagree profoundly with Biggs on all counts. Houston Baker for example, contends that before theories of textuality or art for art's sake and a universal human condition are adroitly endorsed, the central question that must be

introduced to the discussion is "whether a way of life known as black American culture is distinct and separate from a way of life known as white culture." (Op.Cit., p.1) The critic answers with history by posing a syllogism: "if...the history of a people is the culture, then the history of the black American is black American culture, and the only way to arrive at an understanding of black American culture is to comprehend fully the history of the black American." (Op.Cit., pp.1-2) A survey of the evolution of the Negro's way of life also reveals to Baker why analysis of "culture" (in this sense culture as a surrogate for race), often "came to be defined in America as something spiritual, transcendental, and white." (Op.Cit., p.2) Thus:

For some, the most vexing problem surrounding such an examination is the fear that black American culture may prove separate and unequal. However, "separate and unequal" in the question of culture is as much a myth as "separate but equal" in the question of school facilities. Any whole way of life differs from any other whole way of life in content and form, but discussions of the relative value of different cultures can only lead to distortions and faulty evaluations. The attempt here, then, is not to demonstrate the equality of black American culture but to deal with its distinctiveness from another whole way of life. We must begin with history, the primary factor in such a discussion, and move on to study the distortions occasioned by race and culture theorizing, the literary reflections of a black culture, and finally, the wholesome effects of acknowledging a distinct black American culture. (Op.Cit., p.2)

To begin with history and move on to study the distortions occasioned by race and culture theorizing via the literary reflections of a black culture is to recognise certain fundamental pitfalls. In the literary realm there are many who believe, as Houston Baker claims, that "black literature began with Richard Wright and ends with James Baldwin." (Op.Cit., p.8) The myopic insight of such a reductionist critic is then often wilfully grafted onto black culture; the end result becomes a picturesque view of America as the 'refuge of huddled masses yearning to be free,' complete with the myth of America as freedom's dream castle, which Baker calls "the components

of the white culture theorizer's perspective." (Op.Cit., p.10) For the Negro however, the image that looms larger than life before his/her misty eyes is the image of the ancestors "brought to America in chains, put to the most degrading tasks imaginable, set outside the laws, and worked 'from can to can't'." (Op.Cit., p.11) The images and symbols that Baker uses to demarcate the resultant perspectives of black America and white America, especially the "something apart" with which the Negro has come to regard his/her difference are the captain's cabin and the holds full of "black ivory" during the middle passage or the eight week voyage from Africa to the new World. Like the servitude to the muse of history which in Derek Walcott's West Indian society has produced a 'literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves and a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters,' Houston Baker reiterates that "the two cultures that proceed out of these differing perspectives are polarized, and the body of intellectual and imaginative work that reflects these different cultures - while their artistic forms merge at times - stand in striking contrast to one another." (Op.Cit., p.10) Thus it is the inner workings of black culture that provide fascination for Henry Louis Gates, Jr. who supplies striking insights into the machinations of black discourse in its ritualized settings. Gates who is concerned with lifting the discourse of signifyin(g) from the vernacular to the discourse of literary criticism confesses to being:

fascinated with the inner workings of black culture, its linguistic and musical resources. My fascination with black language stems from my father's enjoyment of absolute control over its manipulation. My father has mastered black language rituals, certainly; he also has the ability to analyze them, to tell you what he is doing, why and how. He is a very self-conscious language user. He is not atypical. It is amazing how much black people, in ritual settings such as barbershops and pool halls, street corners and family reunions, talk about talking. Why do they do this? I think they do it to pass these rituals along from one generation to the next. They do it to preserve the traditions of "the race." (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 1988, p.xi)

An integral aspect of the rituals and traditions of the race which black people pass along from generation to generation includes black folklore out of which the black American literary tradition emerged. As a result of the historical degradation and trauma of the Middle Passage, Houston Baker contends that "black Americans were not likely to produce the same type of folklore that white America produced." (Op.Cit., p.11) The differences remain salient and because black folklore and the black literary tradition 'are the products of a people who began in slavery and who, to a large extent, remain in slavery':

black folklore does not deal primarily with derring-do like that of Davy Crockett and Mike Fink; instead we find the cunning and guise of Brer Rabbit or the artful gymnastics of Buck and John. Black folklore reflects the Southern agrarian environment that served as the first home of black Americans. The lore is filled with the flora and fauna of a new world as it was seen through the eyes of an enslaved people. The woods that symbolized vast wealth for white America represented a place of refuge from an irate master to blacks. To blacks, the roots and herbs that seasoned the dishes brought to white tables were a source of magic and power over the white master. And the animals of the forest, which were looked upon as game by white America, became symbols of human behaviour to black Americans. Indeed, the first heroes of black American folklore were the animals of the surrounding forests. (Op.Cit., p.11)

Black Americans were, for a significant period of time, simply caught in what Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones<sup>2</sup> calls the "deathurge of this twisted society." Like his

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<sup>2</sup> Werner Sollors' *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism"*, chronicles in a biographical sense the movement from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka. Sollors' words in describing the transition are carefully chosen and highlight the significance of the movement: "when he received his name 'Amiri Baraka' ('blessed prince') from the same orthodox Muslim who had buried Malcolm X, Baraka became the symbolic heir to Malcolm, the 'Malcolm of literature'." (Werner Sollors, 1978, p. 1) For convenience, I stick to the name Amiri Baraka in the rest of this chapter (in the spirit of the Afro-American street saying, "Don't call me out of my name!"), though the reader must be warned that some of the works were written when the writer was still LeRoi Jones. No attempt is made however, to alter the name when critics who wrote before the change refer to Baraka as LeRoi Jones.

"auto/biographical" novel *The Systems of Dante's Hell*<sup>3</sup>, the grand excuse for the "cloud of abstraction and disjointedness" inherent in his volume of poetry *Black Magic: Collected Poetry, 1961-1967* among others, is according to the poet, "just whiteness." In the same vein, the poet describes "Black Art" as "the crucial seeing, the decisions, the actual move...to destroy...the confrontation of blankness, whiteness, etc." (Amiri Baraka, 1969, Preface) This mode of poetry becomes the high point of what Lloyd Brown describes as "anti-rationalism in LeRoi Jones." Brown cites the critical summation of some of Baraka's critics, some of whom he describes as perceptive and sympathetic to the poet's cause but they could not help but conclude that the poems "carry no argument, no extractable, paraphraseable statement. They operate prior to the pros and cons of rational, persuasive, political discourse...His poetry is written out of a heavily anti-rationalist, anti-didactic bias." (Claude Taylor, cited in Lloyd Brown, 1974, p.1) However, as the preceding chapters have argued, concepts such as subversive revision, transgression, and to add the new term, anti-rationalism, merely investigate the blunt edges of reason/unreason and the break-down effected in the logic of their usage when subjected to critical scrutiny. To paraphrase Lloyd Brown, what writers like Baraka attack is not *reason* but the abuse of reason. Looking pointedly and seeking to understand why the scalpel of scientific diagnosis falters when dealing with men and women of other races, even the most conservative among the black observers like Joseph R. Washington laments the damage done to

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<sup>3</sup> *The System of Dante's Hell* is Baraka's quintessential Afro-American auto/biography. The novel is a subversive interjection of Dante Alighieri's famous *Divina Commedia/The Divine Comedy* and the Greco-Christian mythology of *The Inferno* based on their purgatory/paradise syndrome. In Baraka's revision "hell" becomes "a subjective symbol, connoting (1) the corrosive insanity of a technological culture and (2) the ironically conceived craziness of the rebellion against the systems of racism, built-in socio-economic barriers, and the morality of Dante's (and America's) White Christianity." (Lloyd Brown, 1974, p.4)



"the prestige of the social sciences with their failure to solve problems (e.g. racism) created by human irrationality." (J.R. Washington, cited in Brown, Op.Cit., p.1) Thus, "what we encounter in writers like Washington and Malcolm X (and Amiri Baraka) is not irrationalism but a reasoned anti-rationalism which arises from a general scepticism about the scientific rationalism that has become a sacred cow in Western culture." (Op.Cit., pp.1-2)

What follows in the rest of this chapter is both a critique and an appraisal of the peculiar nature of Afro-American subversion and reasoned anti-rationalism. While Amiri Baraka's works remain the essential focus of the chapter, the prodigious output of this writer is only an index of what Houston Baker describes as the movement "from immanence to semiosis, from essence to rhetoric, from tribal allegiance to signifying tropes." (Op.Cit., p.xvi) The movement should be treated in a Barakian sense as 'the motion of history'; vigorously pursued, it would yield a realisation of what I call 'the movement through and away from nationalism' in the next section.

## **7.2 The Motion of History: The movement through and away from Nationalism**

Black American folklore is very different from white American folklore, but it also differs from African folklore. The same can be said of black American literature in general; it is certainly not African, and most assuredly - as its traditional theme of repudiation illustrates - it is not another component in the white American literary tradition.

(Houston Baker, Jr., *Long Black Song*)

If Esu is a repeated topos, for my purposes he is also a trope, a word that has come to be used in Yoruba discourse in figurative senses far removed from its literal denotations. If we examine some of the primal myths of origins in which Esu defines his metaphoric uses for black literary criticism, we shall be able to speculate on Esu's relation to his functional equivalent in Afro-American mythic discourse: that oxymoron, the Signifying Monkey.

(Henry L. Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*)

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* caricatures the African heritage syndrome, especially the tendency by many Afro-Americans to seek solace from centuries of racial abuse and oppression through the psychic preservation of an idyllic image of an African homeland. This "dream deferred" tendency and the frustration it brings is the subject of Langston Hughes' poem from which Hansberry's play derives its title. Hughes's poem entitled "Montage of a Dream Deferred," as Bigsby observes is the source of "an energy which can be turned into violence, self-destruction, despair or genuine realisation." (Bigsby, Op.Cit., p.158) The poem is a chain of questions and propositions which examines among other things:

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over -  
Like a syrup sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?* (Langston Huges, cited in Hansberry, 1960, p.8, original italics)

Langston Hughes's poem sets the stage for the peculiar nature of the Afro-American topos of 'un-naming' which bears slight differences from and a few similarities to that of its West Indian counterpart considered in the preceding chapter. The kinetic nature of the energized field of cultural and ideological discourses that this process of un-naming is capable of releasing has led many individuals to the path of self-destruction, others have been made overtly violent by it, while others simply despair. The majority of these individuals however, become 'fulfilled' or what in Bigsby's words could lead to a process which has led others to the path of 'genuine

realisation.'

In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, three of the characters epitomize the nature of the allegiance that repels or propels individuals along the course of realisable fantasies with the "African dream". For those who realise this dream, Africa naturally becomes an alter/native to the rather elusive 'American dream'. In *A Raisin in the Sun* the character who typifies this realisation is Beneatha whose strong sense of racial pride, to paraphrase Bigsby, compounds her humanistic commitment. Her socio-cultural awareness sharply dictated by the constraints of racialism leads to her association with Asagai, an African student, and their combination contrasts directly to the sullenly cynical Walter Youngers and George Murchison who is easily exasperated by constant sermonizing on the theme of "our great West African heritage":

Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! Our great West African heritage. In one second we will hear all about the Ashanti empires, the great Songhay civilization, and the great sculpture of Benin - and some poetry in Bantu - and the whole monologue will end with the word *heritage*. (Lorraine Hansberry, 1960, pp.56-57)

George Murchison's studied cynicism is one aspect of the Afro-American response to the idea of an African homeland. He typifies those who never thought that the relationship between Africa and her diaspora would yield any positive result, as "Baldwin had in part anticipated it would (lead to) a complex arrangement of subtle misunderstanding." (Bigsby, Op.Cit., p.160) Hansberry's creative articulation highlights some of these 'subtle misunderstandings'. It is possible to argue with Bigsby however, that "Lorraine Hansberry's greatest achievement lies in her ability to avoid what Saunders Redding has called 'the obligation imposed by race on the average...talented Negro.' The obligation to limit one's scope to the immediate but

parochial injustices of racial intolerance has for long sapped the creative potentials of the Negro writer."<sup>4</sup> (Op.Cit., p.172)

One could begin a critique of Bigsby's summation from the premise of its own self-imposed stasis, which to adopt Langston Hughes' metaphor, 'festers like a sore/And then run.' For Hughes' poem represents a creative re/construction of 'the motion of history.' Vigorously pursued, the poem's syllogistic approach to the theme of the 'dream' supplies a creative parallel to the critical opinions of Houston Baker which constructs a similar discernible movement in black American writing as it oscillates through "immanence to semiosis, from essence to rhetoric, from tribal allegiance to signifying tropes." (Baker, Op.Cit., p.xvi) Thus Hansberry's and to a significant extent Baldwin's "greatest achievements" merely typify that immanent stage in black American literature and they do not negate the validity of the other stages. The second stage of this movement which moves from 'essence to rhetoric' also 'festers like a sore/And then run.' Some of its products might 'stink like rotten meat' but much of it also 'crust and sugar over/- like a syrup sweet.' However, it must be emphasised that the 'dream deferred' analogy does not relate to the African heritage alone. Indeed the African heritage aspect of this dream functions against the backdrop of the denial of black (human) rights and liberty which the civil rights

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<sup>4</sup> On the contrary what seems to have sapped the creative potential of the Negro writer is the tendency by the majority of the writers at this immanent stage to side-track the injustices of racial intolerance in a bid to reinforce what Werner Sollors has described as the peak of Afro-American "integrationist universalism, middle-class orientation, sexual inhibition, and naturalistic conventionality. Lorraine Hansberry's Broadway and Hollywood success *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) epitomized this literature; and it was an anathema to later Black writers that Hansberry insisted on interpreting the characters of her play as 'honest-to-God, believable, many-sided people who *happened* to be Negroes,' and herself, not as a 'Negro playwright,' but as a writer who 'happens to be a Negro'." (Werner Sollors, 1978, p.14, original italics)

movements of the 1960s pointedly address. For the dispossessed Negro who sees Africa as an alter/native to the American dream remains unconvinced by the American "talk of the competitive spirit, justice for all, and bootstrap philosophies of advancement." (Baker, Op.Cit., p.3) Perceiving these philosophical quips as simply naivete, the Negro is sadly aware, in the words of James Comer, that "much of the wealth of America was given away while blacks were still in slavery. Almost all of it was given away before 1915 when 90 percent of the black population lived in extreme poverty and oppression in the Deep South." (Comer, cited in Baker, Op.Cit., p.3)

But even at its immanent stage, black American writing pointedly addresses the Negro's economic dispossession including his/her socio-cultural and political powerlessness. A relationship of signifying, according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., could be traced between the various stages; this relationship links seemingly disparate texts like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* (1845) to W.E.B. DuBois's *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), as they both find thematic echo and tertiary formal revision in Zora Neale Houston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). The signified black presence in these early texts accounts for the immanence of this stage of black writing. Paradigmatic signifying texts such as Houston's *Their Eyes* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* consequently inform a "precisely chartable formal literary relationship" in which "black writers read and critique other black texts as an act of rhetorical self-definition." (H.L. Gates, Jr., 1990, p.290) Houston Baker on the other hand presents the 'act of rhetorical self-definition' using Richard Wright's odyssey as he wanders across the wasteland of American racial segregation and stereotype conceptions. Consequently, Wright's writing provides a starting point of

tertiary formal revision for Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* (1968) among others:

Soon after his return from Paris in 1947, while walking the streets of Greenwich Village one day and marvelling at the abundance of America, he paused before a small store's display, then decided to buy fruit to take home. While he was making his selection, the Italian owner rushed out of the store and brusquely asked, "Whudda yuh want, boy?" With the question, Wright's feeling of a moment before - "It's like Christmas! Just like Christmas!" - vanished, and once again he was suffering the "old and ancient agonies" at the hands of white American neighbors. One individual from what Ellison calls "the waves of immigrants who have come later and passed us by" had made Wright acutely aware of his true culture. His white neighbors on Charles Street were not a bit kinder; on occasions, the word "nigger," spoken distinctly and loudly enough for him to hear, drifted from a group of white gossipers as he climbed the steps to his home. After a short and frustrating stay in the United States, therefore, Wright departed once more for France and never again saw his native land. (Houston Baker, *Op.Cit.*, pp.128-29)

The experience of Richard Wright and many others dictated the pace of the Afro-American literary movement as it sped through the stages of immanence and the black essence to acts of rhetorical self-definition. The mainstay of this second stage is the upsurge of cultural nationalism which according to Baker represents 'a full-scale attack on the culture theorizing of white America.' While the second stage witnesses black demands for civil rights and liberty, these demands are hand in hand with a re/construction of black American cultural identity beginning with the reappropriation of 'skilfully crafted and beautifully expressive artifacts of black culture' which white America has labelled "American": "thus jazz is viewed as 'America's gift to the world.' Well, that is just not so; jazz, like the rich folklore, the skilled literature, and the countless other facets of the body of intellectual and imaginative work reflecting black American culture, is simply not America's to give." (Baker, *Op.Cit.*, p.15) Houston Baker's ebullient but critical feeling of appropriable

and expressive artifacts of black culture matches that of many creative writers, most especially that of "one of black America's most prolific writers, LeRoi Jones, (who) has manifested his concern for the blues form and values in his poetry and in critical works such as *Blues People* (1963) and *Black Music* (1968)." (Op.Cit., p.40)

Baraka who has been variously described as the Malcolm X of black literature in a polemical/rhetorical sense, has also acquired the image of a black Baudelaire in a literary/aesthetic thrust. Baraka has however, had his fair share of different aspects of the 'dream deferred' analogue of Langston Hughes' poem, and while many of his critical and creative contributions to black American literature have 'festered like a sore/And then ran,' much of it has also 'crusted and sugar over/like a syrup sweet.' To many critics Baraka is the quintessential "Negro writer (who) is committed by virtue of his birth. His art is the expression of his attempt to come to terms with that commitment." (Bigsby, Op.Cit., p.125) For Bigsby however, Baraka is 'the most violent of the new Negro dramatists,' while other critics have even gone further to describe him as suffering "from a 'hate-ridden' and 'insane' vision that offers only the prospect of mutual madness." (Donald P. Costello, cited in Lloyd Brown, Op.Cit., p.1) A case could be made for Baraka's "negative" attributes if, as Houston Baker proposes, one decides to see him as a revolutionary writer. The theme of his most apocalyptic essays such as "The Last Days of the American Empire (Including some Instructions for Black People)," Baker argues, is consistent with the revolutionary spirit of the Negro spiritual "God's gonna set dis world on fire," among others.

Baraka contrasts sharply with James Baldwin on the themes of love and the apocalypse. Both Baldwin and Baraka have written essays and volumes of creative

writing and they offer paradigmatic signifying texts around which the subjects of love and the apocalypse could be further broached. *The Fire Next Time* (1964) perhaps represents Baldwin's summation on the impending apocalypse which America faces as a result of its open policies of racialism and injustices towards millions of black wo/men. What appears to be lacking to Baldwin in his diagnosis of the American racial disease is simply love. A sufficient dose of wholehearted liking for one another, Baldwin contends, would end the racial nightmare "and achieve our country, and change the history of the world." (Baldwin, cited in Baker, Op.Cit., p.55) Thus "if the white man acknowledges the humanity of the black and gives him his due, there is hope for the world. The black man in turn, must give love." (Baker, Op.Cit., p.54) Baldwin's socio-political stance smacks of a plea for equality which Baraka substitutes for what he calls "a widening of the consciousness." The role of the revolutionary theatre for Baraka, is "to stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching, spitting craziness - but a craziness taught to us in our most rational moments." (Baraka, 1968, p.211) Furthermore Baraka offers no apology for creating characters who are victims instead of heroes and proclaims his depictions as the essence of the revolutionary theatre which in Baraka's view should be devoted to highlighting the "horrible coming attractions of *The Crumbling of the West*." (Op.Cit., p.211, original italics) In his 1968 collection *Home: Social Essays*, particularly in the article that precedes "the revolutionary theatre," entitled "The Last Days of the American Empire," Baraka, as Houston Baker observes:

does not advocate love, nor does he think the apocalypse should be staved off. Jones would welcome the apocalypse as many slaves did the Civil War, considering it an eschatological and liberating experience. As a writer Jones casts himself in the role of herald and agent as well. The subtitle of Jones's essay is "Including Some Instructions for Black People," and this reveals Jones's position - he



stands with those whom he describes as "standing on their porches with their rifles looking into a night made unfriendly by the hideousness of the white man's ego." Jones is against all of the "white eyes" and the MAWPs (Mad American White People). In his essay, he ruthlessly exposes the deceit and lies of the white oppressor, and the images he presents demonstrate the corruption of American society. James Bond, for example, though British, is a typical image of this society - the suave lover licensed to kill foreigners. Again, Amos Burke of the now defunct television series "Burke's Law" is also typical - the millionaire policeman who shows the clear connection between capitalism and police power. (Baker, Op.Cit., pp.55-56)

Consequently, both James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka have rearticulated in creative terms the lives of revolutionary black figures, and here again their *One Day When I Was Lost: A Scenario based on Alex Haley's The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1973) and *The Death of Malcolm X* (1969) respectively offer paradigmatic references on the themes of love and the apocalypse. On the one hand Baldwin's artistic rendition of Malcolm's life is designed to show the "pitfalls" of Malcolm's consciousness, especially the love/hate syndrome that characterized Malcolm's revolutionary aesthetics. Baraka's version on the other hand sees the love/hate syndrome as the grand excuse for Malcolm's murder supported by the propagandist machinery of the postcolonial state. Thus as Malcolm lies "dead on floor with weeping hysterical mourners... We hear the TV announcer: Today black extremist Malcolm X was killed by his own violence." (Baraka, 1969, p.19) This is the end of the story but what Baraka's account interjects into the story of Malcolm's life is the other story of the plot by the white establishment which controls 'black minds' in a bid to divide class from class and constrict the evolution of a (black) national way of life. *The Death of Malcolm X*<sup>5</sup> in Baraka's handling is thus displaced into the larger context of the

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<sup>5</sup> *The Death of Malcolm X*, in *New Plays From the Black Theatre*, Ed Bullins (ed), New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1969. Page references are to this edition of the play

complicity between the various organs/apparatuses of the postcolonial state as it is seen constricting the evolution of the national ways of life of one of its ethnic minorities. The I.A.B.S. or Institute for Advanced Black Studies, plays a very important role in this process. The Institute is the organ of state concerned with taking out the 'mindsoul' of black folks and replacing it: "they take out a black brain, substitute a white one for it." (p.2) Lobotomized, the blacks whose brains have been replaced are transformed into mindless individuals who conduct their agitation for civil rights and liberty within integrated picket lines, desperately trying to be white:

*Out the window, down the street.* A crowd of civil rights marchers, the Negroes impeccably clad. They are chanting mindlessly, "LET US BE AMERICANS." It is an integrated picket line, fat white ladies with sparkling necklaces...priests and ministers ogling each other. They are led by a tall "distinguished" looking Negro with greying temples. He is walking in long gallant strides, turning his head from one side to the other to take in the applause (and abuse). The streets are lined with white people...There is music with the marchers. Some of the marchers are singing "WE SHALL BE WHITE" in a spiritual vein...The rich ladies scream with laughter...Some of the marchers we recognise from the classroom or the operating room...Cops and plainclothesmen stop marchers...They kneel and begin to pray. "Oh, white Northamerican God, help us...help us to be like you and your loved ones." The marchers repeat their whines. They begin to weep en masse. The leader bawling like a baby. (pp.9-10)

This travestied civil rights movement reveals Baraka's parody of the reality that lies behind 'acceptance and integration.' The larger question raised by the integrated picket line remains, integration conducted on whose terms? Baraka answers with Malcolm's distinctive approach, not pleading like the integrationists but an approach that is aimed at making the logic/unreason of racialism confront its own inhumanity:

Malcolm: No, finally it is the fact that you are evil. Evil. It is that simple fact that will animate the rest of the world against you! That simple alarming fact of your unredeemable evil. You are all disqualified as human beings (Voice rise sharply), disqualified by your inhuman acts.....

Klansman's bedroom. (Malcolm's voice is droning over the television, "by your inhuman acts..") Klansman looks up at tv, stares hard at the words and the (unseen) face, his face twisted in a leering grimace, then he begins to laugh.

Klansman: Hahaha...yr right nigger...yr right...hahaha...by our evil...hahaha...but what good will it do you...{laughing hysterically...his female companion follows with highpitched shrieks.} (p.9)

The combination of the Klansman and his agents in collaboration with the men in 'USam suits' organise 'the dazed/lobotomized Negroes' to plot Malcolm's murder. Symbolically on a "dawn to morning, the flag of American sky grows dim and breaks up into white cloud. It is sunday morning," and the dazed Negroes are in a plane with their instructor on their way to silence 'Malcolm the extremist' for good:

ATTENDANT: Sir, we'll be in New York in 15 minutes

INSTRUCTOR: All right men, check your weapons...and go over your assignments for me one more time.

NEGROES: "I get the guards out of the way." "I stage the commotion." "I lead my men up the side hallway and through the front aisle, blasting after the first shot."

After the briefing...attendant comes back, "5 minutes." (pp.12-13)

*The Death of Malcolm X* marks, in a symbolic sense, the end of Baraka the artist *per se*. The integrated picket line of the play signifies, beyond a plea to be white, a marked division within the cultural nationalist ranks of black Americans. As the phase draws to an end it is those who participate in the integrated picket line and go their separate way from the rest of the black community that emerge as the new black middle-class of the postcolonial state. A year after *The Death of Malcolm X* appeared along with plays of similar concern in *New Plays From the Black Theatre* edited by Ed Bullin, Baraka published his famous doctrine of Kawaida otherwise known as "A Black Value System". Kawaida is a pseudo-religious doctrine formulated in conjunction with the political activist Ron Karenga, based on an admixture of African socio-cultural/religious practices and a particular brand of the

Islamic faith. The seven pillars of the Kiswahili terms or Nguzo Saba of Kawaida are "Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith). Baraka considers Nguzo Saba the key to the new nationalism." (Theodore Hudson, 1973, p.35) It is rather compartmentalizing to drive a critical wedge between the works that Baraka produced after the 1970 Kawaida declaration, but the subtle shift from art to politics is an integral part of the 'movement through and away from nationalism' that this section addresses. Thus the time of the publication of his first volume of poetry *Preface to a twenty volume Suicide Note* in 1961 to *The Death of Malcolm X* in 1969 marks the end of an eventful decade in the Barakian/Black Arts Movement. The new nationalism launched with the Kawaida doctrine culminated in the Congress of African People held in Atlanta also in 1970. Both the Congress of African People and the Kawaida/black nationalist movement to paraphrase Lloyd Brown 'went into swift decline':

The movement lost its impact as an explosive, potentially revolutionary force...And, ironically, the more the white mainstream opened up opportunities to blacks, under pressure from militant black movements, the greater the loss of momentum for traditional militant black groups alike: current and potential leaders of mass discontent became successful members of the mainstream. This latter development was particularly irksome to Baraka, who eventually came to look with a jaundiced eye at the overall impact of integration. From his viewpoint that impact had had the effect of enriching the pockets and the political position of the black middle class. (Lloyd Brown, 1980, p.25)

Baraka's art does not atrophy as a result of the declines in the black nationalist movement and the Congress of African people. Rather Baraka and his art have moved along the commitment continuum from black cultural nationalism/Kawaida into the phase of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought. The literary significance of that movement as William Fischer sees it is that "he is no longer concerned solely with

the art of literature, but now sees his 'specific placement in the world' as Imamu Amiri Baraka - as a spokesman preparing the 'raised consciousness of a people' against fractious American realities." (William C. Fischer, 1973, p.259) In his 1975 article "Why I Changed My Ideology," Baraka compares black nationalism with the Socialist revolution and concludes that "nationalism that says we must struggle alone in the U.S., when there are millions of other exploited people, is reactionary." (Baraka, 1975, p.37) "Why I Changed my Ideology" establishes the new revolutionary imperatives and undertakes a critical overview of the global system of exploitation as it exists within the confines of neo-colonial forms in Africa or involving the 'oil swindle in the Middle East.' Henceforth Baraka sees the new commitment in terms of the global struggle of all the oppressed people against imperialism. His major emphasis however remains the millions of dispossessed black wo/men in the United States, Africa and across the black diaspora. Baraka's 1988 interview with Elaine Duval looks back at the achievements of the 1960s and 70s before he proffers the following assessment of what Duval calls 'the present aesthetic scene in America':

After the revolutionary period of the sixties and seventies, we are now plunged into backwardness, headed by Ronald Reagan - the world leader of animalism and reaction and backwardness. But I think I at least see signs of a turn around now. Look at the struggle in South Africa, for instance. The struggle is intensifying, and gives a good indication that things are turning around. I think you have to see the African-American struggle and the South African struggle and the struggle of the people of the West Indies as real barometers of world struggles, because Black people are on the bottom. We have been and are still slaves. We have been slaves in relation to everybody else. We are still discriminated against for racial reasons. (Baraka, 1988, p.7)

There is an important sense in which Baraka should look back at the revolutionary period of the sixties and seventies with nostalgia, as what follows the

rest of his sentence focuses on the stagnation or backwardness of the eighties. There is no known source which claims that Baraka has changed his ideological stance since he explained "Why I Changed My Ideology" in 1975. His 1978 collection *The Motion of History and Other Plays* remains the best known manifestation of the 1975 change in ideology. For my immediate purpose in the next section of this chapter I focus on what could be construed as the starting point for Baraka in the most social of all art forms, drama; the section explicates what I consider a discernible trend in Baraka's discourse which begins in "Anger" and by the passage of time moves significantly "Beyond."

### **7.3 Anger and Beyond: The Cultural and Ideological Discourse from *Dutchman* to *The Motion of History***

The magic words are: Up against the wall mother/  
fucker this is a stick up! Or: Smash the window at night (these are magic/  
actions) smash the windows daytime, anytime, together, lets smash the/  
window drag the shit from in there. No money down. No time to pay. Just/  
take what you want. The magic dance in the street. Run up and down Broad/  
Street niggers, take the shit you want. Take their lives if need be, but/ get  
what you want what you need. Dance up and down the streets, turn all/ the  
music up, run through the streets with music, beautiful radios on/ Market  
street, they are brought here especially for you. Our brothers/ are moving all  
over, smashing at jellywhite faces. We must make our own/ World, man, our  
own world, and we can not do this unless the white man/ is dead. Let's get  
together and kill him my man, lets get to gather the fruit/ of the sun, let's  
make a world we want black children to grow and learn in/ do not let your  
children when they grow look in your face and curse you by/ pitying your  
tomish ways.

(Amiri Baraka, poem addressed to "Black People!")

Amiri Baraka's poem entitled "Black People!" was first published between the arrest and trial of the poet/playwright, in the December 1967 issue of the *Evergreen Review*. The poem has entered into history along with its author as an integral 'participant' in the famous Baraka trial of 1967 which was preceded by the civic

disorders in Newark in the summer of 1967. Baraka and two of his associates were accused of gunrunning and arraigned before Judge Leon W. Kapp, and an all-white jury. When Judge Kapp pronounced "the sentence of this Court, on the basis of your conviction for the unlawful possession of two revolvers," Baraka interjects, "and two poems" (cited in Theodore Hudson, *Op.Cit.*, p.31), thus helping the judge and his Court to produce the 1967 version of the famous anti-communist witch-hunts of the Senator Joe McCarthy era. At the point when the judge decided to read the poem to the Court, the following tirade ensued between him and the poet:

**DEFENDANT JONES:** Are you offering that in evidence?

**THE COURT:** Just a minute.

**DEFENDANT JONES:** It should be read wholly, if you are.

**THE COURT:** "The author: LeRoi Jones, Evergreen Publications, December, 1967."

**DEFENDANT JONES:** Let me read it.

**THE COURT:** Just a minute. This diabolical prescription to commit murder and to steal and plunder and other similar evidences -

**DEFENDANT JONES:** I'm being sentenced for the poem. Is that what you are saying?

**THE COURT:** -causes one to suspect that you were a participant in formulating a plot to ignite the spark on the night of July 13, 1967 to burn the City of Newark and that -

**DEFENDANT JONES:** You mean, you don't like the poem, in other words.

....

**THE COURT:** Another shocking excerpt from a speech which you delivered on September 15, 1967 at Muhlenberg College has been brought to my attention.

**DEFENDANT JONES:** Did I have the guns then too?

**THE COURT:** Which reads -

**DEFENDANT JONES:** Is that what I'm being tried for, Muhlenberg College?

**THE COURT:** "Unless we black people can come into peaceful power and begin the benevolent rule of the just the next stage of our rebellion will burn Newark to the ground. This time City Hall and the rest of the greco Romans will go down, including the last of these greco Romans themselves."

It is my considered opinion that you are sick and require medical attention.

**DEFENDANT JONES:** Not as sick as you. (*Op.Cit.*, p.30)

There is no denying the fact that the poem must have been written in one of Baraka's angriest moments, but the whole point of its re-presentation in this section

is to show that "Anger" is the keynote of Baraka's socio-economic and cultural aesthetics in the crucial decade of the 1960s. Baraka's literary output during the period ranges from the 1961 first volume of poetry *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, and reaches a climax in the screen play *The Death of Malcolm X* (1969). A critical survey of many of the works contained in Baraka's prodigious output from 1961-69 would reveal that the poem "Black People!" and the trial are in fact anticlimactic denouements to an era that was drawing to a close.

In the dramatic art form, *Dutchman*<sup>6</sup> is the starting point of the remarkable feat of anger which Baraka showed himself to be capable of attaining. The discourse of the play centres around the sociology/mythology of race-relations which Baraka mastered early in his play writing career. Thus when Clay Williams, a twenty-year-old Negro, meets Lula, a thirty-year-old white woman, "in the flying underbelly of the city," they both seek to define one another in social and cultural terms. In an atmosphere "steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth", all the mythologies of racialism are exhumed from historical and contemporary perspectives to achieve the play's act of rhetorical self-definition. Lula takes the initiative from the beginning and after Clay's murder at the end of the play she prepares to take on another Negro of Clay's age. We are made to realise that her act is an art practised to perfection:

{Lula busies herself straightening her things. Getting everything in order. She takes out a notebook and makes a quick scribbling note. Drops it in her bag. The train apparently stops and all the others get off, leaving her alone in the coach.

Very soon a young Negro of about twenty comes into the coach, with a couple of books under his arm. He sits a few seats in back of LULA. When he is

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<sup>6</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave*, New York: William Morrow & Co., 1964. All page references are to this edition of the play



seated she turns and gives him a long slow look. He looks up from his book and drops the book on his lap. Then an old Negro conductor comes into the car, doing a sort of restrained soft shoe, and half mumbling the words of some song. He looks at the young man, briefly, with a quick greeting}

CONDUCTOR: Hey, brother!

YOUNG MAN: Hey.

{The conductor continues down the aisle with his little dance and the mumbled song. LULA turns to stare at him and follows his movement down the aisle. The conductor tips his hat when he reaches her seat, and continues out the car}

Curtain

(pp.37-38)

The play ends here but a powerful basis for a sequel to the original actions has been established. The old Negro conductor seems to be aware of the potential danger that awaits the young Negro of about twenty just boarding the subway. He is probably humming and shuffling to the words of a Negro spiritual; the difference between the conductor, Clay, and the young Negro is that the conductor does not go about carrying a couple of books under his arm to establish a middle class identity. The conductor is of the order of Bigger Thomas, the hero of Richard Wright's *Native Son*; Bigger and the old Negro conductor 'murder' people like Lula instead of being murdered by them. Thus the characters of Clay and the young Negro come from a study of the black middle class which they typify. Baraka establishes their odyssey in an early poem entitled "Consider This" published in 1959, with the following studied affectations:

*I am wearing a brown flannel suit  
& button down shirt.  
I have degrees from three colleges; & an  
affected french name. I'm well liked  
(cited in W. Sollors, Op.Cit., p.11, original italics)*

Baraka has never hesitated to place himself at the heart of the act of rhetorical self definition which his work often pursues. Thus, in making Lula guess Clay's first name, Baraka's own first name surreptitiously creeps into the list:

LULA. I bet your name is...something like...uh, Gerald or Walter.  
Huh?

CLAY. God, no.

LULA. Lloyd, Norman? One of those colored names creeping out of New Jersey. Leonard? Gag....

CLAY. Like Warren?

CLAY. Definitely. Just exactly like Warren. Or *Everett*. (p.15, my italics)

Amiri Baraka was at birth Everett LeRoi Jones. Like the persona in the poem "Consider This," Baraka shares the same middle class affiliation of having 'degrees from three colleges and an affected French name.' What Baraka's family lacked in economic terms to qualify as black middle class, to paraphrase Theodore Hudson, it made up for in 'attitude and orientation, with a lineage of preachers and teachers.' Baraka himself explains that "black people who had jobs, as my parents did, could be considered middle-class but certainly not middle-class compared to what America is. They had jobs, and they were steady, secure jobs. They were not middle-class in the sense of what middle-class is - they were working class - although I wound up in what I guess is a bourgeois school, Howard." (Baraka, cited in Hudson, p.3) 'Howard,' family attitude and orientation give Baraka the valuable insight into the phoneyess of this black middle class life which *Dutchman* and other works portray in terms of their modern mythological manifestations:

He criticized middle-class Blacks for betraying other Blacks in their individualistic adherence to the American "economic sensibility," and he cast his own lot, against them, with the opposing "imaginary sensibility." In his opposition, however, he was no less individualistic than his opponents and displayed an exaggerated obsession with his own self in often hermetically privatistic autobiographic literature. Baraka, the self-declared "prodigal" son of the "shabby" Black bourgeoisie, thus protested against his cultural matrix, using patterns that that culture had first conveyed to him. His first form of protest against the middle class was an aesthetic rebellion, formulated as an indictment, not of racism, capitalism, or the Cold War, but of middle-brow taste. (Werner Sollors, *Op.Cit.*, pp.13-14)

Baraka's first form of protest against the middle class finds one of its angriest

manifestations and expressions in *Dutchman*. Clay William is not merely awkward but every aspect of his middle class life which Lula reads like an open book, is predictable. Baraka's aesthetic rebellion also find expression in the modern myths which the discourse of *Dutchman* exhumes in its bid to 'revise' what Sollors describes as the earlier phase of Afro-American 'integrationist-universalism, middle-class orientation, sexual inhibition, and naturalistic conventionality.' Thus while Lula seems to have mastered all the elements used in the ritual of signifying which Roger Abrahams has described as "a 'technique of indirect argument or persuasion', 'a language of implication', 'to imply, goad, beg, boast, by indirect verbal gestural means'" (cited in Gates, 1990, p.288), an integral part of Clay's awkwardness is his complete middle class alienation from this aspect of the black cultural matrix. Ostensibly, it is Lula who controls every aspect of the signifying techniques of indirect argument, by 'implying' Clay's integrationist middle-class orientation, or 'goad' him about his sexuality, and 'boasting' of her (white world) ability to control Clay and characters like Clay in socio-cultural and political terms:

*Train roars. Lights flash outside the windows.*

*LULA enters from the rear of the car in bright, skimpy summer clothes and sandals. She carries a net bag full of paper books, fruit, and other anonymous articles. She is wearing sunglasses, which she pushes to the back of her forehead from time to time. LULA is a tall, slender, beautiful woman with long red hair hanging straight down her back, wearing only loud lipstick in somebody's good taste. She is eating an apple, very daintily. Coming down the car toward CLAY.*

*She stops beside CLAY's seat and hangs languidly from the strap, still managing to eat the apple. It is apparent that she is going to sit in the seat next to CLAY, and that she is only waiting for him to notice her before she sits.*

*CLAY sits as before, looking just beyond his magazine, now and again pulling the magazine slowly back and forth in front of his face in a hopeless effort to fan himself. Then he sees the woman hanging there beside him and he looks up into her face, smiling quizzically.*

LULA. Hello.

CLAY. Uh, hi're you?

LULA. I'm going to sit down...O.K.?

CLAY. Sure.

LULA. {Swings down onto the seat, pushing her legs straight out as if she is very weary}

Oooof! Too much weight.

CLAY. Ha, doesn't look like much to me.

{Leaning back against the window, a little surprised and maybe stiff}

LULA. It's so anyway.

{And she moves her toes in the sandals, then pulls her right leg up on the left knee, better to inspect the bottoms of the sandals and the back of her heel. She appears for a second not to notice that CLAY is sitting next to her or that she has spoken to him just a second before.

CLAY looks at the magazine, then out (sic) the black window. As he does this, she turns very quickly toward him}

Weren't you staring at me through the window?

CLAY. {Wheeling around and very much stiffened}

What?

LULA. Weren't you staring at me through the window? At the last stop?

CLAY. Staring at you? What do you mean?

LULA. Don't you know what staring means?

CLAY. I saw you through the window...if that's what it means. I don't know if I was staring. Seems to me you were staring through the window at me.

LULA. I was. But only after I'd turned around and saw you staring through that window in the vicinity of my ass and legs.

CLAY. Really?

LULA. Really. I guess you were just taking those idle potshots. Nothing else to do. Run your mind over people's flesh ..... (pp.5-7)

Goaded by Lula and her language of implication, Clay displays an insufficient grasp of the socio-cultural thrust of their encounter. Of paramount importance to Baraka's discourse of subversion in *Dutchman* is the unusual transfer of so much of the 'authorial viewpoint'<sup>7</sup> to the white woman, Lula. The transfer achieves both the author's critique of Lula and what she stands for while preserving at the same time Baraka's venom and anger against Clay and his black middle-class orientation. Lula's personality and peculiar insight about black middle class existence are revealed to the audience/reader in a series of self-contradictory assertions. Lula emerges as a result

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<sup>7</sup> By 'authorial viewpoint' in a play where there is no narrative, I refer to the process of victim identification, especially the subjective expectation of a {black} reader who would expect the playwright to sympathize with the victim {Clay} and not victimizer {Lula}.

as the 'void' that links the white world to its black counterpart. Thus she first introduced herself as 'one who lies in order to control the world' (p.9). Her later introduction as "Lena the Hyena, the famous poet" (p.14), and an actress (p.19), confirms her as a congenial liar. Invariably Lula who claims that 'everything Clay says is wrong' (p.18) reveals her true identity to the mortified Clay who sees himself rather naively as a black Baudelaire, in the following terms:

LULA. *Well, you're wrong. I'm no actress. I told you I always lie. I'm nothing, honey, and don't you ever forget it. {Lighter} Although my mother was a communist. The only person in my family ever to amount to anything.*

CLAY. My mother was a Republican.

LULA. And your father voted for the man rather than the party.

CLAY. Right!

LULA. Yea for him. Yea, yea for him.

CLAY. Yea!

LULA. And yea for America where he is free to vote for the mediocrity of his choice! Yea!

CLAY. Yea!

LULA. And yea for both your parents who even though they differ about so crucial a matter as the body politic still forged a union of love and sacrifice that was destined to flower at the birth of the noble Clay...what's your middle name?

CLAY. Clay

LULA. A union of love and sacrifice that was destined to flower at the birth of the noble Clay Clay Williams. Yea! And most of all yea yea for you, Clay Clay. The Black Baudelaire! Yes!

{And with knifelike cynicism}

My Christ. My Christ. (pp.19-20, my emphasis)

It is not difficult to perceive Lula as the child prodigy of a communist mother. The most convincing aspect of her character is her overriding cynicism which links her knowledge of American mediocrity in socio-cultural and political terms to the hollowness of black middle class families in their bid to fit into the mainstream of that mediocrity. Thus to the conceited Clay, Lula poses the question that echoes his alienation: "I bet you never thought of yourself as a black nigger. {Mock serious, then she howls with laughter. Clay is stunned but after initial reaction, he quickly

tries to appreciate the humor. LULA almost shrieks} A black Baudelaire." (p.19)

*Dutchman* is a dialogized account of the social and cultural perspectives of representatives of two divergent worlds. Lula's cynicism teases out Clay's black middle class pretences and betrays her own insecurity within the mainstream of American mediocrity. In the process of teasing out these pretences, many myths, especially those of the Negro's past, are revealed. The setting of the play is the subway which in itself "heaps in modern myth," as it echoes in Lloyd Brown's words, "the famous 'underground railway' which assisted runaway slaves on their way from the South to the North." (L. Brown, 1980, pp.143-44) Aspects of these mythic manifestations include the characters' chthonic essences as they 'fly in the underbelly of the city.' According to Lloyd Brown, "any approach that singles out one mythic theme will miss the degree to which the play's structure depends in part on the weaving of several myths." (Lloyd Brown, Op.Cit., p.143) Thus the "steaming hot summer weather outside" literally imposed 'on top' of the characters for example, becomes linked structurally, to Lula's mythical evocation of Clay's middle class alienation and pretences later in the play:

LULA. Everything you say is wrong.

{Mock smile}

That's what makes you so attractive. Ha. In that funnybook jacket with all the buttons.

{More animate, taking hold of his jacket}

What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard. (p.18)

*Dutchman* was written at a period when the politics of race-relations in the United States could not be more volatile. Black writing had just emerged from its

integrationist/universalism phase into a more ethnocentric defence of black culture. These literary/historical facts have often coloured the judgement of, especially, black critics who seem, odd as it is, to find it difficult to imagine that a writer as perceptive as Baraka would load the dice so heavily against a black man (Clay) at the unsolicited behest of a white woman (Lula). Consequent upon this, many have performed simple critical but cognitive twists on the play in order to fit Clay the anti-hero into the white equals evil, black equals good syndrome that characterised this phase of black writing and much of its criticism. One such persistent simplistic binary opposition perceives Clay as the 'Outsider' in America's deracinating racial milieu enduring a pre-ordained agony and in the process emerging as a Christ-like figure:

Thus, Lula and the American society which she represents experience a psychologically unbalancing phenomenon in LeRoi Jones's presentation of the erstwhile easy-going Uncle Tom. His Uncle Tom is an iceberg whose destructive potentialities are so well hidden that they take their victim by surprise. Lula the liberal thinks she knows Clay; but his tirade is unexpected, arousing primitive instincts for self-protection in her. For Lula and the society to maintain their equilibrium, society must connive at getting rid of the outsider, as we see in Clay's instance. His character is not individualized, emphasizing the democratizing quality of black art. Clay is the chosen black representative, and his role, with its suffering and pain, is for the benefit of all black men. (C.O. Ogunyemi, 1978, p.29)

These views portraying Clay's hidden heroism are contrary to those of the playwright himself who sees "Clay in *Dutchman*, Ray in *The Toilet*, Walker in *The Slave*, (as)..victims. In the Western sense they could be heroes. But the Revolutionary Theatre, even if it is Western must be anti-Western." (Baraka, 1968, p.211) Baraka's essay "The Revolutionary Theatre" in the collection *Home: Social Essays*, attacks the narrow base of ethnocentric readings by conceptualizing in signifying terms the parameters of revolutionary writing which is to "stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching, spitting craziness - but a craziness taught to us in our

most rational moments." (Op.Cit., p.211) In his middle class alienation Clay abandons completely the confines of these signifying but revolutionary imperatives to Lula. When Clay's 'destructive potentials' surface as Ogunyemi claims, they prove to be 'too little too late.' In one of the essays that precedes "the Revolutionary Theatre" entitled "LeRoi Jones Talking," Baraka attacks what he calls 'the mainstream mentality' which whenever "any Negro shows up in a play...can only see that Negro as an advertisement for the NAACP, but very rarely as a man." (Op.Cit., p.186) In "LeRoi Jones Talking," Baraka engages the stereotypical readings as they operate on both sides of the 'critical divide'. To those who say that Clay is naive to the point of claiming that "he is 'not Negro enough,' meaning, of course, that this critic has a definition of what a Negro, any Negro, is, or...say, of Clay's death, that he does not die the death of a Negro, but of a naif," Baraka asks, "can't a Negro be a naif? And what is 'the death of a Negro'? Has that been institutionalized too?" (Op.Cit., p.187) Indeed it is the institutionalizing imperative, crank theories and stereotypes which *Dutchman* undermines and makes the play the most critically engaging of Baraka's plays. Again, Baraka steps in to defend the validity of his depiction:

Another recurring criticism of the play, *Dutchman*, was that the white girl, Lula, was too crazy, too neurotic, too extreme, etc. Critics wanted also to know, in what I think ought to be an obvious paranoid plea for "understanding," was this girl supposed to be all white people. But how can one white person be all white persons, unless all white persons are alike. Are they? Similarly, it is equally stupid to think of the Negro boy as all Negroes, even though, as I've said, most white people do think of black men simply as Negroes, and not as individual men. But I showed one white girl and one Negro boy in that play, and the play is about one white girl and one Negro boy, just them, singularly, in what I hope was a revelation of private and shared anguish, which because I dealt with it specifically would somehow convey an emotional force from where I got it - the discovery of America - on over to any viewer. But for the feeble-minded, black or



white are always the most important aspects of anything, not what a thing really is, but how it can be made to seem, if it is to accommodate the silly vision of the world they are stuck with. But I will say this, if the girl (or the boy) in that play has to "represent" anything, I mean if she must be symbolic in the way demented academicians use the term, she does not exist at all. She is not meant to be a symbol - nor is Clay - but a real person, a real thing, in a real world. She does not represent any thing - she is one. And perhaps that thing is America, or at least its spirit. You remember America, don't you, where they have unsolved murders happening before your eyes on television. How crazy, extreme, neurotic, does that sound? (Op.Cit., pp.187-188)

Thus if Clay is the black American Adam, and Lula the Eve who tempts him with the forbidden fruit as Lloyd Brown claims, this Adamic relation, in a sense slightly divergent from that described by Derek Walcott in the preceding chapter, possesses its own peculiar 'tartness of experience.' Lula approaches Clay in stereotypical terms as the 'black stud' who is eternally infatuated with whiteness in its femininity. Lula's constant reference to the symbolic gesture of 'apple eating' as the starting point of the seduction process echoes the Adamic relation and its peculiar American 'tartness of experience.' It is important for Lula to be able to define the essence of their coming together because in her words, the ability to define "helps her to control the world." (p.9) Lula, according to Baraka, 'does not represent any thing - she is one, and perhaps that thing is America, or at least its spirit'; it is that spirit, one might claim, which lends Lula 'helping hands' at that crucial moment when she alone could not cope with Clay's murder. To the mortified Clay however, it is simply a case of "all these people (emerging) so suddenly. They must all come from the same place." (p.29) Their emergence in Baraka's terms proves the case of the white majority's complicity in the orgy of 'unsolved murders'.

As *Dutchman* approaches its inevitable denouement Lula, as she has done from the beginning of the play, defines Clay in social and cultural terms as "an escaped

nigger." The premise of that definition contains overtones of what Baraka describes as "American sexual reference and the mythology of the black male." Thus Clay according to Lula is an escaped nigger "'cause you crawled through the wire and made tracks to my side." (p.29) The tirade that follows brings Clay out of his complacency and confirms Baraka's diagnosis of America's sexual/racial psyche; "the black man in America has always been expected to function as less than a man; this was taken for granted, and was the ugliest weight of his enslavement." (Baraka, Op.Cit., p.221)

CLAY. Wire?

LULA. Don't they have wire around plantations?

CLAY. You must be Jewish. All you can think about is wire. Plantations didn't have any wire. Plantations were big open whitewashed places like heaven, and everybody on 'em was grooved to be there. Just strummin' and hummin' all day.

LULA. Yes, yes.

CLAY. And that's how the blues was born.

LULA. Yes, yes. And that's how the blues was born.

....

And that's how the blues was born. Yes. Yes. Son of a bitch, get out of the way. Yes. Quack. Yes. Yes. And that's how the blues was born. Ten little niggers sitting on a limb, but none of them ever looked like him.

{Points to CLAY, returns toward the seat, with her hands extended for him to rise and dance with her}

And that's how the blues was born. Yes. Come on Clay. Let's do the nasty. Rub bellies. Rub bellies.

CLAY. {Waves his hands to refuse. He is embarrassed, but determined to get a kick out of the proceedings}

Hey, what was in those apples?...

LULA. {Grabbing for his hands, which he draws away}

Come on, Clay. Let's rub bellies on the train. The nasty. The nasty. Do the gritty grind, like your ol' rag-head mammy. Grind till you lose your mind. Shake it, shake it, shake it, shake it! OOOOweeee! Come on, Clay. Let's do the choo-choo train shuffle, the navel scratcher.

CLAY. Hey, you coming on like the lady who smoked up her grass skirt.

LULA. {Becoming annoyed that he will not dance, and becoming animated as if to embarrass him still further}

Come on, Clay...let's do the thing. Uhh! Uhh! Clay! Clay! You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay. Dance with me, Clay. (pp.29-31)

However, because the mechanism of Lula's 'goaded and indirect verbal gestural means' function along the joke/myth/conditional fact continuum which Baraka describes in "American Sexual Reference," Clay's response to Lula's outburst conjures another "outside reality that will seem either beast-like or God-like, depending on the lady's psychological connection with White American Crime." (Baraka, Op.Cit., p.228) Lula's psychological affiliation is however "loose" enough and indeed the thrust of her mockery is an appeal to Clay to break out of centuries of social and cultural stereotypes including "jackets buttoning up to your chin, so full of white man's words..Clay, you got to break out. Don't sit there dying the way they want you to die. Get up." (p.31) Because of Lula's loose psychological connection, Clay's reaction to her is not God-like but beast-like; awakened to the reality of his social existence Lula robs Clay of "his belief that he has actually transcended his social history, and entered a world of pure light, etc" (Op.Cit., p.226) What follows is the longest speech by Clay and it represents his beast-like response to Lula's prodding:

CLAY.

{Pushing her against the seat}

I'm not telling you again, Tallulah Bankhead! Luxury. In your face and your fingers. You telling me what I ought to do.

{sudden scream frightening the whole coach}

Well, don't! Don't you tell me anything! If I'm middle-class fake white man...let me be. And let me be in the way I want.

{Through his teeth}

I'll rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don't ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats. I mean wantonly. You great liberated whore! You fuck some black man, and right away you're an expert on black people. What a lotta shit that is. The only thing you know is that you come if he bangs you hard enough. And that's all. The belly rub? You wanted to do the belly rub? Shit, you don't even know how. You don't know how. That ol' dipty-dip shit you do, rolling your ass

like an elephant. That's not my kind of belly rub. Belly rub is not Queens. Belly rub is dark places, with big hats and overcoats held up with one arm. Belly rub hates you. Old bald-headed four-eyed ofays popping their fingers...and don't know yet what they're doing. They say, "I love Bessie Smith." And don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, "Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass." Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she's saying, and very plainly, "Kiss my black ass." And if you don't know that, it's you that's doing the kissing. (pp.34-35)

Clay's Lula-induced outburst has often been interpreted by black critics as the coming of age of the erstwhile docile and subservient Clay. Everything that comes before and the conclusion of the play do not support these claims. What the outburst portrays on the other hand, is Clay's revolutionary potential sapped and contained by his middle class orientation, integrationist-universalism, sexual inhibition and inherited conventionality. Ostensibly Clay falls victim of the social/sexual conformity that has sapped that revolutionary potential. At that point when Clay becomes the mouth-piece of black nationalism, the playwright sets the entire discourse on a course of paradoxical equivocation, because neither Lula nor Clay according to Baraka are meant to be 'symbols, but real persons, real things, in a real world.'

Clay's character suffices as the quintessence of the 'house Negro.' His 'field' counterpart has often been espoused in Baraka's overall aesthetics in creative and critical terms. Both the house and the field Negroes have their origins in slavery, and "unlike the "house Negro" who loved the white slave-master, the "field Negroes" hated the master and were always eager to rebel and run away from slavery." (Lloyd Brown, *Op.Cit.*, p.150) The 'field Negro' is of the order of the "Black Dada Nihilismus" in Baraka's poetry who carries out acts of rebellion and revolt, through his preparedness to "Rape the white girls. Rape/ their fathers. Cut the mother's throats./ Black dada nihilismus, choke my friends/ in their bedrooms with their drinks spilling/ and restless for tilting hips or dark liver/ lips sucking splinters from the

master's thigh." (Baraka, 1964, p.63)

Walker Vessels, hero of Baraka's *The Slave: A Fable in a Prologue and Two Acts*<sup>8</sup> articulates more vividly that "Black scream/ and chant, scream,/ and dull, un/ earthly/ hollering," (Op.Cit. pp.63-64) which "black dadaism" advocates. Walker Vessels is a 'tall, thin Negro of about forty.' In contrast to Clay's middle class orientation, the prologue of *The Slave* establishes Walker's 'field Negro' characteristics from the onset. As a fable, the play advocates the suspension of disbelief as Walker claims "to be much older than I look...or maybe much younger. Whatever I am or seem..." (p.44) However Walker's rage oscillates between vital ends of the play's juxtaposed settings. At one end, the parameter established by Walker in the prologue is that of an old man who has seen the end of his days but one advocating a meta-language to take control of tendencies that fail to understand that "brown is not brown except when used as an intimate description of personal phenomenological fields." (p.45) At the other end, Walker is the fiery revolutionary, 'tall, thin Negro of about forty' who leads a racial revolt and dreams other dreams. The interplay between the old field Negro to Walker Vessels and back to the old advocate of a meta-language, according to Lloyd Brown, "suggests that there is a 'fading in' to the main-action dream sequence." Next to the dream sequence is "the physical change at the end of the play (which) is equally suggestive: as Walker the rebel leader stumbles out, he becomes 'the old man at the beginning of the play'... signifying the 'fading out' of the dream." (L. Brown, Op.Cit., p.149)

*Dutchman* and *The Slave* are two plays portraying Baraka's fierce anger and

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<sup>8</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Slave: A Fable in a Prologue and Two Acts*, New York: William Morrow & Co. 1964. All page references are to this edition of the play

contempt for America's racial/sexual inhibitions. According to John Lindberg, it is "only when we view the plays as complementary (that) we know the full meaning of several actions and lines." (John Lindberg, 1971, p.102) The politics and poetics of racialism and sexuality in both plays are anchored on Baraka's articulation of "American Sexual Reference" in *Home: Social Essays*. The mythology of race and sex operate along a tripartite continuum that revolves around the black male, the licensed-to-kill white male, and the socially beatified white woman. In "American Sexual Reference," Baraka recounts a story told by his grandmother when he was about nine years of age. The story centres around a black boy of seventeen who raped a white woman. Some white men swiftly get together, cut the black boy's 'privates' off, and 'stuff' them in his mouth. The scene of horror that ensued Baraka concedes, is a spectacle for cheap drama, "And cheap drama is one thing white women live on." (Op. Cit., p.230) The effect on the white woman in this story who was invited to watch the castration of her rapist is the starting point of one of the numerous paradoxes of American ritual/sexual drama; contrary to the expectation of the white men that the horror of the black boy's castration would create eternal repulsion between the woman and her victim, the encounter merely set "the woman's clitoris ...trembling so, it banged loudly against the sides of her soul." (p.230) The implicit belief of the men who castrated the black rapist is simple; "by removing the black man's organs, his manness, the white man removes the threat of the black man asserting that manness, by taking the white man's most prized possession." (p.230)

Between Clay Clay Williams and Walker Vessels, and by extension 'the house Negro' and 'the field Negro,' implicit understanding of the scene of the Negro archetypal castration portends an ominous outcome for their respective socio-cultural

reactions. Clay's lust for the white man's prized possession is clipped by a white woman who has as I have indicated, 'a loose psychological connection with White American Crime.' In *The Slave Walker* Vessels succeeds in 'taking' and possessing the socially beatified woman for a while and goes beyond this to reinforce another aspect of the racial/sexual metaphor by marrying and raising children by the archetypal 'blonde white woman' Grace, who is also about forty. As a middle class phenomenon, Baraka concedes that typical participants in 'mixed marriages' are usually the "liberated" segment of the middle class, artists, bohemians, entertainers, or the otherwise "famous":

Liberated here meaning that each member has somehow gotten at least superficially free of his history. For the black man this would mean that he had grown, somehow, less black; for the white woman it means, at one point, that she has more liberal opinions, or at least likes to bask in the gorgeousness of being a hip, ok, sophisticated outcast. There is a whole social grouping of white women who are body-missionaries, and feel themselves *elevated* through such acts as would qualify them as either "swingin' chicks" or strong women.... (Baraka, Op.Cit., p.223, original italics)

One of such 'body-missionaries' is Grace Easley and Walker Vessels complements her as the 'liberated artist' who thought he was superficially free of his social history. The actions of the play centre around Walker's realisation to the contrary. Indeed the parameters for victim identification revolve around the crude facts of this social history. The marriage between Grace and Walker ends in divorce, and when the play opens the two daughters of their mixed marriage now live with Grace and her present husband, Professor Bradford Easley "a tall, broad white man, with thinning hair, about forty-five." Walker returns to the Easleys' new abode at the height of a black revolt which he leads to raise a whole range of social, cultural and political issues surrounding his failed marriage to Grace and the racial expediency of her present

association with Bradford. Appropriately, much of the dialogue is carried out in literary metaphors beginning with Bradford's description of Walker's creativity as "inept formless poetry...A flashy doggerel for inducing all those unfortunate troops of yours to spill their blood on your behalf...Ritual drama, we used to call it at the university. The poetry of ritual drama." (pp.55-56) Grace's claim that Walker's domination of the entire field of discourse in *The Slave* by violence is "the mad scene from *Native Son*...A second-rate Bigger Thomas," (p.57) merely takes Walker to larger conceptualisation:

WALKER:

{Laughs}

Yeah. But remember when I used to play a second-rate Othello? Oh, wow...you remember that, don't you, Professor No-Dick? You remember when I used to walk around wondering what that fair sister was thinking?

{Hunches EASLEY}

Oh, come on now, you remember that...I was Othello...Grace there was Desdemona...and you were Iago... (p.57)

Thus the racial/sexual mythology and its tripartite structure is only complete when viewed against the backdrop of the 'social beatification of the white lady,' the joke/myth/conditional fact of the Negro's stud role, and the myth of the white male impotence symbolized by Professor Bradford Easley. These mythologies, it would appear, inform:

an obsession that has formed the racial triangle of black man, white woman and white man - even in Shakespeare...In short, the black imitation of whites is represented by the Iago-Easley figure of treachery - treachery to one's racial identity. And the self-destruction that is inherent in that treachery is embodied by the half-man (Professor No-Dick) whose alleged impotence represents Walker's crippled humanity as a black. (L.Brown, Op.Cit., p.148)

Unlike Clay, Walker insists on retrieving aspects of his social and cultural selfhood submerged in the metaphors and symbolisms of his previous marriage to Grace Easley. The process of retrieval leads to reinforcement of other myths, especially the



myth of the black male's creation; if the black man rapes a white woman, according to the crude dialectics of this mythology, the child is regarded as a black child. Thus "the white man calls the mulatto black. And senses that in 'assimilation' the white race would disappear, simply. So the white man's disgust at the thought of the black man hitting on his stuff." (Baraka, Op.Cit., p.233) Reinforcing this theory in their racial diatribe, Walker quotes probably one of the Ku Klux Klan's party lines: "Stop him before he kills another white person!...I mean, after all, only you and your husband there are white in this house. Those two lovely little girls upstairs are niggers. You know, circa 1800, one drop makes you whole." (p.55) Bradford dies in a feeble attempt to choke Walker, while Grace and the girls are killed when parts of the house collapse from the explosions outside. Walker stumbles out of the rubble and becomes "the old man at the beginning of the play. There are more explosion. Another one very close to the house..." (p.88)

According to Lloyd Brown, "Walker's capacity to dream of revolution in specific terms and his growing sense of commitment take him beyond Clay's rather muddled impulses in *Dutchman*." (Op.Cit., p.150) However, my explicit intention in presenting the plays in this juxtaposed manner is to point out that in aesthetic terms, if *Dutchman* proposes a thesis of middle-class orientation, sexual inhibitions, and integrationist- universalism, *The Slave* is very much its anti-thesis. Both plays represent a structured continuum along which the black nationalist phase of Baraka's writing can be contrasted with the later stage of his emancipation into scientific socialist writing along Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse-Tung lines. The movement represents further what I have characterised as the fierce 'Anger' of a black nationalist who matures in artistic and political terms, and one who has since moved

'Beyond' cultural nationalism to espousing the 'science of liberation.'

Apart from the essays, interviews and poems that celebrate "Why I Changed my Ideology" the best known expression of Baraka's ideological shift in dramatic terms, is the plays in the volume *The Motion of History and Other Plays*.<sup>9</sup> The volume contains among other things Baraka's apologia and reasons for why he has begun to see socio-cultural, economic, and political issues differently. Inserted between *The Motion of History* and *S-1: A Play With Music in 26 Scenes* is the 1967 "Historical Pageant" *Slave Ship*, which probably belongs to the cultural nationalist phase. In Baraka's introduction to the volume he gives justification for the inclusion of the play along with its supposedly more radical counterparts:

*Slave Ship* was written just before the Newark rebellion, and its impending explosion is the heat you feel. It is flatly nationalist and antiwhite. *Killing*, before it, is not, but it is lyrical, searching, confused. It poses the question that haunted me until my fuller understanding of it: Is the Act as legitimate as the Word? (A question that could only be asked in a bourgeois society, it is so absurd.) Now we know the act is *more* legitimate, it is principal! (p.12, original italics)

A conscious demarcation between the 'Act' and the 'Word' soon proves that Baraka's art has entered a new phase of revolutionary inversion, in which art is likely to become increasingly subservient to the politics and poetic of liberation. Earlier depictions when not decried were also constantly described as works inspired by petty bourgeois cultural nationalist instinct. Institutions, such as the Church and the University, their philosophies, art and culture were reified as bogus superstructures built upon and supporting the material base of monopoly capitalism. Furthermore the emphasis on the *Act* and not the *Word* propelled Baraka's new creativity into portrayal

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<sup>9</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Motion of History and Other Plays*, New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1978. All page references are to this edition of the plays

of series of historical vignettes, as one finds in *The Motion of History*, in a bid to determine historically the linear movement of the history of exploitation and oppression. Finally the new aesthetics advocates the dictatorship of the proletariat to take absolute control of the means of production and end centuries of monopoly control of the land, factories, machines, mineral wealth, oil wells, transportation and waterways by those *S-I* describes as constituting less than one percent of the population. However, if *The Communist Manifesto*, *Das Capital* and *A Critique of the Political-Economy* dictate the economic and political imperatives of the new aesthetic, the new vision of the artist, art itself and their relationship to society is built on the famous recommendations of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung in *Yenan Forum on Art And Literature*. The *modus operandi* of Mao Tse-Tung's thought on Art and Literature remains its implicit opposition to works of art that lack artistic quality and their denunciation as lacking any force no matter how progressive they are politically: "therefore we oppose both works of art with a wrong political viewpoint and the tendency towards the 'poster and slogan style' which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power. On questions of literature and art we must carry on a struggle in two fronts." (Mao Tse-Tung, cited in Baraka, 1978, p.14)

Perhaps the most important aspect of Baraka's socialist vision is the radical revision of what he calls anti-white depictions in his early works. Designed to reverse the reversal of history, Baraka's "Hate Whitey" syndrome and its banality is now replaced with a new slogan; "MARXISTS-LENINISTS UNITE...TO SMASH CAPITALISM AND BUILD SOCIALISM!" (p.16) What is jettisoned in the process of making this radical change Baraka reiterates, is the petty bourgeois radicalism of the early plays and its allied bourgeois nationalist instincts. By grasping the science

of revolution, dialectical thinking reveals that henceforth the struggle is not one between black and white as such, but an open struggle waged against the enemies of humanity. This constituent widening of concern for oppressed humanity, and what I call a movement that begins in *anger* and moves *beyond*, Baraka sees as "the movement of my work into, through, and away from nationalism," (p.16) which he regards as being well chronicled. There is an important sense in which Baraka's art in its black nationalist phase and the later socialist concern for humanity could be regarded as companions in revolution. For a literary critic the primary concern however, remains an assessment of what has been gained or lost in artistic terms as a result of the movement. Lloyd Brown takes a critical look at the changes and offers the following opinion:

Baraka's involvement in the black nationalist movement stimulates a significant shift in his drama. In his black revolutionary plays theatre is no longer a process of reenacting or analyzing tensions, or conflicts, between the revolutionary idea or word and the political act. It attempts, instead, to be an example of the dramatic art as political action. That is, theatre itself is a political activity by virtue of the fact that the play has become a form of political advocacy. But although the theatre of political advocacy would seem to fulfil Baraka's ideological ideals - as black aesthetician and later as scientific socialist - the plays of this period seldom meet the criteria which he himself admires in Maoist aesthetics. Many of the plays are ideologically "correct," from Baraka's black nationalist viewpoint, but they seldom approximate that "highest possible perfection of artistic form" which Baraka is later to demand of political art...A basic problem, one that is seldom resolved in this period, is that Baraka finds it difficult to use drama for sociopolitical purposes while maintaining convincing dramatic forms. Consequently, too, many of the plays are little more than the kind of bombast that appears in the preface to his *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*: "We are building publishing houses, and newspapers, and armies, and factories/ we will change the world before your eyes." (Lloyd Brown, Op.Cit., pp.150-151)

In addition, while the audience/reader approaches the early plays with a certain degree of apprehension, intrigue and suspense at what one might find, another

weakness of the 'ideologically correct' political art is its predictability. The yardstick for victim identification has without doubt changed from the 'black equals good and white is evil' simplistic binary opposition to a clear cut struggle between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' However, after coming to terms with the new aesthetic parameters, a major aspect of the audience/reader's sense of trepidation at what Lloyd Brown describes as the process of reenacting or analyzing tensions or conflicts in the earlier plays disappears. Finally, while in the black nationalist plays conflict resolutions including the processes of their reenactment do not follow the same pattern as I have shown in *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, there is a valid feeling of 'read/see one of the revolutionary plays and you have probably read/seen it all.'

Baraka's revolutionary black plays like *The Motion of History and Other Plays* however, make it clear that a broadening of the socio-cultural and economic horizon is not tantamount to an abandonment of the black struggle. On the contrary, what the new socialist vision emphasises is that the black discourse is cultural as well as ideological. Thus while *The Motion of History* goes to great length to explain the revolutionary motion as it occurs in history, portraying black and white united in opposition to the ruling cabal, *S-1* on the other hand points out one of the contemporary weapons that the bourgeoisie is using and will use against the revolutionary motion. Indeed Baraka urges the reader in his introduction to the volume to recognise *S-1* as an addendum to *The Motion of History* or a conscious reification of "the political line of the revolutionary proletariat...a detail of further development in the class struggle." (p.13) Both plays as far as the discourse of blackness is concerned contain a significant parade of the equivalents of the field Negro and his/her house counterpart in historical and contemporary times. *The*

*Motion of History* celebrates the achievements of folk heroes of the black struggle ranging from Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass in historical times to the polarized views of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Elijah Mohammed and the Black Panthers among others in a contemporary sense. *The Motion of History's* socialist summation of these struggles is that the internationalization of black nationalism is contemporaneous with the emergence of black middle class turncoats in Africa and the black diaspora who, like their historical counterparts in slavery, prefer the crumbs from the seat of power to total liberation/decolonization:

*{We see Afrikan Liberation Support Committee's demonstration, blacks marching in the street, "Down with Portuguese Colonialism." We see on stage and film, in all directions, black people fighting, singing, crying, moving back and forward across the stage, while now here and there, we see blood being suddenly elevated out of the crowd, a spotlight on him or her. A few mayors, congressmen, actors, athletes, ex-militants, suddenly pop up out of crowd, start to acclimatize themselves to being elevated-they are the new consolidating middle class formed by the struggles of black people, the "neocolonial" element. They begin to mouth new slogans for instance. The politicians change from saying "Black Power"}*

**BLACK POLITICIAN.** Black Power!

*{Glass eyed, then}*

I nominate for vice-president of the United States Nelson Rockefeller, the fiend of Attica.

**EX-BLACK MILITANT.** Black Power!

*{Glass eyed, then}* Black Capitalism! Let the Soul Brothers get a piece of the action.

**ACTOR.** Black Art. *{Glass eyed, then}* Blacula! Super Fly! The Werewolf from Watts! Starsky and Hutch!

**LYNDON B. JOHNSON.** *{At one side of the stage}*

We shall overcome!

**RICHARD NIXON.** *{From other side of stage}*

Power to the People! *{Raising fist}*

**JAJA MOBUTU.** *{Comes in with his retinue, in Afrikan dress-has blood in chauffeur's uniform carrying his bags of money, dollar bills stuck in his pockets. He shouts}*

Lumumba is Dead. Lumumba is Dead. Lumumba is Dead. Nkrumah is in Exile. Nkrumah is in Exile. *{Turns and shouts at brother with bag}* Come on, damn monkey, keep up! (pp.97-98)

*S-1* as an addendum to *The Motion of History* extends the discourse of this black

middle class betrayal and presents a longer list of the 'neocolonial' elements whose only difference from those in the former play is that they are fully 'acclimatized to being elevated.' The list include black Supreme Court Justice Thurman Marsh, black Legislators and Barnston Rayfield, a civil rights poseur and labor union bureaucrat lackey, among others. In both plays, binary opposition to the socio-cultural and economic framework represented by these lackeys of monopoly capitalism comes from Central Committee members of the Revolutionary People's Union such as Lawrence "Red" Hall and his wife Lillian. The socialist views of this opposition are significant and the new revolutionary repertoire supplied by well known documents of the science of revolution is defined by Jake Johnson, member of the "CC PRU" while urging Barnston Rayfield to acknowledge the supremacy of dialectical thinking in a televised debate in *S-1*: "All development is the result of the conflict of opposites, the clash of contradictions. That's basic dialectics, Rayfield, or has your heavy salary made you forget?" (p.186) The struggle which the new socialist vision articulates is enormous and the more the enemy changes tactics by converting potential revolutionaries to its ranks, the more it places seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the path of those seeking to overthrow the status-quo. With unbridled optimism Baraka's Marxian dialectics proclaim victory for the communists on all fronts. This theoretical bombast, as Lloyd Brown observes, is the hallmark of the new aesthetics which, in its bid to use drama for sociopolitical purposes, is unable to maintain convincing dramatic forms. The last scene in *S-1* acknowledges that the socialists have been driven 'underground' by the reactionary State Apparatus, but as people move clandestinely into a Church and "the congress begins, the delegates sound the following slogans: 'Defeat S-1! Forward to the party! Marxist-Leninists

unite, win the advanced to communism! Build a Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist Party based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought!" (p.206) At this point what I have described as the movement of Baraka's writing from the starting point of its black nationalist "Rage/Anger," and what the writer himself describes as "the movement of my work into, through, and away from nationalism" is in an important sense complete. The following conclusion summarises what I consider the significance of this traceable continuum to the cultural and ideological discourse of blackness via the works of an author whose writing career is by no means over.

## Conclusion

"Race" is not a thing. For, if we believe that races exist as things, as categories of being already "there," we cannot escape the danger of generalizing about observed differences between human beings as if these differences were consistent and determined, a priori.

{Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Talkin' That Talk"}

One critical opinion defines racism as "a type of behavior which consists in the display of *contempt or aggressiveness* toward other people on account of physical differences (other than those of sex) between them and oneself." (Tzvetan Todorov, cited in Gates, 1986, p.204, my emphasis) Todorov's emphasis on the 'display of contempt or aggressiveness', Gates contends, is an interpretation of 'racism' not supported by the general history of the domination and oppression of one race by another. American history of racist benevolence, paternalism and sexual attraction, to paraphrase Gates, has very little or nothing to do with 'contempt or



aggressiveness.'

Racism could be more appropriately defined as the tendency to generalize about an individual's racial attributes such as the colour of his/her hair-eye-skin ad infinitum, and treat him or her accordingly. "Such generalizations are based upon a predetermined set of causes or effects thought to be shared by all members of a physically defined group who are also assumed to share certain 'metaphysical' characteristics." (Gates, *Op.Cit.*, pp.204-5) Thus it is the effect of racism rather than its causes that Todorov's definition broaches. To neglect the 'predetermined set of causes' that nurture racism, such as generalization based upon essences perceived as biological, is to reinforce what Houston Baker refers to early in this chapter as the critical fallacy of the establishment at Yale among others, which constructed 'an empowering myth of nonreferential analysis based on the absence of blackness, or of blackness as an absence.' Such critical constructs could only 'speak to life' their counter-constructs, a purpose which the cultural nationalist phase of black writing serves only too well. When the inner conflict and tension occasioned by culture theorizing which gives rise to the Self/Other syndrome or what Baker calls the Walcottian dilemma are absent, Baker observes in another essay entitled "Caliban's Triple Play," "there may sound instead the gross polemics of a nationalism that militaristically asserts the superiority of Caliban. This is 'protest' with a vengeance." (Houston Baker, 1986, p.190)

Amiri Baraka's early creative constructs would fit the image of such 'protest with a vengeance.' When Baraka moves from the premise of this anger/rage to the terrain of the 'ideologically correct' depictions, he does so, as I have shown, with devastating results to the artistic impetus of his works. Ostensibly it is to the works

that stubbornly assert the superiority of Caliban that theorists of Afro-American and African literatures would continue to return in order to construct the black textual tradition and to develop theories of criticism indigenous to black literatures.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion

#### 8.1 Africa and the Black Diaspora: The Discourse in Cultural and Ideological Signification

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contribution from the oppressors' culture and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture. The latter is nourished by the living reality of the environment and rejects harmful influences as much as any kind of subjection to foreign cultures. We see therefore that, if imperialist domination has the virtual need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an *act of culture*.

(Amilcar Cabral)

For all sorts of complex historical reasons, the very act of writing has been a 'political' act for the black author.

(Henry Louis Gates, Jr.)

*Culture* and *Ideology*, the preceding chapters have argued, are at the heart of the black writer's patterns of signification/figuration. The starting point of this discourse in cultural and ideological signification is the historical terrain of the Middle-Passage, including its politics and social trauma. Amilcar Cabral's summation of the issue of culture above represents one of the numerous antidotes which Pan-African ideologues on both sides of the Atlantic offer the individual and collective psyche of blacks in search of what Biodun Jeyifo describes as 'tropes of disalienation.'<sup>1</sup> However, the path towards the creation of tropes of disalienation is

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<sup>1</sup> Biodun Jeyifo's essay "Wole Soyinka and the Tropes of Disalienation" examines Soyinka's overall aesthetics in an introduction to a collection of essays spanning nearly three decades of critical dialogue and outrage and the "volume bears the title - Soyinka's own choice - *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*," (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988, p.x) The essays complement Soyinka's creative endeavours and attempt to formulate an African alter/native or trope of disalienation to the colonialist's framework of social and cultural alienation.

as problematic as the colonialist's framework of cultural alienation it seeks to replace. Thus at the end of one of the essays in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* entitled "Cross Currents: The 'New African' after Cultural Encounter," "Soyinka frankly acknowledges the 'complexities, paradoxes and pragmatic challenges posed by black scholars and revolutionary leaders such as Frantz Fanon, Agostinho Neto, Amilcar Cabral and others' with regard to the question of cultural autonomy in Africa as a prerequisite of social revolution or reconstruction." (Biodun Jeyifo, 1988, p.xxiii)

Part one of this thesis represents an attempt to examine critically the complexities, paradoxes and pragmatic challenges of the question of cultural autonomy in Africa and the black world which Soyinka acknowledges. Chapter one deals with the historical manifestations of the discourse of blackness which emerges as one of cultural and ideological significations. Chapter two is a theoretical proposition that agrees in part with the cultural and ideological delineations of the first chapter. The main theoretical proposition in chapter two is a careful examination of the carnivalesque figure of Esu-Elegbara often perceived as the Yoruba trickster God. Because "it is Soyinka who has confronted more than anyone else, albeit reservedly, the increasing pervasiveness of a *class* approach to literature and culture" (B. Jeyifo, Op.Cit., p.xxiii), it is Soyinka's overall aesthetics and tragic sensibility that receive a great deal of attention in the second chapter. Both theoretical and historical circumstances surrounding the deities of the African mythological pantheon are examined in a bid to discover why, out of the many figures the pantheon contains, only a handful have achieved prominence in critical/cultural discourses. The historical route reveals that the starting point of Wole Soyinka's theory of African tragic/aesthetic discourses and their accompanying polemical *tour de force* is the non-

problematic or "Konfliktlosse/conflict-less synthesis" (Jeyifo, Op.Cit., p.xv) of Negritude. However, the chapter argues further that Soyinka's post-Negritudist trope of disalienation deconstructs itself as a result of its preoccupation with a 'useless and disorderly science.'<sup>2</sup>

Ogun's Iron/Metallic Ore and its 'paleotechnic' potentialities afford Soyinka, on the one hand, the opportunity to proffer his own set of syllogistic propositions to Negritude's discourse of blackness.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Soyinka's alter/native to Negritude deconstructs itself as a result of what Biodun Jeyifo describes as the system's inherently "willed aporia as much as a verifiable construct." (Ibid., p.xxix) The 'verifiable construct' is Ogun's 'Paleotechnics' or what Soyinka's essay, "Neo-Tarzanism: the poetics of pseudo-tradition" describes as some of his opponents' narrow conception of 'African reality' and African traditional literature. Soyinka postulates with unabashed relish, using Ogun's Iron as evidence of 'scientific innovation,' an alter/native view of African reality that "embraces 'precision machinery, oil rigs, hydro-electricity, my typewriter, railway trains (*not iron snakes*), machine guns, bronze sculpture etc.'" (cited in Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.129, my

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<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Hartman describes this type of self-deconstructive discourse as one often preoccupied with the assumption that "by the miracle of art, the 'presence of the word' is equivalent to the presence of meaning. But the opposite can also be urged, that the word carries with it a certain absence or indeterminacy of meaning." For detail see Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism*, London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp.vii-viii

<sup>3</sup> In Soyinkian terms, the insertion of phrases like 'the minor term of a dialectical progression' which is Jean Paul Sartre's grading of Negritude, has "the theoretical and practical assertion of the supremacy of the white man (as) its thesis; the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the bottom of negativity." Thus Negritude stands accused of conceding the crucial domain of analytical thought to the white man and retaining rather uncritically, intuitive understanding as the exclusive preserve of the race, for and on behalf of whom the movement of Negritude speaks. For detail see, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp.126-139

emphasis) The paradox inherent in the juxtaposed images of 'precision machineries' such as machine guns and typewriters vis-a-vis the whole question of a disorderly science notwithstanding, Denis Williams provides the following historical comments of what, to paraphrase Jeyifo, represents a counter-view on African traditional essentialist and ritualist beliefs:

The ritualising of iron is perhaps best explained within the structure of belief by means of which its strange techniques and processes were understood. For the Yoruba, iron was apprehended within an *orisa* system which served to explain all phenomena, spiritual and natural, in terms of the operation of inherent power, the *Ase*...Power inherent in the unfamiliar and intractable metal is to be controlled not so much by means of analysing the process of its operation as by propitiation and prayer addressed to the *orisa*, or god, who has been able to tame such power. The empirical development of iron metallurgy in Asia and in Europe was not therefore open to the African craftsman, trained from apprenticeship to suspect unfamiliar phenomena and to regard deviation from accepted practice as potentially harmful; the process of his craft, strictly spirit-controlled, remained unavailable to inquiry. (Denis Williams, cited in Biodun Jeyifo, Op.Cit., p.xxvii)

If these essentialist and ritualist beliefs are endorsed then it would seem that the factors Soyinka gives for his opponents' 'poetics of pseudo-tradition' are themselves harking back to the empiricist "belief that all knowledge is ultimately derived from sense experience. It suspects metaphysical schemes based on *a priori* propositions, which are claimed to be true irrespective of experience." (*The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, 1988, p.418)

On a second equally important level, the imposition of 'high culture' from the top of a pyramid of social stratification to the bottom of the pyramid is evident in the parody of a traditional Hollywood image of the pop-eyed African chanting 'bwana, bwana, me see big iron-snake.' In retrospect, 'iron-snake' however, seems an appropriate description of 'railway trains' among other scientific artifacts to the African craftsman 'trained to suspect unfamiliar phenomena and to regard deviation

from accepted practice as potentially harmful.' Thus the act of equating Ogun with 'the empirical development of iron metallurgy' is tantamount to an endorsement of the classification by 'science' of "the narrative dominated oral world as belonging to a different mentality, 'savage, primitive, undeveloped'." (Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.166)

However, my discussion of the role Esu-Elegbara, the Yoruba 'trickster' god can play in reading black texts is not complete without a brief examination of the theoretical framework on which my reading of the myths and legends that are subsumed, truncated, misread or simply repressed within the black tradition in order to propound a 'liberal humanist' philosophy, is anchored. The starting point of my theoretical focus is Roland Barthes' paradigmatic study which reveals through its "penetrating investigations of contemporary mythologies, such as the face of Garbo or advertisements for soap powder...that what appear to be given truths about a society are instead constructed ideologies through which they sustain their hierarchical systems." (John Drakakis, 1989, p.39) Thus the carnivalesque essence which Esu-Elegbara represents through the acts of transgression, grotesque realism and the cultural and ideological construction of difference as otherness is a binary opposition to the 'official attitudes of the high' that culminates in a diffusion of culture from bottom/low to top/high. The *modus vivendi* of such cultural re-diffusion is to present a 'socially mediated truth' which "has at least as much legitimacy as one that is abstract. The difference however, is that the former is 'anti-colonial' (Derrida)..." (Ashcroft et al., Op.Cit., p.166)

The third chapter is to a large extent a polemical treatise on black literature and literary theory in general. The chapter through its exploration of patterns of

figuration in African and black texts reinforces the arguments of the chapters that precede it and concludes that mythology on the one hand, a semiotic order on the other, and their accompanying ideological constructions, are at the heart of the social history of these texts. The third chapter is also an overview of black texts and critical attitudes that leads the way to my reading of the works of five postcolonial writers from the black tradition in part two of the study.

Thus my reading of the novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, Jorge Amado and Wole Soyinka in chapters four and five respectively, works through the Bakhtinian notion of indeterminacy and what Bakhtin describes as 'a certain semantic openendedness' to proffer the study's views on African/Brazilian postcoloniality on the one hand, and the black world on the other. As Bakhtin observes further a focus of this nature is concerned with the:

unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)...all these phenomena are explained by the transposition of other genres into this new and peculiar zone for structuring artistic models (a zone of contact with the present in all its openendedness) a zone that was first appropriated by the novel. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7)

In the dramatic art form, the postcolonial discourse is shown to be as potent as its novelistic counterpart through a critical exploration of the West Indian and Afro-American plays of Derek Walcott and Amiri Baraka in chapters six and seven. Conversely, the argument in part two of this study is that postcolonialism is one thing; like every 'socially mediated truth', the postcolonial discourse "and its post,...is a post that challenges earlier legitimating narratives." (K.A. Appiah, 1991, p.353) To conceptualise further the basis of this conclusion on the postcolonial subject I examine in the next section how the challenges posed to earlier legitimating narratives are at the heart of what the study demarcates as the comparative attitudes



that exist within the discourses of "Negritude/Structuralism, Postcolonialism/Poststructuralism and Deconstruction."

## **8.2 Negritude <-> Structuralism, Postcolonialism <-> Poststructuralism and Deconstruction**

Thought is one side of the sheet and sound the reverse side. Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of the paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to isolate thought from sound and sound from thought.

(Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*)

In theoretical terms, the constituent site of the cultural and ideological discourses of Africa and the black diaspora and their literary links could be summarised even further in terms of the crucial parallels and similarities that exist between Negritude and Structuralism, Postcolonialism and Poststructuralism, and the arguments of the Deconstructionist critics. The historical synthesis underlying the formation of these philosophical and theoretical attitudes agrees in part with the foregoing analysis and delineation of a discourse which exists as one of cultural and ideological significations. Reconstructing the history of the formation of these attitudinal superstructures is essentially an act of constituting the sites of the major "shifts backwards and forwards that have taken place over the last half-century":

Perhaps Foucault's notion of 'genealogy' best describes both the complex web of relationships, and the constant debates, between different theoretical positions. Our whole understanding of 'literature' and 'literary criticism' has been unsettled by this unceasing discussion and disruption of traditional boundaries...Today we are faced with an arresting display of theories, for example we must distinguish between Marxism and feminism, between feminism and psychoanalysis. Moreover, the language used is often difficult for us to understand, although more and more critical terms become current in our everyday speech, 'ideology' for example...No longer do we need to turn to a 'master' author, critic or particular theory, nor do we need to remain constrained by a single interpretation. Rather our practice of literary criticism can become,  
*the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of*

*becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation* (Derrida). (John Drakakis, Op.Cit., pp.48-49, original italics)

Before we arrive at this stage however, it is important to reflect on the numerous continuums and linear processes by which thought systems have evolved or crystallised into various schools and critics in a formal order. Thus the rivalry between the F.R. Leavis led journal, *Scrutiny* and the exchanges with the editor of *Essays in Criticism* in the early 1950s, do not merely implode and fall upon one another but offer paradigmatic means of constructing the complex web of relationships and debates described by John Drakakis above.<sup>4</sup>

For the black author and critic Negritude is the discursive equivalent of that structuralist view of the world which probably begins with Sunday Anozie's claim that an "integration {of Negritude and Structuralism} will serve...to provide negritude with the one thing it so far lacks - a scientific method of inquiry." (Sunday O. Anozie, 1990, p.106) The scientific claims which Anozie make for Negritude (a movement which ironically does not aspire to explicating a scientific discourse) is an integral part of the Structuralist project. Without a contradiction of essences, Anozie's essay entitled "Negritude, Structuralism and Deconstruction" is to a large extent a structuralist reading of Senghor's poem "Le Totem". Anozie allies Senghor's 'African thought systems' with Claude Levi-Strauss's tripartite demarcation of mythology into 'the Raw, the Cooked and the Rotten' which he juxtaposes with a Derridean deconstructive perspective. Anozie's primary conclusion is that if Senghor is practice,

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<sup>4</sup> The aim of the *Scrutiny* <-> *Essays in Criticism* project was directed at distinguishing critical judgement from social processes, since, according to the critics, critical practice "was founded upon an unexplainable intelligence and sensitivity...F.R Leavis asserted that the critic's primary concern was with questions of evaluation, that is to discover the universal truth behind the language of the text." (John Drakakis, Op.Cit., p.34)

then Levi-Strauss's view on mythology complements that 'thought system' as theory. The two perspectives yield Anozie's paradigmatic integration of Structuralism and Negritude, or what in the critic's words should lead to an understanding of "the innate scientific disposition of negritude, (or) at least, (Anozie's) belief in its potential to develop into one." (Op.Cit., p.106)

Because Anozie's juxtaposition of Negritude <-> Structuralism with Deconstruction represents, in my view, a giant leap that side-tracks the arguments of the structuralists' immediate predecessor, it is important to fill the gap left by that 'leap' with a poststructuralist position before one takes on the claims of deconstruction. Again, I propose to do this within the framework of the African/black discourse of cultural and ideological signification.

The primary basis of the structuralist, the poststructuralist and indeed the deconstructionist theoretical focus is Saussurean linguistics which enumerates the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified*, both of which are equivalents of the French terms *langue* and *parole* respectively. While Saussure's linguistics could be said to be central to each of these theoretical foci, Saussure's construction of the individual's linguistic repertoire as constituting a field of signs and the linguistic <-> sign itself defined not as "a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern," has become the primary basis of the structuralist enterprise. This is not to suggest that there is a unified body of writing, united in a formalistic sense and obeying the same rules of critical inquiry that one might call structuralist. Rather, 'what unites the otherwise disparate group of theoretical writings' (which encompasses the Russian formalist works of Roman Jakobson, the social anthropological findings of Claude Levi-Strauss and the mythological

investigations of Roland Barthes among others) loosely classified as structuralist "is a commitment to the Saussurean precept that analysis will uncover a series of structural and nonvariable laws." (John Drakakis, *Op.Cit.*, p.37)<sup>5</sup>

However, if the strict idea of structural rules which proclaims the interdependence of all institutions constitutes the strengths and weaknesses of structuralism, poststructuralism 'distances' itself from that nonvariability even while using the same Saussurean precept to uncover inherent structures. In Africa, this distance according to Biodun Jeyifo, is best compared to that "distinguishable between structuralism and poststructuralism. By this reckoning, Soyinka's postulates of the "African world" would then constitute something of a "post-Negritude" revisionary "deconstruction" of the "classical" concepts of original (Senghorian) Negritude." (B. Jeyifo, *Op.Cit.*, p.xv) Thus the attempt by Structuralist critics like Sunday Anozie to provide a 'scientific' critical discourse for the 'konfliktlosse or conflict-less synthesis' of Negritude is to say the least, belated. The critical/cultural space which Anozie's Structuralist < - > Negritude contests has been fragmented by 'Soyinka's reformulation of Negritude's paradigmatic binary opposition of European and African thought,' which, to paraphrase Jeyifo, is only comparable to the ways poststructuralism ruptured, fragmented, problematized and deconstructed the fixed, nonvariable laws of structuralism.

Even more belated is Anozie's attack on Derridean deconstruction. The deconstructive 'joyous affirmation of the play of the world' which localizes 'truth'

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<sup>5</sup> I am highly indebted to John Drakakis's essay for my views on structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction. I should also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Drakakis for numerous discussions on critical theory and most especially for making available for my use the original manuscript of the essay "Contemporary Approaches to Literature."

among other problematic terms which Structuralist <-> Negritude totalises also affirms the existence of a world of signs which has its precept in Saussurean linguistics. The difference is that with the deconstructionist this world of signs exists "without fault, without truth and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation." (Derrida, cited in Drakakis, Op.Cit., p.49) This affirmation Anozie perceives as a 'meta-narrative' or what he calls Derrida's 'arch-writing' which to Anozie 'incarnates an ambiguity':

It is neither 'morality' nor 'immorality', but simultaneously 'immorality' and 'morality': it mediates the tension or opposition between the two terms. Consequently, one can say that Derrida's 'arch-writing' is a trickster concept. In African trickster tales, especially those dealing with the origin of things - the universe, life and death, heaven and earth, etc - we have proper names that designate the trickster figures, based upon the ease with which they flout or transcend codes of morality and immorality, overcome their foes and cheat their friends, or surmount obstacles - all by their special gift of words (speech?) and their cunning tricks (writing?). We call them Esu (in Yoruba), Mbe (in Ibo); in the New World there also exists various terms for the trickster. (S.O. Anozie, Op.Cit., p.121)

I have quoted Anozie in full in order to demonstrate that his critical problem is inherent in his conclusions. Anozie's account of the trickster concept is another manifestation of the conflict-less synthesis of Structuralist <-> Negritude. This study has dwelt on the 'trickster' aspect of Esu for example, and one of my primary conclusions is that the mediation of the opposition between morality and immorality is a dialectical potential inherent in Esu's ability to transgress spatial boundaries (pp.79-101). Besides this, the choice which Anozie seems to be asking the reader to make between his own Structuralism and {Derrida's} Deconstruction is also one between a thought system which *totalises* and one that *localizes* the problematic quantum. Thus the contradiction deepens as Anozie endorses Henry Louis Gates' essay "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying

Monkey" in a footnote attached to the passage I have just quoted, as "the first and most engaging attempt I have so far come across to examine the potential of the trickster figure as the basis for formulating an original black literary theory." (Op.Cit., p.125) Even the most casual reader of Gates' essay is not likely to miss Gates' indebtedness to a deconstructive perspective and the acknowledgement of a (trickster) figure whose potential in critical theory gives the critic the opportunity he needs to 'reverse a received racist image of the black as simianlike.'<sup>6</sup> For Gates this trickster figure embodies the ambiguities of language which Anozie sees in fixed, nonvariable structuralist terms.

I have undertaken this panoramic overview of what John Drakakis describes as 'Contemporary Approaches to Literature' in order to construct the major sites of this study's theoretical focus. My focus shares Gates' *joyous* but deconstructive affirmation of the play of the world which 'need not trace here the history of the concept of signification'. The concept of signification, to paraphrase Gates, has, since Ferdinand de Saussure, become a crucial aspect of contemporary critical theory. However, Gates 'joyously' discovers signification to be "a homonym of a term in the black vernacular tradition that is approximately two centuries old." (Gates, 1990, p.286) Thus, I have also insisted throughout the study that this black vernacular tradition which is approximately two centuries old and its signifying practices embody cultural and ideological significations. While proposing an extension of Gates'

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<sup>6</sup> Antony Appiah's "Structures on Structures: the Prospects for a Structuralist Poetics of African Fiction," also takes the Anozie/Senghorian Structuralist < - > Negritude, to task and observes that neither the theory (structuralism) nor the practice (negritude) have reversed the received racist image of the black: "Again and again, Anozie asks the reader to understand Africa by embedding it in European culture - a habit we might dub 'the Naipaul fallacy'. What, save a post-colonial inferiority, would lead anyone into the assumption that this embedding is either necessary or desirable?" (Anthony Appiah, 1990, p.146)

predominantly 'trickster' conception of Esu-Elegbara on page 79, I reiterate that my incursion into this discursive extension is to delve into the equally two-century old history of the marginalization of the discourse of 'the low', and propose a clear understanding of the 'true' meaning of this occlusion as championed by Esu's carnivalesque essence in times past and present.

My reading of the myth of Esu at this stage relies heavily on the Barthian poststructuralist understanding of mythology and Barthes' deconstruction of the fixed binary system of the *signifier* and the *signified*. When employed to read the novels and plays of five postcolonial writers from the black tradition, the theoretical focus yields the cultural and ideological delineations of a pattern of signification that operates, first and foremost, within the matrix of the black tradition and welcomes positive contribution from other traditions. Such contribution underscores the 'return to the upward paths of cultural' moorings encouraged by Amilcar Cabral among other Pan-African ideologues on both sides of the Atlantic. A regrettable omission in the study however, remains the inadequate representation of the works of Black women writers in particular, and Black British writers in general. A study of this nature must understand its limitation and draw solace from the fact that after the establishment of a distinctive critical focus the opportunity will always exist to return to the creative efforts of the Toni Morrisons, Alice Walkers, and Erna Brodbers.

Conversely, I should like to end with the deconstructive idiom which proclaims '*the innocence of becoming as the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin offered to an active interpretation.*' I have joyously discovered in the course of this study that process of *active interpretation* which should, I hope, serve as the firm basis for a lifetime's work.

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