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THE NIGERIAN NOVEL AND INDIGENOUS  
CULTURE : PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION

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A concern with culture strengthens society, but not a concern with mythology. The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself.

Wole Soyinka

Much more fundamental than the mere reproduction of syntax is the conveying in its totality of an experience in a way that reflects its environment without precluding it from general applicability. In looking at the African author's work we may be able to recognise its Africanness; we must be able to see its universality. Fortunately the two things often go together. A work which succeeds in realising its environment to the full often achieves this universality. The happy paradox is that, to be truly universal, one must be truly local.

Eldred Jones.

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## Abstract

It is argued in this thesis that the Nigerian Novel is an attempt to transliterate traditional customs, beliefs and attitudes, the characters of myth and legends, a whole universe of ancestors, into an entirely new context of the twentieth century, employing a language to which the modern reader can respond. The work gives detailed consideration to the salient features of this attempt and assesses, with particular reference to the novels of Tutuola, Achebe, Aluko, Nzekwu, Amadi, Balewa, Egbuna, Adaora Ulasi, Nwankwo and Okara, what in each case is the attitude of the novelist to the indigenous culture of his country and how successfully the link between tradition and modern experience has been established.

The approach adopted in the thesis is one of close analysis of texts in an attempt to find out how critically an author has presented those aspects of tradition he has selected for treatment and how skilfully he has dramatized the realities and dilemmas of the present. On each author answers are sought to a number of searching questions. What are the particular values the writer is upholding or opposing, and what is his attitude to them? What particular emotional or intellectual effect does he hope to achieve, and does he succeed? If he does, by what methods of communication? If he fails, from what problems of communication has failure resulted, and what effect does this have on the reader? What sympathies are evoked, and how do we see a particular work in the body of works of a particular author?

A writer's language is a mirror held up to his personality and his particular circumstances. It is through his use of language that he reflects his individual awareness of a given situation. The detailed study of language leads, almost inevitably, to a consideration of the more fundamental problems of communication. Even though all save one of the novelists to whom this thesis is devoted use English as their creative medium, they do so in the consciousness of the fact that they are presenting a Nigerian experience, and the best of them reveal in their works a specific mode of the imagination which derives from their Nigerian background. It has therefore been necessary in all cases to examine closely the use of language by each novelist and try to assess how effectively the artist has communicated. Because of the historical and cultural environment of the Nigerian novelist considerable interest is taken in the influence which the mother tongue (L1) has had on the writer's English (L2).

The thesis concludes by identifying the essential requirements for the establishment of a successful link between tradition and modern life: an important theme, a consistent imaginative scheme, a language which recognizes the characteristics of L1 and skill in the use of language. Only works in which many of these conditions are fulfilled as, for example, in the novels of Achebe, Amadi, Okara and Aluko achieve satisfactory results. The link between tradition and modern life is valuable only if it widens satisfyingly our experience of what it is to be human and thus contributes to the solution of the political and social problems of the present.

## Chapter One

### The Historical and Cultural Environment of the Nigerian Novelist

No Nigerian novelist is not in one way or another, and sometimes in several ways at once, preoccupied with his country's indigenous culture. From author to author, however, the directions and emphases which this preoccupation involves vary in important respects. To put it for the time being rather roughly and crudely, one has something like near uncritical total acceptance at one end of the scale, and decidedly critical scrutiny at the other. It is with the problems of communicating to the reader just what his sense of the place and value of Nigerian indigenous culture is, that this approach to the Nigerian novelist will be concerned. Two questions will be constantly kept in mind:

- (a) What is the attitude (or what are perhaps the several attitudes) of novelist X towards his country's culture?
- (b) What problems does the business of making the reader understand these attitudes present?

This thesis will therefore be concerned with the perennial critical question of the 'what' and the 'how', (and the 'how successful?') in a particular localized context.

Nigerian novelists, like all other writers, have been influenced by their environment and the circumstances in history which helped to make that environment what it is today. They write partly to explain the social dilemma of the group to which they belong and partly to portray a way of life which might have survived (and to some extent, has survived) if certain historical events had not so drastically affected Africa and the attitude of Africans not only to people of other races but also to their own selves.

Of these experiences the slave trade is the most remote and has therefore exercised only an indirect influence on the present writers. What certainly provided the motivation and subsequently the tools for writing is the colonial experience. This experience was such that it disturbed the life of the Nigerian even though it left him free for the most part to carry on his traditional pursuits especially when he lived far from the seat of government. Just as government followed the lead of trading companies in administrative matters, so also it allowed the missionaries to seize the initiative in matters of education.

The government was at first slow in providing education, but was reluctantly willing to give moral support to the effort of the missionaries who for their own purposes were early in the field. The missionaries controlled education at the early stages, and most of the Nigerian writers discussed in this work would have attended missionary schools, at least at the primary level.



The aim of Christian missionary education was initially narrowly utilitarian - to make converts to the Christian faith. Its target was the people and, to reach the people, the vernacular had to be used. This meant that for a long time education was in the vernacular and touched the life of the people more intimately than would have been possible in a second language. The more ambitious the missionaries became in their work of evangelism, the greater the number of people who became educated in the vernacular and had a type of education which did not interfere with their way of life to any large extent. No doubt some old ideas, beliefs and forms of behaviour had to be abandoned. But on the whole the missionaries were more anxious to make converts of the people than antagonize them. Ologunde has called this early stage of education the golden age of the Yoruba language as a medium of education in Western Nigeria and has drawn attention to the cultural advantages which attach to the use of the vernacular in education.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from Yoruba, other vernacular languages were employed as the media of education elsewhere in the country. This extensive use of the mother tongue in education conferred many advantages on Nigerian education and may be responsible for the predominance of oral tradition in Nigerian novels today. It certainly made transition from home to school easier and encouraged the continuation in school of those social activities with which the child was already familiar at home. As Dr. A. Fajana points out, the use of the vernacular language in the early stages of Nigerian education had other important results.<sup>2</sup> It encouraged research by language experts working for the missions into the nature and operation of the various Nigerian languages notably

Yoruba, Ibo, Efik, Nupe and Hausa. Many of these languages were reduced to writing, and as early as 1860 translations of sections of the bible, hymn book and even a newspaper in Yoruba, Iwe Irohin, were already published. All these gave impetus to the work of education and encouraged the missions to work harder. Before long they had established a system of education in which everybody came to have confidence:-

... as a result of the economic changes which made European education more and more essential, men were prepared, even though reluctantly at first, to allow their children to go to school to learn these new skills. The missionaries were realistic in taking note of this factor and in taking advantage of it. Christianity per se sounded no call to Nigerians but education seemed to do. If therefore, a mission was to make a good showing in its annual report it had to take an account of the school where children became easy converts. Indeed the time came when no mission could hope to gain any ground in a new area unless it offered literary education.<sup>3</sup>

There can be no doubt that the present Nigerian novelists benefited from the type of education offered at this time. They also certainly benefited from the fact that about the time most of them were in the primary school government was already adopting a more realistic attitude to education. Government had become interested in education first because of the need for civil servants, clerks, court messengers and teachers and later because of the value of education for political and social growth. It was therefore necessary to lay down a firm policy for the future. For this reason in 1925 the Secretary of State for the Colonies appointed a committee to look into the problems of education in West Africa, and this committee recommended that

Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of African social life and adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances

and progressive ideas in the interest of national growth and evolution ...

Every effort should be made to improve what is sound in indigenous tradition in the important field of religion and character training.<sup>4</sup>

The Colonial assumption that the 'sound and healthy elements' could be distilled from the rest of the African social fabric proved extremely useful. The policy was to try and isolate these elements without doing damage to the overall whole. The implementation of this policy proved a turning point in Nigerian education. An era of purposeful education was initiated. More schools were built and the provision for education became more extensive. The role of the missions as government agents in the matter of education was better defined. Government would not only supply the money and recommend syllabuses which must be followed, but would also ensure that the schools were otherwise properly run. In 1934 the Yaba Higher College, the first of its kind in Nigeria, was founded to provide middle-level manpower. In 1948 the University of Ibadan was established. At this time the struggle for independence had started. It was not a mere coincidence that Nigerians started to produce fiction on any notable scale at the time when the political battle was fiercest. 'The close correspondence between political nationalism and literary nationalism', writes Obiechina, 'is not just an accident; it is a natural result of the nature of colonial relationship'.<sup>5</sup>

Colonialism supplied the means of its own eventual destruction. It provided education which the nationalists used for the anti-colonial goal. Ibadan University College which was at the apex of the educational system and at which many of the writers studied was largely responsible for providing them with the motivation to write. These writers studied English at

Ibadan at a time when English studies had a strong literary bias. John Povey gives an interesting detailed account of the situation:-

In the early fifties at Ibadan University College a number of highly gifted young men attended class together. Their relationship seems to have touched off a spark that ignited each other's individual skills. Now the names, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, along with Chinua Achebe, have become the most significant contemporary African writers ... These writers have little in common with the efforts of Tutuola, for they are cosmopolitan and highly literate men, studied academically in English literature and as aware of current experimental trends in the poetry and drama in English as would be any young writer in this country [U.S.A.]... One can point to the influence of Ezra Pound on Okigbo and of Hopkins on Clark. One can demonstrate how Achebe draws upon the novels of Hardy and Soyinka upon the plays of Synge. These writers are eclectic as they develop their personal idioms.<sup>6</sup>

In these cases Western education and influence helped to strengthen the creative writer's confidence in himself and to restore him in his imagination to the pre-colonial African society. By leaving his traditional institutions almost intact, British policy helped to remove some of the bitter taste which colonial experience would have left in his mouth. The advantages of this policy become even more obvious when it is considered against the background of the policies adopted by other imperial powers. The French policy, for example, aimed at assimilation, especially in the urban areas. Assimilation required great proficiency in the French language and complete absorption into French culture. To meet these ends education in French colonial territories was given in French, a situation which resulted in the neglect of the mother tongue in education, with all the disadvantages this entails. The theory of negritude established jointly by Aime Cesaire,

Leopold Senghor and Leon Damas was one method of calling world attention to a situation which, to them, amounts to a cultural deprivation. As may be expected, this theory is not popular among Nigerian writers who have not had the same type of colonial experience as their French colleagues. Most of them look on negritude with suspicion and would not even accept the moderate views of Dr. Davidson Nicol who appears to have put negritude in its proper geographical and historical perspective. Addressing a seminar on African Literature and the University Curriculum at Fourah Bay in April 1963 he said about negritude:-

I am tempted to say that it is confined to the Atlantic Negro who has for three centuries carried on a dialogue of varying violence and passion with the Western European and American. Indeed, Negroes from the interior of Africa... are sometimes puzzled by negritude which to them seems like emphasizing the obvious... negritude, by its very name, emphasizes an apartness, a consciousness of being a Negro, as distinct from being anything else. Because of this, it calls primarily for a foreign audience; the presence, and indeed, the necessity for states of being like negritude and the African personality are evidence of the cosmopolitan or foreign surroundings in which the Negro lives and in which he fears submergence and obliteration unless he raises a strong voice of protest... It emphasizes the loneliness of the Negro in the white world, the Negro anxious that all the influences which bear on him from all sides should not suppress and obliterate his individuality. It is necessary that he first receives these influences before he can be conscious of a necessity for negritude. If he has not been influenced by them, then he goes to the opposite extreme and desires them.<sup>7</sup>

This passage seems to lay down clearly the conditions precedent to a full appreciation of the message of negritude. From what has been said so far it should be obvious that the psychological climate for such an appreciation hardly exists in Nigeria. The historical background against which the writers do their writing makes it unnecessary to emphasize

'the obvious'. This is responsible for the comparative lack of bitterness against the former colonial power in Nigerian novels. Furthermore, negritude is a method of proclamation more suited to poetry than any other medium. Mr. Samuel Allen, the Negro poet and critic, tells us why this is the case:-

It is probably true also that it was not by chance that this concept, negritude, originated among the poets rather than among those working in prose. Except for certain highly imaginative works, the novelist writes within a framework of what we term reality. He must in part concern himself with Plato's shadows - with plot and setting. His characters must grow up. He is constrained to a certain degree of reasonableness. The poet has probably a greater chance to penetrate, at once without apology and without a setting of the worldly stage, to the deepest levels of his creative concern. And so, perhaps what we are saying may have greater applicability to poetry than to prose.<sup>8</sup>

So Nigerian novelists, especially those of them to whom this work is devoted, not wanting to become involved in 'mere name-dropping', write in order to recreate and investigate aspects of Nigerian traditional life. Achebe, for example, is preoccupied largely with the traditional life of the Ibo as it came into contact with Western civilization. Onuora Nzekwu writes about Nigerian tribal society from the viewpoint of a fully-initiated member. Timothy Aluko scrutinizes different aspects of Yoruba culture. Tutuola assembled and embellished Yoruba folk tales and showed through his writing the potentialities of African folklore and mythology as a vitalising force in Nigerian literature. The later writers - Nwankwo, Amadi, Nwapa, Munonye, Egbuna - show with varying degrees of success how proverbs, tales, myths, community festivals, traditional ceremonies, music and dancing can be exploited by the novelist for his creative purpose. Their main concern seems to be the

necessity to correct the mistaken impressions about Africa arising from the experience of the slave trade and colonialism and to describe in all its complexity, and without attaching any philosophical tag, the Nigerian culture with which they are familiar.

## II

For a long time in history Africa was regarded as a 'Dark Continent' mainly because it was considered impenetrable. When eventually the 'Dark Continent' was penetrated, travellers and missionaries came out with dreadful stories - more imaginary than true - of human sacrifice, cannibalism, inter-tribal wars and abject poverty. According to Eldred Jones in Othello's Countrymen the two main sources of Englishmen's knowledge of Africa in the sixteenth century were 'the tales of the ancients as popularized by translations, and the contemporary accounts of sailors who had themselves seen Africa'.<sup>9</sup> But he is quick to add that these accounts were a mixture of fact and fiction.

Mandeville's Travels, a monumental work about travels in foreign lands, was published in England in the fifteenth century. This helped to create an awareness about Africa and an appetite for more knowledge about the continent, its traditions, the manners and customs of its people. Other important publications were soon available to give more information about Africa - in 1555 Richard Eden's first two accounts of English voyages to Africa, in 1589 Hukluyt's Principal Navigations, and in 1600 the English version of John Leo's The History and Description of Africa. Each of these added a little bit more to the Englishman's knowledge of Africa but none was free of fantastic flights of

imagination or the tendency to overemphasize the 'darkness' of the continent and the primitiveness of the people. They have therefore among them helped to establish an unfavourable image of Africa which writers, travellers, missionaries and political adventurers have exploited throughout history.

Misrepresentation of Africa and its people was not restricted to Britain. It was fairly widespread even before the colonial era. Ronald Dathorne reports that in the literature of the West Indies, Africa was seen as an essential study in primitivism.<sup>10</sup> Europe's interest in Africa was initially centred on the peoples' primordial way of living and was mainly based on conventional beliefs and thought about Africa. In the United States, for historical reasons, the image of the black man was a depressing one. According to Michael Furay, Africa was regarded as a 'land of errors and Egyptian gloom'.<sup>11</sup> This idea persisted in spite of the Abolitionist Movement and the Civil War.

This stock image was carried into the colonial period and was, in fact, used as a justification for colonialism. Colonial administrators helped for the most part to perpetuate this image. G.D. Killam in his Africa in English Fiction gives as one of many examples the case of George Alfred Henty, a single-minded exponent of imperialism and its uncritical supporter. As a colonial administrator, he gave inaccurate and largely imaginary accounts of Africa. His attitude was paternalistic in an age which took African inferiority for granted and therefore readily accepted the view that Africans

... are just like children. ... They are always either laughing or quarrelling. They are good-natured and passionate, indolent, but will work



hard for a time; clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond. The intelligence of an average negro is about equal to that of a European child of ten years old. They are absolutely without originality, absolutely without inventive power. Living among white men, their imitative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilization. Left alone to their own devices they retrograde into a state little above their native savagery.<sup>12</sup>

Thus was started a tradition of writing during the colonial era which had the effect of popularizing the notion of British superiority and duty to the less fortunate, almost helpless, people of Africa. As Killam reports, nearly all the novels in this tradition, if novels they may be called, initially failed to present believable portraits of Africans. However, starting from this level of sheer romance, writers later moved on to a state when some attempt was made to realize the African background. This reached its height with the African novels of Joyce Cary.

It is the literary pretensions of the novels of the early period and the image of Africa they project which appear to have affected the consciousness of Nigerian writers most. With the exception of writers like Cary and Elspeth Huxley in Red Strangers, novelists did not look objectively at the African setting, but concentrated on the exotic and sensational. As a result, they produced a one-sided account which emphasized the barbarity and inhumanity of Africans, their lack of inventiveness and addiction to human sacrifice and lawlessness. There was an inordinate attempt to judge Africans by standards imposed from outside, standards which were largely irrelevant to the African situation. Such fiction amounts to little more than propaganda put out with the sole aim of justifying white imperialism in Africa and confirming the imperialist in his position of strength. It is necessary to look fairly closely into a number of these

novels to see how art was employed to achieve a non-artistic purpose and how, initially at least, the image of Africa in fiction bears little resemblance to the real Africa.

One of the first books in this tradition is Edgar Wallace's Sanders of the River.<sup>13</sup> This is a collection of stories about the activities of Sanders as Chief Commissioner for the Isisi, Ikeli and Akasava territories in West Africa. The stories are full of violence and sudden death, reported cases of witchcraft, murder by fetish, caning, child stealing, abduction of women, hanging from trees, raiding of goats, inter-tribal wars - in short, those things one might expect to happen among people considered, in a derogatory sense, to be close to the 'state of nature'.

Wallace presents Sanders as a man who possesses the great qualities required to carry out successfully the enormous task of keeping 'a watchful eye upon some quarter of a million cannibal folk'<sup>14</sup> and of governing 'a people three hundred miles beyond the fringe of civilization'.<sup>15</sup> Sanders is a strong man with an intimate knowledge of Africa which he has acquired by travelling widely on the continent. Unfortunately, his knowledge of the people has led him to the disastrous conclusion that the only way to rule them is by an iron hand, a display of ruthlessness unparalleled even at the worst of colonial times. 'By Sander's code you trusted all natives up to the same point, as you trust children.'<sup>16</sup> He is also convinced that

Hesitation to act, delay in awarding punishment, either of these two things would have been mistaken for weakness among a people who had neither power to reason, nor will to excuse, nor any large charity.<sup>17</sup>

Here we find Wallace's views of the African little different from those expressed by Henty. Each draws a gloomy picture of

the African situation and offers caricatures of Africans. The one notable difference is that Wallace's Africans, even in a position of great inferiority and faced with the colonial might and authority of Sanders, are more active and resourceful, and cunning enough to be suspicious of white rule. Sanders represents a regime they do not like and they show their hatred of Sanders and his sponsors by the several attempts on his life. On one occasion Sanders is made to 'dance' on hot stones by the King of Yitingi; on another he is fired at at Asisi. At O'Fasi, Imgani arranges to ambush him but fortunately he arrives two days before schedule and is thus able to upset his enemy's plans. The last attempt on Sander's life in the book is an interesting one because of the light it throws on his character. Lataki is Sander's cook and is paid only ten shillings a month. One day he is found drunk on his master's bed and for this offence he is given what he considers excessive punishment. 'Lataki was no stoic and when, tied to a tree, ten strokes were laid upon his stout back by a bored Houssa, he cried out very loudly against Sanders, and against that civilization of which Sanders was the chosen instrument'.<sup>18</sup> Lataki decides to poison Sanders and puts ground glass in his palm-oil chop. Sanders discovers this through the use of a microscope and deals with the situation in a way typical of 'a man who knew the native.' Sanders prepares Lataki's mind for his punishment:-

"Lataki," said Sanders carelessly, "knowing the ways of white men, tell me how a master might do his servant honour?"

The cook in the doorway hesitated.

"There are many ways," he said, after a pause.

"He might..."

He stopped, not quite sure of his ground.

"Because you are a good servant, though possessed of faults," said Sanders, "I wish to

honour you; therefore I have chosen this way; you, who have slept in my bed unbidden, shall sit at my table with me at my command."

The man hesitated, a little bewildered, then he shuffled forward and sat clumsily in the chair opposite his master.

"I will wait upon you," said Sanders, "according to the custom of your own people."

He heaped two large spoonfuls of palm-oil chop upon the plate before the man.

"Eat," he said.

But the man made no movement, sitting with his eyes upon the tablecloth.

"Eat," said Sanders again, but still Lataki sat motionless.

Then Sanders rose, and went to the open doorway of his bungalow and blew a whistle.

There was a patter of feet, and Sergeant Abiboo came with four Houssas.

"Take this man," said Sanders, "and put him in irons. To-morrow I will send him down country for judgment."<sup>19</sup>

Lataki is later brought before a judge and is sentenced to 'fifteen years' penal servitude'. To show the unreasonableness of people of the Lulungo tribe Wallace concludes this story by revealing their attitude to the whole affair:-

Here the matter would have ended, but for the Lulungo people, who live far away in the north and who chose to regard the imprisonment of their man as a casus belli.<sup>20</sup>

It is not without reason that Africans hate Sanders and all that he stands for. Apart from summary punishments such as the one meted out to Lataki, the people and their chiefs suffer every kind of humiliation <sup>at</sup> ~~in~~ his hands. He keeps a large number of informants who spy on the people, especially the chiefs, and warn him in advance of any possible rebellion or offence against the law. On the least suspicion Sanders imposes the heaviest punishment. He establishes what amounts to a reign of terror and succeeds in infusing fear in the people he treats with the utmost brutality. The novel is full of examples of harsh judgements handed out by Sanders. At Isisi,

the young man who prophesies that the river will rise and drown the people is put in a wooden prison cage built on the bank of the river. 'You will stay here,' says Sanders, 'and when the river rises you must prophesy that it will fall again, else assuredly you will be drowned.'<sup>21</sup> Even a man of God, Rev. Kennett McDolan, is not allowed 'to bring light into dark places' because he is black. 'White missionaries, yes,' he [Sanders] said wrathfully, 'but black missionaries I will not endure'.<sup>22</sup> Sanders is extremely impolite to Rev. McDolan. But others suffer worse fates. Tigili, the King of the N'Gombi folk is quietly disposed of for leading a secret society. Sir George Carsley, a great scientist, Consulting Surgeon to St. Mark's Hospital, London and the author of many books on tropical diseases, who becomes a witch-doctor in the jungle of Africa, is arrested by Sanders and disgraced before his patients. Again, Sanders threatens to make a bonfire of two men of the Amatombo tribe for not giving him a piece of information he requires. As the men are bundled together ready to be set on fire, they talk to save their lives. Kelebi, the great witch-doctor of Mfabo village, tells us more about the atrocities perpetrated against Africans by Sanders in the name of good government:-

I have lived all my life in this district, and have never known so cruel a man as Sandi (Sanders). I remember once he caused a man to be drowned, the man's name I forget; on another occasion he burned a worthy native alive for refusing to guide him and his Houssas through the forest. I also remember the time when he put a village to the fire, causing the people great suffering.

The people of the country groan under his oppressions, for from time to time he comes demanding money and crops, and if he does not receive all that he asks for he flogs the villagers until they cry aloud.<sup>23</sup>

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that Sanders is so obsessed with the good he considers himself to have done the people that he cannot understand why they hate him or wish to take his life. Living in an age of paternalism and working for an imperial power in distant parts, he has come to regard Africans almost as children who should take with equanimity any treatment they are given, however harsh or unreasonable. He makes this point clearly to the people of Amatombo when an attempt is once more made on his life:-

I am as your father and your mother,... I carry you in my arms; when the waters came up and destroyed your gardens I came with manioc and salt and saved you; when the sickness came I brought white men who scraped your arms and put magic in your blood; I have made peace, and your wives are safe from M'Gombi and Isisi folk, yet you are for killing me.<sup>24</sup>

In strict accordance with the spirit in which Wallace's work is conceived, believable African characters do not appear in this novel. There are also only occasional general references - never detailed or dramatised - to African social or political institutions. What we have instead are caricatures. The two African characters who are portrayed at some length are exposed to ridicule all the way. Bosambo of Monrovia is presented as a member of a race of 'liars and thieves'. He comes from a country where the President 'was sitting on the edge of his desk at Government House, eating sardines with his fingers'.<sup>25</sup> Bosambo lives a dishonest life, serves various terms of imprisonment, successfully tricks the Ochori people into accepting him as their chief and finally ends up a traitor, an ally of the colonial power. M'Lino of 'no pure Bantu stock' is shown as a girl of easy virtue who throws herself uninvited

on British officials. Because she is beautiful these officials become fascinated and fall in love with her. This is anathema, of course, to the Administration and in turn Ludley and Penson, young officials who get involved with M'Lino, are sent back to Britain. There are innumerable other characters but there are none fully drawn or endowed with any individuality of their own. They are for the most part either chiefs who spend their time preparing for inter-tribal wars and exhibiting the type of savagery the chief of the Akasava shows in killing Mr. Niceman or ordinary people engaged in mischief-making like M'Fasa who poisons her husband.

These are the types of people Sanders has to deal with and to whom he attempts to bring the advantages of civilization. In a novel conceived in an idealistic notion of the mission of empire it is only natural that Wallace should give the impression that Sanders has been largely successful in his onerous task:—

He had control of some sixteen distinct and separate nations, each isolated and separated from the other by custom and language. They were distinct, not as the French are from the Italian, but as the Slav is from the Turk.

In the good old times before the English came there were many wars, tribe against tribe, people against people. There were battles, murders, raidings, and wholesale crucifixions, but the British changed all that. There was peace in the land.<sup>26</sup>

'Peace' may have been achieved, but at what price? Not only Africans but also white officials are made to experience the stern discipline of Sanders. Any officer whose ideas are too liberal for his purpose is expelled. Torrington, deputy commissioner whose scientific experiments fail, is sent home. So also is Cuthbeth for smoking hemp given him by the notorious Bosambo. Nothing is allowed to happen which can bring the

imperial power into disrepute or detract from its authority in any way. Within these narrow limits of his conception Wallace may be said to be successful.

But Sanders of the River can hardly be taken very seriously as a work of art. Its weaknesses are patent. The tone of patronage and the expression of paternalism are put in a wholly unconvincing context of self-contained stories. These stories are short and episodic with Sanders serving as the only recognizable link between them. There is a continual shifting of interest, and the locale changes frequently between Sierra Leone, Grand Bassam, Togoland, Guinea, Nigeria and the Congo without adequate notice or justification, thus giving the wrong impression that Africa is the same, no matter where you go. Because of the need to concentrate on the seamy side of life the African background of these stories is not fully realized. There is therefore a monotonous repetition in each story of a pattern of offence and punishment.

Sanders is the only character who appears fully drawn. Even here, the delineation is not convincing. His individuality is subsumed under the weight of his authority as the representative of a colonial power. He exercises his powers ruthlessly to achieve a predetermined goal. Given the circumstances in which he operates and the importance he attaches to his assignment, it is only to be expected that he will act strictly in accordance with his very precise mandate. This makes him appear a type, a mere specimen rather than an individual. Moreover, he is portrayed as a kind of omnipresent spirit who suddenly appears at vital moments to award punishment for offences committed.



This happens so often that it loses any credibility it may have possessed. All these are faults, but the greatest weakness of the book is the lightweight presentation of the African point of view and the use of Africans to provide justification for the excesses of Sanders.

However, it must be allowed that the novel offers interesting comments on colonial administrative practice - the procedure for acquiring territories, the relationship between the administrator and his men in the field, the chiefs and people on the one hand and the home government on the other, the interaction between junior and senior officers and the effect of a prolonged stay in the field on colonial officials. Sanders stays out for so long that Wallace thinks he has almost become a native:-

Sanders, as I have tried to explain, was a man who knew the native; he thought like a native, and there were moments when he acted not unlike a barbarian.<sup>27</sup>

### III

The image of Africa which emerges from John Buchan's Prester John is a slightly more complex one.<sup>28</sup> The African is still a 'native' and a 'barbarian'. His ways are still considered primitive and lacking in social refinement. But here he is endowed with an ancestry dating back to antiquity. He is the descendant of Prester John, the legendary king of Abyssinia in the fifteenth century, and he is called to his great inheritance:-

Priest and king was he, king of kings, lord of hosts, master of the earth. When he ascended on high he left to his son the sacred Snake,

the ark of his valour, to be God's dower and pledge to the people whom He has chosen.<sup>29</sup>

Buchan's Africans are therefore a chosen people intensely conscious of their privileged position and the special relationship which exists between them and the 'sacred Snake'. They are therefore more articulate than the Africans of Sanders of the River. They do not address white people as 'master', 'lord', 'our father and mother'. Not only do they resent the colonial situation, but, unlike Wallace's Africans, they decide to do something positive about it. They therefore organize themselves first into a strong political unit and later into a military force held together by an oath of allegiance to John Laputa, the priest of the Snake, and prepare for a deadly conflict with the forces of imperialism. A great part of the novel is devoted to the preparation on both sides for this inevitable confrontation, and from time to time Buchan emphasizes the uneasiness in inter-personal relationships which usually results from the condition of domination of one race by another. In this particular case an atmosphere of mutual suspicion develops between the Kaffirs and the British, and this is exploited by Laputa who has cultivated an anti-colonial feeling while studying abroad. The Kaffirs endure their sufferings for a long time mainly because they have no acknowledged leader. It is not surprising therefore that, in the circumstances narrated by Captain Arcoll, the commander of the British forces, as soon as Laputa emerges as the chosen leader of the Kaffirs, war breaks out:-

In spite of risings here and there, and occasional rows, the Kaffirs have been quiet for the better part of half a century. It is no credit to us. They have had plenty of grievances, and we are no nearer understanding

them than our fathers were. But they are scattered and divided. We have driven great wedges of white settlement into their territory, and we have taken away their arms. Still, they are six times as many as we are, and they have long memories, and a thoughtful man may wonder how long the peace will last. I have often asked myself that question, and till lately I used to reply, 'For ever, because they cannot find a leader with the proper authority, and they have no common cause to fight for'. But a year or two ago I began to change my mind.<sup>30</sup>

The Kaffirs, as may be expected, are defeated at Dupree's Drift and disarmed. But the lesson of the revolt is not altogether lost on British officials. They begin to show interest in African development as a result of the war.

Unlike Sanders of the River, Prester John devotes a lot of attention to the activities of Africans, and the effect these have on the whites is discussed at some length. Africans play a reasonable part in the action of the novel and at times play crucial roles. Some portion of the work is devoted to a description of African customs, rituals and ceremonies. For the most part, these are presented as crude and as standing in the way of progress. Even so, the African is allowed to play his part in a way that causes his white overlords considerable disquiet or even excites their admiration. Wardlaw, a white school teacher who has come to acquire an intimate knowledge of Africans, has this to say of Kaffirs:-

They are cunning fellows, and have arts that we know nothing about. You have heard of native telepathy. They can send news over a thousand miles as quick as the telegraph, and we have no means of tapping the wires. If they ever combined they could keep it as secret as the grave. My houseboy might be in the rising, and I would never suspect it till one fine morning he cut my throat.<sup>31</sup>

Africans do in fact combine and keep it secret. Before the great uprising an important ceremony takes place in the cave during which Laputa is made the leader of his people.

He is given the totem - the Snake - by the Keeper as his symbol of leadership and everybody present is committed to the Kaffir cause and sworn to an oath of secrecy which to the credit of all concerned is kept to the letter. David, a white man and hero of the novel, is present at this ceremony as a spy and himself attests to the dignity and solemnity of the occasion and the impression it leaves on him:

Then a song began, a wild incantation in which all joined. The old priest would speak some words, and the reply came in barbaric music. The words meant nothing to me; they must have been in some tongue long since dead. But the music told its own tale. It spoke of old kings and great battles, of splendid palaces and strong battlements, of queens white as ivory, of death and life, love and hate, joy and sorrow. It spoke, too, of desperate things, mysteries of horror long shut to the world. No Kaffir ever forged that ritual. It must have come straight from Prester John or Sheba's queen, or whoever ruled in Africa when time was young.

I was horribly impressed. Devouring curiosity and a lurking nameless fear filled my mind. My old dread had gone. I was not afraid now of Kaffir guns, but of the black magic of which Laputa had the key.<sup>32</sup>

African portraits in this novel are not always the caricatures one finds in Sanders of the River. It is true that Africans are still for the most part playing roles subordinate to those of the white man or in some cases directly in his employ. Zeeta, for example, is the maid of Japp, a white man. She works hard for very little pay. On the other hand, 'Mwanga, a Kaffir, is a partner-in-crime of Japp in Illicit Diamond Broking (I.D.B.). By far the most important African character in the novel, and one that comes next in importance only to the hero, is John Laputa. Laputa is a man of many parts who is assigned various roles in the novel. In Scotland he is a Christian Minister. In Africa he is a priest and king in the

cave, the leader of a well-organized army at Dupree's Drift. He is respected as a well-educated man even by his enemies. To him the Kaffirs owe the rise in their political consciousness and the amount of self-respect they eventually build up for themselves. Laputa is presented as a gifted public speaker, a quality essential for success in his double role of Christian minister and native priest. David talks of his pervasive influence and how on one occasion he holds a critical church audience in Durban spellbound by his oratory and magnificent personality:-

For myself I was intensely curious, and not a little impressed. The man's face was as commanding as his figure, and his voice was the most wonderful thing that ever came out of human mouth. It was full and rich, and gentle, with the tones of a great organ. He had none of the squat and preposterous negro lineaments, but a hawk nose like an Arab, dark flashing eyes, and a cruel and resolute mouth. He was black as my hat, but for the rest he might have sat for a figure of a Crusader. I do not know what the sermon was about, though others told me that it was excellent.<sup>33</sup>

Laputa is decidedly against colonialism and regards the oppression of his people as unnecessary. He therefore rouses them to action by attributing all the evils in society to colonialism. He thinks the white oppressors have had their day and the time has come for Africans to regain their freedom:-

What have ye gained from the white man? he cried. A bastard civilization which has sapped your manhood; a false religion which would rivet on you the chains of the slave. Ye, the old masters of the land, are now the servants of the oppressor. And yet the oppressors are few, and the fear of you is in their hearts. They feast in their great cities, but they see the writing on the wall, and their eyes are anxiously turning lest the enemy be at their gates.<sup>34</sup>

Laputa gears himself up for action. His goal is the improvement of the lot of his people. He sees it as his essential duty to redeem them from a corrosive Western civilization which he himself has come to detest:-

It is because I have sucked civilization dry that I know the bitterness of the fruit. I want a simpler and better world, and I want that world for my own people. I am a Christian, and will you tell me that your civilization pays much attention to Christ? You call yourself a patriot? Will you not give me leave to be a patriot in turn?<sup>35</sup>

It is not surprising that in these circumstances his people give him their full support. The fact that they fail cannot detract from the importance of Laputa who shows great qualities of leadership, infuses a sense of dignity in his people, mobilises their entire resources for war and at the point of defeat dies a heroic death. With him we lament that 'The Snake returns to the House of its Birth... The Heir of John is going home'<sup>36</sup>

Laputa is a fully-drawn believable African character put in a fictional context. The necessary background is provided by the activities of David Crawford, the main character of the novel, and his white colleagues who exhibit various motives for going to Africa. David, a Scot, is employed by a commercial firm and sent to Blaauwildebeestefontein (Blaau for short) in <sup>the</sup> Transvaal where he is to work under Peter Japp, a white man who has lived all his life in Africa. On the way to Blaau, David makes the acquaintance of Mr. Wardlaw from Aberdeen who is going to take charge of the village school in Blaau. After a few months' stay in Blaau David comes in contact with Henriques, a Portuguese whose only business in *the* Transvaal is to exploit Africans through the promotion of I.D.B.

(Illicit Diamond Broking). It is interesting that Africa elicits a different kind of response in each of these characters. As soon as David gets to know about his African job, his thoughts are directed to the possibility of making a large fortune in Africa. He is at first quite willing to make his money honestly. But he is soon influenced by the methods of others and decides to acquire wealth by any means. He goes treasure-hunting, comes in conflict with the natives, gets involved in many risky adventures and survives them all. In one of such occasions he lets us into the secret of his thoughts:-

I had begun to watch the bird in idle lassitude, I ended in keen excitement. The sight of it seemed to take a film from my eyes. I realized the zest of liberty, the passion of life again. I felt that beyond this dim underworld there was the great joyous earth, and I longed for it. I wanted to live now. My memory cleared, and I remembered all that had befallen me during the last few days. I had played the chief part in the whole business, and I had won. Laputa was dead and the treasure was mine, while Arcoll was crushing the Rising at his ease. I had only to be free again to be famous and rich. My hopes had returned, but with them came my fears.<sup>37</sup>

David leaves Africa with a fortune of half a million pounds which is out of proportion to any contribution he has made. His contribution from an African point of view has been largely negative. He has helped to set in motion the chain of events which ends with the great uprising. Unlike Wardlaw, he has helped to confuse further a potentially-explosive situation. For all that, his conception of Africa is more acceptable than that of Japp or Henriques. Japp regards Africans as a stupid lot naturally prone to be dishonest. This imaginary weakness he exploits to the fullest. He therefore enters into a secret agreement with African crooks like 'Mwanga to benefit from I.D.B. to the detriment of the lawful commercial activities of his

Company. Henriques, the Portuguese adventurer, regards Africans as primitive and unprogressive. To him they are the right type of people to be exploited. Africa for him provides the right setting for the display of every kind of human failing. Apart from his connection with I.D.B. he plays traitor in the camp of Laputa and is willing to betray the African cause for money. Against this must be set the conception of Africa of comparatively honest white men like Wardlaw and Aitken. They see Africa as a place crying out for immediate help and work hard to bring about improvement in their different fields, Wardlaw in the field of education, Aitken in the field of industry as the founder of the Aitken Proprietary Mine. They are intensely conscious of the white man's duty in Africa and consider their help vital for the survival of Africans who need and seem to enjoy their patronage. They are thankful for the experience Africa has afforded them. Like David they can say

It was an experience for which I shall ever be grateful, for it turned me from a rash boy into a serious man. I knew then the meaning of the white man's duty. He has to take all risks, recking nothing of his life or his fortunes, and well content to find his reward in the fulfilment of his task. That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being in a little way a king; and so long as we know this and practise it, we will rule not in Africa alone but wherever there are dark men who live only for the day and their own bellies.<sup>38</sup>

This may well be the view of Africa supported by John Buchan. So we have a picture in Prester John of Africa still considered the 'Dark Continent', helpless and confused, with the destruction of everything traditionally valid at Dupree's Drift. Fortunately, on this darkness a ray of light is being shed by the honest effort of men like Wardlaw and Aitken. We therefore leave the novel with our minds focused on the



great things to come. Already we notice some improvement taking place in <sup>the</sup> Transvaal:-

But Aitken did more than mine diamonds, for he had not forgotten the lesson we had learned together in the work of resettlement. He laid down a big fund for the education and amelioration of the native races, and the first fruit of it was the establishment at Blaauwildebeestefontein itself of a great native training college. It was no factory for making missionaries and black teachers, but an institution for giving the Kaffirs the kind of training which fits them to be good citizens of the state. There you will find every kind of technical workshop, and the finest experimental farms, where the blacks are taught modern agriculture. They have proved themselves apt pupils, and to-day you will see in the glens of the Berg and in the plains Kaffir tillage which is as scientific as any in Africa.<sup>39</sup>

Prester John leaves the reader with the impression of a novelist who is fundamentally a paternalistic colonialist, with nevertheless a slightly uneasy conscience and decidedly mixed feelings where Africans are concerned.

#### IV

Joyce Cary's African novels are written in the tradition we have been considering but at a different level and to serve a different purpose. With Cary the tradition reaches its peak. Wallace and Buchan write as persons interested in Africa. Cary writes as one who knows Africa well and is deeply committed to its development. He has therefore given us in four widely-read novels - Aissa Saved, An American Visitor, The African Witch and Mister Johnson - his impressions of Africans, particularly Nigerians among whom he worked and lived for five years. The image of Africa which emerges from these novels is of the utmost importance to Nigerian novelists not only because Cary is a serious writer but because he has some claims to write from an intimate knowledge of Nigerians. What makes Cary's work so important is the fact that it touches nearly all aspects of Nigerian life. In order to explore his themes thoroughly against the background

of his motivation for writing about Africa, it is necessary to discuss in some detail his last two African novels - The African Witch and Mister Johnson.

What, in the main, differentiates Cary from the other novelists we have been considering is the active and important roles he gives to Africans in his novels. In The African Witch Africans are in control of the situation. Their activities are influenced and at times directed by the English officials in their midst, but it is true to say they dominate the action of the novel and provide Cary with sufficient material for his African setting which, according to him, 'just because it is dramatic, demands a certain kind of story, a certain violence and coarseness of detail, almost a fabulous treatment, to keep it in its place'.<sup>40</sup> We therefore have in the story believable African characters set against one another in violent conflict, several passages devoted to the description of life in a pagan compound and the Emir's palace, the processes in a witch hunt and the theory and practice of juju which is presented as the one factor which sustains the life of the people. We are presented with the picture of the state of Rimi alive with dissension and intrigues. We witness 'a certain violence and coarseness of detail' in the women's riots, the fate of characters like Ibu and Osi and in the war of succession to the emirship between the Mohammedan Sale and the English-educated Aladai.

However, in spite of this 'coarseness of detail', Cary approaches his work with some ~~amount of~~ sympathy for many of his characters. Characters like Osi and Ibu who are singled out for punishment, through no fault of their own, earn the

author's sympathy. They are portrayed as victims of an intolerant society in which individual freedom of action is restricted by superstitious beliefs and outmoded customs. Both are accused of witchcraft and penalised for being witches. Osi is apparently forced to give up her magic power and brutally treated. But the author regards this as a case of mistaken identity leading to a miscarriage of justice:-

Osi was therefore put back in the cell. But the spoiled, loved girl, who had been surrounded with affection all her life, was in fact temporarily mad with bewilderment and agony. When they pushed her into the cell again, she dashed herself against the wall, screaming.<sup>41</sup>

There is nothing in the author's description of Osi which could lead a reader to believe that she is a witch. It is by the same kind of treatment we are made to realize that Ibu suffers unjustly. She is given as an example of the many Africans who are needlessly destroyed every year:-

Ibu, though stupid with terror, confusion of mind, misery, cold, and hunger, was an intelligent child. This quality had probably been her ruin. All intelligent, good-looking persons are exposed to jealousy, and jealousy is the subconscious source of the hatred which produces injuries - from injuries, fear; and from fear, an accusation of witchcraft. In this way Africa has destroyed, every year for some millions of years, a large proportion of its more intelligent and handsome children.<sup>42</sup>

One may complain of exaggeration and over-dramatization on the part of Cary, especially as shown in the last sentence of the passage. But there can be little doubt about his intention to enlist the reader's sympathy for Ibu through whose ghastly experiences traditional society is exposed to ridicule.

Even greater sympathy is shown in the portrayal of the two most important African characters in the novel - Aladai and his

sister, Elizabeth. Aladai, the hero of the book is portrayed as a typical educated African who is exposed to all the disadvantages educated Nigerians experienced during the early colonial period. Mission-trained and educated in England he thinks he will for this reason be acceptable to the English community in Rimi and will be preferred as Emir by them. But this hope is disappointed. The British officials fear that, as Emir, he will bring rapid development to Rimi, and this, they consider, will undermine their position. They therefore put their official weight behind Sale, the traditionalist, and help to bring about an unnecessary confrontation and the destruction of lives and property. It is mainly through the activities of Aladai and Elizabeth that the weaknesses of the Colonial Administration are revealed. The British officials are portrayed as an incompetent lackadaisical group, given to a policy of drift. They seem to put their personal pleasures before official duty and spend more time than the serious situation permits on social activities. They mishandle the incipient nationalism which manifests itself during the tax riots, and are several times embarrassed and outwitted by Aladai and his sister. On the other hand, in Aladai the author gives us a picture of a nationalist who grows in popular favour with the masses in direct proportion to the difficulties put in his way by the Colonial Administration. His great passion, according to the novel, is to bring improvement to Rimi. To this end he mobilizes his people for action. When his forces are annihilated he dies, fighting, in circumstances which remind us of the heroic death of Laputa at Dupree's Drift:-

Aladai, just before he went down, waved his arm,  
and shouted something about Rimi, but no one could  
distinguish what it was.<sup>43</sup>

Here no doubt is a hero who has the welfare of his people in mind, even at the point of death.

The picture of Elizabeth is no less favourable. She is shown to possess tremendous organizational ability, and succeeds as much in the political field, where she throws the whole of the British Administration into disarray, as in her traditional role as priestess:-

Elizabeth had been a juju priestess for four years. She had succeeded an uncle on account of her special aptitude. In Africa, a juju priest has a power of life and death which resides in him personally. He has knowledge and training; he has to be initiated, like priests elsewhere, but he must also have a quality which marks him off from others - the quality of power. A woman may have the quality as well as a man, and then she may become a priestess. The power is real, and so no one would dream of setting it aside by artificial rules limiting priestcraft to one sex or caste.

But Elizabeth was greater than her uncle, because she had been trained for the women's juju as well as inheriting the men's. Also, she was an organizer. She had great power in Rimi. It was only limited by the modern scepticism, infecting some of the townpeople, and by the Mohammedan and Christian preachers.<sup>44</sup>

Elizabeth's role in the novel is a crucial one. She is not only powerful in her own realm as priestess of the community's juju, she exercises wide influence over the events of the novel, including the activities of the white community. She supports her brother's royal claim not only because Sale threatens her juju but because she thinks she will more easily control Louis. Her greatest triumph is achieved during the women's war which is undertaken in support of Aladai's claim. She relies on her female nature and juju to be saved from the war. At one stage captured and imprisoned, she is given poisoned chicken and put in a hole in the bush to be eaten by hyenas. Yet she survives in a condition

where more ordinary mortals may have died. Even when the Resident finally calls out the troops which immediately subdue the uprising, Elizabeth is not defeated. Although, by his description of these events, it is clear that the author does not approve of the political objectives and the violent methods of the women, he shows respect for their discipline and determination:-

No one had realized that the women were organized by villages, and that every branch was self-operating, nor that women do not need leaders as much as men. If they are given a simple object, they pursue it with great resolution, and often will continue to do so in spite of leaders.<sup>45</sup>

Elizabeth grows in the estimation of the Administration. She comes to be accepted as the recognized leader of an organization whose cooperation is needed in order to avoid a political disaster. Even more than Aladai she brings the British officials to a realization of the ineffectiveness of their policy. Too late, Burwash admits his administrative errors, and is afraid of losing his post - 'He was greatly disturbed by the violence. Violence almost always leads to enquiries - perhaps even to a commission of enquiry, which is the worst thing that can happen to a Resident.'<sup>46</sup> The position of Burwash is therefore, by implication, contrasted with that of Elizabeth who starts as a hated political agitator and undignified juju priestess but rises in status to a position where an official report can speak of 'the moderating control of the woman Elizabeth, or Lisbet, deservedly commended in Appendix A, far exceeded that of the southern leaders...'<sup>47</sup>

However, not all the characters in the novel are treated with sympathy. The traditional leaders are the hardest hit. Musa, the leader of <sup>a</sup> palace gang, is a bully who amuses everyone by his energetic display of ignorance:-

He was ready to teach anybody anything. Not that he was skilful or full of practical knowledge. On the contrary, he knew very little, much less than the Rimi pagans, whom he despised, and who had their fathers and their chiefs to look after their education. Musa was a waif who knew nothing exactly, except dirty stories and a great many lies. But he believed that he knew everything, and his confidence made others supply his deficiency by the unusual energy he provoked in them.<sup>48</sup>

His overlord, the Emir, fares no better with Cary. He is portrayed as temperamentally unfit for leadership and as an obstacle in the way of progress. He does not allow the people to be consulted on the problem of succession and issues a threat which worsens an already explosive situation - 'The king says that if Aladai is permitted to remain free in Rimi, and Sale not sent away, he will himself go away.'<sup>49</sup> One cannot help feeling that if Emir Aliu had co-operated with Burwash and the Colonial Administration in the manner laid down by the system of Indirect Rule, it might have been possible to avoid bloodshed.

Rev. Selah Coker, in spite of his religious enthusiasm and devotion to duty, is presented as a comic figure. He is the leader of his own separatist church, but his religion to Aladai is no more than a primitive religious juju which he considers just as harmful to Rimi as Sale's mohammedanism. His sermons are always centred on blood and sacrifice:-

His key word was blood, but it appeared in different connections: blood of Jesus - blood of sacrifice - blood of the wicked man - blood of the sinner - the baptism of blood. He preached equality. He was not a Communist and reprobated the Communists as anti-Christ. But the geyser, as it burst out of him, uttered pure original Communism, the brotherhood of the pack and the herd, expressed in fraternal love for the like, in hatred of the unlike, sealed in the magical properties of blood.

Blood-love, blood-hatred, were the ethics of Coker's religion; its theology was the geyser, the hot fountain shot out of primaeval mud.<sup>50</sup>

He is popular with the masses of the people who, for purely nationalistic reasons, see him as localising the content of religion. They all go to him and listen to his gospel of sacrifice. Despite his scant respect for Coker and his brand of religion, Aladai is forced back to his camp at the end of the book when Coker makes a blood sacrifice of Dr. Schlemm and displays his head to the pagan-Christian mob. In his portrayal of Coker, Cary's intention may be to satirize the revivalist splinter groups of Christians, especially the Seraphim and Cherubim, which were mushrooming in Nigeria at the time he wrote. Like Coker, the leaders of these groups exploit to their advantage the connection between Christianity and the Colonial Administration and retain the allegiance of their gullible followers only by a false display of knowledge.

The heaviest satire in the novel is reserved for Akande Tom who gets excited with everything connected with the white man. He is presented as always wanting to 'learn book' and so discover 'the white juju'. For the same reason he wants to put on the white man's clothes:-

When Akande Tom had put on over a naked skin linen coat, trousers, cloth cap, and black goggles, he felt as near a white man as it was possible for him to be, and enjoyed an exaltation which might possibly be compared with that of a risen soul on his first morning in paradise. Because, for Akande Tom, the change was not only one of appearance, but of being and power... and now, when he took his usual turn on the town road, walking by himself and for himself, he felt to the end of his toes and hair the quality not merely of a white man, but all that belongs to him - the power of his engines and guns, the magic of his telegraphs, gramophones, radios, motors, ships, and his mysterious being. By wearing white man's clothes, it seemed to Tom's bodily and natural logic, that he became one with the white juju.<sup>51</sup>



Only a foolish African, such as Tom is made out to be here, would think that all he has to do to have an insight into modern technology is to put on a white man's clothes 'over a naked skin' or that, by so doing, he would immediately come into the cultural heritage of the white man. Little wonder Elizabeth finally establishes her superiority to Tom in an attempt to subdue his ambition to adopt the white man's way of life in preference to hers. However, it must be allowed that, in spite of the context in which it appears, Tom's desire for education is worthy of attention. Africans need education as the only way of ridding themselves of some of the superstition one reads about in this novel. As Cary himself says in the preface to the novel, 'the story of Tom who wants to 'learn book' was used to raise the cry that the Empire had failed to educate the African, and that this was the worst of its crimes'.<sup>52</sup>

The African Witch is not as committed to the idealistic notion of the mission of Empire as Sanders of the River or Prester John. As has been pointed out, unlike Wallace and Buchan, Cary treats many of his African characters with more human sympathy than he is willing to extend to Europeans who are usually portrayed in a manner that implies criticism. Even so, it must be said that the book is firmly rooted in the paternalistic tradition. The attitude of the English community in considering themselves as a race apart and in their rejection of Aladai, though to a considerable extent criticized by the author, is also to some degree endorsed by him. In this work Nigerians are usually referred to by Cary as 'naked savages', 'niggers', 'barbarians'. Their streets are 'stinking alleys'. They are not accepted by the author as being conceivably on terms of equality with the English, and there

is an invidious attempt to keep the country 'in the Middle Ages, as a kind of museum for anthropologists'.<sup>53</sup> Rackham may have been speaking for the author as well as the whole of the white population in Rimi when he says 'the blacks out here are not fit to run their own show, and it will be a long time before they learn. Meanwhile we've got to keep the machine running, and the only peaceful way of doing that is to support white prestige'.<sup>54</sup> Although their actions are capable of bringing about the exact opposite of what they intend, there can be no doubt that the aim of the English people in Rimi is 'to support white prestige' in furtherance of the policy of the Colonial Government. One has a strong suspicion that the main reason for Cary's criticism of them is that they are not efficiently fulfilling their mandate. So Cary's attitude would appear to be that of a liberal imperialist who might be willing to support African nationalism and advancement if a way could be found of bringing both under the control of Europeans who are far more businesslike than those in Rimi.

V

It is the same impression of Cary as a 'liberal' that emerges from Mister Johnson where the author uses his imaginative energy to full effect in creating a rich mental life for his main character. This novel is widely read in Nigeria and was at one time a setbook for the West African School Certificate Examination. Even now many secondary schools in Nigeria have it on their reading list and some include it on their Literature programme. It is likely that most of the Nigerian novelists treated in this work have at one time or other read Cary's novels. The African image in these novels has influenced the Nigerian writer's consciousness

a great deal. It is therefore important to find out to what extent the last, and probably the best, of these novels, Mister Johnson, although African in content, is also African in sympathy and approach.

The centre of interest in Mister Johnson is Johnson himself. There are no other African characters of any stature. Those of them who crowd round him apparently for example and inspiration are no more than satellites in his orbit and, in a general sense, share his triumphs and failures. From this group the two most affected are Bamu, his wife and the slavey, Sozy, who are his only constant companions. But Johnson is essentially a comic figure. He exploits to his own advantage his official connection with British political officers in his capacity as government clerk. He is naive enough to think that, by informing everybody that Mr. Rudbeck is his 'friend' and by allowing himself to be seen frequently with Celia, his social standing with the local people will immediately improve. For the most part the reader is either laughing with Johnson or laughing at him:-

Are you well enough to go to the homfice? Bamu asks. Yes, I think so - yes, Mister Rudbeck will be there this morning. Yes. He feels himself again and laughs. I really do feel quite well again - almost - I shall go to the homfice.

As he goes down the path he is heard singing:

England is my country, de Kind of  
England is my King. De bes' man in  
de worl' - his heart is so big.

But when he comes in sight of the office, his steps falter. He sees there Moma, the headman, and every one of his creditors. He feels again very ill; he has a pain in his stomach. He half turns away. But suddenly the head messenger, Adamu, catches sight of him and bawls, 'Akow'.<sup>55</sup>

In the same manner Johnson makes a public fool of himself when he is sacked by Tring for embezzlement:-

Johnson makes no secret of his misfortune; he tells everyone on the road, including market women, passing traders or unemployed labourers, that he has been sacked.

He stops in front of each and shouts, 'Have you heard, friend - they've turned me out - me, the chief clerk of Fada and a friend of Mister Rudbeck? Did you ever hear anything like that? And all a mistake too. It's not Mister Tring's fault, you understand. He's been very nice and polite. It's the Treasurer, the Ma'aijin Gumna. I tell you, that man is sold to the devil. He is the deadly enemy of Mister Rudbeck, too. Of course, Mister Rudbeck knows his tricks - Rudbeck and me, we're a match for the Treasurer.<sup>56</sup>

By gratuitously defending Tring, unnecessarily attacking the innocent Gumma and failing to mention the real reason for his dismissal, he only succeeds in making himself an object of ridicule. Many days after the event he still finds it difficult to believe that he has been dismissed - 'Did you ever hear anything like that?' - and continues to hope that his 'friend', Rudbeck, will later absolve him from blame by proving the Treasurer wrong. His expectation is, of course, rightly not fulfilled.

An interesting feature of Johnson's character is the way his mood alternates between triumph and despair. This alternation of mood usually results in a comic situation. Whenever Johnson is in great difficulty, is unable to pay his creditors, has bungled his accounts in the office or suspects that Bamu may leave him because of his failure to pay the last instalment of the bride-price, he is overcome by despair:-

Oh, Gawd! Oh, Jesus! I done finish - I  
 finish now - Mister Johnson done finish -  
 Oh, Gawd, you no fit do nutting - Mister  
 Johnson too big dam' fool - he fool chile -  
 oh, my Gawd. He hits himself on the forehead  
 with his fist. Why you so bloody big dam'  
 fool, you Johnson? You happy for Fada -  
 you catch government job - you catch good  
 pay - you catch dem pretty girl - you catch  
 nice gentlemen frien's - you catch new shoes -  
 you big man - now you play de bloody fool -  
 you spoil everyting...<sup>57</sup>

But Johnson is not the type of boy to accept defeat easily, or remain in this kind of mood for long. He therefore quickly finds solutions to his problem, and, whenever he appears to be succeeding, he galumphs about and tells everybody about his exploits and heroism. His spirit rises again and he feels on top of the world:-

What fool chile stand in de way of Johnson?  
 What fool chile dis in Johnson's road?  
 Out of the way, fool chile; when Johnson go  
 walkum  
 The whole worl' make path for him, all same  
 for de lions of de forest  
 De whole sea go dry for him all same dat  
 King Moses from Egypt  
 De whole sky make light for him, all same  
 de fire for Moses.<sup>58</sup>

In this way Cary makes us follow Johnson's rise and fall in fortune - from his achievement as Mr. Rudbeck's trusted clerk and escort to Celia, Rudbeck's young wife, to dismissal for embezzlement; from enjoying the confidences of Sergeant Gollup, a white merchant, to another dismissal; from the construction of the great Fada road in collaboration with Rudbeck to the sack for receiving money illegally from lodgers in the zungos (local inns); from lavish parties as a very important person in Fada to his arrest, trial and execution for killing Gollup in a duel. Cary's artistic achievement lies in the rhythm which he makes out of the confused life of Johnson. When one examines closely this

sequence of events, one is tempted to agree with Cary that Johnson 'is a young clerk who turns his life into a romance, he is a poet who creates for himself a glorious destiny.'<sup>59</sup>

The 'romance' of Johnson's life lies in the way he is made a symbol of cultural clash without completely losing his identity. The Africans do not like him but court his favour because it is in their own interest that they should be on friendly terms with him. He is never understood by the white people with whom he works; they regard him as little more than a curiosity. Johnson allows himself a lot of freedom of action with these two groups. Just as he is ridiculed when these actions are silly, so he is treated with sympathy when occasionally he is creative or is the originator of useful ideas which produce effective results. A case in point is the construction of the Fada road, which represents his greatest joint achievement with Rudbeck. Johnson works extremely hard to ensure the success of the project. At a stage when Rudbeck appears to be at his wit's end and about to give up the project for financial reasons, it is Johnson who tells him how to get money. There is no doubt that this is Johnson's hour of glory and he thoroughly enjoys it. Rudbeck and Johnson ultimately experience the pleasure of seeing the road completed largely through community effort, of opening Fada for trade and of contributing their bit towards the economic liberation of the continent. The chapters dealing with the way the road is finished are some of the most vigorous in the novel. Cary leaves the reader in no doubt about his own interest in the matter and that the road is introduced as a symbol of change and economic progress, bringing with it problems of social adjustments. The road speaks up, as it were:-

I'm smashing up the old Fada - I shall change everything and everybody in it. I am abolishing the old ways, the old ideas, the old law; I am bringing wealth and opportunity for good as well as vice, new powers to men and therefore new conflicts. I am the revolution. I am giving you plenty of trouble already, you governors, and I am going to give you plenty more. I destroy and I make new. What are you going to do about it? I am your idea. You made me, so I suppose you know.<sup>60</sup>

However, the overall general impression one receives of Johnson is not that of a creative free individual. He no doubt has his own individual standard of behaviour and is occasionally creative. But his personal freedom is to some extent limited by his subordinate position and the various difficulties he creates for himself. He may frequently display abundant vitality and sometimes succeed in making the villagers respect his official position. But the comic elements in him are never far from the surface and, even at the moments of great achievements, detract from the quality of his contribution. This is how, as headman of all the gangs constructing the Fada road, he makes the workers feel the weight of his assumed importance and authority:-

He also buys himself a new canopy chair, a white helmet and a pair of patent leather shoes. He wears the shoes on Sunday; on the other days he goes barefoot, followed by a small boy, carrying the hat and the chair. He is never seen to sit in the chair. Whenever he visits a gang, it is set up and the hat laid on the canopy, like a royal crown above the chair of state. Johnson himself, having thus displayed the marks of his rank, goes among the gang, to swap jokes with the drummers or improvise a chorus. Sometimes he takes a hoe or a matchet, but though he makes with them the most tremendous gestures, he does not actually strike the ground or the scrub. He merely illustrates and expresses the act of digging and chopping, so that the actual workers both laugh at him and make a kind of poetry of their own hard work.<sup>61</sup>

Even the very serious occasion of his trial for the murder

of Gollup Johnson treats with surprising levity. He turns the trial into a tragicomedy and succeeds in forcing Rudbeck into the position of both judge and defence counsel. He relies on his assumed friendship with the judge to become free and, by his antics, burdens Rudbeck with a guilty conscience for having been partly responsible for his fate. Cary uses this dramatic moment in the novel to expose some of the weaknesses of the official policy pursued by Rudbeck. If, like Tring, Rudbeck had insisted on a correct accounting procedure and had not connived at Johnson's excesses, the boy might have avoided disaster. 'At the trial', says Miss Mahood, 'it is Rudbeck, the judge, who is captive and the prisoner Johnson who is free.'<sup>62</sup> Rudbeck is 'captive' only to the extent that he has unwittingly helped to bring about an undesirable situation. Johnson is 'free' only because he is unable to take the situation seriously, and, even after he has been sentenced to die by hanging, insists on being shot. The difference between Johnson, the comic figure, and Rudbeck, the serious-minded but erring Colonial official, cannot be more clearly dramatized. It is in the interaction between these two characters throughout the novel that Cary brings out the strengths and weaknesses of each of them, their various communities and of the Colonial Administration. The author's achievement in this connection has been adequately summarized by Wright:-

In his characterization of Mister Johnson Cary moves in a new direction: he explores the destructive as well as the creative aspect of the free man. I think it fair to say, in fact, that as his novels improve so his idea of the world matures. Cary can realize in art the shape of his world as the shape of the world clarifies itself in his own mind. Or it may be that in the act of creation itself Cary's world develops the shape which is a realization in both senses of the word.<sup>63</sup>



Cary's overall achievement in this novel is the most complete of the novels we have been considering. The image of Africa which emerges from it is closer to reality than those of the earlier novels. The author shows intimate knowledge of the relationship between the Native Authority and the Colonial Government in the way he describes the events of each of the three administrative periods headed in turn by Blore, Rudbeck and Tring and its effect on the development of his main character. Cary goes much further here than in The African Witch into native institutions and the problems of interpersonal relationships among Nigerians of different tribes. For example, compared with Celia, Bamu is much better prepared for marriage and settles down more easily into her new role; many of Johnson's troubles arise from the fact that as a Southern in Fada he is treated with suspicion by the local population. Moreover, this is the first novel to recognize African English, as many of the passages in pidgin English, already quoted, show.

However, the point must be made that Cary is paternalistic in his approach and reveals, as in The African Witch, a mental preference for the seamy aspects of Nigerian life. Except to satisfy the expectations of one's audience there is hardly any justification for calling Nigerians of 1936 'savages', 'barbarians', 'bush pagans' with 'crooked necks'. When Bamu greets her brother with respect as custom demands, she is said to mutter 'some pagan salutation'. Bamu herself is presented as an article for sale - the negotiation for the bride-price to be paid on her is never concluded. The Waziri, the traditional prime minister, next in rank and importance only to the Emir, is made an object of ridicule. According to Cary, he sits in his hut 'shivering on a

bamboo bed among dirty blankets. His shaved head without its turban looks as small and narrow as a dog's. The skin hangs on his face in deep wrinkles like an old boot and his eyes are sunk and bloodshot'.<sup>64</sup> The Emir himself is an old savage fool' who 'has no idea of civilized things'.<sup>65</sup> He is portrayed as an obstacle to progress, a reactionary force opposed to the construction of the trade road. Fada is a town with 'no beauty, convenience or health ... all its mud walls are eaten as if by small pox'. To complete the bleak image, we are told

Poverty and ignorance, the absolute government of jealous savages, conservative as only the savage can be, have kept it at the first frontier of civilization. Its people would not know the change if time jumped back fifty thousand years. They live like mice or rats in a palace floor; all the magnificence and variety of the arts, the ideas, the learning and the battles of civilization go on over their heads and they do not even imagine them.<sup>66</sup>

Such misrepresentations and unnecessary exaggerations detract not a little from the stature of this novel. Yet another kind of defect is evident. Cary writes of Nigerians of 1936 as people who are not touched by 'the battles of civilization' when, in fact, at this time the people were becoming conscious of their political rights and were organizing political parties in order to effectively demand these rights. Cary appears to ignore altogether this incipient African nationalism which is needed for a complete picture of the sort of life he attempts to portray. This omission has led Arnold Kettle to ask this question about the novel:-

Is this an entirely just appreciation of the African situation? Does it not leave out something essential, that rising tide of African national consciousness and effectiveness which today one knows to be a vital element in the cultural and political issues of West Africa? Is not the whole novel conceived within a paternalist attitude - the attitude of the liberal imperialist inadequate to the fullest and profoundest treatment of the subject?<sup>67</sup>

One must therefore conclude that in spite of the genuineness of Cary's literary effort, the image of Nigeria in his novels is not satisfactory. For, as Miss Mahood points out,

Because it is a world apart, Joyce Cary's Africa, though it may often give a shock of delighted recognition to the reader who knows Nigeria, is Joyce Cary's Africa and no one else's. It certainly is not the Nigeria of 1915 or 1936 as it might be recalled by the average expatriate of either date. Still less is it a Nigerian's Nigeria?<sup>68</sup>

Because the British novelist, whether totally unsympathetic like Wallace, uneasily mixed in feelings like Buchan, or paternalistically 'liberal' like Cary, had contrived to paint a picture of Africa to varying degrees misleading, Nigerian novelists have seen it as their duty to reconstruct in fiction a Nigerian's Nigeria out of the ruins of history and as an appropriate reaction to the misrepresentation of Africa which has gone on for so long. To do this effectively they base their authority on traditional culture 'within which art was functional and utilitarian as well as providing aesthetic pleasure'.<sup>69</sup> Chinua Achebe, probably the best known of these novelists, is fully alive to the seriousness of the duty which Nigerian history and environment impose on Nigerian writers. He believes that they should in their writing help to reassert Nigeria's true image and propagate its culture. At a lecture, the text of which was later published, on 'The Role of the Writer in a New Nation', after he had cited many passages from European Literature which portrayed Africans as people without culture he went on to suggest how a 'serious writer' should react to such a situation:-

This presents the African writer with a challenge. It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate, or be indifferent to this argument which calls his full humanity in question. For me, at any rate, there is a clear duty to make a statement. This is my answer to those who say that a writer should be writing about contemporary issues - about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last coup d'etat. Of course these are all legitimate themes for the writer but as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme - put quite simply -

is that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them ... In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history'.<sup>70</sup>

## VI

Another factor which might have affected the consciousness of Nigerian novelists is the past greatness of Africa as embodied in history and historical romance. Many of them might have been inspired by names like Jaja of Opobo, Oduduwa (the legendary father of the Yoruba), Overami of Benin and Utman dan Fodio. These men, as history records, carried out heroic exploits and successful adventures sometimes against the British Colonial power and generally showed themselves as men of great enlightenment for the age in which they lived. But a writer's intellectual stimulation is likely to have come from the exaltation of African greatness as embodied in literary works. Two of such works, to which frequent references have been made, are Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali and Chaka.<sup>71</sup> Not only do these works constitute important landmarks in the history of the development of prose writing in Africa; more relevant to the purpose of this study is the fact that they celebrate traditional values which are seen reflected in many Nigerian novels.<sup>72</sup>

In Sundiata one such value, held up for admiration, is the art of eloquence. The whole story which recounts the heroism of Sundiata, the legendary founder of the old kingdom of Mali, is told by the griot Kouyate, 'master in the art of eloquence'. He is the official propagator of tradition. His place in the society he describes is secure, his authority and mandate, unassailable. He is the memory of mankind and teaches 'kings the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve them as an example, for the world is old but the future springs from the past.'<sup>73</sup> 'It is he who, for want of archives, records the customs, traditions and governmental principles of kings.'<sup>74</sup> One is therefore given an impression of a story which has behind it the weight of authority and tradition. The dramatic impact the story has on the reader is achieved through the intense oral quality of the prose, vividly apparent even in translation. This epic tale relies for its success on the devices of traditional verbal art, especially the simple speech rhythms of the story-teller which are a prominent feature of the works of Amos Tutuola and Tafawa Balewa:-

Let us leave here, my son; Manding Bory and Djamarou are vulnerable. They are not yet initiated into the secrets of night, they are not sorcerers. Despairing of ever injuring you, Sassouma will aim her blows at your brother or sister. Let us go away from here. You will return to reign when you are a man, for it is in Mali that your destiny must be fulfilled.<sup>75</sup>

This is the style of one speaking direct to another. To escape from Barete's wrath, and in partial fulfilment of destiny, Sogolon decides to flee Mali with her children, confident that Sundiata will return there some day a greater man.

Sundiata offers a good example of a story told in order to achieve a declared objective - to dramatize Sundiata's heroism which results in the establishment of political order over the

wide area of the old Mali Empire and the acceptance of Islam as the official religion of this Empire. The narrator plays down the fact that these successes are achieved at the cost of much blood. In the usual African tradition, Sundiata is required to prove himself in war to establish his manliness. The fact that many die in the process is not considered important. To emphasize Sundiata's heroism, the disorder, terror and paganism of which Soumaoro is an embodiment are played up so that the hero can achieve a degree of immortality by successfully overcoming these divisive tendencies. These are some of the devices employed to publicise the heroic legacy of the African in this book. For all who accept the tradition on which the story is based, Mali is eternal, and the name Sundiata becomes a symbol of pride because, as the griot says, his achievements are unique:-

There are some kings who are powerful through their military strength. Everybody trembles before them, but when they die nothing but ill is spoken of them. Others do neither good nor ill and when they die they are forgotten. Others are feared because they have power, but they know how to use it and they are loved because they love justice. Sundiata belonged to this group. He was feared, but loved as well. He was the father of Mali and gave the world peace. After him the world has not seen a greater conqueror, for he was the seventh and last conqueror. He had made the capital of an empire out of his father's village and Niani became the navel of the earth.<sup>76</sup>

It is a matter for speculation to what extent the works of Nigerian writers like Balewa, Fagunwa and Tutuola have been influenced by the narrative techniques adopted in this tale. It is not unlikely, as Miss Bown points out in her article, that the kind of speeches which one finds in Achebe's novels, and the sermons and political addresses in the novels of T.M. Aluko owe a great deal to the display of eloquence in a work like Sundiata.

Sundiata and Chaka are full of references to the types of traditional practices and customs one comes across in Nigerian novels. In Sundiata, for example, there is an elaborate description of the different stages of the marriage ceremony between Maghan and Sogolon, culminating in the festivities of the wedding day:-

The royal drums of Nianiba announced the festivity at crack of dawn. The town awoke to the sound of tam-tams which answered each other from one district to another; from the midst of the crowds arose the voices of griots singing the praises of Nare Maghan.

At the home of the king's old aunt, the hairdresser of Nianiba was plaiting Sogolon Kedjou's hair. As she lay on her mat, her head resting on the hairdresser's legs, she wept softly, while the king's sisters came to chaff her, as was the custom.<sup>77</sup>

We are made aware of such elaborate preparations and display of public interest in the descriptions of the marriages between Akueke and Ibe in Things Fall Apart, Okuata and Obika in Arrow of God, Toro and Joshua in One Man, One Wife, to give only three examples.

The two early works under discussion show considerable interest in the problems of polygamy, especially the inevitable quarrels between two wives, the attendant domestic upheaval and the unhappiness for all concerned. As has already been pointed out, because of the conflict which develops between Barete and Sogolon after the death of their husband, Sogolon flees Mali with her children. A substantial portion of Sundiata is devoted to this journey which takes the hero and his entourage from Niani in Mali to Wagadou in Ghana and Nema in Niger. The sort of treatment they receive in each of these places is fully recorded. The hero returns later by the same route to fulfil his mission in Mali as the

founder of an empire. The problems of a polygamous household play a more crucial role in the events of Chaka, and result in circumstances similar to those which force the boy-wanderer into the Bush of Ghosts in Tutuola's novel. They also remind one of the tensions in Udezue's family in Highlife for Lizards, caused by the frequent quarrels between his two wives, Nwadi and Agom. Chaka's unpleasant experiences result from the jealousy of the other wives of his father. He and his mother are ill-treated; he is denounced as being 'born of sin' (an allusion to the fact that his mother conceived him as a result of pre-marital intimacy with his father) and molested by the other boys in the neighbourhood. His mother Nandi, in the face of such growing hostility, employs a witch-doctor who takes measures to protect her son:-

The messenger brought the medicines and Chaka was inoculated in his presence, after which the messenger returned. From that time Chaka had a wonderful love for fighting - either with the club or the spear. When he slept at night he dreamt of it, and in the day-time while awake he dreamt of it. When he saw a man with a stick or spear in his hand his whole body itched to come into contact with him. He dreamt that tribe after tribe was attacking him, and he saw himself scattering them single-handed with none of his people to help him. The only conversation he enjoyed was about fighting.<sup>78</sup>

It is the 'wonderful love for fighting' developed at this stage which determines the whole of Chaka's future career, and turns him into a bloody hero who has immortalized his name by the atrocities he perpetrates. For Mofolo's Chaka is the presentation of the tragic experience necessary for the welding together of numerous weak tribal units into a great nation. This union is achieved at the cost of much blood for which Chaka is largely responsible. But at no stage are we made to lose interest in the hero even though for the most part we are horrified by his activities. He is presented throughout as the inheritor of an ancient



culture and a man of great personal magnificence. We see in his fate 'the story of a human passion, an uncontrolled and then uncontrollable ambition which grew and developed fatally, as though fanned by some implacable Nemesis. Gradually it enveloped the whole personality, consuming all before it, until it led to the moral destruction of the character and inevitable punishment.'<sup>79</sup>

In Chaka the witch-doctor Isanusi enjoys a status in society comparable to that of the dibias in Amadi's novels. But he turns out to be the hero's evil genius, the means by which he becomes completely blood-thirsty - 'I will kill without a cause him whom I wish to kill, be he guilty or be he innocent, for this is the law upon earth. I will hearken to the entreaties of none'.<sup>80</sup>

Since Isanusi is accepted as the agent of the gods, it seems fair to conclude that here, as in Nzekwu's first two novels, the gods have intervened, as an instrument of fate, in the affairs of Chaka only to bring about disaster.

Like Fagunwa in all his novels, Mofolo takes the Christian moralistic view that 'the fruit of sin is wondrous bitter'.<sup>81</sup> If Chaka is conceived in sin, he cannot but suffer the just reward. To make sure of his ultimate downfall he is handed over to evil forces in the persons of Isanusi and his messengers, Malunga and Ndlebe. To this extent Chaka is not altogether responsible for his actions. Initially, the lust for power forms the basis of his ambition, but later this lust knows no bounds and results in the destruction of the work of enlightenment initiated by Dingiswayo. However, what seems to have ensured Chaka's place in the rank of African past heroes is that his cruelty and murders achieve a purpose considered pre-ordained, the founding of a Zulu nation. It is to his credit that he succeeds where others fail. Even where we deprecate some of his methods, we are compelled to

acknowledge his greatness. His activities and achievements are today alluded to all over the continent of Africa with respect and a sense of pride:-

Even to-day the Mazulu remember how that they were men once, in the time of Chaka, and how the tribes in fear and trembling came to them for protection. And when they think of their lost empire the tears pour down their cheeks and they say: 'Kingdoms wax and wane. Springs that once were mighty dry away.'<sup>82</sup>

Apart from Mofolo, other African writers have paid literary attention to Chaka. In a recent dramatic poem dedicated to the 'Bantu martyrs of South Africa' the distinguished Senegalese poet, Leopold Senghor, presents Chaka as the forerunner of African unity and a tower of strength to all Africans: 'You are the Zulu, by you we sprung up thick as corn, you are the nostrils through which we draw strong life. You are the broad-backed. You carry all the black-skinned peoples.'<sup>83</sup> Senghor's Chaka is given an opportunity of explaining away the atrocities committed by Mofolo's Chaka. This opportunity on each occasion comes as a result of a charge levelled by a 'white voice'. For example, Chaka answers the charge for the murder of Noliwe in this way:-

Yes, I killed her. With a steady hand, a flash of fine steel in the scented bush of her armpit. I should not have killed her had I loved her less. I had to escape from the doubt, from the inebriating milk of her mouth, and the fierce thudding of the night of my blood in my loins of boiling lava, from the uranium mine of my heart in the depths of my blackness, from my love for Noliwe to love of my black people.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from these two major works, references to Chaka abound in African Literature. He appears to have exerted more fascination on African writers than any other hero. Ndabaningi Sithole calls him the 'black Napoleon of South Africa' in African Nationalism.<sup>85</sup> H. Dhlomo, a South African writer, has written a play 'Chaka' for

the stage. So also has a government minister in Mali, Seydon Badian Couyate. As an African historical figure Chaka is known to have inspired the writing of such novels as Let My People Go by Chief Albert Luthuli and many others devoted to African political and cultural freedom. He is no doubt a significant part of the heroic legacy of Africa, and is likely to have affected the consciousness of many Nigerian writers.

## VII

Given their education and the historical environment I have described, what indigenous culture do the Nigerian novelists we are concerned with here reflect in their works? They seem conscious of the Nigerian heritage as manifested in her traditional art and craft - the culture reflected by the known antiquities of Nok, the terra cottas of Ife, the bronzes of Igbo Ukwu, the brasses of Benin, the pottery of Abuja, the Afo fertility figures from Nasarawa, the Idoma masks and the Tiv pipes, to mention only a few outstanding features.<sup>86</sup> But these novelists appear to be more interested in recreating in the reader's mind a whole traditional way of life, bringing out with varying degrees of realism, and different shades of attitude, its triumphs and failures. Frequent allusions are made to the people's customs, traditional ceremonies, community festivals, beliefs and rituals in order mainly to demonstrate their importance to the community, but occasionally to show the effect of external influence on traditional culture.

On the whole the impression created by many of these novels is of a people at an early stage of economic development,

living the simple rural life of farmers but with a political organization, moral conscience, and code of behaviour handed down by the elders and supported by tradition and custom. Into this social framework everyone tried to fit himself. The chief as the traditional leader of his people had enormous powers. But everybody, including the chief, was under the ultimate protection of a supreme deity who was in turn assisted by a pantheon of lesser gods to whom he assigned specific duties. These gods and the chiefs were responsible for maintaining traditional law and order and ensuring that justice was done to all, big or small. But, as is implied in some of these novels, traditional leaders failed their people on several occasions, mainly for selfish reasons, and laid themselves and the order they stood for open to attack.

In these novels Nigerian culture is portrayed with the necessary variation from place to place as regards details. Many of the novelists are Ibo and so reflect specifically in their writings Ibo culture, although most of what they write about will be valid for other parts of Nigeria. In The Way We Lived Rems Nna Umeasiegbu describes in some detail the Ibo customs to which many of these writers make frequent references.<sup>87</sup> He discusses the significance to the people of community festivals and treats other items like the breaking of kola, the use of cohise chalk, the worship of idols, the place of women in society, the birth of twins, wrestling, the functions of the tribal priest and the responsibilities of a titled man. Nigerian novels are full of allusions to these items and many others which they often consider side by side with the acquired values of Christianity and Western social ideals. In Arrow of God, for example, we see what importance villagers attach to their gods and the need for worshipping them regularly. Ezeulu as Chief Priest of Ulu, the

principal village god, is a very important person whose actions affect the welfare of the people. When on one occasion he fails to announce the Feast of the New Yam, the people go hungry, a great deal of suffering follows, and Ezeulu becomes the arrow of his god doing damage to the people.

Marriage and religion are frequent points of reference in a way that highlights the clash between the old and new. In Onuora Nzekwu's Wand of Noble Wood we see how Peter Obesie tries unsuccessfully to evade the sanctions of inherited culture by attempting to marry Nneka, a girl who is under the curse of 'iyi ocha'. As they are anxious to get married in the church they perform some rites so that the girl may be absolved from the curse. But she dies <sup>the</sup> a night before the wedding. Another apparent triumph for the old way of life, this time in the area of religion, is indicated in the same author's Blade Among the Boys. Patrick Ikenga who has recently become a member of the Catholic Church decides to dispense with ancestor worship altogether and become a priest. But by virtue of his position in the family he should take up the office of 'okpala', the spiritual head of his people. Patrick is tempted into an affair with Nkiru, the girl to whom he was formerly betrothed. Nkiru becomes pregnant, and Patrick is sent out of the seminary where he is training to become a priest. In Achebe's Things Fall Apart we are introduced to many aspects of Ibo culture. In the activities of Okonkwo we observe, among other things, the importance attached to titles in Ibo society, the duties and responsibilities of an ozo, the values, and at times the harshness, of traditional laws to which everybody is subject, the relationship between husband and wife, the place of the family and community gods, the potency of oracles, the patrilineal nature of Ibo society and wrestling as a village sport. In nearly all

the novels there is an indication of the usefulness of the people's mode of greeting and addressing a meeting, their system of self-help as shown by the Umuofia Progressive Union's help to Obi Okonkwo, their belief in an anthropomorphic god who is consulted on all important family occasions and their sense of hospitality which makes the breaking of kolanut an important symbolic act. According to an Ibo adage, 'he who brings kolanut brings life'.<sup>88</sup>

But these novelists by no means always approve of old customs and traditions. The way in which he treats the subject in No Longer At Ease strongly suggests that Achebe does not approve of the system of 'osu' in Iboland which makes outcasts of freeborn citizens merely because, sometime in the ancient past, their ancestors were presumed 'dedicated' to the gods. However, whatever the novelist's opinion, it must be pointed out that the belief was strong enough at the time he writes about to prevent Obi from marrying the osu girl, Clara. The treatment meted out to twins and 'abiku' (children born to die) is hardly justifiable. As Umeasiegbu points out, the practice seemed to be for twins 'to be drowned or thrown into a mighty jungle where carnivorous animals abound. The mother is taken away to a place where mothers of twins are purified. Here she spends ten market days alone in her hut.'<sup>89</sup> It will be recalled that Nwoye (later Isaac) in Things Fall Apart becomes so horrified first by the killing of twins and later by the death of Ikemefuna that he decides to embrace Christianity in order to escape from the traditional society which allows such atrocities to be committed. The concept of 'abiku' - the Ibo equivalent of this Yoruba word is 'Ogbanje' - is utilized by Amos Tutuola in his creation of the 'Burglar-ghosts' in My Life in the Bush of Ghosts. The general belief is that these children are wandering spirits born only to

die young and then return to be born again to the same mother. They choose certain families for their victims and into these families they allow themselves to be born. By their good looks and nature, everybody gets to like them. But theirs is a rebellious nature. They come when they please and go when they choose to go. All of a sudden, they take ill and die, usually on market days, when their kindred spirits are generally supposed to be around. Usually no charm is strong enough to make them stay against their will. They appear to take delight in torturing people, especially their parents. They want their mothers to cry over them; the more pain they cause over their death, the more respected they are considered to be among their fellow spirits. It is because of the grief and inconvenience they cause others that the abiku are usually brutally treated before they die.

Novelists from other parts of Nigeria refer in their works to these and other customs, but usually in a way that reflects their own particular culture. For instance, in One Man, One Wife Aluko depicts many aspects of Yoruba culture - strict parental control over children, arranged marriages, child and ghost marriages, the sacrifice of dogs to Ogun, the god of iron, the traditional sleep of chiefs (the act of taking poison to avoid disgrace of any kind), traditional religion and the strong belief in the gods of small pox and lightning. He brings out the enjoyment of riddles and folktales at moonlight gatherings by the children of Isolo village. Before Toro, the famous story-teller, decides on which story to narrate, these children who are already familiar with the story of the tortoise decide that Toro should tell them more about him. We see that during the narration there are interruptions from the children, made either to agree or to

disagree with the points raised by the story-teller or to identify with one or other of the characters of the story. The listeners also participate by either joining in the chorus of Toro's songs or clapping their hands to the beat of the music. The setting here could have been in any other part of Nigeria. Moonlight was a time for amusement, and one of the best evening entertainments children could have was to sit round the feet of the story-teller to listen to his stories. Apart from their use for entertainment these story-telling sessions also had an educational value. The effectiveness of the story-teller's performance was measured by the influence his stories had on the behaviour of the children who listened to him. They were expected to derive knowledge and wisdom from him and become familiar with the customs, traditions and religion of their people. The serious purpose behind the story-telling sessions was therefore to have children properly introduced and integrated into their cultural environment and ensure <sup>that</sup> they learnt the proper lessons from the achievements and failures of their ancestors. It is this immemorial practice that Aluko recreates for us.

On the other hand, Tafawa Balewa's Shaihu Umar, the only Hausa novel included in this study, brings before us the traditional life of the Hausa. There is a detailed description of court-life, the use of slaves and the traditional muslim system of education. In particular, aspects of Hausa marriage custom are fully utilized - the departure of the bride three days after the marriage ceremony to her husband's compound, the two-year weaning period, the role of the 'kawa' (a female bond-friend) and the duties of the bride as the latest wife of the husband.



## VIII

One common feature of these novels is the constant recourse the novelists make to oral traditions - riddles, proverbs, myths, legends and folklore. They draw a great deal on folk sources to localize the content of their works. Practically everyone of these novelists shows some skill in the African verbal art of conversation and attempts to enrich his work by the appropriate use of proverbs. These proverbs deal with all aspects of life and are usually employed to convey effectively moral lessons and advice. However, as Achebe points out, their importance for us lies in their judicious application in literary works:-

Proverbs by themselves have little significance. They are like dormant seeds lying in the dry-season earth, waiting for the rain. In Igbo they serve two important ends. They enable the speaker to give universal status to a special and particular incident and they are used to soften the harshness of words and make them more palatable. They are called in Igbo 'the palm-oil with which words are eaten'. Palm-oil by itself is not food. If you want to eat you must look for yams, plantains, or dried meat; palm-oil and pepper will then be added to them from your wife's hut. If literate Africans cannot be persuaded to be enthusiastic about the collection of proverbs, however, one hopes that African writers will make use of them in dialogue, for which they were originally intended.<sup>90</sup>

These and other traditional modes of communication, especially as they are reflected in the writer's English, will be thoroughly considered in this thesis which regards the Nigerian Novel as an attempt to transliterate traditional customs, beliefs and attitudes, the characters of myths and legends, a whole universe of ancestors, into an entirely new context of the twentieth century, employing a language to which the modern reader can respond. The work gives detailed consideration to the salient features of this attempt and assesses how successfully in each case the link between tradition and modern experience has been

established.

In each of these novels important customs, beliefs and practices are selected for treatment, but nowhere does this necessarily mean total and uncritical commitment to them. These writers frequently expose to critical scrutiny, at various levels, those aspects of tradition which, if left unchanged, may be in the way of progress. Sometimes the retarding effect of tradition on social development and political advance is explicitly put:-

"Mazi Ofodile, I have come here today to see you all and to express my deepest sympathy for the death of your brother. As you know, he was a close friend of mine."

'Father Joseph,' Mazi Ofodile barked out, 'I cannot pretend to be pleased to see you here. I am not.'

'Mazi Ofodile!' called the priest in playful reproach. 'Where is your African hospitality?'

'African hospitality is a dirty phrase as far as I am concerned,' replied the mazi. 'It has cost us a continent.'<sup>91</sup>

Ofodile does away with the constraint imposed by tradition, rejects the traditional notion of 'African hospitality' and tells the European priest he is not a welcome guest, considering the circumstances of his visit.

If the past is not invariably described with affection, the realities and dilemmas of the present are not glossed over. These novelists are as critical of the present as they are of the past. When occasionally they appear to show a nostalgia for the traditional past, it is only as an indication of their impatience with man's selfishness and greed in contemporary society:-

Our fathers' insides always contained things straight. They did straight things. Our insides were also clean and we did the straight things until the new time came.<sup>92</sup>

Okara is not recommending a return to the past. He is rejecting the values of the present and suggesting that contemporary society could benefit from the wisdom of the ancients as embodied in the

inherited way of life.

Even a writer like Achebe who shows great admiration for Ibo culture clearly indicates in his writings that this culture contained the seed of its own destruction. A society which barricades itself against any kind of outside influence will inevitably suffer moral decline: a situation which spells doom for strong men like Okonkwo and Ezeulu but allows corrupt court messengers and political upstarts, like Nwaka, to prosper cannot be expected to last for too long. However, there are writers like Amadi and Tutuola who do not appear to be preoccupied with making explicit statements about the particular culture which they reflect in their works. They seem more interested in dramatizing the connection between the past and present experiences of their various communities. Amadi, for example, makes no obvious special effort to convince the reader that the Ibo people have a culture of their own; this conviction emerges by way of implication from an intelligent reading of his novels.

The approach adopted in this thesis is one of close analysis of texts. I have not aimed at any kind of comprehensive examination of all the novels available. Even where all the novels of a particular author are treated, it has sometimes been necessary to pay greater attention to some than others. In a few cases only one of the several works of an author has been discussed in detail. My main concern has been to find out how critically an author has presented those aspects of tradition he has selected for treatment and how successfully he dramatizes in his works the realities and dilemmas of the present. On each author answers are sought to a number of searching questions. What are the particular values the writer is upholding or opposing, and what is his attitude to them? What particular emotional or

intellectual effect does he hope to achieve, and does he succeed? If he does, by what methods of communication? If he fails, from what problems of communication has failure resulted, and what effect does this have on the reader? What sympathies are evoked, and how do we see a particular work in the body of works of a particular author?

A writer's language is a mirror held up to his personality and his particular circumstances. It is through his use of language that he reflects his individual awareness of a given situation. The detailed study of language leads, almost inevitably, to a consideration of the more fundamental problems of communication. Even though all save one of the novelists to whom this thesis is devoted use English as their creative medium, they do so in the consciousness of the fact that they are presenting a Nigerian experience, and the best of them reveal in their works a specific mode of the imagination which derives from their Nigerian background. It has therefore been necessary in all cases to examine closely the use of language by each novelist and try to assess how effectively the artist has communicated. Since, as was previously pointed out, each of these novelists started his education in his mother tongue (L1) and then went on to learn English as a second language (L2), great interest is shown in this work in the influence of L1 on L2 in the writings of individual authors. As will become evident, this influence is greater in some cases than others; innocent in some cases, deliberate in others. Even in novels like Many Thing You No Understand and Wind versus Polygamy where the effect of L1 on L2 seems negligible, this factor is taken into account in my assessment of the works.

Each novelist has represented the link between indigenous culture and modern experience in his own particular way. Themes vary a great deal from one writer to another. To reflect this variety, it has been necessary to concentrate attention on the most significant theme treated in a body of works or occasionally on a particular attitude of mind or approach to creativity which seems unique in an author. For instance, with Tutuola what seems most remarkable is his growing sophistication as a writer, which is evident in the differences in structure and style between The Palm-Wine Drinkard and Ajaiyi. But with this progressive improvement in his literary powers comes a gradual falling off from the great achievement of his first novel. In chapter three I discuss at length Achebe's interest in communication at various levels - between peoples of different cultures and religious beliefs, between people of the same race and political inclination, between different sections of the same community, between the Government and the people, between the town and country. As is emphasized in the chapter, disaster results in Achebe from a breakdown in communication either between two individuals or between an individual and his community.

In chapter four Aluko is discussed as a leading Nigerian satirist. When he looked around him in Western Nigeria in the fifties he saw, among other things, a large measure of bad politics and the misleading of ordinary people. It is this disturbing state of affairs that he calls attention to in his novels in the hope of bringing about improvement. His writings become more satirical as the situation gradually deteriorates, leading to the civil war. In chapter five the difference is brought out clearly between the mind of the imaginative writer and that of the documentary novelist. While Nzekwu for the most part merely talks about Ibo customs and lore, Amadi, like Achebe,

would dramatize a point in such a context that its importance is fully appreciated. Each of the novels in chapter six has been selected either because of the writer's attitude to tradition or some interesting ways it seeks to solve the problems of communication. Some of these methods have been more successful than others. Success or failure in social criticism has largely depended on how clear an indication a writer gives both of the need for change and the direction it should take in order to establish a relevant link between tradition and modern experience.

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- 55 Joyce Cary, Mister Johnson, Carfax Edition, (London, 1961) p.50. All page references are to this edition.
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## Chapter Two

Amos Tutuola

Of all the novelists discussed in this thesis Amos Tutuola stands closest to first sources, to the roots of oral tradition. His six novels draw freely on Yoruba folklore, his main source, and his attitude to the culture which produced it is one of near uncritical total acceptance. These novels are written in English but it is a type of English which represents a bodily translation from Yoruba, Tutuola's first language, in which he probably does all his thinking.<sup>1</sup> This peculiar use of English, considered unacceptable or even offensive by some Nigerians, has helped to ensure a predominant oral tone and reinforce the cultural value of his works. But it has also helped to keep him in the centre of a great literary controversy in which, initially at least, he fared better abroad than at home.<sup>2</sup>

Tutuola has been admired abroad and rejected at home for the wrong reasons. Because most of the criticism of his works has been based on this controversy it is important to point out as briefly as possible the fallacies in the previous arguments and approaches of both sides before indicating what, in fact, forms the basis of Tutuola's true literary greatness. As a result of a largely-unnecessary argument the essentials of his achievements as a creative writer have either been glossed over or completely misapplied.

Foreign critics on the whole appear to have overestimated Tutuola's intellectual experience. They seem to have endowed him with a vast knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology.<sup>3</sup> To appreciate their point of view one must imagine a Tutuola who at one stage or other in his career studied Jung's theory of

archetypes, read Joseph Campbell's The Hero With a Thousand Faces, thus assimilating its ideas of the cycle of the heroic monomyth, Departure - Initiation - Return, studied in detail the purpose, course and outcome of the classic journeys of Aeneas, Orpheus and Odysseus, for example, and made up his mind to write novels utilizing these ideas and forms. This pattern of criticism was initiated by Gerald Moore in 1962 and has since been applied by foreign critics with only a few minor modifications. Moore's criticism was on the whole perceptive and informed. But the same cannot be said for many of the Western critics who followed him. Mrs. Anne Tibble's work, for example, contains several vague generalisations. For the sake of brevity only one example is cited. Writing about The Palm-Wine Drinkard she says 'the quest Tutuola tells of incorporates fantasies that most of us as children encountered in dream and daydream or in legends. Legends would include Biblical myth, heroic myth, Greek, and north-European myth. Mingled with these are myths of a lurid Africa partly of Tutuola's fervent imagination, partly of his knowledge of Yoruba oral folktales'.<sup>4</sup> The mistakes here are obvious. Mrs. Tibble confuses the three distinct narrative forms of myth, legend and folktale and makes unsubstantiated claims on the past experiences of her readers and on the way Tutuola's mind works. For this and other faults in her book she has been castigated in an article by Bernth Lindfors.<sup>5</sup> Such garbled statements, made by foreign critics in an attempt to impress others with Tutuola's intellectual achievement, do not go down well with his countrymen who know him personally and are conscious of the limited educational opportunity he had and his low academic attainment. Dr. Harold Collins comes

close to the correct assessment of the situation when in his book he says 'although the response of Western critics was right in the main, it was somewhat uncritical, as though they were bowled over by the strange manner and the subject matter of Tutuola's romances. On the other hand, the unfavourable response of the West Africans, though substantially wrong, raised most of the right critical issues.'<sup>6</sup>

One of the issues constantly raised by Nigerians is the importance attached abroad to Tutuola's language and the unusual effect which foreign critics have claimed the language has on the content of the books. The language has been erroneously claimed to be a great experiment. Dr. Collins writes ecstatically about Tutuola's linguistic accomplishments and after claiming for him 'a fixed grammar' concludes that 'Tutuola's innocent manhandling of our language gives results that are extremely interesting for language study; they suggest the malleability of the language, the possibilities in the language for creative expansion and development, for freshness, and for the assimilation of alien ideas.'<sup>7</sup> Any such results must be wholly unintentional. Tutuola is no conscious experimenter in the English language; his mastery of the language has never been sound enough for him to want to experiment with it. He left school at the end of the first year of secondary education, at a stage when his English was naturally not entirely free from vernacular influence. This experience is not peculiar to Tutuola. It is a stage which every educated Nigerian, including the most sophisticated writers, have had to go through. What has made this stage important in Tutuola's case is that he did not get a chance of formal education beyond it. So he has

carried Yoruba speech habits into English and writes in English as he would speak in Yoruba. This point is easily appreciated by a Yoruba-speaking reader of Tutuola's novels. As Mrs. Omolara Leslie has pointed out with reference to The Palm-Wine Drinkard, 'he has simply and boldly (or perhaps innocently) carried across into his English prose the linguistic patterns and literary habits of his Yoruba language using English words as counters. He is basically speaking Yoruba but using English words.'<sup>8</sup>

The characteristics which have affected Tutuola's prose style arise from the fact that Yoruba is a tonal language unlike English which is an inflected language. In English the form of the word changes according to its use and part of speech. So the word 'go' changes to 'went' when used in the past tense and assumes many other forms according to its use - 'is going', 'has gone', 'are going', 'had gone' and so on. The Yoruba word for 'go' is 'lo' - that is, when it is pronounced with a particular accent - and it does not change whatever the part of speech, whether singular or plural. Only auxiliary words reveal these differences. A further complication is introduced by the fact that a speaker only has to change his accent for the same word to mean 'grind' or 'twist' in all the possible inflections, singular and plural. It is because of the tonal nature of his language that the Yoruba tends to say the same thing in a few different ways in order to make sure he is communicating. For, as a result of the application of the wrong accent on 'lo', his hearer will mistake 'go' for 'grind' or 'twist'. Exaggeration results from the unconscious attempt to justify the need for repetition so that on each occasion a slightly different version of a previous statement is given,

with something usually added to make it sound more important. At times, a previous word and a new one, considered weightier or more descriptive, are used together during repetition. This often results in word-play. Furthermore, because of the symbolic nature of the language there is a more frequent use of personification and concrete images in Yoruba than in English. All these influence Tutuola's English. He benefits in his writing from the Yoruba's love of rhetoric and word-play, his use of proverbs and epigrams. In this passage he presents Laugh personified and reveals a sheer love of words:-

... and we knew "Laugh" personally on that night, because as every one of them stopped laughing at us, "Laugh" did not stop for two hours. As "Laugh" was laughing at us on that night, my wife and myself forgot our pains and laughed with him, because he was laughing with curious voices that we never heard before in our life. We did not know the time that we fell into his laugh, but we were only laughing at "Laugh's" laugh and nobody who heard him when laughing would not laugh, so if somebody continue to laugh with "Laugh" himself, he or she would die or faint at once for long laughing, because laugh was his profession and he was feeding on it. Then they began to beg "Laugh" to stop, but he could not.<sup>9</sup>

The Satyr gives us one of the finest examples of Tutuolan rhetoric and word-play during his initial encounter with Simbi and Rali:-

Who are you? What are you? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? or don't you know where you are? Answer me! I say answer me now! .... Certainly, you have put yourselves into the mouth of 'death'! You have climbed the tree above its leaves! You see me coming and you too are coming to me instead to run away for your lives!

By the way, have you not been told of my terrible deeds? And that I have killed and eaten so many persons, etc. who were even bold more than you do?<sup>10</sup>

Even his peculiar use of punctuation, resulting in an unending combination of sentences, Tutuola owes to his Yoruba speech:-

When he tried all his power for several times and failed and again at that moment the smell of the gun-powder of the enemies' guns which were shooting repeatedly was rushing to our noses by the breeze and this made us fear more, so my brother lifted me again a very short distance, but when I saw that he was falling several times, then I told him to leave me on the road and run away for his life perhaps he might be safe so that he would be taking care of our mother as she had no other sons more than both of us and I told him that if God saves my life too then we should meet again, but if God does not save my life we should meet in heaven.<sup>11</sup>

Here Tutuola adopts the conventional Yoruba orthography which permits the stringing together of many sentences as a single unit. In practically every section of the passage the Yoruba comes out true and clear from beneath the English prose. Only a few examples need be cited.

He tried all his power.  
O sa gbogbo agbara re.

The smell of the gun-powder of the enemies' guns which were shooting  
Orun ota ibon ti awon ota nyon.

(Yoruba leads Tutuola to use the active voice, 'were shooting' instead of the passive)

When I saw that he was falling several times  
Nigbati mo ripe o nsubu loye igba

(Because he is translating direct from Yoruba, Tutuola uses the past continuous, 'was falling' instead of the simple past, 'fell' which is more appropriate in the context)

She had no other sons more than both of us.  
Ko ni awon omo emiran ju awa meji lo.

(It is worth pointing out that no comparison is intended here. Tutuola's use of 'more than' results from his translation of the



Yoruba word 'ju' which usually means 'greater', 'bigger' (in size) but which in this context translates as 'only', 'apart from')

Tutuola's English is therefore what might be described as 'Yoruba English' because of its dependence on Yoruba linguistic characteristics. Such characteristics are responsible for the type of syntactic and lexical deviations from the norms of Standard English which we find in expressions like these:

I ran to his back.<sup>12</sup>

Tutuola uses 'to his back' (from Yoruba 'sehin re') instead of English 'behind him'.

All of them shouted with gladness.<sup>13</sup>

Tutuola uses 'with gladness' (from Yoruba 'pelu ayo') instead of English 'for joy'.

When I entered the room I met a bed.<sup>14</sup>

Tutuola uses 'met' (from Yoruba 'ba') instead of English 'found'. 'ba' has a wider semantic field than 'to meet'. It also means 'to overtake' or 'to find out'.

She did not listen to her father.<sup>15</sup>

Tutuola confuses 'listen' (from Yoruba 'feti sile') with English 'heed', 'pay attention to' (an advice).

Frequently Tutuola's attempt to draw a parallel between Yoruba and English syntax results in clumsy or ungrammatical sentences.

They saw me lied down there.<sup>16</sup>

We saw a male child came out of it.<sup>17</sup>

We were travelling inside bush to bush as before<sup>18</sup>

In the first two examples Tutuola seems to have overlooked

the fact that, unlike Yoruba, English is an inflected language, and has attempted to impose the syntactic regularity of Yoruba on English. Often the structures of his sentences are not English but Yoruba:

He (Death) asked me from where  
did I come?... Then he asked  
me what did I come to do?<sup>19</sup>

To my surprise was that since I had  
done so I did not think so much about  
the horns.<sup>20</sup>

A sentence like this reveals Tutuola's interesting use of the adverbial:

Whenever I reached a town or village, I  
would spend almost four months there, to  
find out my palm-wine tapster from the  
inhabitants of that town or village and if  
he did not reach there, then I would leave  
there and continue my journey...<sup>21</sup>

The first 'there' means 'in that place', the second, 'to that place' and the third, 'from that place', a situation which ought to have been made clear in the context by the use of the appropriate adverb in each case. Tutuola uses 'there' to express the three different senses because the same Yoruba word 'ibe' would do in all cases.

Another Yoruba influence on Tutuola's language is shown in his use of proverbs and gnomic sayings, usually translated literally from the original. There are numerous examples in each of the novels, appropriately applied in the true Yoruba tradition to lend weight to the narrative. In The Brave African Huntress and Ajaiyi suitable proverbs are used as superscriptions to some of the chapters, thus enabling the knowledgeable reader to determine in advance the contribution of the particular chapter to the progress of the story as a whole. At times some of these proverbs have been taken

from the text and have only been made more prominent by their use as superscriptions. A few examples will suffice:

A person who chased two rats at a time  
would lose all.<sup>22</sup>  
Enito o ba leku meji a pofo.

All days are for the thief to thief  
but one day is for the owner to catch  
the thief.<sup>23</sup>  
Ojo gbogbo ni ti ole, ojo kan ni ti onirun

When there is a quarrel the song becomes  
an allusion  
Ija lo mu orin da bi owe.

It is the end that shows the winner.<sup>24</sup>  
Igbehin ni alayo nta.

The names Tutuola gives to places and things are also influenced by his first language: 'unreturnable Heaven's town' is a direct translation of Yoruba 'ilu-orun-ayun-ibo'; Bush of Quietness: 'igbo kiji' and 'Gladness becomes Weeping': 'Ayo dekun'

These are some of the linguistic devices - all borrowed from Yoruba - which have given Tutuola's prose style its distinctive and peculiar quality. The impression given by some critics is that Tutuola has invented - or discovered - a totally new type of English prose usable only by himself and no one else. The reason for discussing the stylistic features of his writing in such detail is to help correct this wrong notion, particularly common among non-Yoruba-speaking admirers of Tutuola. There is no intention here to undermine his literary achievements or deny the effectiveness of his language but merely to emphasize that his language is 'new' not in the sense of an invention but in the way it has been applied with great imaginative power to a new situation. Dr. A. Afolayan has come to much the same conclusion after a careful

study of Tutuola's language.<sup>25</sup> He has found that Tutuola's language in his earlier books has the same linguistic and stylistic features as English written by Yoruba-speaking school children in the second year of secondary school. Some improvement in the control of English is observed in the later novels where, according to Dr. Afolayan, the English approximates to the standard of secondary Class Four. After allowing for some amount of editing done by the publishers, he concludes that 'Tutuola's English is neither an idiolect (a unique form of the Language personal to the writer) nor a living dialect or sub-dialect of English used deliberately to achieve local colour, but a brand of Nigerian, or more exactly, Yoruba English resulting from the interaction of the two languages and an imperfect education in English. Tutuola, in fact, writes English as well as he knows how'.<sup>26</sup>

It is because Nigerians possess such a background knowledge of Tutuola that they are surprised at the exaggerated claims sometimes made for his language by some foreign critics who often mix fact with fiction because they are so uncertain of the details of their offerings. Such lapses occur in even some of the best works of criticism available. It is necessary to discuss one important example. Dr. Collins' book, to which reference has already been made, is not free from errors of facts and assessment. This book, according to the author, was written after a long period of research and travelling in Nigeria with the aim of helping to sell Tutuola to his countrymen. Where Dr. Collins, a confessed admirer of Tutuola, stays close to the text of the novels -

he calls them variously ghost novels, naive quest romances, romances and folk novels - he is often sound in his interpretation. He makes his most serious mistakes when he attempts to interpret the background against which Tutuola writes. Thus, for example, he confesses himself "somewhat troubled by the cryptic epigraphs under the chapter headings in The Brave African Huntress ... since some of them are very obscure. But perhaps the publishers could not throw their weight around and 'persuade' the gentle Tutuola to drop these epigraphs or make them clearer ..."<sup>27</sup> The 'cryptic epigraphs' complained of here are the proverbs with which Tutuola makes his novels more meaningful and readable. Dr. Collins also shows lack of knowledge - or is it respect? - of Yoruba tradition when he holds up to ridicule the situation in Simbi when "a terrified bell-ringer lies prostrate, momentarily expecting the king to 'behead him or send him to somewhere.' Obsequious courtiers (and no courtiers are more obsequious than old-time African ones) scramble for the privilege of blowing the smoke out of the ceremonial pipe, and hold it while the king smokes, the bell-ringer being prostrate all the while."<sup>28</sup> All that the 'terrified bell-ringer' has done here is to comport himself in the presence of the king according to the demands of tradition. Unfortunately Dr. Collins sees this as something laughable. Again, Collins has found completely baffling "the special designations for days of the week in The Brave African Huntress. These rather intriguing epithets sound as though they referred to some body of African thought - 'Day of Confusion Wednesday' 'Day of New Creation which was Thursday ....."<sup>29</sup> For those who know, these are

the literal English translations of the Yoruba names for these days. But Collins sees this as 'one curious example of Tutuola's creativity' which involves 'syncretism' and needs to be 'satisfactorily explained'. There are a few factual errors like his definition of 'shakabullah' as 'the rather primitive dane gun imported from Europe in the nineteenth century',<sup>30</sup> - this happens to be a locally-made inferior type of gun, so called because of the noise it makes - or his sensational assertion that some Nigerian languages are 'spoken by less than seven hundred persons'.<sup>31</sup>

In pointing out these errors of fact and interpretation, it is not my intention to belittle Dr. Collin's literary effort or to deny his book every kind of merit. There is no reason to believe he is more prone to these faults than others. The intention has been to show the types of mistakes to which a critic is liable when he is criticising books written against the background of a culture with which he is not thoroughly familiar and by an author like Tutuola who has been particularly reticent about his works and objectives.

The initial objections of fellow-Nigerians to Tutuola were of a different kind and are more easily disposed of.

According to Ulli Beier,

Nigerian readers complained... that Tutuola wrote 'wrong' English, that his books were a mere 'rehash' of grandmother tales they had all heard before. They alleged that Europeans were merely attracted by the quaint exotic qualities of the book and that they did not judge the work on literary merits.<sup>32</sup>

They denied him any claim to originality and even accused him of plagiarism, asserting that he merely attempted to do

in English what had been successfully done in Yoruba by Mr. Fagunwa, another Yoruba novelist.

Nearly all these accusations are unfounded. Nigerians are gradually realising this and have begun to take more kindly to Tutuola.<sup>33</sup> It is not difficult to clear him of many of the charges. The reasons for his type of English have already been given. His detractors show their ignorance of oral traditions when they confuse myths with folktales and legends. Myths deal with racial matters of great significance and are usually fixed in form. Legends as fragments of history tend to be factual. Only folktales can be easily adapted to suit a writer's artistic purpose. For this reason Tutuola uses mainly folktales, makes a few references to legends, but only occasionally employs myths, one imagines because of their ritual significance. The general framework of each folktale is well-known but each narrator embellishes it in a way that appeals to him most, usually in an attempt to make its content relevant to a particular situation or audience. His version of the story then becomes original to him. Even so, there is no means of preventing another story-teller from using his particular version or a modification of it since there is no problem of copyright involved. In this type of situation it is difficult to see how the charge of lack of originality can be sustained against Tutuola who, as he is well entitled to do, has used his own versions of some of these stories in a creative sort of way. It will soon become obvious how well he has performed this task.

The charge of plagiarism is a serious one and needs very careful consideration. Were it to be conclusively proved that Tutuola merely copied Fagunwa without acknowledgement, that he exercised no originality of his own, this would completely destroy his reputation as a creative writer. The aim of any investigation therefore must be to find out whether Tutuola is indebted to Fagunwa at all; if yes, what type of debt and to what extent. This matter is so crucial for any true appreciation of Tutuola's work that it has rightly exercised the minds of most of his critics.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately no completely satisfactory answer has emerged from these attempts. Some critics like Collins plainly confess themselves unable to pronounce on the matter while others have arrived at conclusions which can hardly be supported by their scanty evidence. One piece of criticism worthy of serious consideration is that of Lindfors both because of his method of approach and his conclusion. Lindfors starts his article with a general discussion of the type of material used by Tutuola and Fagunwa and finds that 'certainly they share a lot of common ground'.<sup>35</sup> He then goes on to make a comparative analysis, supported by close references, of some episodes and characters in Tutuola's The Palm-Wine Drinkard and Simbi and Fagunwa's Igbo Olodumare and The Forest of a Thousand Daemons which is Soyinka's translation of Fagunwa's Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale. His conclusion deserves to be quoted in full and discussed:-

Indeed, it is conceivable that Tutuola seems closest to Fagunwa when Fagunwa is closest to oral tradition. Without folktale texts suitable for comparative study it is impossible to assess accurately all of Tutuola's



debts. But it can be assumed that Fagunwa's books taught Tutuola how to weave a number of old stories into a flexible narrative pattern that could be stretched into a book. Fagunwa's contribution to Tutuola should perhaps be measured more in terms of overall structure and descriptive technique than in terms of content. Tutuola followed Fagunwa's lead and travelled in the same direction but he did not always walk in Fagunwa's tracks.<sup>36</sup>

Here, as elsewhere, 'Tutuola's debts' are still 'impossible to assess accurately' and the conclusion has been based on an assumption. Like all the other conclusions, this one has ignored some basic facts about the works and circumstances of Fagunwa and Tutuola. The one wrote in Yoruba which he knew very well, the other in English which he knows very little. The one wrote mainly in order to help satisfy the need for reading material in church-related schools, the other, with a more catholic intention to entertain adults. Although Fagunwa started his writing career before Tutuola, for eleven years, from 1950 to 1961, both were actively involved in writing fiction. This point is important because the impression that is created by critics anxious to emphasize Tutuola's debt to Fagunwa is that Fagunwa had ceased writing when Tutuola started, thus leaving the latter free to plagiarize the former. One reason 'Tutuola seems closest to Fagunwa when Fagunwa is closest to oral tradition' is, as has been pointed out, that these stories were available for everybody to use and adapt to his particular need. It seems more reasonable to suppose that the two writers drew from this common pool. Given the differences in objectives and readership, and the fact that in a sense, although a limited one, they were contemporaries, the conclusion is almost inescapable that Tutuola had very little cause or opportunity to borrow direct from Fagunwa,

that the similarities on which critics have capitalized have arisen from the fact that both writers relied on traditional Yoruba folklore, Tutuola doing so more heavily than Fagunwa.

This opinion is easily confirmed by a close study of the different ways Fagunwa and Tutuola make use of common sources and because of some fundamental difference in attitude. A comparison between one of Fagunwa's novels, The Forest of a Thousand Daemons, and some of Tutuola's reveals that there are indeed incidents and episodes common to both writers. Since the claim for Tutuola's indebtedness is usually based on such incidents, it is necessary to examine them in detail to see to what extent the claim can be sustained. These are some of the main points of similarity: Agbako in Fagunwa is comparable to the Satyr in Simbi,<sup>37</sup> in Fagunwa Helpmeet helps Akaraogun in almost the same way the Faithful-Mother helps the Drinkard and his wife in The Palm-Wine Drinkard,<sup>38</sup> in Fagunwa Akaraogun encounters Egbin, in Tutuola the boy-wanderer in Bush of Ghosts encounters the Smelling Ghost.<sup>39</sup> Other similar incidents include magical gifts to the hero - stone to Akaraogun and egg to Drinkard in The Palm-Wine Drinkard,<sup>40</sup> the use of melodious music as a trap,<sup>41</sup> the half-bodied baby motif<sup>42</sup>, display of ingratitude<sup>43</sup> and the loss of some members on an expedition or journey.<sup>44</sup>

The similarity is for the most part superficial and is attributable only to the fact that they both used a common source. Fagunwa's Agbako has nothing to compare with the ferocity of Tutuola's Satyr in the same way as Akaraogun has nothing to show for the grim determination of Simbi. The monsters appear twice and are twice defeated. But while

Simbi in her second deadly encounter with the Satyr stands her ground and fights hard to ensure the defeat of the monster, Akaraogun shows mighty despair as soon as he sees Agbako the second time and leaves the other members of his party to do the fighting:-

We climbed a certain hill to the top, only to see Agbako coming towards us from the other side of the hill and, as soon as I set eyes on him, I cried, 'We are lost!', and when these travellers to Langbodo asked me why I cried thus, and I told them, Kako was furious and so were the rest of the fearless hunters in the group. Before Agbako came upon us, Efoiye shot an arrow; it hit him but it did not pierce him. He shot a second one with the same result. He shot a third but the target did not turn aside.<sup>45</sup>

It is Kako who finally kills Agbako. This incident is important not only because it reveals the different reactions of the hero and heroine to two somewhat similar situations but also because of the light it throws on one of the important techniques employed by Tutuola to make the personages and situations in his novels memorable. Further references will be made to this technique later. It is Tutuola's method to build up each of the two parties to an encounter to such a tremendous height that the reader comes to believe that each party speaks from a position of strength. Usually the hero is equipped with some magical power for his fight with a fierce monster. The preparation for the fight takes some time, usually devoted to verbal duel, so that a fully-charged atmosphere is created. When the encounter finally takes place, it is usually a deadly one since both monster and hero go into it confident of victory. Meanwhile, the reader is put in a state of anxiety for the outcome. Hence we find

that when, during their first meeting in the Dark Jungle, the Satyr threatens to kill Simbi and Rali, Simbi replies with great confidence, attempts to infuse fear into the mind of the Satyr and thus create the needed atmosphere of tension:-

Then she looked at him as if he was an ant and then she began to roar on him  
 "Though I believe that you are the Satyr of this Dark Jungle and I do believe that you have killed and eaten several wayfarers or refugees like us!

But to make it clear to you is that, refugees are quite different from refugees! Therefore I tell you now that if you insult us as well as you have done to others! Believe me! you will be one of the inhabitants of heaven today! And doubtless, you will dine with them today!<sup>46</sup>

Fagunwa's Helpmeet is not as convincing a character as Tutuola's Faithful-Mother doubtless because she is dismissed in half a page. The stone given Akaraogun by his mother during his second sojourn in the Forest of a Thousand Deamons serves only the limited purpose of helping him cross from one section of the Forest to the other while the Drinkard's magic egg helps to avert the annihilation of a whole community as a result of famine. Fagunwa's Egbin is in all respects inferior to Tutuola's Smelling-Ghost who is held in high esteem by the other smelling-ghosts. The half-bodied baby motif is such a common one, with so many versions, that it can hardly be used to prove one writer's indebtedness to another.<sup>47</sup> It would appear on the whole from what has been said that even where similar motifs have been used by both writers, they have been used rather differently. The intention has not been to assess the relative merits of the two writers or to show that one is inferior to the other. It is to emphasize that Tutuola's debt to Fagunwa may be much less than many critics have suggested.

What makes this view particularly attractive to hold is the fact that Tutuola has not allowed himself to be affected by the sentimentalism and the evangelical zeal of Fagunwa.

It would be difficult to find anything like this in Tutuola:-

God is almighty. He is the One who makes good his word, our Creator. He is King of Heaven, the Owner of Today, Clean Spirit, the Wondrous One, the Owner of life, the Blessed One, the Prince of Glory, Dispenser of Goodness, the Mender of Ills, the Sower of all good things, Protector and Defender, the One who Alone Is, and who shall be for ever and ever. And I want you who have come to Mount Langbodo to listen carefully while I tell you a short story so that you may understand how mighty a King is the Omnipotent One.<sup>48</sup>

or even such an attractive sentiment with which Fagunwa ends his novel:-

My story is ended at last, let it receive solid kola and not the segmented, for the first is what secures a man to this world while the latter scatters him to the winds. And so, adieu for a little while, I have a feeling that we shall meet again before long; let me therefore utter a short prayer and then raise three cheers - the world shall become you, your nation will wax in wisdom and in strength, and we black people will never again be left behind in the world. Muso! Muso! Muso! I trust you have enjoyed this tale.<sup>49</sup>

Any future discussion of these two writers should concentrate on their mutual involvement and interest in Yoruba culture, their accomplishments as story-tellers and their creative inventiveness rather than on the assumed debt owed by one to the other. Criticism stands to gain nothing from creating an artificial relationship of creditor and debtor between two respectable largely-independent Nigerian creative writers.

## II

After that consideration of the main critical issues, the basis of Tutuola's achievements as a writer must now be discussed. His importance to the Nigerian Novel in English is not only that of a pioneer. True enough, his The Palm-Wine Drinkard was an instant success in 1952 and in a sense put Nigeria on the map of world literature. But to appreciate Tutuola's contribution fully he must be seen as a writer standing between the old and the new, a writer active during a period of transition from a purely oral tradition of village story-telling to <sup>a</sup> Western-introduced literary tradition. His greatest achievement is that he represents a successful integration of both traditions. Both influences feature prominently in his works. The process of integration in each case seems to have been as follows: Tutuola takes a story in its well-known form, amends it to suit his artistic purpose, usually by introducing new characters and episodes and occasionally by introducing elements of modern life; this story in its new form is then worked into the framework of another much-longer story which itself may have resulted from a combination of many stories reshaped by Tutuola's imagination. Stories are introduced into larger frameworks to serve various artistic purposes, and the whole process is carried out in such a highly imaginative way that the stories dovetail easily one into another. To cite an example, Ajaiyi is the story of Ajaiyi and his sister, Aina, who set out on a perilous journey to try and find out a cure for their inherited poverty. Into this framework are woven Tutuola's versions of other stories, one of which is the

story of Ade's ingratitude to Ajaiyi to which reference has already been made. This story is introduced at the appropriate point to show the differences in character and moral orientation between Ajaiyi and Ade and is made to fit properly into the larger framework. That is why when one reads Ajaiyi, one does not have a feeling of going through an anthology of stories but of a composite story into which other narratives have been wholly integrated. This is an essential of Tutuolan art which is missed by all those who claim that the structures of his works are too loose for them to be called novels. The traditional narrative form is usually self-contained. It is sufficient in itself for structure, style and purpose. What Tutuola does is to introduce artistically successfully a number of these episodes into his writing. As will be seen later, some of the novels contain more episodes than others and these episodes hold together better in some novels than in others. But even one of the most episodic of the novels, The Palm-Wine Drinkard, has been shown to achieve narrative and intensive continuity through density 'in much the same way... in which the discrete beats of drumming occur with such dense frequency as to create a temporal 'solid', or continuity.'<sup>50</sup>

Another essential of Tutuolan art is the use he makes of all the techniques available to the oral story-teller to make his stories interesting. Tutuola, as it were, does in writing what the story-teller does verbally before his audience. He is primarily 'a story-teller in the best Yoruba tradition, pushing the bounds of credibility higher and higher and sustaining it by sheer adroitness, by a juxtaposition of analogous experience from the familiar'.<sup>51</sup> He gives us the true setting of traditional

story-telling sessions in Feather Woman where he provides ten 'night entertainments'. In these 'entertainments' story-telling is accompanied by drinking, dancing and drumming as in this setting for the eighth night:-

And it was hardly nine o'clock of the eighth night, as the moon was just appeared, when the whole people of my village had gathered in front of my house. When all of them sat quietly then everyone was served with one keg of the palm-wine and the biggest keg was in front of me. After they had drunken some of their wine and then sung and danced for a while, and when I put the fire in my pipe and then sat up in my usual old arm-chair. Then when the people sat back quietly and were ready to hear my story. I began to tell them the story of my sixth journey.<sup>52</sup>

Just as the oral story-teller seeks to involve his audience in his narration by occasionally putting questions to them and inviting their participation, so also Tutuola uses various devices to involve his readers in his stories. In some cases, he puts direct fact questions to them as he does, for example, in connection with the woman who brings the Drinkard and his wife to the Red Town - 'She was not a human-being and she was not a spirit but what was she?'<sup>53</sup> - or with reference to the problem posed by the 'Lost or Gain Valley' - "So I am still eager to find out the right way of how to cross this 'Lost or Gain Valley' without any loss except gain. Do you know?"<sup>54</sup> Sometimes the question is rhetorical like the one used to justify Rali's reaction to the abduction of Simbi by an eagle - 'If it were you or I how in deep grief you or I would be?'<sup>55</sup> There is also Tutuola's use of dilemma tales to increase the reader's involvement with his novels. There are two very interesting ones in The Palm-Wine Drinkard. In the 'mixed town' the Drinkard is called upon to judge two cases, but he finds



himself unequal to the task. Tutuola therefore decides to let his readers try their hand at judging these cases. 'So I shall be very grateful', he says, 'if anyone who reads this story-book can judge one or both cases and send the judgement to me as early as possible, because the whole people in the 'mixed town' want me very urgently to come and judge the two cases.'<sup>56</sup>

However, there are a few examples of happily-resolved dilemmas in the novels. An example is the one in Ajaiyi which nearly results in the loss of Babi's daughter but for the generosity shown at the last minute by Aina.

Another device borrowed from traditional verbal art is the adoption of the point of view of a first-person narrator. With the exception of Simbi all ~~the~~ novels of Tutuola are written in the first person and this has made it possible, as it were, for him to 'talk' direct to the reader. He uses this device to make up for the difference between the oral and written versions of the same story, usually resulting from what cannot naturally be committed to writing - voice, gestures and facial expression, to mention a few. This has been largely responsible for the intense oral quality of his writing. The combined effect of these two devices - first-person narration and his warm speaking voice of which a few examples will be cited presently - is to heighten the reader's interest and make the novels themselves more valuable as literature:-

First-person narration by the protagonist gives us the greatest possible sense of involvement in the story. Empathy is fully possible, so that we have the illusion of undergoing all the protagonist's adventures and sharing with him the revelations brought

by his experience. His moral growth becomes, ideally, ours. This effect can be achieved with other points of view, but it is never so convincing as in first-person narration by the protagonist.<sup>57</sup>

The intense oral quality of Tutuola's writing is evident on practically every page of his novels. As has already been pointed out, the peculiar rhythms of his English are the rhythms of Yoruba speech. However, the speaking voice is warmer in certain parts of his works than in others, and occasionally becomes captivating. At the beginning of The Palm-Wine Drinkard one has the impression of a speaker speaking direct to another in front of him:-

I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. In those days we did not know other money, except COWRIES, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town.

My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard workers, but I myself was an expert palm-wine drinkard. I was drinking palm-wine from morning till night and from night till morning. By that time I could not drink ordinary water at all except palm-wine.

But when my father noticed that I could not do any work more than to drink, he engaged an expert palm-wine tapster for me; he had no other work more than to tap palm-wine every day.<sup>58</sup>

Feather Woman provides very many examples of this type of oral performance mainly because it is a collection of stories told to a group of enthusiastic listeners. This is how the entertainment of the third night begins:-

It was hardly nine o'clock of the third night when the people of my village came to my house to enjoy the entertainment of my second adventure. All sat as usual and everyone was served with one keg of palm-wine. But this third night, they brought with them some drums, horns and many other of the native musical

instruments, because we were badly disappointed about the musical instruments the first night. Then I sat on my usual old armchair in front of them. As the moon was shining and the cool breeze of that dry season was blowing very quietly. Then after everyone had drunken of his or her palm-wine and I put fire in my smoking pipe. I first addressed the people: "You see, my people, my motto this night is that this world is not equal. So all my adventures were not the same. One who has head has no money to buy hat and one who has money to buy hat has no head on which to put it.<sup>59</sup>

Tutuola uses the folktales in his novels in a progressive evolutionary manner.<sup>60</sup> To make them fully functional he occasionally includes in them features of Western civilization. In doing this he is acting within his right as a story-teller to amend the content of his tales to suit his purpose. He is at the same time establishing a connection between the past and present experiences of his people by creating a link in this way between tradition and modern life. What makes this point important in Tutuola is the way he fully integrates these Western elements into the texture of his works and makes successful artistic use of them. They have not only helped to broaden the base of his narrative and give the content of his novels a wider application but have occasionally been utilized in plot management. At times they only help to make a point clearer as in the following cases in The Palm-Wine Drinkard: the half-bodied baby speaks 'with a lower voice like a telephone'<sup>61</sup>, the Drinkard becomes 'a big bird like an aeroplane'<sup>62</sup> and flies away with his wife to avoid highwaymen, the young lady who approaches the Drinkard and his wife after they have left the Faithful-Mother has on 'high-heel shoes which resembled aluminium in colour'<sup>63</sup>. In Bush of Ghosts the 'homeless-ghosts' listen to the cry of the hero-wanderer 'as a radio'<sup>64</sup> and in Feather Woman the hero-narrator

builds 'a very beautiful storey which had many flats'<sup>65</sup>. Often these comparisons result in felicitous expressions which provide some of the most delightful passages in the whole of the Tutuolan canon, as we find in these two examples. In the first the author makes use of the knowledge gained from his participation in the last war:—

I could not blame the lady for following the Skull as a complete gentleman to his house at all. Because if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would jealous him more than that, because if this gentleman went to the battle field, surely, enemy would not kill him or capture him and if bombers saw him in a town which was to be bombed, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they did throw it, the bomb itself would not explode until this gentleman would leave that town, because of his beauty.<sup>66</sup>

The second is an imaginative description of the Red Fish, which draws on the author's acquaintance with Western industrial civilization:—

At the same time that the red fish appeared out, its head was just like a tortoise's head, but it was as big as an elephant's head and it had over 30 horns and large eyes which surrounded the head. All these horns were spread out as an umbrella. It could not walk but was only gliding on the ground like a snake and its body was just like a bat's body and covered with long red hair like strings. It could only fly to a short distance, and if it shouted a person who was four miles away would hear. All the eyes which surrounded its head were closing and opening at the same time as if a man was pressing a switch on and off.<sup>67</sup>

However, it is in their use for plot structuring that these Western elements have been of the greatest service to Tutuola. It is not known to what extent he was conscious of this, but it is a fact that by his use of Western ideas and institutions he has been able to avoid in Bush of Ghosts some

of the less satisfying things in the structure of The Palm-Wine Drinkard. In The Palm-Wine Drinkard, except for the brief period of rest with the Faithful-Mother, the Drinkard and his wife go from one dreadful experience to another. The hero-wanderer in Bush of Ghosts, after wandering in the bush for twenty years, runs into a dead cousin of his in the tenth Town of Ghosts. Considering the length of time the boy has spent in the bush and the harrowing experiences he has gone through, he badly needs some respite at the time he gets to the tenth Town of Ghosts. It seems reasonable to suppose one of the reasons he enjoys his stay with his cousin, and is able to remain with him for so long, is that his time is gainfully employed in the school and "as the chief judge of the highest court which is the 'Assize court'"<sup>68</sup>. Far more important is the way Tutuola brings this particular novel to an end by using a device which, although not Western, shows to what extent he is willing to incorporate Western-derived ideas into his stories: through the use of an 'Invisible Magnetic Missive' the boy's mind is directed homeward and he is magically brought back home by looking at the palm of the Television-handed Ghostess. But for this device it might have been necessary to get the hero-wanderer to go through some other adventures on his way home. Such unnecessary prolongation of the boy's monotonous experiences of horror would have further weakened an already-weak structure and virtually destroyed any impact the present book has. We would then have experienced, as is the case at the end of The Palm-Wine Drinkard, 'a repetitive pattern of marvels ... where the anecdotic functions are duplicated with the effect, sometimes, of crescendo and even boredom.'<sup>69</sup>

The third essential of Tutuolan art is the use of the quest form. This form is adapted to suit the particular requirements of each novel. In each of these novels the hero is highly motivated by the object of his search and the conviction of the enormous advantages which will be derived from a mission successfully accomplished. This is what gives meaning and purpose to his journey and for this he is usually willing to take risks and forego every kind of convenience. Hence, for example, the Drinkard sets out to find his dead tapster in the town of the dead. The pursuit of this objective takes the hero from the world of living beings to the world of the dead and results in a journey fraught with every kind of danger. Adebisi in The Brave African Huntress sets out in order to rescue her four brothers from the jungle of the pigmies; the hero-narrator in Feather Woman, to seek wealth and Ajaiyi and Aina in Ajaiyi, to look for a cure for their inherited poverty. Each of these is no doubt an important mission worthy of the hero's devotion. Simbi's mission is of a different kind; even so, it results in a journey just as hazardous as any other. She of her own volition decides to go abroad in order to "experience the difficulties of the 'Poverty' and of the 'Punishment'."<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the hero-wanderer in Bush of Ghosts gets into the bush without wishing to and finds himself undertaking a long tedious journey in order to avoid the jealousies of his father's wives.

As soon as Tutuola's heroes start their journeys, for whatever reasons, they begin to be faced with difficult tasks, many of which can only be accomplished by supernatural means. Usually they are magically equipped to transform themselves into any object of their choice or otherwise make themselves invisible

to avoid being killed by the enemy. It is only the reader's knowledge that the heroes have these powers that assures him they will survive. Occasionally, the hero is given a little respite, a period of comfort and easy life during which he appears to have forgotten the object of his search. The Drinkard spends such a period with the Faithful-Mother; the wanderer in the Bush of Ghosts, with the Super Lady; Adebisi, in the Bachelors' Town and Simbi, with the old woman who gives her temporary shelter. But the hero soon pulls himself together again and continues with the object of his search in a single-minded manner until he finally arrives at his goal a wiser man than he set out. In this way Tutuola uses effectively a rather simplified version of the quest form - a hero at one end and the object of his search at the other. In between are interposed difficult tasks which make the objective of the hero almost impossible to accomplish. The only reason the hero perseveres is the high motivation provided by the achievement of his goal, and usually the only way he can survive is by the use of his magical power. It is important to keep this pattern in mind for our detailed analysis of the novels later. The advantage of the quest form is that it lends itself easily to episodic treatment. The hero is made to go from one adventure to another and the author is free to introduce any number of these. There can be no doubt that Tutuola makes the fullest use of this advantage in his novels.

These three essentials are the advantages which Tutuola has derived from the integration of features of traditional verbal art into his novels. But also, in his attempt to impose literary organization on an essentially-oral material he has adopted certain techniques which will do any writer, however sophisticated, great

credit. I have already, in discussing the fight between Simbi and the Satyr in the first part of this study, referred to Tutuola's ability to create a tense atmosphere. This ability is widely applied to great advantage in his novels. Other notable occasions for the creation of tension are during the titanic struggles between the Drinkard and the Red Fish in The Palm-Wine Drinkard and between Adebisi and Odara in The Brave African Huntress. In each of these cases the two parties to the duel are built up to such great heights that when the encounter finally takes place it assumes epic proportions. Linked with this is the author's high imaginative and descriptive power, applied often in character delineation. This has given the novels some of their most memorable personages and situations. For example, one may forget many of the details of Bush of Ghosts but certainly not the stationary monster, the Flash-eyed Mother, who instalts herself 'permanently' in the centre of the thirteenth town of ghosts. Apart from all other inconveniences, the inhabitants have the business of feeding the Flash-eyed Mother with her 'millions of heads' and of enduring the cacophonous sound often made by these heads:-

Millions of heads which were just like a baby's head appeared on her body, all circulated set by set. Each of these heads had two very short hands which were used to hold their food or anything that they want to take, each of them had two eyes which were shining both day and night like fire-flies, one small mouth with numerous sharp teeth, the head was full of long dirty hair, two small ears like a rat's ears appeared on each side of the head. If they are talking, their voices would be sounding as if somebody strikes an iron or the church bell which sound would last more than ten minutes before stopping.<sup>71</sup>

The novels are full of highly descriptive passages, but not all are done on the elaborate scale of the Flash-eyed Mother. But even where the greatest economy of words is exercised Tutuola still



achieves a clear and effective image. In the following passage one can almost hear the noise made by the skulls 'rushing out' and 'rolling on the ground'. The effect is achieved by the apt comparison with 'a thousand petrol drums' which itself contains an hyperbole:-

But one day, the lady attempted to escape from the hole, and at the same time that the Skull who was watching her whistled to the rest of the Skulls that were in the back-yard, the whole of them rushed out to the place where the lady sat on the bull-frog, so they caught her, but as all of them were rushing out, they were rolling on the ground as if a thousand petrol drums were pushing along a hard road.<sup>72</sup>

Other examples reveal that Tutuola has the eye for detail and the power of observation which result in vivid description. His description of the 'ultra-beautiful' ladies who are appointed watchdogs over Simbi by the Satyr is not only attractive in itself but especially meaningful in its context, because of the particular influence they exert over Simbi:-

They were dressed in snow white attires which were full of the superfine decorations. The hairs on their heads were glossy and were adorned with the decorations of gold flower, etc. which were glistening in the darkness. Everyone of them wore silver bead on neck, but Simbi was unable to describe the kind of the metal which they wore on their wrists, for all their snow white attires were sewn in long sleeves. All of them were neat and smart.<sup>73-4</sup>

Another characteristic of Tutuola's writing is his use of conflicts, internal and external. These are of many kinds. There is the conflict of the kind which has already been mentioned - physical combat between two deadly enemies. There are also conflicts arising from the nature of the tasks the heroes have to perform, the encounters they have with their opponents and the steps they take to overcome obstacles in the way of their mission. Examples of these abound in each of the novels: the Drinkard has encounters, for instance, with bush animals, field creatures, 400 dead babies and with the hungry creature who, having eaten all that is available, still wants more. The boy-wanderer in Bush of Ghosts has encounters with the golden, silverish and copperish ghosts, with the smelling ghosts, a spider-eating ghost and even with a talking piece of ground which refuses to be stepped upon by an 'earthly person'. 'Don't smash me!' it says, 'oh don't smash me, don't walk on me, go back to those who are chasing you to kill you, it is paining me too much as you are smashing me.'<sup>75</sup> Ajaiyi has encounters with the Spirit of Fire and the witch mother, not to mention his ordeal with the talking lump of iron. All these are in the area of external conflicts. These conflicts constitute an important centre of interest in Tutuola's novels. They provide the novels with activities and help to sustain the reader's interest to the end. In these novels there are practically no dull moments. At any given time the hero is either doing something or having something done to him or somebody else. Usually what is being done is important or even crucial to the achievement of the hero's objective.

The internal conflicts are of a different order. They do

not provide activities as such, but they often determine what activities are undertaken by the heroes. These conflicts result from some doubts and uncertainties in the minds of Tutuola's heroes, or their regrets, as in the case of Simbi and the boy-wanderer in the Bush of Ghosts, or their mental agony, as in the case of Ajaiyi. Simbi who leaves home against the advice and better judgement of her mother soon finds herself in trouble, and this results in a state of mental conflict which manifests itself in frequent expressions of regret. 'Hah! if I had obeyed my mother's warnings not to try to know the poverty and the punishment all these should have not happened to me,'<sup>76</sup> she says in the town of the multi-coloured people after she has been made to undergo heavy punishment. This conflict is in Simbi all the time and it almost becomes a mental condition. The author makes it affect her actions and predetermine her reactions to situations in the novel. The same is true in Ajaiyi where Ajaiyi and Aina are distressed because of their inherited poverty which only gets more chronic the harder they work. Apart from physical strain, Ajaiyi suffers throughout from the thought of being a victim of natural injustice. This conflict provides the motivation of most of his actions in the novel.

Tutuola provides us in his novels with a world of dream visions, and, to enjoy him fully, one must willingly suspend disbelief for most of the time. It is only then that one can truly appreciate his magic world of dream-like fantasies with its ogres, monsters of every description and ghosts, a world where the living mingle freely with the dead but at their peril, a changeable world full of transformations. Critics have rightly called attention to this world of romance. But what is not always fully appreciated is Tutuola's ability to blend realism with fantasy with the result

that in his type of world we are sometimes relieved with touches of realism. The Palm-Wine Drinkard has many examples of these. Instead of providing himself magically with everything he needs, as he may well have done, the Drinkard sometimes has to work hard like everybody else to get what he wants. Hence, he becomes a farmer on the Wraith Island and plants many kinds of crops. For using the land without the necessary permission, he gets into trouble with the animal-owner of the land. On another occasion when the Drinkard and his wife are beckoned by the Faithful-Hands to enter the White Tree, because of fear of the unknown, each of them wants the other to go in first. They continue to hesitate until they are both dragged in together by the Faithful-Hands. Before they finally get into the Tree, they conclude some business transaction to make provision for the future - "before we entered inside the white tree, we had 'sold our death' to somebody at the door for the sum of £70:18:6d and 'lent our fear' to somebody at the door as well on interest of £3:10:0d per month, so we did not care about death and we did not fear again.'<sup>77</sup> At a stage in his journey the Drinkard becomes 'penniless' and decides on a brisk business: he converts himself into a canoe with which his wife ferries people across a river at the rate of three pence per adult and half fare for children. On the first day they make £7.5.3d and at the end of the month they have saved £56.11.9d. Again, when the Drinkard returns home with his magic egg the greedy behaviour of the crowd at the scene of the food supplied by the egg is realistic considering the fact that there has been a famine in the land for some time and the people have been living at starvation level.

There are examples of realistic touches in the other novels

as well. But only a few more need be given. Like the Drinkard and his wife, Simbi in Simbi and Adebisi in The Brave African Huntress at different stages on their journeys are compelled to work for their livelihood, Simbi in return for shelter provided by an old woman, Adebisi as an office servant. In Bush of Ghosts the boy-wanderer and the Super Lady fall out because of disagreement over the upbringing of their son. In Feather Woman the magic box which supplies the people with food to save them from starvation is stolen away by greedy night marauders. The suspicion with which the heroes are usually received in new communities is realistically motivated because in many cases they become the causes of great inconvenience and, in a few cases, agents of destruction to those communities - the drinkard brings about the destruction of the Red Town; Simbi disorganizes life in the Sinners' Town by beheading their king; Adebisi completely wipes out the pigmies; Ajaiyi, Ojo and Alabi inconvenience everybody in the country of the witches with their talking lumps of iron. Such patches of realism in works essentially conceived and executed in a spirit of fantasy leave one with the impression that after all Tutuola's world is not so naive and unreal as one would initially suppose. As Ronald Dathorne suggests, he is just as concerned with the problems of his society as any other writer: 'Tutuola, better than any other writer in English-speaking Africa, has described the tensions of his society, its conflicts, its loyalties, the inner demands of a superstition that people cherish and the external demands of a materialism to which they must conform. This makes it creative literature.'<sup>78</sup>

We see in these examples the ways in which Tutuola expresses the link between tradition and modern experience by drawing freely from both.

One aspect of Tutuola's writing which has shown considerable improvement with the passing of time is his use of dialogue. This improvement may have resulted from some measure of self-education and the facility in penmanship which he is known to have acquired over the years. In his first two novels there is almost a complete absence of dialogue. The little dialogue there is is stiff and inelegant. It is not until Simbi that we begin to notice the use of dialogue as a definite feature, though it is of a kind which does not wholly convince. The encounter between Simbi and Dogo provides an example of dialogue which, although effective in its context, is not altogether free:-

"Who are you pushing me along mercilessly like this?" Simbi asked with the trembling voice when she became conscious.

"Dogo, the kidnapper, please," he replied sharply. "To where are you pushing me now?" she asked painfully.

"I am pushing you to another town in which I shall sell you," he replied simply.

But when Simbi heard so, she stopped firmly on both feet at the centre of the path.

"I want to go back to my mother now," she told Dogo horribly.

"By the way what is your name?" Dogo asked wildly.

"My name? My name is Simbi," she sneezed and then replied softly.

"Simbi?" he repeated the name. Simbi hesitated for a few seconds and then said "Yes!" disrespectfully.<sup>79</sup>

Not a lot of use is made of dialogue in The Brave African Huntress, where Tutuola seems to have reverted to the straight-forward narrative method of The Palm-Wine Drinkard. But with Feather Woman the author returns to the extensive use of dialogue and makes effective conversation an essential part of his prose. However, it is in Ajaiyi that we discover signs that he has

fully mastered the art of rendering conversation. Coupled with his improved language this new competence gives Ajaiyi a sophistication available nowhere else in Tutuola. His dialogues are now comparatively free and are used with great dramatic impact as we find in the following passage. Here Ishola reports to his witch mother a strange occurrence in the market:-

ISHOLA: "Oh, Almighty!" he shouted suddenly to the hearing of everyone of us.

His witch mother and the rest of us were startled. Then the mother stood up suddenly and walked to him. Then she hastily asked:

"What has happened to you, Ishola? Were you chased on the way by the kidnappers?"

ISHOLA: "Not at all! But I have seen wonder in the market today!..." he explained to his witch mother with throbbing heart.

MOTHER: "Wonder?" she interrupted loudly.

ISHOLA: "Certainly, my mother! And it was the first of the wonder I have ever seen in my life!" he explained as he was perspiring continuously.

MOTHER: "How did it look like?" she asked with wonder as she then bent a little bit forward and paid more attention and listened.

ISHOLA: "It did not look like anything. But ..." he was greatly confused and murmured.<sup>80</sup>

In this novel we discover in Tutuola for the first time an ability to vary his prose style as occasion demands. At the solemn ceremony before the Devil the author adopts a ceremonially formal manner befitting the occasion. The interrogation which forms part of this encounter is conducted in the manner of court proceedings:-

After each of them had promised like that Devil then started to ask them as follows:

DEVIL: "Your name is Oji."

OJO: "Yes, my Lord."

DEVIL: "Are you ready to be cruel to those people who are not my followers?"

OJO: "Yes, my Lord. I am ready to do so."

DEVIL: "Do you know that you are coming back to me after your death to serve your punishment?"

OJO: "Yes, my Lord."

DEVIL: "All right. But you come to me for money. How much do you want me to give you?"

OJO: "My Lord. I shall be grateful if thee can give me up to two hundred thousand pounds! Your worship!"

DEVIL: "Are you ready to spare the life of your sister for me?"

OJO: "Yes, my Lord!"<sup>81</sup>

These then are some of the literary techniques which make Tutuola a strikingly interesting creative writer. However, criticism usually points to three defects - that his language is monotonous, his books are all of the same kind, the order of the episodes is not always meaningful.<sup>82</sup> The reasons for some monotony in his language have already been given - his insufficient mastery of the English language and dependence on the linguistic characteristics of Yoruba. It is true, moreover, that all his novels deal with dream-like fantasies. But, as will soon become evident, some novels are more densely packed with fantasies than others. In this respect his last novel, Ajaiyi, is very different from his first, The Palm-Wine Drinkard. In Ajaiyi we see a clear departure from the general pattern of the other novels. But even if all the books had been of the same kind, it is difficult to see how this could constitute a blemish. Surely no rule of art forbids an author to write many successful books of the same kind. The criticism about the apparent lack of order in the way the author introduces various episodes into his novel is not a sound one. No creative writer is bound to follow a particular order of events. What is important is for the various episodes in a



work of art to form part of the imaginative life of the work and be fully integrated into its artistic purpose. Tutuola often achieves his effect through an apparent lack of order in the disposition of events. In Bush of Ghosts, for example, the suffering of the boy-wanderer is emphasized by the fact that the various towns are reached in a mysterious order. When asked about the apparently haphazard order of these towns, Tutuola simply replied, 'That is the order in which I came to them.'<sup>83</sup> This would appear to confirm what was said before about the absolute freedom the quest form affords the author to arrange the incidents in his work, especially those in the middle, according to his imagination and artistic convenience.

Each of the novels will now be considered in detail. If the discussion of some of these novels is sometimes brief, it is only because a good deal has already been said in order to isolate the common characteristics among them. I shall now concentrate on the distinctive features of each novel, especially its human significance and the link it provides between indigenous culture and modern experience, and Tutuola's increasing sophistication as a writer.

### III

In The Palm-Wine Drinkard we start with an indolent hero, the son of an indulgent father, whose happiness depends entirely on an uninterrupted supply of palm-wine. He appears completely forgetful of the responsibility which his position as the first child of the family places on him in traditional society and concentrates on his own pleasures. Tutuola may have in mind

here a typical Yoruba man who puts his personal comfort before everything else and devotes all his energy to the pursuit of 'alafia'.<sup>84</sup>

To the Yoruba ... life means not merely existence of physical life, gifted with breath like any other creature; when the Yoruba think or speak of life with reference to a person or society the meanings they attach to it embrace good health, prosperity, longevity, peace and happiness.

In life, the Yoruba expect to have felicity, well-being and good fortune. But the prerequisite to these blessings, they believe, is peace. This is what they call 'alafia'. It is the sum total of all that is good that man may desire - an undisturbed harmonious life.<sup>84</sup>

Only something of the nature of a disaster can move the Drinkard from such a secure position. Yet there is need to stir him to action, if he is to prove his mettle. The death of his tapster provides the needed opportunity. Because of the inconvenience caused him by the sudden break in his supply of palm-wine, he goes to look for his tapster in Deads' Town. He finally meets his tapster after a search which goes on for ten years but cannot bring him back to the world of the living. Even though the hero comes back with a prize, he does not achieve the purpose for which he set out - the meeting between him and his tapster fails to produce the desired result. At this level of meaning, therefore, the journey would appear to have failed in its purpose.

But this is to put a narrow construction on the meaning of The Palm-Wine Drinkard and to overlook the symbolic nature of the work. The Drinkard's journey must be seen as a journey of the spirit undertaken for the benefit of his race. It is only then that his sacrifices acquire the right meaning and his trials and punishments become purposeful. Right from the beginning we see how the Drinkard's misfortune affects his

community. The lack of palm-wine has not only brought physical inconvenience but is doing damage to inter-personal relationships. The community is, in fact, already suffering:-

When it was the third day that I had no palm-wine at all, all my friends did not come to my house again, they left me there alone, because there was no palm-wine for them to drink.

But when I completed a week in my house without palm-wine, then I went out and, I saw one of them in the town, so I saluted him, he answered but he did not approach me at all, he hastily went away.<sup>85</sup>

Ironically, it is the satisfaction of the physical needs of the community which is employed to bring about reconciliation at the end of the novel. The magic egg brought back by the Drinkard provides food and relieves famine. 'Alafia' which appears to have deserted the community at the departure of the Drinkard now returns with him:-

Then I commanded the egg to produce food and drinks which my wife and my parents and myself would eat, but before a second there I saw that the room had become full of varieties of food and drinks, so we ate and drank to our satisfaction. After that, I sent for all of my old friends and gave them the rest of the food and the drinks, after that, the whole of us began to dance and when they required more, then I commanded the egg again and produced many kegs and drank it.<sup>86</sup>

The society is yet to derive further benefits from the Drinkard's newly-acquired wisdom. He is definitely now a much wiser man than we find at the beginning of the novel. What has happened in the meantime is that he has gone through a number of excruciating experiences as part of the process of his initiation into racial knowledge. His many ordeals and several encounters with ghosts and monsters are essential parts of this process which culminates in his discovery in Deads' Town of the fundamental

difference between the living and the dead. This Moore has rightly called 'the Drinkard's real Initiation, for thereby he learns the true meaning of life and death'.<sup>87</sup> It is only after such an initiation that the Drinkard can truly be spiritually at one with his community. It is as an initiated member of the community can he be expected to understand its needs and difficulties.

In this novel, as in some of the others, the reader is plunged almost without notice into the Drinkard's disordered world of ogres and ogresses, of monsters and spirits, of an ungovernable half-bodied baby, of 400 malicious dead babies and of men who behave as awkwardly as the people of Unreturnable Heaven's Town:-

These unknown creatures were doing everything incorrectly, because there we saw that if one of them wanted to climb a tree, he would climb the ladder first before leaning it against that tree; and there was a flat land near their town but they built their houses on the side of a steep hill, so all the houses bent downwards as if they were going to fall, and their children were always rolling down from these houses, but their parents did not care about that; the whole of them did not wash their bodies at all, but washed their domestic animals; they wrapped themselves with a kind of leaves as their clothes, but had costly clothes for their domestic animals, and cut their domestic animals' finger nails, but kept their own uncut for one hundred years.<sup>88</sup>

To save the reader from being overwhelmed by the situation the author at times employs irony or even comedy to modify the effect. Two examples will suffice: the Drinkard is given the job of bringing Death in a net. This is no doubt a very risky assignment for which he may lose his life. The author's treatment of this episode helps to relieve us of much of our anxiety for the Drinkard. Right from the beginning he is endowed with so much

courage and determination to succeed that even in the house of Death the initiative rests with him throughout:-

When I reached his (Death's) house, he was not at home by that time, he was in his yam garden which was very close to his house, and I met a small rolling drum in his verandah, then I beat it to Death as a sign of salutation. But when he (Death) heard the sound of the drum, he said thus:- "Is that man still alive or dead?" Then I replied "I am still alive and I am not a dead man."

But at the same time that he heard so from me, he was greatly annoyed and he commanded the drum with a kind of voice that the strings of the drum should tight me there; as a matter of fact, the strings of the drum tightened me so that I was hardly breathing.<sup>89</sup>

The Drinkard also orders Death to be tied with yam strings. It is Death who finally surrenders and buys his release by ordering the Drinkard to be released. It is not surprising that in these circumstances the Drinkard is able to trick Death into his net and carry him away.

Another example of this type of treatment is provided by the often comic melodrama introduced into the relationship between the lady who later becomes the Drinkard's wife and the 'complete' gentleman who turns out to be a Skull. The process of returning the hired parts of the body is laughable, even though it forms part of the background of a serious situation:-

As they were travelling along in this endless forest then the complete gentleman in the market that the lady was following, began to return the hired parts of his body to the owners and he was paying them the rentage money. When he reached where he hired the left foot, he pulled it out, he gave it to the owner and paid him, and they kept going; when they reached the place where he hired the right foot, he pulled it out and gave it to the owner and paid for the rentage. Now both feet had returned to the owners, so he began to crawl along on the ground.<sup>90</sup>

Occasionally all the author does to relieve horror is to introduce a brilliant concept or attractive scenery: the Drinkard and his wife are finally saved from their troublesome half-bodied baby by Drum, Song and Dance; the Drinkard's boastful cognomen, 'Father of gods who could do anything in this world'<sup>91</sup>, is used as a device for his safety; because of the beautiful setting and the comfort provided by the Faithful-Mother's White Tree resort the Drinkard and his wife temporarily forget their 'past torments' and any future hazards they may have to face. The dance hall would doubtless be regarded as a great attraction by many a modern tourist:-

This beautiful hall was full of all kinds of food and drinks, over twenty stages were in that hall with uncountable orchestras, musicians, dancers and tappers. The orchestras were always busy. The children of seven to eight years etc. of age were always dancing, tapping on the stage with melodious songs and they were also singing with warm tones with non-stop dance till morning. There we saw that all the lights in this hall were in technicolours and they were changing colours at five minutes intervals.<sup>92</sup>

On his journey the Drinkard wins a few important battles and is responsible for the annihilation of the Red Fish which is placated annually with human sacrifice. This in itself is a great achievement. But his greatest triumph is reserved for the end of the novel when, as a result of his vastly-improved racial knowledge, he helps to bring about cosmic amity between Earth and Heaven. Not only is he able to relieve famine, he also helps to remove the cause of it, thus bringing lasting benefit to man in every part of the world. So, from a local theme, we arrive at one of universal interest just as the quest form itself symbolizes the restlessness of man everywhere. Starting with a slothful hero, we end up with one mentally active enough to do universal good. Herein lies Tutuola's great

achievement in The Palm-Wine Drinkard, which has made it his very best work. This achievement is adequately summed up by Robert Armstrong when he asserts that

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is one of those marvellous works of human imagination which, rich with fancy, goes simply and directly to the heart of a perennial and profound human concern ... It is therefore, although inevitably and inextricably involved with Tutuola's being Yoruba, equally inevitably and inextricably bound to the fact pure and simple of his being a man. Thus it is necessarily the case that the impact of much of what he writes is supracultural.<sup>93</sup>

Of all the versions of the story of the cosmic quarrel between Earth and Heaven, the author chooses a version which, although not the most popular, is the most artistically functional.<sup>94</sup> By the use of this version calm is restored at the end of a long journey full of hazards and man is shown in his true relationship to the gods - a negligible and diminutive creature little better than an object of sacrifice. Because the slave who takes the sacrifice to Heaven is supposed to have had direct contact with the gods, he is no longer free to have social intercourse with other people. Like the 'osu' of Achebe's No Longer at Ease he is now dedicated to the gods and must live a separate existence. This explains why in Tutuola's version of this story everybody who can exercise a free choice declines to carry the sacrifice to Heaven and the slave has to be compelled to perform the office.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is the best-known of Tutuola's novels partly because of the many translations into other languages. As his first novel it has naturally attracted more attention than any of the others, and most of the criticism of Tutuola's works has been based on it. From a consideration of The Palm-Wine Drinkard generalizations have been made which at best can only

apply with modification to some of the other novels. To cite an example, based on their knowledge of his first novel, most critics emphasize the episodic nature of Tutuola's works. This conclusion is substantially true of The Palm-Wine Drinkard where there are as many as twenty-four disparate episodes. This, however, is not true of Ajaiyi and is only partially true of Simbi and The Brave African Huntress where the number of episodes in each case has been considerably reduced. Nevertheless, it is correct to say that The Palm-Wine Drinkard shows Tutuola at his best. On it his reputation as a creative writer must largely rest.

#### IV

A close consideration of Tutuola's second book, Bush of Ghosts, reveals interesting similarities and differences with The Palm-Wine Drinkard. As in the first novel we start in Bush of Ghosts with a hero in a weak position. Weakness here results from age - he is only a boy of seven - and from some sense of insecurity imposed by the circumstances in which the hero initially finds himself. Here, too, like many of Tutuola's heroes, the boy returns home at the end of his journey a wiser man, having benefited from his recent experiences. In this, as in the first novel, the hero is made to experience many tribulations and carry out a number of painful tasks. There are also a few echoes of the first novel in this one: the Faithful-Mother of the White Tree of the first novel reappears here to settle the dispute between the 12th Town and 13th Town of Ghosts and there are allusions to the Red Town destroyed as a result of the Drinkard's action and on the last page to the



Drinkard disposing of his fear before entering the White Tree.

However, a perceptive reader is likely to be struck more by the differences than the similarities between these two works. The Drinkard's quest is a deliberate action, undertaken of his own volition while the journey of the boy-hero of Bush of Ghosts is forced upon him. He leaves home under conditions which recall the early circumstances of both Sundiata and Chaka. He has known 'bad' through the jealousy and hatred of his father's wives. To arrive at the knowledge of 'good' he probably needs the type of experience Tutuola makes him go through here. Again, although the Drinkard at the end of his journey comes back to do universal good, the boy-hero's triumph is essentially personal - he returns well-equipped to face the type of situation which puts him on the run in the first place. At the rather late age of thirty-one he is now ready for mature adult life. Of course, this is only in the area of a literal interpretation. But even when the symbolic significance of the work is taken into consideration, that is, when the work is regarded as embodying the type of spiritual experience a boy needs to have to equip him to live in this wicked world, we find that the author's achievement here is not as outstanding as in his first novel. At no stage does this second novel achieve the degree of universality which makes The Palm-Wine Drinkard an outstanding success.

Although a much longer novel, Bush of Ghosts contains fewer episodes than The Palm-Wine Drinkard. It would appear Tutuola has improved slightly on his narrative method and now exercises some economy in portraying fairly complicated scenes. However, it is better not to make too much of this point here because we know through Dr. Parrinder that 'the book has been

edited to remove the grosser mistakes, clear up some ambiguities, and curtail some repetition.<sup>95</sup> One reason for the length of the book is the number of transformations and gruesome experiences the boy-hero is made to go through as part of the process of his initiation into adult society. Once he arrives in the Bush of Ghosts, for whatever reason, he is exposed to the same type of difficulties anyone is likely to have who strays from the world of mortals to the world of spirits. There can be no doubt that the boy suffers more and for a longer period than any of Tutuola's other heroes. In this book more than in any other there is a morbid obsession with pain, suffering, torture, humiliation, smell, dirt, insects, size and deformity.

Apart from the experience of physical pain, the boy also suffers from some internal conflict. The evidence is clear that all along he is in a state of mental confusion. This usually manifests itself in his inability to decide at crucial points whether to continue his stay in the Bush of Ghosts or return home. Generally speaking, he desires to go back home when conditions are the hardest for him and forgets home whenever life is easy or there is a temporary break in his suffering. This vacillation is partly responsible for the length of his stay in the Bush of Ghosts and may have been used by the author as a proof of the boy's immaturity. His remembering and forgetting of home are alternated in such a way that they result in a definite pattern and appear to perform an artistic function: after the hero's first wedding he forgets home for at least three months, but after he has been made to suffer great hardship as a long-necked god in a pitcher he starts to think of home again; for a long time after this experience there are no home thoughts, but after another spell of suffering, notably from the Flash-eyed

Mother and the short ghosts, he no longer enjoys his stay and wants 'to continue to look for the way to my home town which I had left for about eighteen years, as I was remembering my mother at this time always.'<sup>96</sup> In the comfort of the Super Lady's company the hero forgets home once again but when they quarrel over the upbringing of their son and he is sent away, he remembers 'to continue to be looking for the way to my home town as I had forgotten that for a while, because of love'<sup>97</sup>. Again, when he discovers his cousin in the 10th Town of Ghosts, settles down comfortably with him and assumes some position of responsibility in the society, we hear him say 'I did not feel to go to my town again, even I determined that I should not go for ever.'<sup>98</sup> Generally speaking, the action of the novel slows down during the hero's period of rest and enjoyment when he forgets home, and moves fast again whenever he remembers home and bestirs himself. This has provided the novel with a built-in rhythm of its own.

In this work the author uses irony and humour at appropriate points to throw light on incidents and characters. In fact, the framework of this novel is based on an irony: the hero gets into the Bush of Ghosts when trying to run away from a slave-raiding party. He wanders about in the Bush for twenty-four years during which he endures every kind of hardship. When he finally gets out, he is sold as a slave, the situation he tried to avoid in the first place. The irony is not always as clear and pointed as this. For example, the short ghosts of the 13th Town of Ghosts have no other business but to provide food for their Flash-eyed Mother. But, ironically, she is quite willing to see these short ghosts starve to death. She prefers to give

the food provided her by these ghosts to the thousand infant heads sprouting all over her body. Occasionally, humour arises from the holding up to ridicule of established institutions and beliefs. To remind us that we are in the Bush of Ghosts the author makes fun of Christian religious practices:-

Rev. Devil was going to baptize me with fire and hot water as they were baptizing themselves there. When I was baptized on that day, I was crying loudly so that a person who is at a distance of two miles would not listen before hearing my voice, and within a few minutes every part of my body was scratched by this hot water and fire ...

After baptism, then the same Rev. Devil preached again for a few minutes, while 'Traitor' read the lesson. All the members of this church were 'evil-doers'. They sang the song of evils with evils' melodious tune, then 'Judas' closed the service.<sup>99</sup>

Another interesting example of grotesque humour is found in connection with the story of the activities of children born to die. After the burglar-ghost has reported with relish the method of denying earthly mothers of their babies he goes away, as it were, on study leave for ten months. When he reappears, he brings back with him some of the hero's personal property to prove his point.

It is only Tutuola's fertile imagination and strange inventiveness that can bring together in one place such a variety of ghosts and spirits one finds in the Bush of Ghosts. One can almost speak of a hierarchy of ghosts. There is the lofty Super Lady who for a ghostess lives in luxury. There is the 'jocose-ghostess' whose jokes are such that 'if a sick man is hearing her jokes he would be healed at once without using any medicine'.<sup>100</sup> Of a different order are the vicious Smelling-Ghosts who live with 'mosquitoes, wasps, flies of all kinds and all kinds of poisonous snakes' and organize annually

an exhibition of smells at the end of which 'the highest prizes were given to one who had the worst smells and would be recognized as a king since that day as all of them were appreciating dirt more than clean things.'<sup>101</sup> In the Bush of Ghosts, strange things happen. It is one of the many attractions of this book that the author makes the ghosts behave consistently in an absurd and unearthly manner. The awkward situation in Nameless-town is only one example:-

When we went round this Nameless-town before we went to the village, there I noticed carefully that all the inhabitants are ladies and women, no single man is living there or coming there at all and to my surprise all these ladies and women have long brown moustaches which resemble that of he-goats, the moustaches are under their lower jaws, so every woman married a lady, because there are no men to marry them.<sup>102</sup>

There are many other examples in the book. The people of Hopeless-town talk in shrugs and there is the puzzle of the 'Lost or Gain Valley' which can only be crossed naked. This gives us some idea of the moral imponderables which the hero has to live with in his strange surroundings; in much the same way as the absurd behaviour of the ghosts is meant to distinguish them sharply from human beings.

Like all other heroes of Tutuola's creation the boy enjoys short periods of glory. He is given some recognition by the river ghosts and feels on top of the world during his brief stay with the Super Lady. With his cousin in the 10th Town of Ghosts he enjoys a period of comparative calm and self-improvement. But his greatest triumph comes at the end when he is reunited with his mother and brother. He has learnt the meaning of 'good' and is now a fully-initiated member of his society. He is ready to start adult life.

## V

In Simbi many new features are introduced into Tutuola's writing. For the first time we move away from the bush of ghosts and spirits to deal with earthly persons. We shall still occasionally return to the jungle and have dealings with monsters, gnomes and ogres, but this will be for only a short period at a time. Here, too, we meet with the first of Tutuola's two heroines and one who is undoubtedly the greater. The other heroine is Adebisi of The Brave African Huntress who displays as much heroism as Simbi but has a slightly less difficult task to accomplish. Again, we find the author for the first time using a third-person narrator. By writing from the point of view of the third person the author is able to give a detailed factual description of the heroine which would have been impossible with a hero-narrator. However, it is clear, considering the author's narrative achievement in the other books, that he succeeds more with the first-person narrator who can 'speak' direct to the reader.

Another innovation introduced in this book is that the heroine is put in the company of other people with whom she shares her experiences. In the first two books the heroes have been alone for the most part. Any social intercourse they have had has been mainly with ghosts and spirits. Again, while the hero in each case has been fully portrayed, the other characters have only been sketchily drawn. Not even the wife of the Drinkard is given much individuality of her own. The two wives of the hero in Bush of Ghosts are flat and unconvincing - the Super Lady is presented more as a type than an individual.

It is a fault of these two books that we do not see in them very much interaction between characters either because the characters are not there or because there is a social distance between them. Many critics consider this defect a sufficient reason for denying Tutuola's works the status of novels.<sup>103</sup> This criticism is no doubt valid when applied to The Palm-Wine Drinkard and Bush of Ghosts but is hardly valid for Simbi. It is certainly not applicable to Ajaiyi. In Simbi Simbi suffers often in the company of Rali, Sala, Bako and Kadara for whom she acts as leader, and reacts with the slave-dealer Dogo, the multi-coloured people and the people of the Sinners' Town, to mention a few. For the good leadership qualities Simbi shows in this book and for the aura of respectability which she builds around herself she reminds one of Elizabeth, the able leader of the Resistance Movement in Cary's The African Witch.

Another new feature is the introduction of a crucial fight which provides a climax to the activities in the novel. Every action seems to lead up to the epic struggle between Simbi and the Satyr. All other episodes are important only to the extent that they form part of the preparation for this mighty confrontation. In short, the whole book is organized around the relationship between Simbi and the Satyr to which a lot of space is devoted. This accounts for the fact that on the whole there are fewer episodes here than in the first two books. Tutuola is fast becoming a conscious artist anxious to leave behind him the loose organization of the previous novels.

The Satyr attracts a lot of attention in his own right as one of the author's best creations. He is a believable sort of monster. Although grim in action, he is comic in

appearance. One is almost inclined to like him and sympathize with him for his unexpected defeat by Simbi.<sup>104</sup>

He was about ten feet tall and very strong, bold and vigorous. His head was full of dirty long hairs and the hairs were full up with refuses and dried leaves. The mouth was so large and wide that it almost covered the nose. The eyes were so fearful that a person could not be able to look at them for two times, especially the powerful illumination they were bringing out always. He wore plenty of juju-beads round his neck. The spider's webs were spread over his mouth and this showed that he had not eaten for a long time. This Satyr was a pessimist, he was impatient and ill-tempered, impenitent and noxious creature. His beard was so long and bushy that it was touching the ground and he was using it for sweeping his house as if it was a broom.<sup>104</sup>

With his qualities and record, defeat is almost unthinkable to the Satyr. This is one reason he cannot understand Simbi's brazen effrontery and cannot accept his initial setback during their first encounter as final. He gets himself properly organized for the next round. As soon as he has his opportunity, he takes his revenge in full measure. Simbi is made part of a rock, which by description resembles Olumo Rock in the author's hometown, and heavily punished.

Simbi provides an example of a heroine who of her own volition seeks punishment and hardship. For this reason the motivation for the quest is somewhat negative but the heroine's sufferings are no less severe. As Simbi herself says, 'One who has done what one has never done, shall see what one has never seen'<sup>105</sup> or as Dogo tells her, 'the dog which will lose will not answer the call and will not pay heed to the call of its keeper.'<sup>106</sup> Simbi starts life with initial personal advantages which she attempts to make good use of in her adventure.



We are told she is 'a wonderful singer whose beautiful voice could wake deads and she was only the most beautiful girl in the village.'<sup>107</sup> Apart from being the daughter of a wealthy woman, she is 'the most merry making girl' in the village and liked for her 'amusing sayings'. All these advantages she throws to the wind once she decides to disobey her mother and experience a self-imposed hardship. At the end of her journey she returns home a wiser girl. She now realizes that her happiness is inextricably bound up with that of her community and that her destiny can only be truly fulfilled as an obedient daughter and a loyal member of the community. Like all Tutuola's heroes and heroines, she returns home to do some good which in her case is not as universal as that of the Drinkard or as personal as that of the boy-hero of Bush of Ghosts. It is her immediate community which benefits from her newly-acquired wisdom and powers. She stops Dogo from further slave-raiding and brings relief, as necessary, to the villagers with the help of the three gods of famine, thunder and iron which she brings back home. Furthermore, she undertakes a campaign on the need for parental obedience among the children of the village so that none of them may suffer her fate.

Two important factors which provide most of the motivation for action in this novel are Simbi's state of mind and her natural gifts, especially her beauty and love of singing. Her beauty is compelling enough to make two gentlemen lose 'all their senses' and, as a result, decide to help her and Rali on their way home. But it is her singing which plays an important, and at times crucial, part in the action of the novel. To start with, Simbi as a slave sings in a town where singing is forbidden. This

leads to the death of her master and to her being put in a coffin. This, in turn, hastens her arrival in the Sinners' Town. Again, in the Sinners' Town she saves herself and her friends from being sacrificed to the king's gods by singing. But, most important of all, the Satyr decides to use her love of music against her:-

Oh yes, I remember, the fearful lady (Simbi) told me when she conquered me the other day, that she was a singer. Therefore I will build a wonderful hall and I will put many creatures there to be singing there every day and night. And I believe, the lady will enter the hall to sing with those creatures, and then I will be able to capture her from the hall!<sup>108</sup>

As a bait for Simbi the Satyr builds a big hall with all the walls, windows and roof made of singing birds. It is indeed a great pageant extremely fascinating to contemplate. 'The plumages of all the birds were made of pure gold, their feet and beaks were white.'<sup>109</sup> Other things provided include 'a wonderful orchestra' to play the sort of music Simbi likes to hear, 'ultra-beautiful ladies' in white attire to dance with her but also 'six big fearful ostriches' with white hoofs to prevent her escape. Every object is made to take on a glittering appearance. The music comes, as it were, from a celestial group:-

Those who were playing the instruments to the song of the birds, were just in form of shadows of angels, and they were seemed as if they were touched with hand perhaps the hand would not hold or feel anything. All were dressed in the multi-coloured clothes which had several ornaments that the hand could not make.<sup>110</sup>

The trap is so well-laid that Simbi, the great singer, falls into it. The Satyr, hidden all the time in a corner, intervenes at his convenience when Simbi is busy enjoying herself. He

takes her away captive. So we arrive at the ironical situation in which the love of music which Simbi has employed a few times before to save herself is now used as a means of her destruction.

Tutuola's fertile imagination results here in several episodes which have helped to make many of the events of the book memorable. The 'iro-iromi' episode is one of the most significant, and shows what use the author makes of such encounters in his novels. This episode is brought right into the centre of the action of the story, and is important for the final defeat of the Satyr. Simbi leaves the Satyr confused and dissatisfied when at their first meeting she, at the instance of Rali, stops short at 'iro' instead of pronouncing the full word, 'iromi', a water insect. The Satyr reveals his state of mind in his soliloquy which immediately follows this incident:-

I believe, the two ladies shall come back  
to this jungle and I shall kill both of them  
at all costs at any day I meet them. It is  
certain, they are my meat! ... By the way,  
what is the meaning of 'Iro ...?' Of course,  
I know the meaning of 'Iromi' that is an insect  
of water, but what of 'Iro ...' into which  
that lady (Simbi) said she could change?  
Anyhow we shall meet again and then continue  
our fight!<sup>111</sup>

This paves the way for the Satyr's downfall. When at their final encounter Simbi changes to 'iromi', the Satyr does not know what to do with the insect: "This insect is called 'Iromi'. This lady (Simbi) told me the other day that we fought together and conquered me, that she could change into 'Iro ...' but she did not say on that day that she could change into 'Iromi' and this is 'Iromi'."<sup>112</sup> The Satyr examines the insect and throws it back into the water. This gives Simbi the opportunity to fly into his nostril in the form of 'iromi' and sting him to death. Thus is the ferocious Satyr annihilated

as a result of a play on the word 'iromi'.

## VI

Anyone who has enjoyed reading Tutuola's first three books must feel slightly disappointed with The Brave African Huntress. Not all the distinctive qualities we have just been talking about with reference to Simbi are clearly displayed here. We return to the direct narrative method of The Palm-Wine Drinkard without the latter's nightmarish grandeur to compensate for it. Little use is made of dialogue although Adebisi's confrontation with the giant bird - half-bird, half-human - and the huge stern pigmy produces some interesting verbal exchanges. Right from the first few sentences we have a feeling that we may be faced with a slightly inferior type of workmanship.

I Adebisi, the African Huntress, will first relate the adventures of my father, one of the ancient brave hunters, in brief:

My father was a brave hunter in his town. He had hunted in several dangerous jungles which the rest hunters had rejected to enter or even to approach because of fear of being killed by the wild animals and harmful creatures of the jungle.

My father had killed thousands of the wild animals which were no more seen or which were not known to us nowadays.<sup>113</sup>

This is not as businesslike as the beginning of The Palm-Wine Drinkard, Bush of Ghosts or Ajaiyi. We do not know of Adebisi's determination to go on her journey until we have read some twelve pages of the book. This contrasts sharply with the situation in The Palm-Wine Drinkard where the Drinkard is already on his way after a few paragraphs. This book is now out of print and may have been withdrawn from circulation only a few years after publication. Although the publishers

prefer not to disclose the reason for this action, one suspects it is because of the similarity in content between this novel and Fagunwa's The Forest of a Thousand Daemons. They are both hunter's sagas; Adebisi and Akaraogun experience similar difficulties. Those critics who emphasize Tutuola's indebtedness to Fagunwa may have this novel in particular in mind without saying so.

But The Brave African Huntress is not completely lacking in its own distinction. It has many interesting episodes which the author keeps together effectively through various organizational devices. One of these is the use of superscriptions, usually well-known proverbs, as illuminating signposts to the content of the various chapters. Another is the significance the author attaches to the Yoruba names of the days of the week. The heroine's fortune is made or marred according to the day of the week in which she takes particular actions. The whole work is organized on the basis of this belief. Hence Adebisi sets out on her journey on a propitious day, Thursday, The Day of New Creation, and starts her homeward journey after she has successfully accomplished her mission on Tuesday, The Day of Victory. She gets out of the custody of the pigmies, where she has barely managed to survive their brutality, on Sunday, The Day of Immortality. While in custody she receives her worst treatment on Friday, The Day of Trouble. It is on Wednesday, The Day of Confusion, that she enters the jungle of the pigmies and leaves the pigmies confused and paralysed after a prolonged encounter. The heroine is inflexibly resolved to help a kind old man against Ajantala on Saturday, The Day

of Three Resolutions. This pattern is followed throughout the novel and it often helps the reader to anticipate the outcome of events, depending on the day on which they take place.

Although The Brave African Huntress is not as episodic as the author's first two books, it has a fair share of episodes of differing complexity. It is the variety that gives pleasure here. Moreover, each of these episodes performs an artistic function. There are delightful episodes like that of the super-animal who when dead still has his eyes alive. There are laughable episodes as when Adebisi as office servant to the chief keeper of the custody is caught taking her master's liquor and thrown out. There are other unbelievable incidents like the help she receives from a gorilla and her riding on the back of a hippopotamus. An episode of far greater significance than any of these is connected with Adebisi's stay in Ibembe Town. Here, Tutuola employs in a skilful manner the literary device, which was referred to earlier, of completely integrating an anecdote into the framework of his novel. As barber to the king of Ibembe Town, Adebisi gets to know that the king's head sprouts two horns. However much she tries to keep the secret, the people finally get to know the fact from a bugle which 'speaks' out:-

The head of the King of Ibembe sprouts  
two horns!

The head of the King of Ibembe sprouts  
two horns!

The two horns are thick and short!

This bugle spoke out like that with a very lovely tone and when this man heard this he was so happy or admired it that he ran with bugle to the town.<sup>114</sup>

This disclosure leads to a riot between the supporters and opponents of the king. Adebisi leaves Ibembe Town without

delay to save her life. Apart from the fact that this story is highly imaginative and appropriately applied, it serves the artistic purpose of imparting some urgency to the heroine's mission. It is as a result of this incident that she hurries to the jungle of the pigmies where she has a job of work to do.

In The Brave African Huntress the motivation for the quest is positive. It is linked with the heroine's desire to prove herself as the inheritor of her father's hunting prowess. Here, as elsewhere in Tutuola, success is achieved only after the experience of pain and torture. By making Adebisi succeed where her father has failed the author may be tacitly giving his support to the emancipation of African girls. Whether he intends it or not, the heroine is presented as truly emancipated and independent. She needs these qualities, and more, to stand her ground against the monsters and dangerous pigmies of the jungle. Her fiercest antagonist is the monster Odara. He is as malicious as the Satyr of the last novel and makes no secret of his intention to destroy Adebisi. His appearance is enough to strike fear into the heart of any opponent:—

He was very tall and stout. He had a very rough body and this body was full of knots and his face was full of big pimples and his body was full of scars. His head was just as a small round hill, the hairs of his body were very long and rough in such a way that they could not be distinguished from the refuses ... Big and small cowries were tied to every part of the trousers in such a perfect way that the trousers itself could not be seen at all except those cowries. The cowries were full of the rotten blood and feathers of birds were stuck to the rotten blood. His eyes were so big and fearful that I was unable to look at them more than once. 115

After her success in vanquishing Odara we become confident that she will be able to overcome the danger posed by the pigmies.

The book is brought to a quick and delightful end on a note of triumph for the heroine. Not only has she succeeded in rescuing her four brothers and some other hunters from the pigmies, she has also fulfilled her ambition of wiping out the pigmies and other wild animals from the jungle. In addition, she returns home with some precious metals which she sells to become rich. It is a fitting tribute to her courage and perseverance that she gains from her mission more benefits than she originally set out to achieve.

## VII

As a preface to Feather Woman Tutuola inserts 'The Biography of my Town in Brief'. This is a factual description of the life of the Egba in the old days and gives among other things their occupations, beliefs, plays, amusements and means of communication. This biography is not an integral part of the book and is therefore not of major interest to the critic. However, having regard to the type of criticism available on his previous works at the time he was writing this book, it is of some significance that Tutuola who is known for his modesty has decided in his fifth book to advertise himself and his tribe the way he does here. There are two possible explanations. He may intend to remind those critics who accuse him of lack of patriotism that he is conscious of the culture and people about whom he writes. This explains the references to Oduduwa both in the biography and elsewhere in the book, the relish with which the hero-narrator describes a sight-seeing tour of Ife and Ede during the eighth entertainment and the inclusion of



the traditional description of Ife as the place where the sun rises and falls. On the other hand, it must be recalled that this book was written close to the time of Nigerian Independence. It may well be that all the author intends to achieve with the biography is to identify himself more closely with his roots and show a feeling of solidarity with his fellow-countrymen at a time of national achievement.

In Feather Woman Tutuola is doing what he knows best how to do - story-telling. The story-telling sessions are turned into full-scale entertainments with the same narrator in control of each entertainment. The hero and his objective provide the necessary link between the stories. The purpose of the original adventures was to seek fortune. In narrating the stories now the hero-narrator hopes the people will 'be able to sort out the useful senses which ... will be useful ... in future.'<sup>116</sup> He particularly wants his people to realise that 'it is very scarcely to go on a journey and return without punishments, hardships, etc. etc!'<sup>117</sup> The structuring of this book's content is functional. The author attempts a formal arrangement in which the journeys are recorded in chronological order. A few other devices help to hold the stories together within the same framework. Some stories provide the enjoyment for two or three entertainments: the first and fifth journeys go on for two nights each while the sixth journey goes on for three nights. At times a character met on one journey reappears in another: Sela, the hero's wife is separated from him during the fifth journey and reunited with him during the sixth journey. In all these journeys the sole purpose of the hero is kept in mind and provides all the motivation for the action. The fact that the ten entertainments are offered to the same audience and

each time under the same conditions give them an appearance of a single occurrence. What might have become monotonous in the hands of a less skilful artist is turned here by Tutuola into a special attraction.

The hero is portrayed as a man whose actions are realistically motivated. His ambition is to relieve his parents of their poverty. He therefore decides to take advantage of his youth and go on several adventures in order to become rich:-

I was very clever and fast enough when I was about fifteen years of age to know which was bad and good, which was to be done or not to be done. But this time I just began to experience the difficulties, hardships, punishments, etc., but I had not yet experienced the difficulties, hardships, punishments, risk, dangers, etc., of the adventures.<sup>118</sup>

The evidence is clear from these stories that the hero makes his money the hard way. He encounters a lot of difficulties which he can only overcome by relying more on his own ingenuity than on magic. We have here a lifelike portrayal of a believable character willing to take a lot of personal risk to get rich. He has become wiser as a result of his accumulated experience and it is part of this wisdom that he is anxious to pass on to his people in the traditional manner at story-telling sessions. Unfortunately, we can only judge him on what he does and says on these adventures. Since he is alone for the most part we are denied the advantage of knowing what other people think and say about him. He is not put in any situation of great complexity which demands intricate interpersonal relationships with other characters similarly realistically portrayed. His companions at various stages and for different reasons - Ajasa, Alabi and Sela - are faintly drawn and appear to exist only as instruments for furthering his purpose.

There is much evidence here of Tutuola's success in the handling of adventure stories. He continues in this novel his practice of making the beginning of his stories as arresting as possible so that the reader may wish to read on with great interest. Added attractions include richness of detail and the exercise of economy in the use of words, as we find in this description of the Queen of the Water People:-

As far as I saw her, she was about thirty years old. Her eyes were very clear and the face was very fresh as the face of a fifteen-year-old girl. There were no scars or pimples on her cheeks or face and the hair of her head was not so much dark but of course, probably the climate of that town had turned the hair to be like that. Her teeth were very white and very closely to each other. Her nose was quite pointed like that of an image, the slippers on her feet were made from the soft leather of crocodile. She had clear and lovely voice and her face always seemed as if she was kind and merciful.<sup>119</sup>

Most of the effect in this book is achieved by a combination of the ordinary with the marvellous and the use of people and ideas in sharp conflict with each other. These are some of the more important examples: for an offence that Ashabi has committed, she remains human while her brother and Alabi are turned to images; later she remains dumb for two years in order that the two men may regain their human form. The Queen of the Water People looks simple and harmless but the round box she gives to the hero performs wonders. In the Bush of Quietness the King and Queen are diametrically opposed to each other. In Ede, Sango invokes thunder and lightning, his wife Oya stops them. In the third entertainment three puppies - Sweeper, Cutter and Swallower - are pitched against the Savage Men and prove strong enough to foil the diabolical

plans of their chief. These conflicts usually give rise to some of the highly descriptive and emotional passages of the book. One such occasion is the confusion and fear caused by the two soldiers of the Goddess of the Diamonds when they bring thunder and lightning on the hero's town in their attempt to take Sela away. This is how Tutuola describes the effect of this action:-

When this was too much for us to bear,  
 then everyone began to shout for help.  
 The dumbs who could not speak were  
 murmuring, the deafs raised heads up to  
 their Creator and were expecting help  
 from Him although they could not hear.  
 And with great fear, the cocks crowed,  
 the elephants trumpeted, the lames crept,  
 the dogs barked, the horses neighed, the  
 cats jumped, the goats butted the ewes,  
 the rams scratched the ground to escape  
 into it, the bats scattered all over the  
 sky with fear.<sup>120</sup>

As in most of Tutuola's works there is an obsession in Feather Woman with pain and suffering: the images of the Feather Woman are whipped regularly; the king in the Bush of Quietness is beaten every midnight; the hero is punished by the Savage Men; the soldiers of the Goddess of the Diamonds set a town on fire, bringing untold suffering on the people; in the ninth entertainment the hero and Ajasa suffer in the hands of the Hairy Giant and the Hairy Giantess. Some of these episodes have parallels in Sundiata and make one wonder whether Tutuola has at any time read this book.<sup>121</sup> For example, the Feather Woman recalls the characteristics of the buffalo woman in Sundiata. Of the Feather Woman we are told:-

Her body was downy but she wrapped herself from knees to the waist with the skin of a tiger and the rest parts were soft feathers. The feathers were really grown out from her body except her head which had white thick hair. Her eyes were red and hollow with old age. Her breasts were hardly to see because soft feathers were covered them.<sup>122</sup>

Like the Feather Woman, Sogolon is possessed of witchcraft and covered with 'long hairs' which give her husband much cause for anxiety:-

I have been unable to possess her - and besides, she frightens me, this young girl. I even doubt whether she is a human being; when I drew close to her during the night her body became covered with long hairs and that scared me very much. All night long I called upon my wraith but he was unable to master Sogolon's.<sup>123</sup>

Also, the hut where the Feather Woman keeps her images - human beings who have been turned by her to mud images - reminds one of Soumaoro's horror chamber in Sundiata, which is also full of images. One is not altogether surprised to discover such similarities between these two books. Both are written in the spirit of adventure, although the subject-matter of Sundiata is of far greater importance than that of Feather Woman. In each case the experience of pain and suffering becomes necessary in order to achieve success.

### VIII

Ajaiyi, Tutuola's last novel, was published five years after Feather Woman. It would appear the author devoted this long break to a rethinking of some aspects of his writing. As a result of this exercise he may have decided to begin to write in a medium more capable of development and attempt to join what one might loosely call 'the main stream' of Nigerian writers. Such a decision, if taken, will give rise to an entirely different kind of novel and may be responsible for the fact that Ajaiyi is different from the author's previous books in many respects. These differences occur in the type of material used and the

way it is presented. Reference has already been made to the author's attempt in Ajaiyi to become a little less non-standard in his use of English and his more imaginative employment of dialogue. Another area of writing where some improvement is noticeable is in his disposition of characters. In his earlier books, with the possible exception of Simbi, only the main characters are substantially drawn; nearly all the others are wooden. Even in Simbi no other characters come close to attaining Simbi's stature and credibility. The situation is different in Ajaiyi. Ajaiyi is decidedly the hero of the novel but at least two other characters, Ojo and Alabi, receive a deal of attention and are presented as important in their own right. It is true that occasionally they act as foils to Ajaiyi, but for the most part they bear their own separate burdens and take their own independent decisions. In fact, on a few occasions Ojo or Alabi acts as the leader of the three, as Ojo does, for instance, in the town of the God of Iron. Each of these two characters is given sufficient literary vitality of his own, and in their midst Ajaiyi is little more than the first among equals. Another character who comes tolerably alive as an individual is Aina but she is placed for too long in the shadow of her brother. Speaking generally, one of Tutuola's main weaknesses in the novels we have been considering has been his inability to create characters who can capture the imagination as ordinary men and women in ordinary possible circumstances. This defect he only partially makes up for in Ajaiyi.

Like nearly all of Tutuola's works, this one is capable of two interpretations at two different levels of meaning. As with The Palm-Wine Drinkard, we do not get far enough with

a literal interpretation which presents the motivation for the quest as financial, Ajaiyi's relentless attempt to become rich and get rid of his inherited poverty. The reader sees this attempt frustrated by a number of missed opportunities: the £200 stolen by Ade, the fruitful kolanut tree cut down at the instance of Babi, the disappointment in the town of the Creator and even the rejected offer of the Devil. From this point of view the journey is a futile one. Ajaiyi does not become rich abroad; he returns home much worse materially than when he set out. It is only when we recognize the symbolic nature of the journey that we accord it its due importance. It will then be seen as a journey made not only for money but also in search of deliverance from everything that oppresses the soul. Such a salvation comes from working hard and enduring pain and disappointment. It can also be attained by abandoning the sort of life which prevents Ajaiyi, Ojo and Alabi from gaining access to the Creator. At this level of meaning success is not measured in terms of material acquisition but the extent to which one has been able to abstain from the acquisition of wealth through dishonest means in recognition of the fact that 'money is the father of all evils and the creator of all sins of this world.'<sup>124</sup>

Such a consideration leads naturally to one of the distinctive features of this novel. Unlike Tutuola's other books, the moral orientation here is definitely Christian. The whole book is presented as an elaborate device to teach people that 'one who is righteous will never follow the satan.'<sup>125</sup> There is no room for coexistence between the Devil and God since the Devil is anti-God and on his own confession

represents a negation of all that is admirable and peaceful:-

My name is Devil!  
 The possessor of money and all of the  
 worldly wealths!  
 The enemy of God!  
 The friend of fighters, thieves,  
 quarrelsome people!  
 The friend of murderers!  
 The enemy of righteous people!  
 The enemy of God worshippers!  
 The friend of rascal boys and girls! 126

The Christian moralistic conception of the work is noticeable throughout and must be responsible for nearly always placing the hero and his sister in the moral right and portraying every other person as morally inferior to them: Ade is made to betray Ajaiyi; Babi is portrayed as a dangerous character anxious to destroy Aina's means of livelihood; even so, Aina is good enough to save Babi's child. Even when, as servant to the Devil-doctor, Ajaiyi plans to elope with the former's wife the author makes it possible for him to absolve himself from all responsibility and all we are told repeatedly by Ajaiyi is 'I did not like to escape with another man's wife.'<sup>127</sup> Again, it is on grounds of morality that the hero refuses to pay the price demanded by the Devil for making him rich. He cannot bring himself to sacrifice his sister and put his conscience in danger in order to acquire wealth, as Ojo and Alabi have agreed to do:-

I preferred to be in the burden of this talking lump of the iron rather than to spare the life of my sister to Devil and to be his follower in respect of money. Although Ojo and Alabi were now very happy because their talking lumps of the iron had been taken from them and that they were going to get thousands of pounds in a few days' time but their two innocent sisters were going to die soon in respect of them.<sup>128</sup>

Ajaiyi will get out of his poverty only 'in a clean way.'



When he finally acquires the sum of six thousand pounds from the witch-doctor, he is still hampered in its use by the method of acquisition. He ends up building churches and involving himself in evangelical work. There can be no doubt that in this book Tutuola has allowed his strong feeling for Christianity to override artistic excellence. By his usual standard he has included here an overdose of popular religious sentiments.

The other highlights of this work will be dealt with fairly briefly. There is here ~~an~~ indisputable evidence of the author's interest in matters of immediate relevance to his society. More references are made to Nigerian beliefs, religious observances and customs in Ajaiyi than in any one of the previous books. There are episodes built around items like domestic slavery, funeral ceremony, idol-worship, sooth-saying and use of incantations. It is a measure of Tutuola's achievement that, although all these items are integrated into the work, the book is not overcrowded with episodes. Another feature of this book is the absence of the type of nightmarish illusion one finds in The Palm-Wine Drinkard. Instead of ogres and monsters we deal here with either ordinary people or deified personages like the god of Iron. Even the Creator is given anthropomorphic characteristics. The town of the Creator is like any earthly town except that it has a truly impartial system of justice. To prove that this is so the hero is made to see a pageant of people once highly-placed in society but now condemned to everlasting punishment in fire for various offences.

Tutuola introduces a new dimension to this work through

his use of symbolism. The god of Iron, apart from denying Ojo, Alabi and Ajaiyi money, gives to each of them a talking lump of iron. These turn out to be not only a physical burden which has to be carried from place to place but also a burden of the mind. The lumps of iron interfere with the happiness of their victims, prevent them from having any form of social intercourse and even from procuring food. More embarrassing for these men is the ambiguous statement issued by the lumps of iron whenever any attempt is made to abandon them:—

Wait and carry us along with you!  
 If you wait, you wait for danger!  
 But if you don't wait, you don't  
 wait for money!  
 It is better for you now to wait and  
 carry us along with you!  
 But if you carry us, you carry troubles,  
 misfortunes, poverty, etc. along to  
 your house!  
 If you don't wait to carry us, you fail  
 to carry good-luck along to your house!<sup>129</sup>

It is not surprising then that Ojo and Alabi take the first opportunity to get rid of their lumps of iron, even at such a high price imposed by the Devil. But, as may be expected, Ajaiyi, the man of character, perseveres in order to keep his soul untarnished. Having regard to the Christian outlook of this work, it seems certain that the author intends the lumps of iron as a symbolic representation of sin, possibly the penalty for some offence which has made poverty chronic in the families of the three men. No amelioration of such a situation is possible without expiation of the sin. In like manner no improvement is made in the material circumstances of the victims until they manage to get rid of their lumps of iron. Just as sin disturbs the whole of man's moral fibre, so also the lumps of iron shatter their victims' hope of

happiness. The experience provided by these lumps of iron must be symbolically interpreted if their cardinal importance to the action of the novel is to be fully appreciated. The use of such a symbolism constitutes an attractive new departure in Tutuola and shows the degree of sophistication he has attained since he wrote his first novel and how willing he is to apply his knowledge of tradition to the changing situation of modern life.

## IX

In Tutuola transliteration of customs and traditions relies on the methods of the story-teller and a language which displays all the characteristics of Ll. The more sophisticated his writing becomes, the more modern his ideas. Ajaiyi shows this new direction of Tutuola's work. There is a suggestion in this last novel of the superiority of the modern world to the tribal past: in contrast to the cruel traditional gods the Almighty Christian God is portrayed as merciful, and offers His followers the type of happiness which only the Town of the Creator can provide. By emphasizing the movement away from tribal religion to Christianity - from communal values to individualized conscience - the novel comes down clearly on the side of an individual code of conduct and the primacy of personal judgements. Tutuola is an example of a writer who has used his literary talents and strange inventiveness to establish a link between tradition and modern life. His works are no doubt rooted in Yoruba tradition, but his achievement as a writer lies in the way he has extended the traditional fantasy in the Yoruba folk tales to cover aspects of modern industrial civilization

while at the same time reminding people in contemporary society of the values and conditions of their ancestral past. Thus, starting from a position of near uncritical total acceptance of indigenous culture in his first five books, he arrives at a stage in Ajaiyi where he begins to question some of the basic assumptions of this culture.

Notes

- 1 Between 1952 and 1967 Tutuola wrote the following novels, all published by Faber and Faber, London. For convenience the shortened forms of the titles of four of the novels (given in brackets) are the ones used in this study.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard, 1952

My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, 1954. (Bush of Ghosts)

Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle, 1955. (Simbi)

The Brave African Huntress, 1958.

Feather Woman of the Jungle, 1962. (Feather Woman)

Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty, 1967. (Ajaiyi)

All translations from English to Yoruba in this chapter are mine.

- 2 The two sides of the argument are well summed up by some previous writers. See, for example, Gerald Moore, 'Amos Tutuola: A Modern Visionary', Seven African Writers (London, 1962), pp.39-57; Bernth Lindfors, 'Amos Tutuola and D.O. Fagunwa', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.9 (1970), pp.57-65; Omolara Leslie, 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard: a Reassessment of Amos Tutuola', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.9 (1970), pp.48-56.

For the difference in initial reaction to Tutuola at home and abroad compare, for example, Dylan Thomas's review of The Palm-Wine Drinkard in Observer, July 6, 1952, No.8405 with references to Tutuola in J.P. Clark, 'Our Literary Critics', Nigeria Magazine, 74 (1962).

- 3 See, for example, Geoffrey Parrinder in 'Foreward' to Bush of Ghosts; Moore, op.cit.; Janheinz Jahn, Muntu (London, 1961), p.215; Robert P. Armstrong, 'The Narrative and Intensive Continuity: The Palm-Wine Drinkard', Researches in African Literatures, Vol.1, No.1 (1970), 9-34. Vladimir Klima makes the same point in Modern Nigerian Novels (Prague, 1969), p.57.
- 4 Anne Tibble, African/English Literature (London, 1965), p.96.
- 5 Bernth Lindfors, 'Approaches to Folklore in African Literature', The Conch, Vol.II, No.2 (1970), 102-111.
- 6 Harold Collins, Amos Tutuola (New York, 1969), p.ix.
- 7 Ibid., p.103.
- 8 Leslie, op. cit., p.53.
- 9 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, pp.45-46.
- 10 Simbi, p.75.

- 11 Bush of Ghosts, p.20.
- 12 Ibid., p.144.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.13.
- 15 Ibid., p.18.
- 16 Ibid., p.11.
- 17 Ibid., p.31.
- 18 Ibid., p.91.
- 19 Ibid., p.13.
- 20 The Brave African Huntress, p.43.
- 21 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, pp.9-10.
- 22 The Brave African Huntress, p.30.
- 23 Ibid., p.77.
- 24 Ajaiyi, p.76.
- 25 See A. Afolayan, 'Amos Tutuola: Language and Sources', Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association, Vol.2, No.2 (1968), 159-60.
- 26 Ibid., p.160.
- 27 Collins, op. cit., p.109.
- 28 Ibid., p.125.
- 29 Ibid., pp.85-86.
- 30 Ibid., p.81.
- 31 Ibid., p.115.
- 32 Ulli Beier, 'Nigerian Literature', Nigeria Magazine, Special Independence Issue (1960), p.213.
- 33 Recent criticisms are far more favourable. See, for example, A. Adetugbo, 'Form and Style', Introduction to Nigerian Literature, ed. Bruce King (London, 1971), p.176; Abiola Irele, 'The Criticism of Modern African Literature', Perspectives on African Literature, ed. Christopher Heywood (London, 1971), p.17.

- 34 See, for example, Ulli Beier, 'Fagunwa, a Yoruba Novelist', Black Orpheus, 17 (1965), pp.52-56; A. Olubunmo, 'D.O. Fagunwa - A Yoruba Novelist', Odu, 9 (1963), pp.26-30; Collins, op. cit., pp.67-68; Bernth Lindfors, 'Amos Tutuola and D.O. Fagunwa', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.9 (1970), pp.57-65; A. Afolayan, op. cit., p.160.
- 35 Lindfors, J.C.L., p.61.
- 36 Lindfors, J.C.L., p.64.
- 37 Fagunwa, pp.22-26; Tutuola, pp.74-79; 121-125.
- 38 Fagunwa, p.29; Tutuola, pp.67-73.
- 39 Fagunwa, p.94; Tutuola, pp.29-33.
- 40 Fagunwa, p.59; Tutuola, p.101.
- 41 Fagunwa, p.96; Tutuola, Simbi, pp.109-114.
- 42 Fagunwa, pp.106-115; Tutuola, The Palm-Wine Drinkard, pp.31-38.
- 43 Fagunwa, pp.123-130; Tutuola, Ajaiyi, pp.64-72.
- 44 Fagunwa, p.139; Tutuola, Simbi, pp.129-136.
- 45 Fagunwa, p.93.
- 46 Tutuola, Simbi, p.77.
- 47 See, for example, Itayemi and Gurrey, Folktales and Fables (London, 1953), pp.46-50 for another version of this tale.
- 48 Fagunwa, p.131.
- 49 Ibid., p.140.
- 50 Robert Armstrong, op. cit., p.30.
- 51 Wole Soyinka, 'From a Common Back Cloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image', AMSAC Newsletter, Vol.6, No.6 (1964), 5.
- 52 Feather Woman, p.104.
- 53 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.83.
- 54 Bush of Ghosts, p.133.
- 55 Simbi, p.82.
- 56 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.115.

- 57 Lynn Altenbernd and Leslie Lewis, A Handbook for the Study of Fiction (London, 1969), pp.63-64.
- 58 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.7.
- 59 Feather Woman, p.36.
- 60 For a discussion of the evolutionary and devolutionary uses of folktales see Alan Dundes, 'The Devolutionary Premise in Folklore Theory', Journal of the Folklore Institute, Vol. 6, No.1 (1969), 5-19.
- 61 p.35.
- 62 p.40.
- 63 p.73.
- 64 p.50.
- 65 p.96.
- 66 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.25.
- 67 Ibid., pp.79-80.
- 68 Bush of Ghosts, p.152.
- 69 S.O. Anozie, 'Structure and Utopia in Tutuola's Palm-Wine Drinkard', The Conch, Vol.2, No.2 (1970), 86.
- 70 Simbi, p.9.
- 71 Bush of Ghosts, p.98.
- 72 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.22.
- 73-4 Simbi, pp.112-3.
- 75 Bush of Ghosts, p.84.
- 76 Simbi, p.61.
- 77 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.67.
- 78 O.R. Dathorne, 'The African Novel - document to experiment', Unpublished Seminar Paper (1965), p.7.
- 79 Simbi, p.16.
- 80 Ajaiyi, p.142.



- 81 Ibid., p.188.
- 82 See, for example, E.N. Obiechina, 'Amos Tutuola and Oral Tradition', Presence Africaine, 65 (1968), p.96 and Collins, op. cit., chapters 4 and 5.
- 83 G. Parrinder in Foreward to Bush of Ghosts, p.11.
- 84 Omosade Awolalu, 'The Yoruba Philosophy of Life', Presence Africaine, No.73 (1970), p.21.
- 85 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, p.8.
- 86 Ibid., p.120.
- 87 Moore, op. cit., p.47.
- 88 The Palm-Wine Drinkard, pp.58-59.
- 89 Ibid., p.12.
- 90 Ibid., pp.19-20.
- 91 Ibid., p.17.
- 92 Ibid., pp.68-69.
- 93 Robert Armstrong, op. cit., p.16.
- 94 In the more popular version of this story a vulture carries the sacrifice to Heaven. This is the version used by Achebe in Things Fall Apart. If Tutuola had used this version, he would not have been able to bring out clearly, as he now does, the intended relationship between man and his gods.
- 95 G. Parrinder in Foreword to Bush of Ghosts, p.15.
- 96 Bush of Ghosts, p.111.
- 97 Ibid., p.135.
- 98 Ibid., p.154.
- 99 Ibid., pp.60-61.
- 100 Ibid., p.129.
- 101 Ibid., p.35.
- 102 Ibid., p.123.
- 103 See, for example, Gerald Moore, op. cit., p.42.
- 104 Simbi, p.74.

- 105 Ibid., p.84.
- 106 Ibid., p.20.
- 107 Ibid., p.7.
- 108 Ibid., p.108.
- 109 Ibid., p.109.
- 110 Ibid., pp.110-111.
- 111 Ibid., p.80.
- 112 Ibid., p.123.
- 113 The Brave African Huntress, p.9.
- 114 Ibid., p.44.
- 115 Ibid., pp. 27-28.
- 116 Feather Woman, p.12.
- 117 Ibid., p.132.
- 118 Ibid., p.12.
- 119 Ibid., p.74.
- 120 Ibid., p.99.
- 121 Professor Collins reports that about this time Tutuola was doing a lot of reading for enjoyment and self-improvement. See Collins, op. cit., pp.23-24, 129.
- 122 Feather Woman, pp.14-15.
- 123 D.T. Niane, Sundiata, translated by G.D. Pickett (London, 1965), p.11.
- 124 Ajaiyi, pp.179-180.
- 125 Ibid., p.194.
- 126 Ibid., p.186.
- 127 Ibid., p.208.
- 128 Ibid., p.190.
- 129 Ibid., p.168.

## Chapter Three

## Chinua Achebe

At first it may seem that no two writers could be more dissimilar than Tutuola and Achebe. Tutuola's material is mainly traditional and relies for its effect on the mode of communication and linguistic characteristics of Yoruba. The result is a kind of writing which concentrates more on ancestral values and implies, on the whole, little criticism of Yoruba society, past and present. For this reason the link with modern life is not always recognizable. However, as was pointed out in the last chapter, the juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements at various points in Tutuola's narrative often brings to the reader's attention the intended link with modern experience.

The process started by Tutuola is carried so much further by Achebe that it may be difficult at first to appreciate the connection between the two. In fact, both novelists rely heavily on traditional lore and indigenous customs and write with a distinctly sociological bias. Each has created in his own time literary structures in which he gives expression to authentically Nigerian experiences and has relied, to varying degrees, on the resources of his first language. Both novelists therefore exhibit in their writings features which may be described as uniquely Nigerian. What, in the main, differentiates Achebe from Tutuola is that in Achebe the criticism of past and present Nigerian societies, particularly Ibo society, is more pungent and the link between the past and present much stronger. As will soon become

evident, this is achieved by the way Achebe presents the traditional customs and practices of his people in situations which suggest the deep convictions of the characters who believed in them, and in his use of an English-language diction appropriate to character, theme and situation. Tutuola makes no conscious attempt to do the first and succeeds, only partially, in his last novel with the second.

What has probably made Achebe the best-known Nigerian novelist is the consistency of his vision which makes it possible for the critic to establish a strong link between his four novels.<sup>1</sup> These novels, considered as a whole, give a serious artist's interpretation of the history of his people and reveal two kinds of movement. The movement of time is from late last century (Things Fall Apart) through the 1920s (Arrow of God) and 1950s (No Longer at Ease) to 1966 (A Man of the People).<sup>2</sup> The movement of place is, to put it simply, from the country in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God to the town in No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People, although sections of the last two novels are set in the country. Achebe's works are dominated by the country and traditional society from where he has taken his two most important characters, Okonkwo and Ezeulu. Even the novels set in the town are greatly influenced by the country and the characters in these novels are made conscious of the importance of rural virtues. Some attention will be given, as necessary, in this study to these two movements with the aim of showing that Achebe succeeds more with the past than the present, with rural characters more than city-dwellers.

Another reason for Achebe's success is his ability to look at a situation from very varied points of view, sometimes bringing

them before the reader simultaneously. The reader finds, almost invariably, that no one point of view is wholly acceptable and that, to reach a satisfying conclusion, several points of view have to be taken into consideration. This quality is owed, as will be shown with several examples later, to Achebe's successful attempt to present many sides of a case with apparent impartiality. For example, he does not seek to explain, justify or condemn the Ibo background against which he mostly writes. He no doubt has a great admiration for this life, but he does not idealize it nor does he at any stage become sentimental in his presentation. Beside the strengths he gives the weaknesses in tribal society. We therefore have a true and complete picture in which the whole of the background is fully realized. We are given enough information about the people for us to feel well acquainted with them and their way of life. We have realistically and convincingly presented many aspects of village life - the feast of the New Yam, the wrestling contest at the 'ilo', the display of the 'egwugwu' on festive occasions, the religious beliefs and activities of the people, their desire for health, happiness and success in life, their attitude to war and their devotion to farming which is their main occupation, to mention only a few. In the opinion of Professor Walsh,

Whether the vision of Ibo society given in the novels is justified by history is almost irrelevant. What we have in this work is a conception of civilisation which has a root in reality. It includes a world and a group with a coherent anatomy of standards and beliefs and a solid convincing body. This is a universe perfectly suited to a novelist. It is complete but small. It incorporates a standard and it expresses itself in a characteristic mode of living .....<sup>3</sup>

But the weaknesses are there and Achebe does not attempt to conceal them. We see in these people an attitude of intolerance towards strangers and outside influence. They are suspicious of everything new. The fear of some unknown evil which may afflict them at any time seems to dominate their lives:-

Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string.<sup>4</sup>

Individuals seem to be perpetually on their guard lest they unwittingly bring some misfortune upon themselves or the tribe as a whole:-

"Ekwefi!" a voice called from one of the other huts. It was Nwoye's mother, Okonkwo's first wife.

"Is that me?" Ekwefi called back. That was the way people answered calls from outside. They never answered yes for fear it might be an evil spirit calling.<sup>5</sup>

This element of fear turns out to be important in the development of Achebe's novels. First, it explains the society's rejection of anything which looks abnormal, like albinos and twins. Secondly, it helps to ensure that any strangers who attempt to establish themselves in this society in the name of religion or good government will be resisted. So we find that, although the society has a concreteness of its own, it is not designed for dynamic growth. Even without much external pressure a society which barricades itself against new ideas and forms of action is likely to experience a moral decline, not to mention an economic one. As will be seen, the process of disintegration is accelerated by the arrival of new groups with new ideas which are at first totally

incomprehensible to the people. In this way the society pays a high price for its inflexibility, its inability to make necessary adjustment with time, its incapacity for change.

Another result of this attitude of mind is the mutual suspicion and tension it generates among the people themselves. The distrust of outsiders is soon directed inwards to the society. The result is that the people do not trust one another to the extent one would expect in such a closely-knit tribal society:-

We grew up knowing that the world was full of enemies. Our father had protective medicine located at crucial points in our house and compound. One, I remember, hung over the main entrance; but the biggest was in a gourd in a corner of his bedroom. No child went alone into that room which was virtually always under lock and key anyway. We were told that such and such homes were never to be entered; and those people were pointed out to us from whom we must not accept food.<sup>6</sup>

This inclination to distrust Achebe uses for his artistic purpose. His novels record the stresses and tensions in society. Some of these merely provide the necessary motivation for action while others are developed into full-scale rivalries between diametrically-opposed religious or political groups.

In Achebe the tensions in society provide the conditions for the breakdown of communication between various groups, a theme to which he attaches great importance. Achebe's novels are of special interest to the investigator of 'problems of communication', for he is himself preoccupied with communication at all levels - between people of different cultures and religious beliefs, between people of the same race and political inclination, between different sections of the same community, between the Government and the people, between the town and country. This interest in communication is not altogether surprising for one who has been a

professional broadcaster. In all his novels disaster results from a breakdown in communication either between two individuals as in A Man of the People or between an individual and his community as in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. The progressive deterioration in the quality of life which one observes in Achebe's novels is caused mainly by the appearance of an external influence or group which the people do not fully understand and therefore cannot appreciate. His principal characters fall in all cases as a result of too much assertion of individualism. With Achebe isolation spells disaster. His heroes come to grief as soon as they fail to communicate effectively with their people.

But communication is a two-way affair. Whenever it fails, usually the two sides in the system suffer as a result of the breakdown. That is why the downfall of Achebe's heroes usually has a disastrous effect on the people. Although the heroes of Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God fall alone, their societies are never the same again after their exit. In A Man of the People the society suffers just as much as its offending members. Even the fall of a weak character like Obi Okonkwo leaves its mark in the fearful precedent it creates. To the extent that these heroes are embodiments of some of the weaknesses in society, their tragedy constitutes a sad commentary on society itself. This, in Achebe, is a sign that either or both of them have failed to communicate effectively. Achebe's greatness, therefore, must be seen in the way he balances the needs of the individual against those of the society and the way he effectively utilizes the problems of communication to explore in depth the condition of man in society. It is to these problems, important for Umuofia and Umuaro societies



as for ours, that this study is devoted in an attempt to show how successfully Achebe has established a link between the past and present.

## II

Things Fall Apart presents the breakdown in communication at two levels: the personal level - between Okonkwo and Umuofia society - and the group level - between Umuofia society on one hand and Christianity and the British Administration on the other. The hero Okonkwo embodies in a magnified form the strengths and weaknesses of his society, and because of the skill with which Achebe handles his material Okonkwo's importance emerges quite naturally and unobtrusively out of the living situation of the novel. Right from the first page we are told one of the incidents to which he owes his position in society:-

The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat.<sup>7</sup>

This is Achebe's description of how Okonkwo throws the great wrestler, Amalinze the Cat. In this short passage the author, by apt comparisons and economy of style, builds the two opponents to almost equal strength in order to bring out clearly the importance of Okonkwo's victory.

But although Okonkwo is undoubtedly an important member of Umuofian society, he is hardly a typical representative of that society. True enough, he shares the ideals of the society with his fellow-clansmen and partakes of its corporate life in peace and war. Achebe puts Okonkwo in many social contexts - as a wrestler, a spectator at the 'ilo', an emissary for his tribe, a father, a head of his household and a village elder - in order to emphasize the fact that he has his roots firmly on Umuofian soil. His personal achievements are such as the tribe admires - three wives, two titles, large barns full of yams. He works so hard that, even as a young man, he is already one of the greatest men of his time. 'Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered.'<sup>8</sup> The first part of the novel is devoted to the evocation of Umuofia society, and Achebe's method of exposition is to integrate Okonkwo fully into the society so that the reader may appreciate the background from which he is later to be alienated.

It is usually through the detailed narration of certain important events that Achebe shows Okonkwo's place in society and the hero's concern for the customs and traditions of his ancestors. Consider, for example, Achebe's description of the wrestling contest at the village arena:-

The whole village turned out on the ilo, men, women and children. They stood round

in a huge circle leaving the centre of the playground free. The elders and grandees of the village sat on their own stools brought there by their young sons or slaves. Okonkwo was among them. All others stood except those who came early enough to secure places on the few stands which had been built by placing smooth logs on forked pillars.

The wrestlers were not there yet and the drummers held the field. They too sat just in front of the huge circle of spectators, facing the elders. Behind them was the big and ancient silk-cotton tree which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade.

There were seven drums and they were arranged according to their sizes in a long wooden basket. Three men beat them with sticks, working feverishly from one drum to another. They were possessed by the spirit of the drums.<sup>9</sup>

A passage like this helps to evoke the feel of life in Umuofia before the advent of Christianity and the British Administration. The reader can feel the excitement of the people and the very rhythms of life as reflected by the beating of the drums and the resilience of Achebe's prose. The first sentence tells us how popular and communal this activity is - "The whole village turned out on the 'ilo', men, women and children." The importance of the occasion is underlined by the presence of 'the elders and grandees of the village'. The fact that Okonkwo is regarded as one of these - 'Okonkwo was among them.' - shows not only his pre-eminence in society but also the extent to which he is supposed to embody society's ideals. Achebe's description conveys an impression of an orderly hierarchical society in which both age and status matter a

great deal. Not only does he show an eye for detail, visualization is also sharp. Everybody in the crowded 'ilo' takes his rightful place and contributes in some way, whether as actor or spectator, to the success of the festive occasion. So we find that the spectators 'stood round in a huge circle leaving the centre of the playground free' for the drummers and wrestlers and that 'except those who came early enough to secure places on the few stands...' others are content to stand. The young ones and slaves carry the stools on which elders sit. Before the wrestlers are ready 'the drummers held the field'. The seven drums are arranged 'according to their sizes in a long wooden basket'. Such realistic descriptions are possible only because of Achebe's power of observation and his firm control of English. In this passage, for example, the novelist's prose becomes less dispassionate as one reads from paragraph one to three. In paragraph three the 'spirit of the drums' is reflected in the increased speed of narration, especially in the use of expressions like 'working feverishly', 'possessed'.

It is through such descriptions that Achebe gives Umuofia what Professor Walsh has called 'a coherent anatomy of standards and beliefs and a solid convincing body.' But even where, as in this passage, Achebe appears to be showing a nostalgia for the past there is always a sustained balance between his own nostalgia and the need for artistic objectivity. This, as will be continually stressed in this study, gives his works their complexity. It is a mark of Achebe's intelligent objectivity that in a description of a successful sporting event we are given an indication of the fear of capricious gods and magic and the adherence to superstition which are a feature of life at Umuofia. The 'ancient silk-cotton tree

which was sacred', referred to in the second paragraph of the passage, is a case in point. 'Spirits of good children', we are told, 'lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade.' The 'young women' are no doubt convinced of the usefulness of their action. But the way the information about the 'sacred' tree is given - so casually - in this passage reveals a slightly sardonic intent on the part of the novelist. 'Good children' is used here in ironic contrast to twins, 'ogbanje' and 'osu' which traditionally are regarded as a threat to the collective security of Umuofia.

Nothing demonstrates more clearly Okonkwo's importance in society than the scene in which, as an 'egwugwu', he appears with 'nine of the greatest masked spirits in the clan'.<sup>10</sup> The 'egwugwu' is 'the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan',<sup>11</sup> and, by devoting the whole of chapter ten of the novel to it, Achebe intends to emphasize its unique place in Ibo culture. The performance takes the form of a trial in which the 'masked spirits' settle a marital dispute, but the reader's interest is aroused by the way Achebe includes elements of both the grotesque and the deeply impressive. Evil Forest, the leading 'egwugwu', strikes one as an object of terror not so much because 'smoke poured out of his head' but mainly because of the dreadful responsibility of his office:-

"Umuofia kwenu!" shouted the leading egwugwu, pushing the air with his raffia arms. The elders of the clan replied, "Yaa!"  
 "Umuofia kwenu!"  
 "Yaa!"  
 "Umuofia kwenu!"  
 "Yaa!"

Evil Forest then thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth. And it began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life. He took the first of the empty stools and the eight other

egwugwu began to sit in order of seniority after him.<sup>12</sup>

In the whole of this scene Achebe has had to rely heavily on the resources of Ibo language and culture to dramatize the interrelation between environment and character, between Evil Forest acting in the name of the elders on one hand and the litigants and audience on the other. For it is only on the assumption that the egwugwu's authority is unassailable and will be readily accepted by the people can a scene like this succeed - and does succeed. The formal address, 'Umuofia kwenu' evokes a massive response and helps to focus attention on Evil Forest while he performs the symbolic act of thrusting 'the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth.' The word 'rattling' is significant. Throughout the scene the symbol of metal, usually associated with the egwugwu, is used to integrate Okonkwo with his cultural environment. Expressions like 'an iron gong sounded',<sup>13</sup> 'the metal gong beat continuously',<sup>14</sup> 'the sound of the many tiny bells and rattles',<sup>15</sup> found elsewhere in the narrative, help to reinforce this symbol. Metal denotes strength and durability, and might have been used here as a symbolic reminder of what, up to now, has been an essential quality of Ibo culture - its conservatism and inflexibility. There is, however, the suggestion that this situation cannot remain unchanged for much longer. Forces are already at work which will finally disrupt the present apparently smooth surface of communal life and dislodge institutions like the egwugwu from their positions of strength. All this is symbolically suggested by the behaviour of Evil Forest's staff which 'began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life.' The word 'agitating' symbolizes the state of restlessness, the imperceptible change of which

Umuofia society is as yet blissfully ignorant.

Meanwhile, Evil Forest, as the leading egwugwu, brings the trial scene to an impressive end after each party to the dispute has stated his case:-

"Uzowulu's body, I salute you," he said

"Our father, my hand has touched the ground," replied Uzowulu, touching the earth.

"Uzowulu's body, do you know me?"

"How can I know you, father? You are beyond our knowledge," Uzowulu replied.

"I am Evil Forest. I kill a man on the day that his life is sweetest to him."

"That is true," replied Uzowulu.

"Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman."

He turned to Odukwe, and allowed a brief pause.

"Odukwe's body, I greet you," he said.

"My hand is on the ground," replied Odukwe.

"Do you know me?"

"No man can know you," replied Odukwe.

"I am Evil Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots. If your in-law brings wine to you, let your sister go with him. I salute you."

He pulled his staff from the hard earth and thrust it back.

'Umuofia kwenu!' he roared, and the crowd answered.<sup>16</sup>

It is the dignity of the scene which impresses the reader most. This dignity is evoked by details such as the formality of address - 'Uzowulu's body, I salute you', 'Odukwe's body, I greet you' - the repetition of certain conventional statements and answers - 'Do you know me? No man can know you' - the willing performance of ritualistic acts like touching the ground as a sign of total submission to the egwugwu and the orderliness of the whole procedure as shown, for example, in the deliberate 'brief pause' before the egwugwu addresses each group. However, the scene is not without some sombre aspects. Evil Forest endows himself with terrible attributes and gives himself grotesque cognomens - 'I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-

mouth, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots'. Do these aspects add to the dignity of the scene or detract from it? Is there any ironic intention on the part of the novelist here? Is it being suggested, for instance, that Evil Forest's authority rests on his capacity to do evil? Do the cognomens have the same devastating effect as the praise-names which the elders give themselves in Okara's The Voice? Achebe's attitude is not altogether clear. But since these cognomens are presented as direct translations from the Ibo original his intention may be to show how rooted in Ibo tradition the scene is in content and language. After all, quite rightly, in the whole passage he has had to rely heavily on the linguistic characteristics of Ibo and Ibo speech rhythm in order that the various statements and responses may be 'in character'. 'Uzowulu's body, I salute you', a transliteration from Ibo, is quite acceptable in the context. It would have been inappropriate for Achebe to write instead 'Good Afternoon, Uzowulu', a mode of greeting which fails to take into consideration the assumed relationship between Evil Forest and Uzowulu. Again, when the 'egwugwu' says 'It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman' he is expressing in direct straightforward English what every Ibo recognizes in his language as an idiom. It is through such devices as we find in the egwugwu scene that Achebe demonstrates Okonkwo's importance in society and the conservative nature of Ibo culture.

Okonkwo's tragedy arises from the fact that he wants the old order retained. Anything which disturbs this order he regards as a personal threat to himself. For instance, when the Christian missionaries arrive, he sees the threat



only from the narrow angle of tradition, forgetting that behind the missionaries lies a power greater than themselves. As he sees it, Nwoye's defection to the Christians amounts to a great betrayal:-

Now that he had time to think of it, his son's crime stood out in its stark enormity. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god. If such a thing were ever to happen, he, Okonkwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth.<sup>17</sup>

Okonkwo's mind is laid bare for us in a manner successfully similar to Okara's handling of Okolo in The Voice. Achebe involves the reader in Okonkwo's thoughts and motives, and manipulates our sympathy in favour of his hero. We come to realize his utter contempt for Christians - 'effeminate men clucking like old hens' - and the fact that he sees his fight with them only in cultural terms - 'to abandon the gods of one's father ... was the very death of abomination.' We are inclined at this stage to sympathize with a man whose declared intention is to preserve his ancestral gods. If we withdraw our sympathy later it is only because Okonkwo shows such narrow vision and single-mindedness in the pursuit of his objectives. The 'prospect of annihilation', of which Okonkwo speaks here, looks forward to much that is important in the novel. In an attempt to live down the life of a lazy and improvident father Okonkwo terrorizes members of his family and commits excesses of various kinds. If his overweening ambition and obsession with

masculinity had brought him in conflict only with his fellow-men, he might have survived through sheer force of character and record of personal achievements. But he also commits offences against his 'chi' and isolates himself further from his people. Through his periodic defiance of the gods Okonkwo becomes, in a sense, a type of abnormality the society is not equipped to handle. For instance, when he violates the Week of Peace, he is told by Ezeani, the priest of Ani, the earth goddess: 'The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish'.<sup>18</sup> The people are so outraged by Okonkwo's excesses that they liken him to the little bird 'nza' who, in the words of the proverb, "so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his 'chi'".<sup>19</sup> The warning embodied in this proverb is a clear one - that nobody can offend his 'chi' and hope to get away with it. Perhaps Okonkwo would have got away with it if he had avoided a direct confrontation with the British Administration. By committing a series of tragic errors Okonkwo makes the 'prospect of annihilation' a real one, and gives the last sentence of the passage an ironic twist. Instead of his children, it is he who is wiped 'off the face of the earth'.

Of the events which lead to the alienation of Okonkwo from the people of Umuofia and his son Nwoye the death of Ikemefuna is probably the most important. In his presentation of this incident Achebe dramatizes the ambiguity in the relationship between man and his gods in Umuofia society:-

"I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy," he asked Obierika.

"Because I did not want to," Obierika replied sharply. "I had something better to do."

"You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die."

"I do not. Why should I? But the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision."

"But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?"

"You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families."

"The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger," Okonkwo said, "A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm."<sup>20</sup>

By the juxtaposition of two different points of view - those of Okonkwo and Obierika - Achebe successfully dramatizes the complexity of the situation. A situation like this does not admit of any easy judgement or conclusion. It reminds one of some of Tutuola's dilemma tales in which any particular solution to a given situation is applicable only in a limited way. The argument of both parties appears sound. Okonkwo is convinced that he has done no more than carry out the wishes of the Oracle - 'The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger' - and clinches his point with a proverb, the last sentence of the passage. Obierika, on the other hand, charges Okonkwo with what amounts to culpable homicide, for which he contends Okonkwo and Umuofia will suffer - 'What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.' For the reader to understand the present situation fully he has to connect the present with the past and see the argument in the context of the novel as a whole. When he recalls, for example, that

Okonkwo has previously been warned by Ogbuefi Ezeudu not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna - 'That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death'<sup>21</sup> - he would see how relevant past events are to the present situation. When it turns out later that it is at the funeral ceremony of the same Ezeudu that Okonkwo makes the mistake that sends him packing from Umuofia, one begins to wonder whether Obierika's has not been the voice of reason, whether, in fact, Okonkwo, like Ezeulu in Arrow of God, has not misinterpreted the will of the gods. For such is the ambiguous relationship between man and god in Achebe's novels that man's survival usually depends on his ability to carry out correctly the wishes of the gods. We are confronted here with an ironic situation in which Okonkwo, in his attempt to uphold 'the authority and the decision of the Oracle' displeases the earth goddess.

The situation is made even more complex by Okonkwo's personal reaction to Ikemefuna's death:-

Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor. He called his son, Nwoye, to sit with him in his obi. But the boy was afraid of him and slipped out of the hut as soon as he noticed him dozing.

He did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried the more he thought about him. Once he got up from bed and walked about his compound. But he was so weak that his legs could hardly carry him. He felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito.<sup>22</sup>

Okonkwo is overcome by grief after the death of Ikemefuna. He feels deserted and lonely, and therefore calls his son 'to sit with him in his obi'. He cannot eat or sleep and unsuccessfully seeks to drown his sorrow in palm-wine. Achebe

dramatizes this grief and brings it vividly before the reader in the verbal picture he draws of Okonkwo's eyes which 'were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor.' Why does a man who is anxious not to be considered weak and who seems certain that what he has done has the approval of the gods become inconsolable at the death of a boy? Given this situation, what justification does the novel provide for Okonkwo's brutal treatment of his wives and children? We are told in the last sentence of the passage that Okonkwo feels 'like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito'. Bearing in mind this contrast between the giant and the mosquito, and the complexity with which Okonkwo's character is drawn, it seems likely that the author's intention is to suggest that, despite Okonkwo's preoccupation with masculinity and contempt for the display of all gentle emotions, he is not completely devoid of humanity. In fact, evidence abounds in the novel that he has not always been harsh and brutal. We have the testimony of Ekwefi to the fact that in early life he was gentle and kind. We see how relieved he is that his wife is unharmed after the gun-fire incident and how distressed he is now at the death of Ikemefuna. In order to comfort Ekwefi, he goes looking for her at the entrance of the cave where she is waiting to receive Ezinma back from Chielo, the priestess of Agbala. However, in spite of these occasional display of kindness, it is Okonkwo's brutalities which influence the course of events in the novel and finally alienate him from his people. It is, for example, because of his harsh treatment of Nwoye and his part in the killing of Ikemefuna that tension develops between

Okonkwo and his son, leading to a complete breakdown in communication between the two. As we are told in the passage, Nwoye 'was afraid of him [Okonkwo] and slipped out of the hut as soon as he noticed him dozing.' This is the beginning of the estrangement between father and son which reaches its climax with Nwoye becoming a Christian.

But all this leaves a basic problem only partially resolved. Why does Okonkwo appear to have purged himself of all gentle emotions, so as completely to ignore the softer dimensions of tribal life? Nothing in <sup>the</sup> Umuofian code of ethics prevents a man from being strong and successful but gentle at the same time. Can it be that Okonkwo shows kindness only as a matter of necessity? Is he doing violence to his true nature when he tries to damp down all outside manifestations of gentleness? Or is it just a matter of putting public virtue in a conformist sense over and above his private feelings? What, for example, prevents Okonkwo from adopting, like his father, the liberal tradition within Ibo culture? The novel does not provide entirely satisfactory answers to these questions even though Achebe gives clear insights into Okonkwo's two important motivations for action by linking his present temperament first with the values of his society and secondly with the need to live down what he considers the disgrace of his father's life. Achebe accounts successfully in the novel for the social and psychological factors arising from the first motivation. These, as has been pointed out, show Okonkwo as an embodiment, in a magnified form, of the strengths and weaknesses of his society. Achebe does less well with the second which, at best, provides only a negative reason for his hero's actions. The reader would

require much more information about Unoka to be convinced that his memory can influence Okonkwo to the extent the novel claims. The little information we have shows Unoka as a lover of music and the arts and as one endowed with those human qualities which Okonkwo would have been the better for possessing:-

He was very good on his flute, and his happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest when the village musicians brought down their instruments, hung above the fireplace. Unoka would play with them, his face beaming with blessedness and peace. Sometimes another village would ask Unoka's band and their dancing egwugwu to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes. They would go to such hosts for as long as three or four markets, making music and feasting. Unoka loved the good fare and the good fellowship, and he loved this season of the year, when the rains had stopped and the sun rose every morning with dazzling beauty.<sup>23</sup>

Unoka is not the worthless man that his son makes him out to be. He is an accomplished artist whose expertise is much sought after by other villages which 'would ask Unoka's band ... to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes.' Generous and good-natured, 'Unoka loved the good fare and the good fellowship.' Here no doubt is a man who through the use of his artistic imagination is at peace with himself. The evenness of Achebe's prose reflects this inward serenity which is brought out in expressions like 'his face beaming with blessedness and peace', 'making music and feasting', 'the sun rose every morning with dazzling beauty'. Achebe seems to approve of Unoka and, in fact, contrasts him with the other artist in the novel, Okoye, who is willing to prostitute the integrity of his art in order to take some of the highest titles in the land. It is true that Unoka's manner of life and death is deprecated by Umuofia society. But the picture of him which comes through from the pages of the novel is one of almost unqualified

approval. Given this situation, the critic is entitled to wonder why the only use made of Unoka in the novel is the negative motivation he provides <sup>for</sup> Okonkwo.

Whatever the part played by the gods, social and psychological factors contribute to Okonkwo's alienation from his people. The spiritual isolation which starts among his own people at Umuofia becomes more intense during his period of exile at Mbanta. When he finally returns, he never really captures the prevailing mood of the times and proves completely incapable of adjusting himself to the new situation created by the presence of the Christian missionaries. The conflict in this novel arises more from a particular than a general failure. It results mainly from Okonkwo's unpreparedness to face reality and accept the fact that the unity of the tribe has been considerably weakened by those aspects of tribal life which many begin not to understand or appreciate. He forgets that he can no longer act as a spokesman for Umuofia, that as Achebe says,

Seven years was a long time to be away from one's clan. A man's place was not always there, waiting for him. As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another.<sup>24</sup>

Okonkwo is too mentally isolated from his community to appreciate the significance of the proverb in the quotation since this in itself is part of the function of the society from which he is now estranged. It is this isolation which prevents him from realizing early that the solution to the problems of Umuofia lies in a concerted, not a unilateral, action. When he finally acts on his own initiative and kills the court messenger, he realizes for the first time - what he



ought to have known a long time before - that he is alone. It is the thought that the unity of the tribe is gone for ever and that there is no hope of reviving the old martial spirit that drives him to commit suicide. Such a tremendous sacrifice and display of heroism might not have been necessary if Okonkwo had remained all along in spirit and action an integral member of the Umuofian community and had been more inclined to accept an accurate assessment of the situation by his reasonable and trusted friend, Obierika:-

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brother, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.<sup>25</sup>

Achebe handles the catastrophe of Okonkwo's suicide with great skill, generating an appropriate sense of drama by his suggestiveness which communicates far more than he might have achieved by explicit detailed description. After Okonkwo has killed the head messenger and committed suicide, the District Commissioner, as yet unaware of Okonkwo's fate, goes to his compound with the aim of arresting him. Achebe's treatment of this delicate situation is as unemotional as the rest of the scene of which it forms a part. He does not engage in any elaborate narration of Okonkwo's reasons for deciding on suicide or his method of carrying it out. All he does is to set the scene in a clear and simple style and then leave the District Commissioner to find out for himself what has happened:-

There was a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound. The only opening into this bush from the compound was a little round hole in the red-earth wall through which fowls went in and out in their endless search for food. The hole would not let

a man through. It was to this bush that Obierika led the Commissioner and his men. They skirted round the compound, keeping close to the wall. The only sound they made was with their feet as they crushed dry leaves.

Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead.<sup>26</sup>

The passage is full of suggestions about the circumstances which surround Okonkwo's death. He has had to struggle through 'a little round hole in the red-earth wall' which 'would not let a man through.' The 'only opening' is used by fowls, not human beings. All this emphasizes Okonkwo's loneliness and the anti-social nature of the act of suicide. The atmosphere created in the passage is a tense one, and the reader can almost hear the sound of the footsteps of Obierika and others 'as they crushed dry leaves'. It is in this state of suspense that they discover what has happened. One is not surprised that 'they stopped dead'.

Apart from this economy of style Achebe brings different points of view to bear on Okonkwo's suicide. The reader soon discovers that each of these is applicable to the situation only in a limited way, none seems to take full account of Okonkwo's unique position and personal experiences in the novel. There is, for instance, the point of view of society which regards suicide as 'an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it.'<sup>27</sup> This view condemns suicide for whatever reason and makes no provision for the social and psychological pressures on Okonkwo. Obierika's point of view, not surprisingly, places the blame on the District Commissioner and plays down Okonkwo's excesses which lead to his isolation from informed and responsible opinion in the clan:

'That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog ...'<sup>28</sup> This point of view is too emotional to take all the relevant factors of the situation into consideration. There is yet the point of view of the District Commissioner which, as we shall see presently, is not only different from the others but also helps to complicate the situation further. It is mainly through the juxtaposition of different points of view, sometimes bringing them before us simultaneously as he does here, that the author achieves the complex effect of this novel. Usually no particular point of view can give an adequate and satisfactory explanation of the situation, however plausible it may appear to be.

Okonkwo provides a good example of a man who 'fails alone'. But with him safely out of the way, and given the moderate position of some important Umuofian citizens like Obierika, is there any possibility of reconciling the two systems, of establishing a bridge of understanding between Umuofia on the one hand and the British Administration and Christianity on the other? All the evidence in the book points to the fact that a policy of accommodation is not contemplated by either side and, in fact, has very little chance of succeeding. Nothing reveals this more clearly than the attitude of the District Commissioner at the end of the novel. He seems to be just as out of touch with the true feelings of Umuofia as Okonkwo, and he is hardly the type of administrator needed at this crucial time to bring home to Umuofians the advantages to be derived from British Administration. First, through a combination of treachery and naked show of power he arrests

the six leaders of the people, offers them no opportunity to defend themselves and then proceeds to harangue them in a speech which reminds one of some of the speeches of Sanders in Sanders of the River:-

We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen. I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people's houses and their place of worship. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world.<sup>29</sup>

Achebe is deliberately ironic in his presentation here. The District Commissioner is put in a situation in which his speech is not likely to be taken seriously by the villagers. His support for Christianity is fully expected and only confirms the villagers' suspicion that both Christianity and the Colonial Administration derive their power from the same source. The District Commissioner speaks of bringing 'a peaceful administration' when, in fact, all his actions are such that will make peace between the two sides impossible. His reference to his queen as 'the most powerful ruler in the world' must leave the villagers in fear that that power may always be exercised in a manner prejudicial to their interests as in the present situation. For, however good the intentions of this District Commissioner, his method of administration only helps to ensure a head-on collision with the people. He misses the whole significance of the death of Okonkwo - Obierika's explanation leaves no impression on him. To him the dangling body of Okonkwo constitutes 'undignified details', only good enough to be relegated to a paragraph in a book he is planning to write:-

The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details.<sup>30</sup>

There is a lack of rapport between the two groups and therefore very little hope of a peaceful co-existence between the two. What finally brings the two sides into tragic conflict is the uncompromising attitude of the new leader of the Christian missionaries:-

Mr. Brown's successor was the Reverend James Smith, and he was a different kind of man. He condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal.<sup>31</sup>

Brown has been willing to respect and accommodate traditional opinion to some extent and curb the activities of the over-zealous members of his flock like one Enoch who is believed to have killed and eaten the sacred python. If he had remained in control of the mission disaster might have been averted. But, as the passage shows, his successor adopts an entirely different attitude to his work and introduces a new element into the situation. 'He saw things as black and white. And black was evil.' He is a missionary in a fighting mood. This frame of mind is reflected in Achebe's prose by the number of expressions which have to do with a state of war - 'he condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy', 'he saw the world as a battlefield', 'children of light were locked in mortal conflict', 'he believed in slaying the prophets of Baal'. The reference to the people as 'the prophets of Baal' brings out clearly Rev. Smith's

contempt for traditional religion. He rules out any possibility of 'compromise and accommodation' by his rigid division of Christians and non-Christians into 'sheep and goats', 'wheat and tares'. His actions bring about a complete breakdown in communication between the two systems. It is the author's deliberate doing that any chance of reconciling the views and positions of both sides is irredeemably lost. One leaves the novel with a feeling that the people of Umuofia are at the beginning of a long and bitter struggle against the combined forces of British Administration and Christianity, which they have no chance of winning. It may well be that it is this feeling of tragic inevitability that Achebe wishes to arouse in the reader. For why, one is entitled to ask, is a man like Rev. Smith who carries out his mandate with such iconoclastic zeal and shows no regard for the established customs and religious practices of the people put in charge of the Mission at Umuofia at such a crucial period? Why is Mr. Brown removed from the scene when his policy of reconciliation has started to bear fruit? Why is the Colonial Administration at this important point in history left in the hands of a District Commissioner who appears pathologically incapable of understanding the point of view of the villagers? One cannot help feeling that if the conditions had existed for the people of Umuofia to be fully exposed to the blessings of the British Administration they would have tried to reconcile their interests with those of the white man. By making such conditions unobtainable, the author, like Rev. Smith, rules out the possibility of 'compromise and accommodation'.

In the face of these facts, to argue as Robert Serumaga does, that the death of Okonkwo has no repercussion at all on

Umuofia is to play down the communal nature of Umuofian culture and to ignore the wider issues raised in the novel. For, apart from other misinterpretations, this is the impression given by this statement of his:

Okonkwo hangs himself. He has been unable to maintain a particular faith, and he takes the easiest way out, which is the way of the coward. Chinua Achebe's society is not falling apart because a lot of people are coming in and bringing new ideas. In fact what happens in this book is that the character Okonkwo kills himself because he refuses to change and embody both experiences. He is the one who hangs himself; the society goes on.<sup>32</sup>

It is true that society goes on. But it is also important to stress that it is not in the same way as before. Professor Stock comes closer to the truth in this matter when she finds that 'Okonkwo's end was not only that of an obstinate hero running his head against a machine too big for him, it was the end of a way of life'.<sup>33</sup> This may be overstating the case slightly. But there is enough evidence in the book to show that Okonkwo's death signifies the beginning of the end. We have Obierika's word for it that in Umuofia 'if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender ... if one finger brought oil it soiled the others.'<sup>34</sup> This is an important statement in the novel because it reveals the complex nature of the work. It brings out clearly the fact that here we are dealing with both the personal tragedy of Okonkwo and the collective tragedy of Umuofia. In the language of Obierika's statement the offender is Okonkwo, but it is on the whole clan that the wrath of the goddess 'was loosed'. The finger which brings oil is Okonkwo's, but there is no effective means of preventing the oil 'soiling' other members

of the community. After all, Okonkwo is 'one of the greatest men in Umuofia', and his excesses and abnormality are derived from that society. So it is only reasonable to expect that, as in all great tragedies, his death, whatever the circumstances, will have a tragic effect on his community.

We must therefore conclude that the Umuofian society we see at the end of the novel is not strong enough to absorb the shock of Okonkwo's death, endure the disastrous effects of a foreign religion and British Administration and yet remain its old self. Although Okonkwo falls alone, his death brings general dismay and strikes terror into the hearts of already-confused Umuofians. In presenting these events, it is not unlikely that Achebe had in mind the confrontation which actually took place between traditional society and the Church at Aro-Ndizuogu in 1916.<sup>35</sup> This brought about widespread dislocation of tribal life in the same way that the events in Things Fall Apart mark the beginning of the eventual liquidation of an old way of life. To limit our interpretation of tragedy, therefore, only to the fate of Okonkwo is to ignore the profound human issues raised in the novel, unduly narrow its scope, misread its title (Things not Something) and undermine the achievement of the novelist in this impressive work.

### III

Like Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease presents a breakdown in communication at two levels: the personal level of Obi who ends up isolated from all the groups and individuals with whom he has had any kind of association - the European Club, the Umuofia Progressive Union, his friends Christopher



and Joseph, and Clara - and the social group level between town and country. Okonkwo commits suicide when it becomes clear to him that he has failed to achieve what he passionately believes to be a noble ideal - the retention in an unadulterated form of the old way of life. It is not so much his ideas as his methods which isolate him from his people. His error of judgement is to attempt singlehanded something he has no power to achieve. This makes him a tragic hero. But his grandson, Obi, in No Longer at Ease is alienated from his people and loses his identity mainly because of his social and moral incapacities. Obi falls because he tries 'to do what everybody does without finding out how it was done'.<sup>36</sup> He ends up taking bribes; he is caught and sent to prison. This makes him a pathetic figure. He is certainly not the stuff of which a hero is made. Tragedy in No Longer at Ease does not result from any heroism displayed by Obi - he is altogether unheroic in his approach to his problems - but from the confrontation between the old and new values, between individualism as personified by Obi and communal values as symbolized by the Umuofia Progressive Union (U.P.U.) and the Umuofian community as a whole including Obi's parents.

The type of kinship ties which the U.P.U. and the Umuofian community represent are given lyric expression in a popular Ibo song which contains the message of the community to the individual.

He that has a brother must hold him to his heart,  
For a kinsman cannot be bought in the market,  
Neither is a brother bought with money.<sup>37</sup>

Members of the U.P.U. regard Obi as 'a brother', a kinsman who 'cannot be bought in the market', and try to 'hold him' to their 'heart'. Ironically, it is in the discharge of their

obligation to their 'brother' that they give him the opportunity to acquire ideals which are more liberal than theirs and unwittingly set him on a course of action which finally separates him from them. 'Neither is a brother bought with money' is significant, in an ironic sense, in the context of the novel as a whole. Members of the U.P.U. are supposed to have helped Obi because he is a 'kinsman'. But, as will soon become apparent, their actions are not entirely devoid of self-interest. In consideration of the huge amount they have spent on Obi they in turn impose on him certain obligations and make no secret of the fact that they expect to benefit materially from their sacrifice. They treat him, in short, as 'a brother bought with money' and, to that extent, depart from the values of Umuofia society and the recorded wisdom embodied in this song which is translated direct from Ibo.

Through Achebe's portrayal of Obi the reader comes to know the strengths and weaknesses of Umuofia society and the aimlessness of Lagos life. The picture of Umuofia which emerges is that of a closely-knit society in which the citizens are willing to make personal sacrifices for the improvement of 'their brighter young men':-

The gathering ended with the singing of 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow'. The guests then said their farewells to Obi, many of them repeating all the advice that he had already been given. They shook hands with him and as they did so they pressed their presents into his palm, to buy a pencil with, or an exercise book or a loaf of bread for the journey, a shilling there and a penny there - substantial presents in a village where money was so rare, where men and women toiled from year to year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil.<sup>38</sup>

This is Achebe's description of the end of the meeting of

the people of Umuofia at Obi's home on the eve of his departure to the United Kingdom. Here, as elsewhere, the author holds the balance skilfully between admiration and gentle rebuke. He points to the long-windedness of the Umuofians - 'many of them repeating all the advice that he had already been given' - and the naivety of the assumption that all that is necessary for a successful outcome is the type of presents they give Obi 'to buy a pencil with, or an exercise book or a loaf of bread for the journey ...' But, by calling these gifts, such as they are, 'substantial presents in a village where money was so rare', the author places his emphasis on the villagers' sense of sacrifice. Through his use of language Achebe makes the reader painfully aware of the villager's difficulty in obtaining his present of 'a shilling there and a penny there.' He has had to work in a situation in which 'men and women toiled from year to year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil.' Every word in this short expression is important for Achebe's meaning. 'Men and women' and 'from year to year' show the communal and continuing nature of the villager's hardship, 'toiled', the amount of exertion he requires for his work, 'to wrest a meagre living', the totally inadequate compensation for his labour. The whole situation is blamed, as it were, on 'an unwilling and exhausted soil'. The reader cannot but admire any man who, under these conditions, contributes generously to a scholarship fund and gives a present, however small. It is the generosity and selflessness of the Umuofians that Achebe successfully depicts in this passage.

But the reader soon discovers that this display of generosity is not altogether altruistic:-

Six or seven years ago Umuofians abroad had formed their Union with the aim of collecting money to send some of their brighter young men to study in England. They taxed themselves mercilessly. The first scholarship under this scheme was awarded to Obi Okonkwo five years ago, almost to the day. Although they called it a scholarship it was to be repaid. In Obi's case it was worth eight hundred pounds, to be repaid within four years of his return. They wanted him to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours. But when he got to England he read English; his self-will was not new. The Union was angry but in the end they left him alone. Although he would not be a lawyer, he would get a 'European post' in the Civil Service.<sup>39</sup>

From the point of view of the Union it is a great sacrifice on their part to send Obi to England - 'they taxed themselves mercilessly.' But the reader soon realizes from a passage like this that the sacrifice is not as great as the Union would have us believe. As Achebe says, 'although they called it a scholarship it was to be repaid.' Furthermore, the 'scholarship' has been awarded by the Union with an eye to its own interest. Obi is required 'to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours.' When Obi changes his course to English they finally decide to leave him alone only because they anticipate that "although he would not be a lawyer, he would get a 'European post' in the Civil Service". The Union sees Obi's further education only in terms of the social and economic advantages it will bring to Umuofia and not as a means of self-improvement and individual growth. This strange inconsistency is the root cause of the difficulties which later arise in the relationship between Obi and the U.P.U. 'His self-will was not new' looks forward to these difficulties. Because members of the Union think of Obi's education as a

means of protecting their own interests against the claims of others they expect him as a senior Civil Servant to continue to share communal ideals and values, however limited in orientation, and refrain from any assertion of his individualism. Obi's isolation results from the conflicting and simultaneous demands made on him by different groups including the U.P.U. In financial terms these demands are high and exact a real pressure on his slender resources. It may well be that those making the demand do not expect him to rely on his salary alone, but his youthful idealism, a result of his overseas education, makes him initially reject any corrupt methods of solving his problems. He means to assert his individualism. He probably would have been able to do this successfully if he had been a much stronger character and had not had financial problems to contend with. He ought to have realized that he is in a difficult situation and taken into account the complex nature of his society. For, to some extent, his ambiguous position is a reflection of the contradiction and ambiguity in the society itself. But it is in this type of society that Titus in Aluko's Kinsman and Foreman lives and survives. As we shall see in the next chapter, the situation in which Titus finds himself is comparable to that of Obi. The social pressures on him are no less great. If anything they are greater because they are accentuated by the fact that, as a newly-qualified engineer, he is assigned to work in his hometown. What Titus possesses and uses to his advantage - and this Obi lacks - is the power of self-analysis and a determination to stand by the truth, whatever the consequences. It is true that Obi often shows a keen moral awareness and usually arrives at a correct intellectual assessment of a given

situation but, as will soon become evident, he never has enough courage to follow up his conviction with appropriate action. This is the aspect of his character which finally isolates him from all groups. A consistent display of 'self-will' would no doubt have made him unpopular with the U.P.U. but might have saved his relationship with Clara.

Faced with a choice between the old and new, between the country and town - in fact, as far as his life in Lagos is concerned, between the U.P.U. and the European Club - Obi's inclination is initially for the apparently softer option of the European Club and his young middle-class friends, Joseph and Christopher. Achebe is not as successful in his evocation of modern Lagos as he is with the traditional Ibo society in Things Fall Apart or even in this novel where, as has been pointed out, he draws attention to its strengths and weaknesses. Achebe's Lagos has very little to recommend it and is important only for its manifestations of social and psychological forces which destroy a young man. This no doubt makes it a suitable locale for Obi's sad story but a more intense realization is necessary for the feeling of disaster to be successfully evoked. Ikoyi is dismissed in a few lines - 'For all its luxurious bungalows and flats and its extensive greenery, Ikoyi was like a graveyard.'<sup>40</sup> Ikoyi may be 'like a graveyard' in its physical setting but it is important for Obi's story. Not only does he live there, the European Club, important for his drift towards modernity, is also situated there. A consistent interplay between character and environment, such as we have in Things Fall Apart, would have given this novel the concreteness which it now lacks. Achebe's slightly more successful description of Lagos

island does not sufficiently make up for this fault:—

On the other side of the road a little boy wrapped in a cloth was selling bean cakes or 'akara' under a lamp-post. His bowl of 'akara' was lying in the dust and he seemed half asleep. But he really wasn't, for as soon as the night-soil-man passed swinging his broom and hurricane lamp and trailing clouds of putrefaction the boy quickly sprang to his feet and began calling him names. The man made for him with his broom but the boy was already in flight, his bowl of 'akara' on his head. The man grinding maize burst into laughter, and the woman joined in. The night-soil-man smiled and went his way, having said something very rude about the boy's mother.<sup>41</sup>

It is the squalor of Lagos which Achebe concentrates upon here. We have a picture of a people who have learnt to live with dirt and resigned themselves to insanitary conditions. Lagosians like Christopher, Joseph and Sam Okoli who live in better social conditions are portrayed as aimless people who devote all their energy to wine, women and entertainment. Achebe's description of Lagos is too one-sided to leave one wholly satisfied. The urban background, one feels, is not fully realized.

Consider, too, Achebe's one-sided treatment of the European Club. The aim and practice of the Club are shown to be unimportant mainly through the inane language of its members:—

'Hello, Peter. Hello, Bill,'  
 'Hello.'  
 'Hello.'  
 'May I join you?'  
 'Certainly.'  
 'Most certainly. What are you drinking,  
 Beer? Right. Steward. One beer for  
 this master.'  
 'What kind, sir?'  
 'Heineken.'  
 'Yes, sir.'<sup>42</sup>

This sort of language does look inane, especially when taken out of context. But, as we all know, people who are not 'inane' at all very often do make verbal exchanges of this sort, in all

kinds of situation, for life cannot be lived at a consistent level of verbal intensity. Achebe's purpose is no doubt to show why the European Club comes to mean nothing to Obi in the face of more pressing problems. However, the Club's inanity is not properly projected. It is usually through the use of language that Achebe isolates Obi from various groups in the novel. Obi either does not understand or appreciate the language of a group or is unable to make himself understood by its members. The language of members of the European Club is too unimportant to Obi; he cannot expect a solution to his problems from such a group. He therefore allows his membership of the Club to lapse since he has never at any time really considered himself a full member.

It is characteristic of Obi that it is only when his bid for social acceptance by the elements of modern life in the city has failed that he makes any serious attempt at reconciliation with the members of the U.P.U. Here, as elsewhere, Obi is destined to fail. The accommodation he now seeks with the Union is to enable him <sup>to</sup> solve some of his financial problems by stopping for some time the repayment of his debt to them. But even this he will do <sup>in</sup> his own way on his own terms and at his own convenience:-

He would not give them another opportunity to pry into his affairs. He would just stop paying and, if they asked him why, he would say he had some family commitments which he must clear first. Everyone understood family commitments and would sympathise. If they didn't it was just too bad. They would not take a kinsman to court, not for that kind of reason anyway.<sup>43</sup>

The word 'pry' is important in the way it reveals Obi's ambivalent attitude to the Union, especially the way he constantly underestimates the importance of the Union as the voice of traditional authority. For what is the U.P.U. but the constant



reminder of Tribe in the city? In the words of Robin Horton, it is 'a sort of maternal octopus; always giving; always making insatiable demands on those to whom it has given, always holding out a tempting vision of the absolute security of traditional ties.'<sup>44</sup> Obi is willing to enjoy 'the absolute security of traditional ties' but he is not prepared to give anything in return to the Union. He forgets that it is because of these 'traditional ties' that Union members arrogate to themselves the right 'to pry into his affairs', that it is for the same reason that 'they would not take a kinsman to court' that they would not allow a 'kinsman' to marry an 'osu'. Obi wants to stick to his assertive individualism and prevent Union members from interfering in his private affairs. Yet he still lays claims to traditional kinship ties and tries to reconcile the two positions in a way that gives him the balance of advantage. This attitude is responsible for the lack of stability in Obi's character and is paralleled only by the attitude of members of the U.P.U. who pretend to be holding fast to tradition when, in fact, they are gradually becoming materialistic in their outlook. The passage hints at the problem of communication which has developed between Obi and the Union. Obi realizes the futility of explaining to the Union in detail his complicated social problems and the financial burden they impose on him. He therefore decides to communicate with them in a language simple enough for them to understand - 'he would say he had some family commitment ... Everyone understood family commitments and would sympathise.'

What finally destroys any moral authority the Union has had over Obi is the ambiguous manner in which its members seek to achieve their objectives. They claim that their concern is for

rural virtues and strict tribal morality. They therefore expect every Umuofian to continue in the city only those modes of behaviour acceptable in traditional society. Yet they themselves show an essential falling-off in dedication to traditional virtues. They foster nepotism and encourage bribery and corruption. There is, for instance, the case of Joshua Udo who is given a loan of ten pounds 'for the ... er ... er the explicit purpose of seeking re-engagement',<sup>45</sup>. Obi is expected to create 'openings' in his department for Umuofia citizens. Although members of the Union are scandalized by Obi's failure to go to Umuofia for the funeral rites of his mother, they are nevertheless willing to assemble at his house at Ikoyi for drinks. By their actions at their monthly meetings and elsewhere members of the U.P.U. create the impression that they have lost their social bearing and are no longer certain of their purpose and status in the city:-

Then by way of light relief someone took up the President on his statement that it was work that brought them four hundred miles to Lagos.

'It is money, not work,' said the man.  
'We left plenty of work at home. ... Anyone who likes work can return home, take up his machet and go into that bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino. It will keep him occupied to his last days.' The meeting agreed that it was money, not work, that brought them to Lagos.<sup>46</sup>

This incident is introduced by Achebe 'by way of light relief', as an interpolation. But it is important, for it reveals the extent to which Union members have departed from rural virtues. The Union's allegiance to tradition and tribal morality has been considerably weakened by its preoccupation with money. By deciding that 'it was money not work, that brought them to Lagos' they undermine the basis of their corporate existence in the city

and encourage Obi to sever all links with them:-

Obi leapt to his feet trembling with rage. At such times words always deserted him.

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

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

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

'I am not going to listen to you any more ... But don't you dare interfere in my affairs again. And if this is what you meet about,' he said in Ibo, 'you may cut off my two legs if you ever find them here again.' He made for the door.<sup>47</sup>

In this, as in the scene in which Clara throws Obi's ring back at him, one has the sense of a grotesque and in some respects rather absurd violence. Obi may feel justified in leaving the meeting, but there is an element of the ludicrous in the way he asserts his individualism here. 'Obi leapt to his feet trembling with rage.' Little wonder he cannot speak. When he later finds his tongue he issues threats and finally makes a farcical exit. The change from English to Ibo is meant to underline Obi's determination not to attend any further meetings of the U.P.U. Obi's behaviour in this scene is laughable, but it serves to highlight the complexity of his relationship with the U.P.U. and to show that neither side is completely right. Union members do not appear to realize that the demands of traditional ties and the unbridled pursuit of materialism are mutually exclusive and occasionally give the impression that they are incapable of making the distinction. Since they do not seem to provide Obi with an acceptable alternative to life in the European Club or with his middle-class friends in the city they become unimportant to him. It is this complete rejection of the authority of the U.P.U. that leads to the final breakdown of communication between Obi and the Union.

One cause of frequent disagreements between Obi and the

Union is Obi's proposed marriage to Clara, an 'osu'. In this case, as in many others, Obi knows what is right but has not the moral courage to stand for it. His intellectual assessment of the situation is sound:-

It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning his descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of Time. Quite unbelievable.<sup>48</sup>

All that is required here is a firm stand against an irrational custom. But Obi is not strong enough to spearhead such an attack on tradition. All we are left with is a feeble declaration of intent:-

'Look at me,' said Joseph, getting up and tying his coverlet as a loincloth. He now spoke in English. 'You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an 'osu' is? But how can you know?' In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country - the most painful thing one could say to Obi.

'I know more about it than yourself,' he said, 'and I'm going to marry the girl. I wasn't actually seeking your approval.'<sup>49</sup>

Like Obi, Joseph has become a man of two worlds for whom no language is adequate. His sudden switch from the vernacular to pidgin English is symbolic of the manner in which he is trying to grapple with the problem of self-identity. Even so, his view on 'osu', though not particularly broad-minded, is more realistic in the situation than that of Obi, especially as the latter does not have the strength and confidence to carry out his intention. By juxtaposing the two points of view so sharply Achebe helps to dramatize the weakness of Obi's position. The reader finds the threat to marry Clara unconvincing because it would require a character much stronger than Obi to carry it out.

Obi may threaten the President of the U.P.U. with court action for mentioning Clara's case and challenge Joseph's realistic attitude but he finds himself unable to overcome his parents' bitter opposition to the proposed marriage:-

'Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters.'<sup>50</sup>

Obi had hoped that his father who is a Christian would realize that 'in Christ there are no bond or free.'<sup>51</sup> What he gets instead is totally unexpected and disappointing: "We are Christians ... But that is no reason to marry an 'osu'."<sup>52</sup> The passage calls attention to an aspect of the problem which seems to have escaped Obi's attention - the negative feeling of the 'free-born' towards 'osu' is inspired not by narrow-mindedness but by the fear of being ostracized by the mainstream of society. A man may wish to demonstrate his newly-acquired Christian ideal by openly associating with an osu, but he is still anxious not to become isolated from the rest of the community. In traditional society a man is already 'set apart', in a sense, on becoming a Christian. Should he further set himself apart by embracing an 'osu'? This is the symbolic significance of the comparison with leprosy. 'We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters' expresses the ironic dilemma of the Christian very clearly. He may accept a new God, but he cannot immediately abandon all traditional beliefs and practices. Christianity does not provide the answer to all social problems.

Ironically, Obi receives his greatest blow from his mother, of whom he always 'thought affectionately'. His moment of recognition comes when his mother threatens to kill herself if he marries Clara:-

His mind was troubled not only by what had happened but also by the discovery that there was nothing in him with which to challenge it honestly. All day he had striven to rouse his anger and his conviction, but he was honest enough with himself to realise that the response he got, no matter how violent it sometimes appeared, was not genuine.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately for Obi, this moment has come too late. By the time he is ready to face reality and amend his ways, he has not only lost Clara but he is already in the firm grip of the law. This situation provides a good reason why the novel should be considered a social satire rather than a tragedy. In a tragedy the moment of recognition usually occurs before the final fatal act, but at a time when it is no longer possible for the hero to retrace his steps. This type of moment comes for Okonkwo, as we have seen, when he kills one of the court messengers and finds that the Umuofians have allowed the others to escape. He realizes he is alone and commits suicide. In the case of Obi, at the point <sup>where</sup> he comes to realize that he has isolated himself from Clara and other groups, his moral decline has gone so far that he cannot now escape the punishment and disgrace of imprisonment. The outcome of the relationship between Obi and Clara is another proof that in this novel it is the values of the tribe that are upheld. In the confrontation between country and town as the mainspring of action and determiner of the fate of the chief character, it is the country which gains the upper hand and helps to ensure Obi's complete loss of identity.

Nothing brings out more clearly the social and cultural distance between country and town - and Obi's isolation from

both - than the language employed by the author. As was pointed out before, Achebe usually succeeds in differentiating his characters through their speech. He requires this skill more here than in the first novel because here he is dealing with two entirely different localities - Lagos and Umuofia. At each locality there is need to differentiate between people at various stages of social development or levels of sophistication. In Lagos alone, there is need to cope linguistically with the divergent groups represented by the U.P.U., the club, Obi and his friends, Mr. Green and Miss Tomlinson, among others. The complex use of language in this novel is well illustrated by the situation which arises when Obi is travelling from Lagos to Umuofia in public transport - the lorry driver speaks pidgin English to his passengers, the passengers sing in Ibo but Obi reflects on this song in English. Achebe handles this complicated linguistic situation skilfully and, on this as on other occasions, exposes Obi's isolation by way of calculated linguistic contrast:-

'Why you look the man for face when we want give um him two shillings?' he asked Obi.

'Because he has no right to take two shillings from you', Obi answered.

'Na him make I no de want carry you book people', he complained. 'Too too know na him de worry una. Why you put your nose for matter way no concern you? Now that policeman go charge me like ten shillings.'<sup>54</sup>

Obi, who speaks Standard English, is differentiated from the driver, who speaks pidgin English. But it is not only language that divides them. They are different in their moral orientation. Each language is made to denote a different scale of values and attitude to life. The driver sees nothing wrong in giving the traffic policeman a bribe of two shillings while Obi considers it morally wrong to encourage bribery and corruption in this way.

The driver's assessment of Obi - 'Too too know na him de worry una' - may appear to be a hasty judgement in the circumstance, but it is significant in the way it points to the greatest flaw in Obi's character. It is the type of charge which might have been levelled against him by Joseph, Clara or any of the other characters from whom he is now falling apart.

On many occasions Achebe uses linguistic situations to highlight the differences between Obi and other groups. Consider, for example, the situation created at the reception organized by the U.P.U. Here is the pompous language of the Secretary in the address presented to Obi:

'Sir, we the officers and members of the above-named Union present with humility and gratitude this token of our appreciation of your unprecedented academic brilliance ...'

He spoke of the great honour Obi had brought to the ancient town of Umuofia which could now join the comity of other towns in their march towards political irredentism, social equality and economic emancipation.

'The importance of having one of our sons in the vanguard of this march of progress is nothing short of axiomatic. Our people have a saying "Ours is ours, but mine is mine". Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that of which it can say: "This is mine". We are happy that today we have such an invaluable possession in the person of our illustrious son and guest of honour'.<sup>55</sup>

The author's intention here is clearly satirical. He uses a mocking tone to hold to ridicule a particular manner of using language. This is the language of a man who wants to impress his semi-literate fellow-clansmen with his massive knowledge of English when, in fact, his control of the language is slight. Achebe immediately contrasts the Secretary's language with that of Obi, a graduate in English, who speaks simple and correct



English - 'is' and 'was' - but whose English is considered 'most unimpressive' by members of the Union.

On another occasion it is Obi who experiences difficulty with language:-

He spoke about the wonderful welcome they had given him on his return. 'If a man returns from a long journey and no one says 'nno' to him he feels like one who has not arrived.' He tried to improvise a joke about beer and palm-wine, but it did not come off, and he hurried to the next point. He thanked them for the sacrifices they had made to send him to England. He would try his best to justify their confidence. The speech which had started off one hundred per cent in Ibo was now fifty-fifty.<sup>56</sup>

The linguistic situation described here shows how Obi, as a man of two worlds, is no longer at ease in either. The joke in Ibo about beer and palm-wine 'did not come off', and this leads to a situation in which he becomes incoherent. He ends up speaking a hybrid language, half English, half-Ibo, truly symbolic of his own divided personality. As Mrs. Riddy points out,

... none of the languages available to him [Obi] is adequate to express the urban experience.

Furthermore, in this book languages are closely related to values; English and Ibo are not merely different ways of saying the same thing, but vehicles for expressing completely different attitudes to life. Where one language or the other proves inadequate, so for the same reasons do the values it represents.<sup>57</sup>

All languages prove inadequate to Obi. So he loses his sense of value and, with it, his identity.

If this novel appears to lack the coherence of Things Fall Apart, the explanation is in the nature of the social situation it projects. In Things Fall Apart a homogeneous society is dealt with. But here the author handles a society in a state of flux. This may be responsible for the relative inadequacy of the

treatment of Lagos. Again, his purpose appears no longer to be tragedy but satire which is developed in this novel in the characters, situations and the language used. For example, the treatment of the European Club with its artificial language and relatively unimportant purpose is satirical. So also is the ambivalent attitude of members of the U.P.U. who expect Obi to live the dignified life of a man in a 'European post' and at the same time observe all the customs of traditional society. Despite Obi's admiration for Mr. Green, what is stressed about the latter is his paternalism. The important thing about the use of satire in this novel is that neither town nor country is spared. Occasionally, satire is employed to emphasize the social gulf which divides the two and to underline the fact that Obi's two worlds are not always in close communion with each other. It would appear that villagers in particular have little information about events in the city:-

Mr. Ikedi had come to Umuofia from a township, and was able to tell the gathering how wedding feasts had been steadily declining in the towns since the invention of invitation cards. Many of his hearers whistled in unbelief when he told them that a man could not go to his neighbour's wedding unless he was given one of these papers on which they wrote R.S.V.P. - Rice and Stew Very Plenty - which was invariably an over-statement.<sup>58</sup>

This immediately strikes one as laughable, but it is not merely 'funny', for it points to a serious reality at the centre of this novel: the absence of regular contact between town and country.

In No Longer at Ease we are given the picture of a chief character who is torn between two worlds but ends up isolated from both. We also have Achebe's portrayal of 'the world turned upside down', a situation in which the fast tempo of

social change has brought with it a corresponding moral laxity and social decadence. The result is the confused state of affairs reflected in the attitude of those who attend Obi's trial. Their surprise at Obi's misdemeanour is as much a sad reflection on society as on the excesses of the isolated prisoner in the dock:-

Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either.<sup>59</sup>

The novel provides a clear and unequivocal answer - traditional and modern forces combine to destroy Obi.

#### IV

Arrow of God is Achebe's most ample novel. In it themes barely mentioned in Things Fall Apart are discussed in detail. Not only do we have a clash of cultures, but also conflicts and rivalries within the same culture. For the first time the religious beliefs and practices of the people are treated in depth. Matters of fundamental importance raised in the novel include the relationship between a community and its principal god and the power of the Chief Priest to divine the will of such a god. More important for our immediate purpose, the theme of isolation is presented in this novel on an elaborate scale, in direct proportion to the magnitude of the work and the tension generated in it. The action of the novel is provided by a three-dimensional conflict - a personal conflict between Ezeulu and Nwaka supported by Ezidemili, a political conflict between Umuaro and Okperi and a battle of the gods between Ulu and

Idemili. There is also the conflict, to which reference will be made later, between Ezeulu and the British Administration. At the centre of all these conflicts, and drawing all together into one complex whole, is Ezeulu.

Ezeulu is undoubtedly 'a most impressive figure of a man', capable of exciting the admiration of an opponent like Winterbottom. He is the possessor of spiritual authority and, with it, some temporal power. An outstanding religious leader, he manifests great skill in the manipulation of men and events. But he is also ambitious and arrogant. It is important to bear in mind Ezeulu's strengths and weaknesses for, without this knowledge, one cannot truly appreciate the various forces which bring about his isolation and the magnitude of the disaster which results from his fall. It is helpful, for example, to recognize the fact that, in comparison with strong Okonkwo, Ezeulu is a much stronger character. Okonkwo is an aspirant for high office but Ezeulu is already in the seat of power. This naturally carries with it grave responsibility. In his position as Chief Priest an error of judgement is certain to have wide repercussions. There can be no doubt, in the way Ezeulu is presented in this novel, that Achebe intends to emphasize this point:-

Ezeulu the chief character in Arrow of God is a different kind of man from Okonkwo. He is an intellectual. He thinks about why things happen - he is a priest and his office requires this - so he goes to the roots of things and he's ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the value of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is completely different from Okonkwo's. He is ready to come to terms with it - up to a point - except where his dignity is involved. This he could not accept; he's very proud. So you see it's really the other side of the coin, and the tragedy is that they come to the same sticky end.<sup>60</sup>

Since the outcome of Ezeulu's isolation spells greater disaster for his people than that of Okonkwo or Obi, the author rightly prepares our minds for this outcome by elaborating on the background against which Ezeulu acts. He gives us a clear insight into the man who bears so much responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his people. We are allowed to observe him behave as a private citizen, a father, the head of a household, a village elder and, above all, as the Chief Priest of Ulu and the centre of a bitter religious and political controversy. Ezeulu's activities in other capacities, his reactions to enemy attacks and his inter-personal relationships with his fellow-clansmen not only throw light on his functions and difficulties as Chief Priest but also help us to a true appreciation of the way of life of the people of Umuaro. By so fully realizing the background here, even more than in Things Fall Apart, Achebe makes it possible for us to analyse the reasons why the main characters behave the way they do in the novel and to establish the pattern of motivation which results in Ezeulu's isolation.

What strikes the reader most about Ezeulu is the way he stands aside from his community in his lonely dignity as Chief Priest. Right from the first page of the novel what is emphasized about him is how different he is from other men. To some extent the duties of his office would appear to compel this singularity:-

His 'obi' was built differently from other men's huts. There was the usual, long threshold in front but also a shorter one on the right as you entered. The eaves on this additional entrance were cut back so that sitting on the floor Ezeulu could watch that part of the sky where the moon had its door. It was getting darker and he constantly blinked to clear his eyes of the water that formed from gazing so intently.<sup>61</sup>

Even his hut has to be built in a special way to conform with the nature of his duties. His 'gazing so intently' gives us an impression of how seriously he takes these duties. We meet him here in a position of strength, waiting patiently to be able to perform the vital function of announcing the arrival of the new moon. We see from the beginning the tremendous influence and authority he has on the fate of his people. When later in the novel this immense authority is misapplied, the people suffer untold hardship.

The complex situation in this novel arises mainly from the fact that Ezeulu's immense authority is ill-defined and that his relationship with his god, Ulu, is an ambiguous one:-

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival - no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare.<sup>62</sup>

Achebe lays Ezeulu's mind bare to make it possible for us to share the Chief Priest's thoughts as he contemplates 'the immensity of his power' and wonders if it is 'real'. The analogy with a child's ownership of a goat is meant to emphasize that Ezeulu is 'merely a watchman'. But there are indications that he is not satisfied with such a humble status - 'No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that.' He recognizes the potentially destructive weapon which he

possesses - 'If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival - no planting and no reaping.' What pains him is that he cannot use this weapon at will - 'he would not dare.' Ezeulu is very conscious of his position in society and is dissatisfied with the ambiguous relationship between himself and Ulu. He believes the delegation of power from his god ought to have been more complete. 'Take away that word dare,' he continues, as he realizes the helplessness of his position. 'Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not yet been born.'<sup>63</sup>

'He would not dare' looks forward to the central preoccupation of the novel. How much of Ezeulu's power is real and how much of it does he exercise as a 'watchman' for Ulu? While Ezeulu considers himself helpless the people of Umuaro consider him very powerful and hold him responsible for all he does in the name of his god. So, for example, when he refuses to name the day for the New Yam Festival and the people suffer as a result, it is he, not Ulu, that they blame. Again, while Ezeulu feels his first loyalty is to Ulu, the people firmly believe his first loyalty should be to them. After all, both he and Ulu are creations of the people:-

The six harassed villagers got together and said to Ezeulu's ancestor: 'You will carry this deity for us.' At first he was afraid. What power had he in his body to carry such potent danger? But his people sang their support behind him and the flute man turned his head. So he went down on both knees and they put the deity on his head. He rose up and was transformed into a spirit. His people kept up their song behind him and he stepped forward on his first and decisive journey, compelling even the four days in the sky to give way to him.<sup>64</sup>

To emphasize the antiquity of this event Achebe uses language which reflects Ibo thought processes - 'So he went down on

both knees and they put the deity on his head' - and is in parts a transliteration from Ll - 'You will carry this deity for us.' Ezeulu's ancestor 'was transformed into a spirit' only because 'his people sang their support behind him ...' He remained powerful only because 'his people kept up their song behind him.' The passage shows clearly that the circumstances of the creation of Ulu leave the clan supreme. Authority therefore rests with the people, and it is only with their continuing support that any Chief Priest can hope to carry successfully 'in his body, .. such potent danger'. It is a mark of the increasing secularization which this novel represents that the people are given so much power. This power they use in their own interests, as necessary, to confuse the Chief Priest, complicate further his relationship with his god and get rid of all kinds of religious restrictions.

So the necessary conditions for the confrontation between Ezeulu and his people are already established. We have on the one hand a Chief Priest who is not satisfied with the limitations placed on his authority and could one day do something, not necessarily what is ordained by Ulu, to show that his power over Umuaro is 'real'. On the other hand are the people, extremely conscious of the supremacy of the clan and the obligation which the Chief Priest owes to them. Into this potentially explosive situation is introduced the element of distrust, arising from divisions in the clan, which makes each side continually suspicious of the motives of the other. This state of affairs is exploited against Ezeulu by his enemies, Nwaka and Ezidemili whose place as the most respected priest in Umuaro Ezeulu has taken. But although enemy action contributes to the downfall of Ezeulu, what is mainly responsible for his tragedy is the ambiguous nature of his position in relation to Ulu and his



people, and the circumstances of his power. Criticism has rightly stressed Ezeulu's great strength and personal magnificence.<sup>65</sup> But what seems to me nearly always overlooked is the fact that beneath this external display of moral energy and stoic dignity lies a deep-seated fear. Ezeulu is conscious of the fact that his position, although externally awe-inspiring, is a vulnerable one. Such a consciousness usually breeds a sense of insecurity which, in turn, promotes a state of psychological isolation:-

I have my own way and I shall follow it. I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am Known and at the same time I am Unknowable. You are my friend and you know whether I am a thief or a murderer or an honest man. But you cannot know the Thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances.<sup>66</sup>

Here we have Ezeulu's statement of his psychological condition. 'I have my own way and I shall follow it' expresses clearly the attitude of mind which ultimately sets him apart from his people. What Ezeulu sees 'where other men are blind' is not encouraging for the most part. There is the fact, to which reference has already been made, that his god is not an ancient deity. He was set up by the six villages for their self-preservation. Presumably this god can be discarded if his protection is no longer required. The neighbouring village of Aninta has recently done just that to the god Ogba. Ezeulu is all the time mindful of this dreadful possibility. His mind is also disturbed by the fact that as Chief Priest he has not inherited all the powers of his father who combined the office of Chief Priest with that of a great medicine man. What has made him particularly vulnerable is that the function of medicine man has passed to a jealous half brother. Another

source of his fear is the uncertainty about a successor to the priesthood. Of all his sons, none appears to him to be a worthy candidate. Although the choice is ultimately Ulu's to make, Ezeulu is naturally concerned that the office he has held with such impressive dignity is likely to be debased by whoever succeeds him. These fears haunt him all the time and result in a psychological condition hardly conducive to efficiency or the clarity of thought expected of a man in his high office. They form a substantial part of the 'Thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances.' A situation like this introduces a moral imponderable into the whole atmosphere of the novel, a new variable which a perceptive critic has to reckon with. Such a consideration must lead us to believe, for example, that, although Ezeulu usually remains externally calm and unruffled by the frequent attacks of his enemies, he is, in fact, internally disturbed by their activities.

Psychological fear leads to over-compensation which manifests itself in action. In Ezeulu's case, this is revealed by the anomalous situation he himself describes in the passage - 'I am known and at the same time I am Unknowable'. This statement is of great significance because it recalls his status of half-man, half-spirit - 'One half of him was man and the other half 'mmo' (the half that was painted over with white chalk at important religious moments). And half of the things he ever did were done by this spirit side.'<sup>67</sup> The activities which result from the 'spirit side' merely exacerbate Ezeulu's psychological condition, to make him 'unknowable' to his people. Achebe portrays Ezeulu as a man caught in a vicious circle. Because of the circumstances of his creation the people do not always recognize the 'spirit side' of him, especially outside

'important religious moments'. But it is precisely because of the conditions imposed by his religious association with Ulu that his motives are constantly misunderstood by his people. This makes 'unknowable' an important word in the novel. As Chief Priest he is a solitary figure and alone carries the guilt of the whole clan during purification rites. He cannot therefore afford to discuss all his actions with other men. This explains the tendency for him to remain silent when he ought to be explaining his position to his people. 'Ezeulu only spoke when he wanted to and not when people asked him.'<sup>68</sup> So his motives remain obscure to many, and he does not seem to care. When, for example, Ezeulu becomes estranged from his half brother, Okeke Onenyi, it is the latter's version of the dispute - that the Chief Priest is jealous of Okeke's knowledge of herbs - that comes to be believed mainly because Ezeulu refuses to discuss the breach with anyone.

Although the citizens of Umuaro regard Ezeulu as an 'unknowable' entity, as something of an enigma, no longer worthy of the people's confidence, the reader finds this point of view too simple to be wholly acceptable. So successful is Achebe's method of making us look at the issues of the novel from very varied points of view, sometimes bringing them before us simultaneously, that we are able to look more objectively at the reasons for Ezeulu's actions than is possible for the other characters in the novel. By juxtaposing, at times very sharply, the different points of view of Ezeulu and Umuaro on all the important issues Achebe underlines the tragic inevitability of Ezeulu's downfall. He is, as it were, a man destined to be rejected and isolated. However unselfish his motive on any given occasion, the people put the worst possible construction

on his action. Hence, when he tells the truth in the Okperi land case, his people regard this as an act of betrayal. But the reader knows that Ezeulu acts from the purest of motives - he testifies against his clan because of his conviction that 'Ulu would not fight an unjust war.'<sup>69</sup>

Consider, too, the three different points of view which are carefully brought into active play in the situation created when Ezeulu sends Oduche to join the Christians. Each of these has wide repercussions on the action of the novel:-

'The world is changing,' .... '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 and so I have learnt to fly without perching." I want one of my sons to join these people 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.'<sup>70</sup>

Ezeulu's action is in his own interests, and is taken with an eye to the future. 'The world is like a Mask dancing ...' draws a verbal picture of the dimension of change which is likely to take place in Umuaro as a result of the activities of the Christians. So Ezeulu, a man with considerable foresight, wants to 'befriend the white man today' before it is too late. But although he may be willing to accommodate change, he wishes to cling to the past for as long as possible - 'The world is changing ... I do not like it.' The analogy with the action of the bird Eneke-nti-oba would appear to suggest that Ezeulu makes his fateful approach to the Christians out of necessity. As he tells us elsewhere in the novel, his son is, in fact, offered as a human sacrifice to the Christians - 'A disease

that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs ... That was why our ancestors when they were pushed beyond the end of things ... sacrificed not a stranger but one of themselves ...<sup>71</sup> However complicated the thinking behind Ezeulu's action, his declared objective is that Oduche should be his 'eye' among the Christians. His aim is not to attack Umuaro or any particular individuals. But his action is widely misinterpreted. Achebe brings two other points of view to bear on the situation, neither of which is correct, but both of which contribute to Ezeulu's alienation from his people. The point of view of Edogo, Ezeulu's eldest son, is that his father takes the action in order to ensure that his favourite son, Nwafo, succeeds him as Chief Priest of Ulu. This has the effect of encouraging the principal contestants to intensify their claims to the succession, thus promoting fratricidal struggle and bitterness in the family. Such domestic unrest weakens Ezeulu's authority as head of his family. However, it is the point of view of the people of Umuaro which turns out to be of the greatest consequence. They see their Chief Priest as siding with the Christians against them as he had done with the Administration on the Okperi land case. They therefore prepare themselves for a direct confrontation with him. So when, as an act of personal revenge, he fails to order the New Yam Festival and the people suffer as a result, they regard this action as a vindication of their point of view.

Achebe brings out more clearly in this novel than in any other the disaster which results from the breakdown in communication between two groups. The point is constantly stressed that tragedy might have been averted if there had

been some understanding between Ezeulu and his people. But the conditions are such that Ezeulu remains 'unknowable' to his clansmen, his own sons and even his close friend, Akuebue, who is to him what Obierika is to Okonkwo. Therefore, during the period of crisis between the Chief Priest and Umuaro, there is nobody available who sufficiently understands him to explain his own side of the case to the people, and since he himself would not speak, the people blame him for the hardship they are experiencing:-

Because no one came near enough to Ezeulu to see his anguish - and if they had seen it they would not have understood - they imagined that he sat in his hut gloating over the distress of Umuaro. But although he would not for any reason see the present trend reversed he carried more punishment and more suffering than all his fellows. What troubled him most - and he alone seemed to be aware of it at present - was that the punishment was not for now alone but for all time.<sup>72</sup>

The sharply different points of view of Ezeulu and Umuaro are again juxtaposed. Because of Ezeulu's isolation 'no one came near enough ... to see his anguish'. The word 'anguish' brings out clearly the extent to which the Chief Priest is suffering in silence and is paralleled only by 'gloating' which reveals the extent to which he is misunderstood. That the people are mistaken in their opinion is indicated by the use of the word 'imagined' - 'they imagined ... over the distress of Umuaro.' 'If they had seen it they would not have understood' shows how complete the breakdown in communication between Umuaro and the Chief Priest has become at this stage. The reason Ezeulu 'would not for any reason see the present trend reversed' is that he is full of revenge against his people because of their apparent lack of support for him during his detention by the British Administration at Government Hill.

Umuaro and its leaders have always misunderstood the nature of the relationship between Ezeulu and the Administration. Because of the former's part in the Okperi Land Case and his action in sending his son to the Christians, the people regard their Chief Priest as Winterbottom's 'friend' and see him as one colluding with the Christians and the British Administration against the interests of his people and their god. The ironic situation is therefore created in which Ezeulu expects the active support of Umuaro during his period of detention at Government Hill while Umuaro considers his humiliation by his 'friend' as well deserved.

Ezeulu proves his people wrong in their opinion of him when he rejects the offer of the Administration to make him a Paramount Chief. In describing the circumstances of the rejection Achebe successfully brings out the irony of the situation:-

After that he calmed down and spoke about the benefits of the British Administration. Clarke had not wanted to deliver this lecture which he would have called complacent if somebody else had spoken it. But he could not help himself. Confronted with the proud inattention of this fetish priest whom they were about to do a great favour by elevating him above his fellows and who, instead of gratitude, returned scorn, Clarke did not know what else to say. The more he spoke the more he became angry.<sup>73</sup>

This passage touches on some of the problems of Indirect Rule, especially the reasons for its failure among the Ibo. It also shows that Ezeulu's fate is intimately tied up with the colonial situation. Achebe's language and the setting reflect the conflict of ideas and beliefs which are essential features of such a situation. At one end of the conflict, as described in this passage, is Ezeulu as the representative of his people, at the other end is Clarke as the representative of the local Administration. The importance of this kind of setting lies

in the way it dramatizes the social and political gulf which separates the two. Clarke's actions only widen this gulf further. His 'complacent' lecture can only have the same type of disastrous effect which the 'lecture' of the District Commissioner in Things Fall Apart has on the leaders of Umuofia. Such lectures only compel the 'proud inattention' of arrogant men like Ezeulu, the 'fetish priest'. The warrant chieftaincy is conceived as 'a great favour', a means of elevating Ezeulu 'above his fellows', for which he is expected to be eternally grateful. One can therefore understand Clarke's disappointment when the Chief Priest 'returned scorn'. What one cannot understand is why Clarke becomes confused and angry at the rejection. The administrator's behaviour here reveals not only a personal fault but also a defect in the colonial practice of government. It shows how the feeling of superiority on the part of British political officers often stands in the way of the effective implementation of the Indirect Rule system and make direct contact with the people impossible. It is this breakdown in communication between the two groups that Achebe intends to dramatize by this incident. For why has the inexperienced Clarke been left in charge of the Administration at this crucial moment? The reader is only left to imagine how skilfully the more experienced administrator, Winterbottom, would have handled such a delicate situation. He successfully handled the explosive situation connected with the Okperi land case and there is no reason to think that he would have failed here. By removing Winterbottom from the scene at this critical period, leaving Ezeulu in the hands of impatient Clarke, Achebe helps to ensure a direct confrontation between the British Administration and Ezeulu whose rejection of the warrant



chieftaincy ironically further alienates him from his people. It is regarded as an indication of the extent to which the Chief Priest has become unpredictable in his actions, and so unworthy of the people's trust.

Since the people of Umuaro have constantly misjudged Ezeulu's actions and have made no real effort to understand his motives on any of the important issues, it is not surprising that they reach a wrong conclusion about the final outcome of events in the novel. Achebe's singular artistic achievement in this novel reveals itself in the way all the important issues treated are brought together at the end and resolved by one masterly stroke. The same tragic error which brings about Ezeulu's isolation and downfall results in triumph for Christianity. The Christians win, as it were, by default, having taken advantage of the dissension within the community. As we are told, 'when brothers fight to death a stranger inherits their father's estate'.<sup>74</sup> All these factors are taken into consideration in Achebe's final statement in the novel:-

So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors - that no man however great was greater than his people; that no man ever won judgement against his clan.

If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold this wisdom. In destroying his priest he had also brought disaster on himself, like the lizard in the fable who ruined his mother's funeral by his own hand. For a deity who chose a time such as this to destroy his priest or abandon him to his enemies was inciting people to take liberties; and Umuaro was just ripe to do so. The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika's death saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many an Umuaro man had sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam that was harvested in the man's fields was harvested in the name of the son.<sup>75</sup>

Achebe's analytical approach makes it possible for him to provoke thought on the different points of view from which the events of the novel may be considered. To the people of Umuaro and their leaders 'the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest ...' But the reader knows that the events of the novel are too complex for such a 'simple' verdict. It is true that Ezeulu is ruined. But the leaders of Umuaro share the responsibility with Ezeulu for the disaster which takes place. Umuaro will not be the same again. The internecine struggles have destroyed traditional authority and damaged the religious unity of the clan to an extent from which they cannot recover. Ezeulu is so important in Umuaro that his fall cannot but bring about a general woe. The same irony is extended to the god which destroys itself. We note here the author's comments and intrusions on the action of the novel - 'If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold this wisdom ...' This is a point of view many readers would feel able to share. The trial of strength between Ezeulu and the Christians comes at a time when the people of Umuaro are already becoming sceptical about the potency of their gods. It is this mood for increasing secularization that the Christians take advantage of when Ezeulu refuses to order the New Yam Festival. The destruction of Ezeulu by Ulu, coming at a time when the people are socially and spiritually depressed, predisposes them to accept the only other source of comfort and salvation available - Christianity. The 'promised immunity' which they now freely get from the Christians constitutes irreparable damage to the allegiance which they had previously owed exclusively to Ulu.

But all this leaves a fundamental problem only partly resolved. Where does one place the tragic responsibility for Ezeulu's death? Reference has already been made to his psychological condition and the fact that he is constantly misunderstood by his people. These factors lead to his isolation, but are not strong enough to destroy him. In the opinion of the people of Umuaro it is Ulu who destroys his Chief Priest. Certain statements of Ezeulu's tend to support this opinion - 'Why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and cover him with mud?'<sup>76</sup> But why would a god, in order to punish his Chief Priest, destroy himself in the process? Why would Ulu behave 'like the lizard in the fable who ruined his mother's funeral by his own hand'? There is no direct evidence in the novel that Ezeulu at any stage fails to divine the will of his god correctly, and there is no reason to suppose that even if this happened Ulu would 'abandon him to his enemies'. A close examination of the events in the novel shows that Ulu is unlikely to be responsible for the tragic fate of his Chief Priest. We are involved in this novel not only with the breakdown of communication between individual characters or groups but also in a situation in which these characters are mere arrows with which anthropomorphic gods shoot one another. It is only within this complex situation that Ezeulu's tragic end can be satisfactorily explained and the python myth, of which Achebe makes so much in this work, given its due importance. Only then would we see the confrontation in the novel for what it is - a fight of the gods in which the god who loses is destroyed with his Chief Priest. Ezeulu suffers because his god is defeated in this vicious contest.

What makes this view particularly attractive to hold is that at a stage during the crisis in Umuaro Ezeulu is told by Ulu that the fight all along has been between him and Idemili - 'Who told you that this was your own fight which you could arrange to suit you? ... As for me and Idemili we shall fight to the finish; and whoever throws the other down will strip him of his anklet!'<sup>77</sup> In the face of such a warning Ezeulu becomes powerless to continue the confrontation with Umuaro. All he can do is to await impatiently the outcome of the fight between his god and the rival Idemili:--

Who was Ezeulu to tell his deity how to fight the jealous cult of the sacred python? It was a fight of the gods. He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god. This thought intoxicated Ezeulu like palm wine. New thoughts tumbled over themselves and past events took on new, exciting significance. Why had Oduche imprisoned a python in his box? It had been blamed on the white man's religion; but was that the true cause? What if the boy was also an arrow in the hand of Ulu?<sup>78</sup>

This passage throws new light on some of the important events in the novel, especially those connected with the python myth. Past events are made relevant to the present situation as they take on 'new, exciting significance'. The reader is provided, <sup>with</sup> as it were, the history of the enmity between Idemili and Ulu in a condensed form. If the 'cult of the sacred python' is 'jealous' it is because Ulu, on its creation, took the place of Idemili as the principal deity for all Umuaro. It is from this situation that the undying enmity between Ezeulu and Ezidemili springs. Added to this is the abomination committed by Oduche, Ezeulu's son, in imprisoning the sacred python, the totem of Idemili. At the time, Oduche is believed to have erred because of his connection with the Christians. Could he not, in fact, have been taking sides with Ulu against Idemili in the war of the gods, without realizing it? Could it be

that Ulu in his fight against Idemili 'had spotted the white man as an ally from the very beginning?'<sup>79</sup> Ezeulu's arrogant refusal to make reparation for Oduche's insult provokes Idemili to retaliatory action. He decides to strike when the Chief Priest is already weakened by the crisis in Umuaro. He haunts Ezeulu in a nightmare.

Look! a python.  
 Look! a python.  
 Yes, it lies across the way.<sup>80</sup>

Ezeulu wakes up only to realize what great harm has been done to him - Obika's body is brought into the house. Within the framework of the python myth this is a clear evidence that Idemili has claimed his victim. With the death of his son comes Ezeulu's moment of recognition. He realizes for the first time that, far from being an arrow in the bow of his god, he has, in fact, become a victim of the fight of the gods. He feels betrayed by the deity he believes he has served so faithfully and on whose behalf he has incurred so much enmity. He spends his last days not only completely alienated from his people but also, in his 'haughty splendour of a demented high priest', partly isolated from his former self.

## V

A new dimension is added to the theme of isolation in A Man of the People. To start with, instead of one principal character as in the previous novels, we have two to consider here - Odili, the hero-narrator and Chief Nanga. These characters end up not only estranged from each other but also collectively alienated from their background. Again, violence is used for the first time to bring about isolation. The

important thing to remember is that the circumstances of this novel are vastly different from those of Achebe's previous works. The novel reveals the progressive drop in the quality of Nigerian life which has come as a direct result of the two movements of time and place which were alluded to at the beginning of this study. The unity of tribal life has been destroyed almost beyond recognition by the forces of social disorder. The symbols of success are no longer titles and large stocks of yams but big cars, expensive clothes, palatial buildings and close links with attractive girls. The restraining influence of traditional religion is no longer felt. The formerly-potent religious masks, like the 'egwugwu' of Things Fall Apart, are now only objects of entertainment. We are given here the picture of 'a society that had gone completely rotten and maggoty at the centre.'<sup>81</sup> Violence has become a prominent feature of social life and a major factor to reckon with in politics. This feature was first highlighted in Nigerian Literature by Cyprian Ekwensi in his creation of Uncle Taiwo in Jagua Nana. As will be seen in the next chapter, the absence of moral scruples in Nigerian politics is the centre of interest of Aluko's Chief the Honourable Minister. In A Man of the People, therefore, the theme of isolation is based on a matter of considerable contemporary interest.

In this novel the breakdown in communication is presented in two ways. There is the bitter political antagonism between the two main characters which rules out any possibility of compromise between them. It soon becomes obvious to the reader, however, that if the two had made any serious attempt to understand each other, they would have discovered they had a lot in common. There is also the problem of communication which results from

the way Achebe has been compelled to use language. As will be shown later, the verbal infelicities and ungrammatical structures found in this work serve a useful artistic purpose.

The situation in A Man of the People is foreshadowed by Achebe in 'The Voter', a short story published only a year before the novel.<sup>82</sup> For example, Roof and Ibe in the short story remind one of Boniface and Nanga in the novel. Like Nanga, Ibe is the object of Achebe's satire:-

Only the other day Marcus Ibe was a not too successful mission school teacher. Then politics had come to their village and he had wisely joined up, some said just in time to avoid imminent dismissal arising from a female teacher's pregnancy. Today he was Chief the Honourable; he had two long cars and had just built himself the biggest house anyone had seen in these parts ... Whenever he could he left the good things of the capital and returned to his village which had neither running water nor electricity, although he had lately installed a private plant to supply electricity to his new house.<sup>83</sup>

Ibe is drawn as a man of little consequence, but with a strong desire for money and influence, who is elected to Parliament only because of the prevailing tribalism in Umuofia. This tribalism is attacked, and the people of Umuofia, <sup>like</sup> ~~as~~ those of Bori, Anata and Urua in the novel, are satirized for being so willing to accept bribes and thus abuse the process of democratic election. Here, as in the novel, the people's cynicism and inability to stand against corruption are presented as some of the important factors which result in political disaster:-

The villagers had had five years in which to see how quickly and plentifully politics brought wealth, chieftaincy titles, doctorate degrees and other honours ... Anyhow, these honours and benefits had come so readily to the man to whom they had given their votes free of charge five years ago that they were now ready to try it a different way.<sup>84</sup>

Although the theme of political corruption is treated in both story and novel, the story is no more than a preliminary exercise for the novel where the theme is given a fuller treatment in a more complex situation. By the time Achebe comes to write A Man of the People the situation has degenerated so fast that honest politicians like Dr. Makinde no longer have any chance of playing a part in the political life of their country:-

The Prime Minister spoke for three hours and his every other word was applauded. He was called the Tiger, the Lion, the One and Only, the Sky, the Ocean and many other names of praise. He said that the Miscreant Gang had been caught 'red-handed in their nefarious plot to overthrow the Government of the people by the people and for the people with the help of enemies abroad.

They deserve to be hanged, shouted Mr. Nanga from the back benches. This interruption was so loud and clear that it appeared later under his own name in the Hansard. Throughout the session he led the pack of back-bench hounds straining their leash to get at their victims. If any one had cared to sum up Mr. Nanga's interruptions they would have made a good hour's continuous yelp. Perspiration poured down his face as he sprang up to interrupt or sat back to share in the derisive laughter of the hungry hyena.<sup>85</sup>

Here Odili describes a scene he witnessed during his last visit to Parliament at Bori with emphasis on the part played by Nanga. Achebe uses the technique of flashback with the satirical intention of showing the violence and injustice inherent in political life. Makinde and the few honest Ministers who support him are referred to as 'the Miscreant Gang', while the Prime Minister is called many 'names of praise' - 'the Tiger, the Lion, the One and Only, the Sky, the Ocean ...' The reader knows, however, that Makinde's 'nefarious plot' is no more than his sound plan for economic recovery after the slump in the international coffee market,



which the Government fear will make them lose popular support. The reader is not therefore favourably impressed by Nanga's 'loud and clear' interruptions which 'would have made a good hour's continuous yelp.' It is from the words put in Odili's mouth that the novelist indicates his disapproval of the part played by Nanga in the whole affair. By referring to Nanga as the leader of 'the pack of back-bench hounds' and portraying him as one who enjoys so much 'derisive laughter of the hungry hyena' at the discomfiture of others, the novelist attempts to manipulate our attitude against Nanga and at this stage make us want to side with Odili. More important, by making it possible for Makinde and his friends to be so thoroughly disgraced and humiliated - a situation which depicts, as it were, the triumph of falsehood over truth - the author successfully dramatizes how ruthlessly the political machine can be abused. For once the moral props which help to keep society in a state of social equilibrium have been removed, the inevitable result is the type of greed, corruption and bitter struggle for political power that we read about in this novel. These are the conditions precedent to the isolation and ultimate annihilation of the principal contestants.

This isolation is brought about by a lack of understanding between Nanga and Odili. Each of them, to varying degrees, is interested in the material gains which come with political power. Initially, however, they appear socially and politically orientated towards different ideals. We see Nanga as a shameless, corrupt, uncultured Minister of Culture anxious to elbow his way to greater patronage and wealth. He is a man of the people only in an ironic sense. While he openly proclaims

his affection for the people - 'Do the right and shame the Devil'<sup>86</sup> - he does everything to undermine their welfare. Not only is he a confirmed agent of an entrenched system of political bribery, he is willing to betray the interest of the nation in his dealings with firms like Antonio and Sons. In him the acquisitiveness and unrestrained corruption which dominate life reach their peak. He is motivated in all his actions by self-interest. When, for instance, he arranges for a road to be tarred, it is only because <sup>an</sup> election is near or because he has ordered ten luxury buses of his which will make use of the road. But, even though he is an embodiment of corruption, he is not without some good qualities. He is an expert in the art of public relations and he is so charming and human that he remains a constant threat to Odili. Odili himself confesses that 'as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the Chief Nangas of this world will continue to get away with anything. He had that rare gift of making people feel ... that there was not a drop of ill will in his entire frame.'<sup>87</sup> To make the situation more complex, when Odili becomes involved in politics he starts to resemble Nanga. So we have in this novel not only an interplay between character and environment but also a constant interplay between the chief characters. From these the novel derives its complexity.

But there is also the technical complexity which arises from Achebe's use of Odili as hero-narrator. Achebe uses Odili to satirize political institutions and the people, but he often satirizes Odili himself. Achebe looks at society for the most part through Odili's eyes but often stands apart from Odili in order to observe him critically. However, as the narrator through whose eyes events and situations are recorded and judged,

Odili has the advantage of frequently presenting his point of view as the correct one. This is how the novel starts:-

No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. I have to admit this from the onset or else the story I'm going to tell will make no sense.<sup>88</sup>

By appearing so fair to Nanga at the beginning of the novel Odili gives the impression that he is going to be a convincing and reliable narrator. But we see in the last sentence of the passage a good reason why we should be on our guard and not accept all Odili's statements as necessarily correct. The mere fact that he is extremely anxious to convince others of his honesty is sufficient proof that his motives are not altogether genuine. There is yet another reason for caution. As we find in this passage, Odili not only narrates but also comments; care must therefore be taken not to confuse the narrator's sentiments with those of the author.

The reader's response to Odili is directed with sustained subtlety. We find ourselves attracted to him or repelled by him according to how close or far he is at any given moment to his proclaimed moral position. Usually he is convincing when his point of view is identical with that of the author:-

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you - as my father

did - if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth.<sup>89</sup>

Here Achebe uses Odili as a mouthpiece to call attention to the sordid aspects of the villagers' reception for Nanga. The description is such that one feels Odili's anger at the 'ridiculous festival' is justified. 'Vast tumult' suggests an excited and unruly mob who are acting this way because of their ignorance of 'one or two truths'. Their opinion of Nanga is, by implication, contrasted with that of Odili. While the Anata villagers think they are giving due honour to one of their great sons, Odili believes they are condoning evil by giving unnecessary encouragement to 'one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation.' 'It would be quite useless' reveals the extent of the people's ignorance and cynicism which the proverb in the last sentence of the passage is meant to reinforce. There can be no doubt that Achebe approves of Odili's contempt for the action of the people.

At other times the irony is directed against Odili himself. On these occasions we are made to realize that Odili is not completely admirable nor is he the centre of moral sanity which he proclaims himself to be:-

A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation - as I saw it then lying on that bed - was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say 'To hell with it'. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us - the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best - had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase - the extension

of our house - was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house.<sup>90</sup>

On this occasion Achebe stands apart from his hero and, through the objective, detached and symbolic use of language, views Odili critically and brings out his inner contradictions. The paradox of the whole situation is particularly striking. Here is Odili comfortably lodged in a ministerial bedroom as Nanga's guest complaining about those who have 'barricaded themselves in'. The first sentence of the passage not only indicates the intended division between those who are 'in' and those who are 'out' but also provides a sound basis for judging the actions of each group. From Odili's description of the 'in' group - 'the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best' - one can only assume that he wishes to be regarded as a member of the 'out' group. Why does he then barricade himself in the Minister's bedroom and seek 'to persuade the rest' to stay out? Achebe's intention is plainly to call attention to the wide gap between Odili's declared moral position and his actions. The sustained image of a 'shelter', used in contradistinction to 'rain', is meant to dramatize the falsity of Odili's position. 'Shelter' and 'rain' bear a symbolic relationship to 'in' and 'out', and one image is made to reinforce the other throughout the passage in order to underline the hero's hypocrisy. It is this kind of behaviour that results in the political confusion which finally brings 'down the whole house'. Achebe successfully uses language here as an instrument for analysing and evaluating character and conduct, and shows a grasp of the complexity of the human situation.

At times Achebe's satire is double-edged, directed against Odili and the politicians at the same time:-

'That row of ten houses belongs to the Minister of Construction,' she said. 'They are let to different embassies at three thousand a year each.'

So what, I said within myself. Your accusation may be true but you've no right to make it. Leave it to us and don't contaminate our cause by espousing it.

'But that's another Chief Nanga Street,' I said aloud, pointing to my left.

'No. What we saw near the fountain was Chief Nanga Avenue,' she said and we both burst out laughing, friends again. 'I'm not sure there isn't a Road as well somewhere,' she said. 'I know there is a Circle.'

Then I promptly recoiled again. Who the hell did she think she was to laugh so self-righteously. Wasn't there more than enough in her own country to keep her laughing all her days? Or crying if she preferred it?<sup>91</sup>

The satire here is directed primarily against the corrupt manner in which politicians acquire their wealth and the cult of personality which many of them shamelessly exploit by having streets, avenues, roads and circles named after them. Jean and Odili, who are on a tour of the capital city, jointly note and deplore these practices, deriding in particular the numbers of places named after Nanga - 'I'm not sure there isn't a 'Road' as well ... I know there is a Circle.' Then there is a sudden reaction by Odili against this satire - 'Who the hell did she think she was to laugh so self-righteously.' Odili suddenly realizes that Jean, an American, has nothing to be smug about since inequalities and social injustice are features of American life. Yet in spite of this display of anger, a few minutes later he expresses a desire to see her the following day. Odili's indignation therefore strikes the reader as an assumed pose, and is therefore unconvincing, an effect wholly intended by the author.

Odili is by no means a strong character. Although he swears

opposition to Nanga, he lacks the determination to carry it through. His irresolute actions call to mind Obi Okonkwo's weaknesses. With Obi he shares the advantages of university education and the idealism which comes with it. An outstanding feature of this novel is Odili's psychological development which shows him as basically not much different from Nanga. The impression created is that he is just as corruptible as Nanga and that, with <sup>a</sup> little more practice, he may become as unconscionable as his opponent. What we know for certain is that Odili is susceptible to the abuses of flattery, that he is not averse to enjoying the comfort of Nanga's luxury home at Bori and that he is not above being overwhelmed by a ride in a Cadillac - 'Any way make we follow them chop small for dis world.'<sup>92</sup> Again, he does not contemplate political revenge against Nanga until he is outwitted in a love affair. When he decides to contest Nanga's seat in a parliamentary election he is not sure whether he is doing so out of political conviction or motive of revenge - 'How important was my political activity in its own right? It was difficult to say; things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl.'<sup>93</sup> But once the Common People's Convention is formed and he secures the post of local organizer for his district, he appropriates party funds for his personal use, thus blurring further the moral distinction which exists between him and Nanga. As he himself tells us, his moral decline has developed gradually over a number of years:-

As I drove ... I could not help thinking also of the quick transformations that were such a feature of our country, and in particular of the changes of attitude in my own self. I had gone to the University with the clear intention of coming out again after three years as a full member of the privileged class whose symbol was

the car. So much did I think of it in fact that, as early as my second year, I had gone and taken out a driver's licence and even made a mental note of the make of car I would buy.<sup>94</sup>

However, Odili never becomes completely unscrupulous.

At worst he is only a potential Nanga. Although Achebe gives several instances in the novel of how Odili starts to resemble Nanga, he still carefully draws a distinction between his hero and the Minister. In fact, occasionally Odili is drawn in moral contrast to Nanga:-

When I brought out my suitcase Chief Nanga ... came forward and tried to put a hand on my shoulder in one last effort at reconciliation.

'Don't touch me!' I eased my shoulders away like one avoiding a leper's touch. He immediately recoiled; his smile hardened on his face and I was happy.

'Don't be childish, Odili,' he said paternally. 'After all she is not your wife. What is all this nonsense? She told me there is nothing between you and she, and you told me the same thing ... If you like I can bring you six girls this evening. You go do the thing sotay you go beg say you no want again. Ha, ha, ha, ha!'<sup>95</sup>

In this scene where Nanga seduces Odili's girl friend we are made to sympathize with Odili as the underdog who is offended by the shameless Nanga but has no means of achieving redress. Odili's reaction to the situation reveals how helpless he is in the same way that Nanga's excuses - 'After all, she is not your wife. What is all this nonsense?' - shows him to be a thoroughly unscrupulous man. The image of 'one avoiding a leper's touch' is meant to emphasize the moral distance between the two. Furthermore, Nanga's ungrammatical English - 'She told me there is nothing between you and she' - and his sudden switch from Standard English to pidgin English in the last sentence of the passage are intended to underline not only his low educational attainment but also his inability to view the situation in any light but a frivolous one.



Another factor which distinguishes the two principal contestants is that Odili often exercises moral scruples which one cannot associate with Nanga. For example, Odili's scruples lead Boniface to believe that Odili is not prosecuting the political campaign against Nanga with sufficient ruthlessness. Again, it is because of his moral scruples that Odili nearly falls out with his political associate, Max:-

'Chief Koko offered me one thousand pounds,' he continued placidly. 'I consulted the other boys and we decided to accept. It paid for that minibus ...'

'I don't understand you, Max. Are you telling me that you have taken money and stepped down for P.O.P.?'

'I am telling you nothing of the sort. The paper I signed has no legal force whatever and we needed the money ...'

'It had moral force,' I said, downcast. 'I am sorry, Max, but I think you have committed a big blunder. I thought we wanted our fight to be clean ... You had better look out; they will be even more vicious from now on and people will say they have cause.'<sup>96</sup>

Odili is here drawn in moral contrast to Max. While Max thinks of the legal force of the agreement with Chief Koko, Odili is concerned with the moral force. He is against Max taking a bribe from Koko even though the money enables his Party to buy a minibus for an effective political campaign. The 'big blunder' made by Max here blurs any moral distinction which may have existed between Government and Opposition Parties and is partly responsible for the confused situation in the novel. 'They will be even more vicious' looks forward to Max's violent death in the hands of Chief Koko's thugs. However, Odili's scruples occasionally stand in the way of positive action - 'I get hold of some pretty inane thought or a cheap tune I would ordinarily be ashamed to be caught whistling ... and I get stuck with it.'<sup>97</sup> Even so, one cannot

help feeling that, if other characters like Max and Nanga had exercised some moral scruples, the outcome of the events described in the novel might have been different.

A situation in which one character is made to criticize another calls for a sensitive use of language if it is to succeed. What Achebe does in this novel is to make Odili responsible for his language, which mirrors Odili's personality and the total situation in which the hero is involved. This explains why stylistically this novel is different from the earlier ones. What seem at first to be stylistic infelicities, which one finds difficult to associate with the author of Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, are calculated strokes intended to reveal the indiscipline in the hero's mind and indicate a process of growth. This is why we have for the first time in Achebe such statements of doubtful grammatical quality as:

the high-minded thinking of fellows like  
Max and I.<sup>98</sup>

A common saying in the country after  
Independence was that it didn't matter  
what you knew but who you knew.<sup>99</sup>

The situation is made complex by the fact that Achebe also satirizes Odili. There is therefore a need, linguistically, for a gap between author and hero. This is the need served by the verbal infelicities which one comes across in this novel. This point is missed by those critics who assert that there is a falling-off in Achebe's usual high standard in the novel.<sup>100</sup> As many of the passages already quoted show, Achebe writes prose of a very high order where he takes full responsibility for what is said - in those sections, for example, where Odili is satirized. It is true that occasionally, in order to achieve a correlation between theme, character and situation, Achebe uses language which would have been inappropriate

in the circumstances of the other novels:-

Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people ...101

The language here is no doubt journalistic. But the empty rhetoric of journalism is meant to reflect the shallow thinking of members of the People's Organization Party. It is the anti-intellectual feeling which the P.O.P. personify that leads to a direct confrontation between Odili and Nanga. It is their organized deceit of the people and insatiable lust for power and wealth that bring about disaster. An entirely different situation required a new method of exposition and Achebe's versatile talent hit on the right techniques and language to describe the chaotic world of A Man of the People.

The chaos is brought to an end by means of a coup which, in the circumstance<sup>s</sup>, is the best solution. When people have become so unrestrained and callous in their behaviour, isolation can only be achieved by an equally drastic method. For, as Achebe makes clear in an article,

things had got to such a point politically that there was no other answer - no way you could resolve this impasse politically. The political machine had been so abused that whichever way you pressed it, it produced the same results; and therefore another force had to come in. Now when I was writing A Man of the People it wasn't clear to me that this was going to be necessarily military intervention. It could easily have been civil war, which in fact it very nearly was in Nigeria.102

This coup has been the subject of several comments, but nearly all of these have, unfortunately, been devoted to the prophetic nature of the work, the fact that the military coup in Nigeria in January, 1966 coincided with the publication of the book.<sup>103</sup> Only a few critics have been willing to consider the distinctive complexity of the work without paying undue attention to the military coup.<sup>104</sup> This is why, no doubt, Professor Jones has found it necessary to warn against devoting too much energy to this sheer coincidence between topicality and art.<sup>105</sup> Bernth Lindfors reminds us that, between February, 1963 and March, 1965 when the novel was written, there were several coups and violent disruptions in other parts of Africa and that Nigeria was then on the 'brink of anarchy' - that, in fact, a coup had become an African dilemma and not a typical Nigerian phenomenon.<sup>106</sup> Seen in this light, the work of criticism becomes profitable only when it concerns itself with the consistency of the coup with the other events in the novel. This is what Margaret Laurence has tried to do. But, unfortunately, she ignores vital parts of the evidence provided by the novel and, not surprisingly, comes to the wrong conclusion:-

In the astonishment at life's imitation of art, the ending itself did not at the time seem questionable, but now the coup in the novel appears slightly contrived. The fact that it actually happened this way in real life does not alter the impression that the novel ends rather too conveniently. No active revolutionary force is even hinted at throughout the novel, and it is therefore hard not to see the final coup as a kind of 'deus ex machina' brought in arbitrarily in order to provide a conclusion.<sup>107</sup>

In actual fact, the coup provides a fitting climax to the political confusion the book portrays, and should be seen

as another example of a self-interested action for which, we are told, 'no public reason' can be given. 'What happened was simply that unruly mobs and private armies having tasted blood and power during the election had got out of hand and ruined their masters and employers.'<sup>108</sup> As with the other events in the book, Achebe has prepared his way carefully for this coup so that, when it takes place, it is seen as an essential part of the plot. It is, in fact, carried out in the prevailing spirit of the day - 'You chop, me self I chop, palaver finish'.<sup>109</sup> Mrs. Laurence talks of the absence of an 'active revolutionary force' in the novel. But revolution and violent changes take place right from the early pages. There is, for example, the violent change of government following the slump in the international coffee market in which the educated members of the cabinet are dropped and Nanga with the other semi-literate politicians of the People's Organization Party is brought into the Government. A little later, the nation is plunged into a state of disorder following the discovery of the corrupt dealings of the Minister of Foreign Trade with the British Amalgamated over the rise in import duties on textile goods. The confusion which follows this last incident, we are told, is so great that the people were 'exhilarated ... by the heady atmosphere of impending violence.'<sup>110</sup> Many believe that everything will soon come to a head:-

'What we must do is get something going,' said Max, 'however small, and wait for the blow-up. It's bound to come. I don't know how or when but it's got to come. You simply cannot have this stagnation and corruption going on indefinitely'.<sup>111</sup>

What finally ensures a violent outcome is the political thuggery carried out by Nangavanga and the group kept by Odili, headed by Boniface. These are the 'unruly mobs and private armies' which get out of hand and make military intervention inevitable. It is important to establish the coup as an essential part of the action of the novel because of its relevance to the theme of isolation.

What saves this novel from extreme cynicism is the section of it set in the country. As in No Longer at Ease, there is opposition between country and town here. The only difference is that in this novel rural morality has been adversely affected by activities in the town to an extent that is only anticipated in No Longer at Ease. Achebe shows a keen sense of history by putting in its true perspective the continuing moral pollution of the rural areas which has been taking place in the six years or so after the events of his second novel. Social intercourse between town and country has no doubt increased during the period to the detriment of rural morality. Even so, the lines of demarcation are still clearly marked for all to see, and the author makes an artistic use of the contrast. If the contrast is not as pointed as that of No Longer at Ease, it is mainly because of the absence of any physical projection of the country into the town as we have in the Umuofia Progressive Union. Again, because of the hot pursuit of political vendetta dramatized in A Man of the People the solidarity of the villages is already threatened:-

The village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No man in Urua will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very back

yard are we not saved the journey? We are ignorant people and we are like children. But I want to tell our son one thing: He already knows where to go and what to say when he gets there; he should tell them that we are waiting here like a babe cutting its first tooth: anyone who wants to look at our new tooth should know that his bag should be heavy.<sup>112</sup>

We have here the same type of situation dealt with by Achebe in 'The Voter'. The passage describes the ignorance, apathy and cynicism of the people. A new element introduced into the situation is the political rivalry between the two villages, Anata and Urua. 'We are ignorant people and we are like children' is ironic. We are not dealing here with the innocence of a 'babe'. Although the villagers may appear indifferent, they are wise enough to be willing to accept bribes from people who make so much money from politics - 'anyone who wants to look at our new tooth should know that his bag should be heavy.' Proverbs are still a feature of rural speech and are translated direct from Ibo, as we find in this passage, but they are now used to press the claims of one village against those of another. They no longer provide the vivid illustrative analogies which one finds, for example, in the 'egwugwu' scene in Things Fall Apart nor show the magnificent simplicity with which, for instance, Achebe sums up Ezeulu's ironic dilemma in Arrow of God - 'A man is like a funeral ram which must take whatever beating comes to it without opening its mouth; only the silent tremor of pain down its body tells of its suffering.'<sup>113</sup>

Even with the drop in the quality of rural life villagers are still motivated by a code of behaviour vastly superior to that of the town. This is shown clearly when they collectively move against Josiah, the local trader, when he outrages their sense of decency by cheating a blind man. He has, in the language

of the village, 'taken away enough for the owner to notice.'<sup>114</sup> Such an action, according to the narrator, shows that 'the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless.'<sup>115</sup> If the circumstances had been such that the laws of the village could be applied to the nation as a whole, the outcome to the events of this novel would have been different. As is usual with Achebe, there is no attempt to idealize the two villages, Anata and Urua, where most of the action of the novel takes place. But the reader is left in no doubt about their importance to the two aspirants for political power - Odili and Nanga. In these villages the crucial battles are fought and political fortunes are made or marred. Although the people are portrayed as generally apathetic, they know that there is little to choose between Nanga and Odili. The opinion of Edna's mother embodies the wisdom of the villagers - 'They are both white man's people. And they know what is what between themselves.'<sup>116</sup> In the same manner, the 'bush woman' Mrs. Nanga, portrayed as an honest, devoted and faithful housewife, gives us an insight into the lack of seriousness in Government circles at Bori, especially as reflected in the frequent parties which she aptly describes as "nine pence talk and three pence food. 'Hallo, hawa you. Nice to see you again.' All na lie, lie,"<sup>117</sup> There can be no doubt that, although the village is no longer the strong cultural and political unit that it used to be, the author intends to suggest that the balance of advantage still remains with the country. This triumph is indicated, for instance, in the way Nanga insists that his children should visit Anata at least once a year.



Even Odili comes to accept the village as a legitimate area of operation and later records his major success in the novel - his marriage to Edna - there.

A Man of the People is a political satire approached in Nigerian fiction in its sardonic irony only by Aluko's Chief the Honourable Minister. Achebe's aim is to expose political corruption in a particular, unnamed country. But the result of his effort has transcended the local and particular and acquired universal significance. We owe this outcome to the theme and the skill with which it is handled. By putting before us two political opponents, separated from each other by age, wealth, experience and education, the author sets our minds on comparison and contrast - on the breakdown in communication between the two. But this soon proves to be a false expectation. By reading between the lines and watching Odili's psychological development closely, we come to realize that, if there had been better communication and understanding between the two, they ought to have been friends rather than enemies - that Odili is likely to become what Nanga is already.

In A Man of the People, as in all his other novels, Achebe's own artistic techniques of communication are primarily devoted to the exploration of the way in which communication, in a more general sense, breaks down between individuals and groups of individuals.

## Notes

- 1 Page references are to the following African Writers Series editions of the novels:  
Things Fall Apart (London, 1969)  
No Longer at Ease (London, 1969)  
Arrow of God (London, 1967)  
A Man of the People (London, 1969)
- 2 This movement has recently been brought up to early 1970 in a short story, 'Girls at War', which describes the tragic effects of the Nigerian Civil War on the civilian population in general and on the chief character, Gladys, in particular. See Achebe, Girls at War and Other Stories (London, 1972), pp.98 - 118.
- 3 William Walsh, A Manifold Voice (London, 1970), p.50.
- 4 Things Fall Apart, p.9.
- 5 Ibid., pp.37 - 38.
- 6 A Man of the People, pp.32 - 33.
- 7 Things Fall Apart, p.3.
- 8 Ibid., p.8.
- 9 Ibid., p.42.
- 10 Ibid., p.81.
- 11 Ibid., p.80.
- 12 Ibid., p.81.
- 13 Ibid., p.80.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., p.82.
- 16 Ibid., pp.84 - 85.
- 17 Ibid., p.139.
- 18 Ibid., p.28.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid., pp.60 - 61.
- 21 Ibid., p.51.
- 22 Ibid., p.57.
- 23 Ibid., p.4.

- 24 Ibid., p.155.
- 25 Ibid., p.160.
- 26 Ibid., p.186.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid., p.187.
- 29 Ibid., p.175.
- 30 Ibid., p.187.
- 31 Ibid., p.166.
- 32 Robert Serumaga, 'A Mirror of Integration', Protest and Conflict in African Literature (London, 1969), p.76.
- 33 A.G. Stock, 'Yeats and Achebe', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.5 (1968), p.110.
- 34 Things Fall Apart, p.114.
- 35 See Mbonu Ojike, My Africa (New York, 1946), chapter one.
- 36 No Longer at Ease, p.6.
- 37 Ibid., p.129.
- 38 Ibid., pp.11 - 12.
- 39 Ibid., p.7.
- 40 Ibid., p.18.
- 41 Ibid., pp.16 - 17.
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- 43 Ibid., p.156.
- 44 Robin Horton, 'Three Nigerian Novelists', Nigeria Magazine No.70 (1961), p.221.
- 45 No Longer at Ease, p.79.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid., p.83.
- 48 Ibid., p.72.
- 49 Ibid., pp.71-72.
- 50 Ibid., pp.133-34.
- 51 Ibid., p.133.
- 52 Ibid.

- 53 Ibid., p.137.
- 54 Ibid., p.43.
- 55 Ibid., pp.31-32.
- 56 Ibid., p.81.
- 57 Felicity Riddy, 'Language as a Theme in No Longer at Ease', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.9 (1970), pp.38-39.
- 58 No Longer at Ease, p.10.
- 59 Ibid., p.170.
- 60 Robert Serumaga, 'Interview with Chinua Achebe', Transcription Centre (London, 1967), p.3.
- 61 Arrow of God, p.1.
- 62 Ibid., pp.3-4.
- 63 Ibid., p.4.
- 64 Ibid., p.233.
- 65 See, for example, Arthur Ravenscroft, Chinua Achebe (London, 1969), pp.24-31; Walsh, op. cit., pp.55-61; Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (London, 1969), pp.152-4; Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons (London, 1968), pp.111-7.
- 66 Arrow of God, p.163.
- 67 Ibid., p.241.
- 68 Ibid., p.196.
- 69 Ibid., p.18.
- 70 Ibid., p.55.
- 71 Ibid., p.165.
- 72 Ibid., p.274.
- 73 Ibid., p.215.
- 74 Ibid., p.275.
- 75 Ibid., p.287.
- 76 Ibid., p.286.
- 77 Ibid., pp.240-41.
- 78 Ibid., p.241.
- 79 Ibid.

- 80 Ibid., p.277.
- 81 Girls at War, p.114.
- 82 'The Voter' was first published in Black Orpheus, No.17, 1965 and is included in the collection, Girls at War, pp.11-19.
- 83 Girls at War, pp.12-13.
- 84 Ibid., p.12.
- 85 A Man of the People, pp.5-6.
- 86 Ibid., p.12.
- 87 Ibid., p.73.
- 88 Ibid., p.1.
- 89 Ibid., p.2.
- 90 Ibid., p.42.
- 91 Ibid., pp.60-61.
- 92 Ibid., p.65.
- 93 Ibid., p.121.
- 94 Ibid., p.122.
- 95 Ibid., p.81.
- 96 Ibid., pp.141-42.
- 97 Ibid., p.29.
- 98 Ibid., p.128.
- 99 Ibid., p.19.
- 100 See, for example, Roscoe, Mother is Gold (London, 1971), pp.129-31.
- 101 A Man of the People, p.4.
- 102 Serumaga, 'Interview with Chinua Achebe', p.11.
- 103 See, for example, H.L.B. Moody, 'Shrewd Foreknowledge or Prophetic Guess', Nigeria Magazine, No.89 (1966), pp.129-31.
- 104 See, for example, Eustace Palmer, An Introduction to the African Novel (London, 1972), pp.72-84.
- 105 Eldred Jones, Locale and Universe - 'Three Nigerian Novels', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.3 (1967), pp.130-1.

- 106 Bernth Lindfors, 'Achebe's African Parable', Presence Africaine, No.66 (1968), pp.130-6.
- 107 Laurence, op. cit. p.122.
- 108 A Man of the People, p.162.
- 109 Ibid., p.167.
- 110 Ibid., p.112.
- 111 Ibid., p.90.
- 112 Ibid., p.141.
- 113 p.286. The use of proverbs in Achebe's novels is extensively discussed in a number of previous works. See, for example, Bernth Lindfors, 'The Palm Oil with which Achebe's words are eaten', African Literature Today, No.1 (1968), pp.3-18; Roscoe, op. cit., pp.121-9.
- 114 A Man of the People, p.97.
- 115 Ibid., p.167.
- 116 Ibid., p.119.
- 117 Ibid., p.41.

## Chapter Four

T. M. Aluko

Aluko's attitude to indigenous culture is decidedly more critical than that of Achebe; at least, this is what it would on immediate response to his novels appear to be. In Aluko, it may well seem that the treatment of customs and traditions in modern context takes the form of a more consistently sustained satire than one finds in Achebe. One must, however, remember such things as the closing page of Things Fall Apart, the dinner party in Arrow of God, and almost any chapter of No Longer at Ease, not to mention the overall effect of A Man of the People. To be sure, the focus of satire in Achebe tends, as the examples cited illustrate, to be that which militates against traditional culture rather than traditional culture in itself. But although one would not think of Things Fall Apart, in its overall effect, as a satirical novel, the ways already noted in which Achebe expresses an ambivalent attitude towards things which in part he admires in Ibo culture, plainly point to a disposition of mind which is likely to lead to the creation of satirical fiction.

Even readers disposed readily to agree with what has just been said, however, would be justified in making the point that Achebe, even in A Man of the People, is at least as elegiac as he is satirical. That is to say, A Man of the People very largely depends for its satiric effect upon an elegiac recognition of the greater things in Nigerian culture,

however subject to qualifying scrutiny, that have passed away. Aluko, on the other hand, can strike the reader as being purely satirical from the first novel to the last, and it is in this light that this study proposes to approach him, whatever the problems that will undoubtedly be encountered in determining the precise scope and intentions of his satire.

Aluko's criticism of society is concentrated on a much shorter period than Achebe's - from the early 1920s in One Man, One Wife to the late 1940s in One Man, One Matchet, 1950 in Kinsman and Foreman and the early 1960s in Chief the Honourable Minister.<sup>1</sup> So Aluko covers only a period of about forty years instead of Achebe's eighty. He therefore does not present that wide conspectus of history which Achebe's works offer. But he does throw an intense critical searchlight on the limited period he deals with. The result is that he is able to describe in some detail various aspects of life of the Yoruba during the years of crisis.<sup>2</sup> This crisis provides much of the material for Aluko's novels. Apart from the comparatively limited movement of time, there is also, as in Achebe, a movement of place between town and country in each novel. This usually results in clashes of opinions and personalities, causing tensions and occasionally community riots.

Aluko's dissatisfaction is shown by the degree of critical scrutiny to which he subjects Yoruba society. This society is presented as one bound together by common beliefs and values but weakened by greed and intolerance. The primary objective of the people is the pursuit of 'alafia', as defined in chapter two. Their attitude to life is therefore different from that shown by the citizens of Umuofia and Umuaro. Such



considerations must be partly responsible for the types of characters we have in these novels. For, with the possible exception of Titus Oti in Kinsman and Foreman, none of them displays any degree of heroism. Their pre-occupation is to attain the necessary wealth, power and position which they almost invariably use for their own selfish ends. It is not surprising that in this type of situation there are frequent clashes of interest in matters political, social and economic. Occasionally Aluko succeeds in fusing together in one single episode all these areas of conflict, as in the Igbodudu Land Dispute in One Man, One Matchet. But usually these interests are so diverse and irreconcilable that they are embodied in separate episodes.

Aluko's Western Nigeria is beset with fear and insecurity. To start with, there is the ever-present fear of one's enemies, visible and invisible. Any of these are considered capable of causing social or political harm to their opponents at any time. In a situation clouded by superstition and mistrust, it is not altogether surprising that people at times take ridiculous actions to safeguard their positions. An example of such an action is the oath-swearing ritual in the bedroom of the Prime Minister in Chief the Honourable Minister in an attempt to settle a dispute between two Ministers of State, Alade Moses and Franco-John. Alade, who is dragged into the affair against his wish, gives us some idea of the weird ceremony:-

Several weeks after, the whole thing still looked to him like a dream - the medico Prime Minister taking some blood with a syringe first from a vein in Franco-John's left forearm and then some from his own and emptying the contents into a

white enamel dish already half filled with water. He saw dimly his relation Chief Odole saying some incantation, after which he first drank of the concoction himself. Perhaps that was to show that he was not poisoning the principal characters in the ceremony - if it was poison he was offering, then the poison would first affect him himself.<sup>3</sup>

Aluko's intention here is clearly satirical. First of all, there is the suggestion that the mutual distrust and suspicion between the two Ministers is so deep that it is not considered that peace can be restored between them without introducing a symbolic element of fear. It is the same kind of distrust which compels Chief Odole to drink of the 'concoction' first. The word 'concoction' not only points to the unpleasant nature of the drink but also suggests that, at best, it can only provide a make-shift remedy. There is also the irony of 'the medico Prime Minister' who, many years after he had left medical practice for politics, now applies his medical skill in the wrong situation. This episode reveals the unhealthy psychological state of mind of the characters who are portrayed as the victims of fear.

Fear and discomfort are brought about not only by visible enemies. There is also an obsession with invisible evil forces which the people attempt all the time to ward off. For example, the whole atmosphere of One Man, One Wife is dominated by the fear of Shonponna, the god of smallpox. One reason why the Christian missionaries make little progress in Isolo is the people's fear of the dreadful consequences of abandoning their ancestral god, Shonponna, for the new-fangled, incomprehensible idea which Christianity represents. As we are constantly reminded in these novels, a dead ancestor is not gone for ever. He is only gone to heaven as a further extension of the extended family on earth and is capable of influencing his existing

relations for good or bad. Even the conduct of government officials is influenced by the belief in the transmigration of souls as we see in One Man, One Matchet when the Ministry of Agriculture's cutting-out squad avoid late chief Ajayi's cocoa farm because of his assumed spiritual presence on the farm:-

The gang of tree-cutters cautiously avoided Chief Ajayi's farm. For Ajayi's ghost was known to haunt his house and his farm, and would continue to hover around his possessions here on earth, from which he was so violently separated, for a number of moons before finally betaking himself to a distant country where he was not known and where he would start another span of human existence under an entirely different name.<sup>4</sup>

The difference between fact and fiction is highlighted here by the juxtaposition of 'ghost' and 'human existence'. The fact is that Ajayi is dead and gone for ever; the fiction is that he 'would continue to hover around his possessions ... before finally betaking himself ...' Although Aluko explains the concept of life after death from the point of view of those who believe in it, he makes the whole idea look ridiculous by putting his emphasis on the restlessness of Ajayi's ghost, and linking this with the tragi-comic manner of his death. The author's mocking tone comes out clearly in the use of expressions like 'cautiously' (which points to the conscious effort of the tree-cutters), 'was known to haunt' (which is far more circumstantial than is necessary), 'betaking himself' and in the need for Ajayi to assume a 'different name' in the 'distant country'.

An inevitable consequence of these superstitious beliefs is the creation of a situation in which rumour and gossip thrive. These play unusually important parts in Aluko's

works and are employed for the most part to make the confused world of these novels more confounded. Occasionally, however, they provide humour and are used for the relief of tension. In One Man, One Wife, when Jacob disappears for a few days after his court case with Toro, varied and fantastic accounts are offered for his temporary disappearance, the most colourful being that he has been taken away on the wings of <sup>the</sup> Archangel Gabriel. In the same manner, in One Man, One Matchet many far-fetched explanations are given at Ipaja of Benjamin Benjamin's accident and stay in hospital at Apeno, including the preposterous suggestion that he has been jailed by Udo Akpan. These unfounded rumours, which are allowed to influence the course of events to an incredible extent, prove that in the Yoruba society of Aluko's fictional creation, most of the people are credulous and uncritical, and thus fair game for satire.

Practically every aspect of the life of the people is heavily criticized by the novelist. An important feature of this society is its conservative attitude - a predisposition to reject anything new or capable of upsetting old ways of life. This characteristic it shares to some extent with Achebe's Ibo society. It rejects a new religion in One Man, One Wife, a truly beneficial economic proposition in One Man, One Matchet and an attempt to introduce a new dimension into family relationships in Kinsman and Foreman. But to the credit of the same society it stands resolutely against, and triumphs over, a system of social and economic exploitation in Chief the Honourable Minister. Dramatic tension is provided in this novel by the unrelenting opposition of the majority of the people to the political abuses and electoral

fraud practised by the Ministers and party functionaries of the Freedom for All Party. In this respect they display a greater political consciousness than the society of Achebe's A Man of the People which remains largely indifferent to the corrupt activities of politicians.

Religion, especially Christianity in which these novels show a great deal of interest, is presented with a measure of satire. In each of the first three novels, a priest plays a prominent role in the development of the action. For example, in One Man, One Wife the Christian Mission, Rev. David and his assistant, Teacher Royasin, provide most of the action of the novel. As might be expected, initially they have a very difficult time; in fact, at no time during their ministration can they claim complete success. Their difficulties and modest achievements are symbolically represented by the peculiar behaviour of a kerosene lamp at the Mission House at Isolo:-

Pastor and Teacher watched the flickering flame. It appeared to be fighting a gasping battle against unseen forces wanting to choke it out of existence. The gasps were spasmodic, the flame looked like going out after every one. Then it seemed to recover and flicker into life again for a brief period ... The flame slowly regained steadiness and confidence. Its light rose steadily in intensity ...<sup>5</sup>

The sustained metaphor here gives a vivid impression of the situation. The operative word is 'gasping' which successfully describes the initial difficulties Christian missionaries had in making any impression on the people of Isolo against the 'unseen forces' of ignorance and superstition. At first it looked as if the 'flame' must be choked out of existence by the stronger forces of tradition. But because

of the energetic evangelical work of Rev. David, the 'flickering flame' regains 'steadiness and confidence'. Aluko succeeds in this short paragraph in setting the pattern which is followed in his first three novels in the encounter between Christianity and traditional religion.

It is appropriate that religion plays very little part in Chief the Honourable Minister. As in A Man of the People, the progressive moral degeneration of the leaders of the people has proceeded so far and they have become so unconscionable and ruthless in their political behaviour that they are not likely to benefit from the admonitions of a priest. Aluko shows intimate knowledge of the society he writes about. That is why, for example, he imaginatively accepts the duality of the life of the typical Yoruba, the type of situation which makes it possible for him, for instance, to worship with a church congregation in the morning and offer sacrifices to his ancestors in the evening without suffering from any mental conflict. This is the way Simeon behaves in Kinsman and Foreman. 'The deistic approach of the Yoruba,' says Wole Soyinka, 'is to absorb every new experience, departmentalize it and carry on with life.'<sup>6</sup> The desire to carry on with life, preferably in conditions of ease and quiet, provides the necessary motivation for Aluko's characters and is manifest even in the actions, songs, prayers and proverbs of the society he presents. An example is provided by this short modern Yoruba pop song:-

Ma a ko'le  
 Ma a bi'mo  
 Ma ramoto ayokele  
 Laisi alafia  
 Wonyen ko se ise  
 Alafia loju  
 Ilera loro  
 Eniti o ni alafia  
 O lohun gbogbo

I want to build a house,  
 I want to have children,  
 I want to have a motor-car.  
 Without peace,  
 These things are impossible,  
 Peace is supreme,  
 Health is wealth,  
 He who has peace  
 Has everything.<sup>7</sup>

This song points to material values and an attitude of mind which Aluko does not share. He uses these, usually in an ironic sense, to carry forward the purpose of satire.

Aluko's presentation of Yoruba society shows how preoccupied he is with the present, especially the conflicts and abuses which appear in daily life. His themes are based on the conventional subjects of poverty, ignorance, disease, religion and struggle for power, which he often treats with real insight. His method is to stay close to social reality in the treatment of events. For, as Eldred Jones has pointed out,

The writer today in Africa must see around him bad politics, bad religion, the misleading of ordinary people, and he is bound to write about all this if he writes about his environment. Of course, he can decide to opt out of it altogether, to write space fiction or something like that. But I feel that the writer has to write about what happens around him...<sup>8</sup>

This is what Aluko does. When he looked around him in Western Nigeria in the fifties, he saw, among other evils, a large measure of 'bad politics' and 'the misleading of ordinary people'. It is this experience that he tries to communicate artistically to his readers. What this study will attempt, apart from straight analysis of Aluko's satiric techniques, is to determine the extent to which those techniques can be said really and truly to work, and the kinds of response which they elicit. In Aluko's novels it is not merely a question of the

author's own 'problems of communication'; the reader, too, has his own problems of response and evaluation.

## II

Aluko presents his material in a way which shows clearly his keen observation of the various ways English is used by both literate and illiterate people in Nigeria. The problems of communication which arise from these works reflect this concern. What seems to be of particular interest to the novelist is the inappropriateness of the use of language in various situations and for various purposes. That is why we find in these novels a greater variety of English registers, as commonly used in Nigeria, than in those of many other Nigerian novelists. There is, for example, the language of people like Jacob, a semi-literate who can barely use the English language correctly; then there are characters like Benjamin Benjamin and Royasin who, although literate, use language as a means of deceiving gullible villagers. Aluko also uses, as appropriate, the language of journalism and the Civil Service to show the sort of things which can go wrong with language in the hands of demagogues and over-zealous civil servants. It is this kind of interest which Aluko shows in the use of language and the problems of communication generally which accounts for the large number of clichés, 'journalese' and 'officialese' in his works. As will become evident in the discussion of the novels, these are employed deliberately for satiric ends.

In One Man, One Wife, for example, a great deal centres on Royasin's dishonest use of language. In his opposition to the Church in his new capacity as 'Public Letter-writer and



Notary, Friend of the Illiterate, Advocate of the Oppressed', Royasin wins enough popular support to be able to embarrass the Christians. His position soon becomes so unassailable that many sections of the community look up to him for help and advice. This is part of a letter he writes to The Nigerian Recorder on behalf of the people of Isolo:-

All the inhabitants of this ancient village - men, women, boys and girls and children - they all opened wide their mouths in wonder and astonishment and curiosity when they discovered and disclosed the identity of the manager of the thieves and robbers; for he was one important and importable member of the Church at Isolo. The law of libel and slander and scandal forbids and forbodes a newspaper correspondent from correspondingly disclosing the name of this leader of the culprits.<sup>9</sup>

Aluko uses newspaper articles in his novels for satirical effect. Royasin's use of The Nigerian Recorder is a good example of how a mass communication medium can be thoroughly abused. As soon as he falls out with his boss and is dismissed from his post he turns against the Church and uses the newspaper as a platform of a bitter attack and full-scale revenge on the Church, calling its leaders rogues and vagabonds. His language is that of a semi-literate writer who wants to impress others with his prodigious knowledge of the English language. Many of the linguistic characteristics of Yoruba referred to in chapter two - repetition, exaggeration and word-play - are featured here, and are blatantly used for effect - 'wonder' and 'astonishment', 'discovered' and 'disclosed', 'thieves' and 'robbers', not to mention the comically unintended malapropisms 'importable' for 'important' and 'forbodes' for 'forbids'. The writer is so anxious for revenge and so full of hatred for Pastor David that he communicates only with difficulty. As Aluko says, 'as for Pastor David, the ex-Catechist would go to the ends of the earth

to put that man in real trouble.'<sup>10</sup> Royasin's journalistic activities broaden the area of conflict between him and the Christians and incite Pastor David to further evangelical work. The more successful Rev. David is in his mission, the more embittered and vociferous Royasin becomes.

Even in cases where Royasin intends to be of help to his friends his approach is usually a very clumsy one:-

I beg your Honour most respectfully and respectfully to carefully and patiently peruse these few lines of a tale of woe and persecution and prosecution perpetrated and perpetuated on your Honour's most unworthy servant, to wit my humble self, Longe of Idoka Village ...

The land that is the subject of this abominable act of man's inhumanity to man is the land of your Honour's respectful, respective, unworthy servant, to wit my humble self Longe, of Idoka Village ... The land was the undisputed and absolute property of the renowned forebears of your Honour's most humble and unworthy servant. In the unwritten but verbal, verbose and oral history of Adasaland, the large piece of land was very generously and royally given by His Highness Oba Atakumasa, to his humble subject and loyal general for valiantly and courageously driving out the soldiers of the King of Ibadan away from Adasa Territory.<sup>11</sup>

This is part of the petition which Royasin writes in his characteristic bombastic English to the District Officer, Idasa, on behalf of Longe who has allegedly been deprived of his land. It is by<sup>a</sup> stroke of luck that a long pedantic petition like this succeeds. Through such parody Aluko deliberately presents the reader with the problem of separating fact from fiction and of sorting out the significant from the trivial, the original from the merely repetitive - 'respectfully and respectfully', 'carefully and patiently', 'persecution and prosecution', 'perpetrated and perpetuated', 'unwritten and verbal', 'valiantly and courageously'. The pervasive use of clichés and stereotyped expressions - 'your Honour's most unworthy servant', 'this abominable act of man's inhumanity to man', 'his humble subject

and loyal general', 'to wit my humble self, Longe' underlines Royasin's total lack of originality. Although he occasionally achieves good results, as in this case, the impression of Royasin that a letter like this creates is of a man who is full of his own importance and is determined to impose himself at all costs on his illiterate community.

Often in this novel Aluko deliberately inflates language in order to demonstrate Royasin's pretentiousness. The tendency to exaggerate and say the same thing several times over in slightly different ways is a characteristic of Aluko's prose style which he shares with other Yoruba writers. This tendency has been the subject of comments by literary critics who rightly call attention to the tendency but usually make no serious attempt to give the reason for it.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Ulli Beier writes of Fagunwa: 'He likes words. He likes to pile them up, say the same thing over and over again in infinite variation. He is a master of rhetoric, who can make repetitions and variations swing in a mounting rhythm ...'<sup>13</sup> Bernth Lindfors has also found that Aluko 'seems to delight in wringing comedy out of verbal repetition and stylistic exaggeration'<sup>14</sup> In his article Lindfors calls attention to the different characteristics of Yoruba and Igbo prose styles in English. These differences are certainly discernible, at least as far as the present Nigerian novels are concerned. But it is also important to add that Yoruba and Igbo prose styles in English are not invariably different from each other. This is a matter in which one has to reckon with the linguistic competence and the creative methods and talents of individual writers. We must also bear in mind the fact that, as well as differences,

similarities exist between Yoruba and Igbo.<sup>15</sup> Such similarities are responsible for the fact that the language of a passage written by an Ibo writer at times resembles very closely that of another by a Yoruba writer. We find such close similarities, for example, in the speech of the Secretary of the Umuofia Progressive Union at the reception held for Obi, quoted and discussed in the last chapter and the 'Illuminated Address Presented by the Newtown Improvement Union on behalf of the Chiefs and the People of the Newtown District Council Area to the Honourable Alade Moses, M.P., B.A.(Hons), Dip.Ed., Minister of Works in the Government of Afromacoland'<sup>16</sup>

Our dearly respected Minister, our beloved son and fearless nationalist, we the undersigned on behalf of ourselves, the Chiefs and the entire Newtown Community both at home and abroad welcome you today to the town of your birth the status of which you have raised to the level of a first-class city by your recent appointment as a Minister of State in the Government of our beloved country, Afromacoland.<sup>17</sup>

Again, writers of the same ethnic origin do not necessarily write the same kind of English, as Lindfors asserts. For example, there is nothing in the whole of Achebe as colourless and flat as this pointless collection of short sentences from Flora Nwapa's Efuru:-

Efuru's mother-in-law saw to it that she was very well looked after. She was to eat the best food and she was to do no work. She was simply to eat and grow fat. And above all she was to look beautiful. The camwood was used in dyeing her cloth. She also rubbed it all over her body and the iziziani was used for her face.

She ate whatever she wanted to eat. She did not eat cassava in any form. Only yams were pounded for her. She ate the best fish from the market. It was said that she was feasting. On market days her mother went to the market and bought her the best.<sup>18</sup>

The exaggerations and repetitions in Aluko serve careful satirical purposes and show his technical sophistication in the matter of handling language. It is when considered against such a background that this Christmas message, for example, coming as it does from Royasin, (even though given in reported speech) acquires an ironic significance:-

CHRISTMAS!

It comes but once a year. The little knot of Christians of Isolo listened devotedly to Royasin propound in the village church its story, its message and its lesson. The story of the birth of the Boy Jesus born to the Virgin Mary and how He subsequently founded the greatest and only true religion in the world. The message of peace on earth and goodwill to all men in all lands and where at all hours of that sacred day various voices were being lifted up in prayer and in praise to the Boy born to be King. The lesson of humility - that to serve and save mankind the Lord Jesus had to descend to human level and assume human form, and had to be born not to the king's queen on her throne, but to a carpenter's wife in the horses' stables.<sup>19</sup>

The Christians may listen 'devotedly', but they have nothing to gain from Royasin's examples. Here we have the case of a man who is himself far from humble preaching 'the lesson of humility'. Aluko reports the sermon in a way which reflects the speaker's hackneyed phrasing and his revelling in the grandiose glory of his subject. The village church is hardly the right place to 'propound' any theories about Christmas. In any case, there is nothing inspiring in the way the message is presented to the audience - what we have is a tedious restatement of pious platitudes - 'it comes but once a year.' It ought to have occurred to the speaker that very few people in the audience are likely to be hearing of the Christmas message for the first time.

The reader cannot help feeling that Royasin becomes important only because of the social context in which he finds

himself, one which he fully exploits to his own advantage. If he is accepted by the villagers as a saviour, it is only because his unscrupulous methods occasionally succeed and because the people are too ignorant and indifferent to discover his faults. So when, for example, a drummer in a state of excitement sings Royasin's praises:-

Royasin, Royasin,  
 Son of Royasin, Chief Osi Oba of Idasa.  
 Royasin, Royasin,  
 The wizard who knows the White Man's secrets.  
 The wizard who reads telegrams and writes letters.  
 The wizard who understands and speaks the White  
 Man's strange tongue.  
 Royasin, Royasin,  
 Son of Royasin, Chief Osi Oba of Idasa.<sup>20</sup>

the reader realizes the drummer is acting in ignorance. To the drummer Royasin may be a 'wizard' because he can read and write and speak 'the White Man's strange tongue'. To the reader he is an unscrupulous man who devotes his energy and skill to the deceit and exploitation of his people. He is a memorable character only because of the part he plays in helping to make the world of this novel a confused one. In his opposition to the Church he succeeds in generating so much tension that the Christians end up just as confused as the adherents of traditional religion.

Like Royasin, other characters in the novel are satirized through the kind of language the author puts in their mouths or bestows on their pens. For example, Aluko gives us an insight into the character of Jacob through the letter he writes to his father, Joshua, the beginning of which reads:-

To my dear Father,  
 Mr. Joshua,  
 Isolo Village,  
 Idasa District.

With much gladness of heart and love I write to you this letter. I hope that it will get to you in peace and in good health as I am here. I am very well, and there is nothing to complain about. For this and other blessings Jehovah's name be praised.

I received the letter which you wrote to me. My dear father, my joy was exceedingly great when I saw the letter. I opened the envelope and I read the letter. All the matters that you wrote about I understood. I thank you greatly for this, Father. You are a good father to me.<sup>21</sup>

We have no difficulty in establishing from this letter that Jacob is a semi-literate person. Through his literal translation from the Yoruba in which the letter was originally written, the novelist both confirms the low degree of literacy of the writer and suggests his social status. The first two sentences in the original would have read:

Pelu inu didun ati ife ni mo fi kowe yi si yin.  
Mo si rope yio ba yin ni ayo ati alafia bi mo  
ti wa nihin.<sup>22</sup>

This is not only a word-for-word translation but it takes a familiar pattern which has almost become a formula for semi-literate people writing Yoruba. There are other pointers to aspects of Jacob's character in this letter - his casual reference to Jehovah, the needless recapitulation of the steps he took when the letter arrived - he 'saw the letter', 'opened the envelope' and 'read the letter'. His enthusiastic praise of his father as being 'good' is not borne out by the rest of the letter in which he accuses his father of forcing Toro on him. The overall impression created of Jacob from this letter is that of a man who is excited because he can do any writing at all, naive in his beliefs and given to facile assumption.

The emphasis on the big gulf which separates Christianity and traditional religion produces many of the ironies of situation needed for the author's satirical purpose. For example, the relationship which develops between Joshua and Toro is used

to highlight the ironic dilemma of the new convert:-

Then one day Joshua learnt at the Bible Class that to reach the highest level of perfection in this new religion of which he had become an elder he must have only one wife. No other one besides Rebecca. Sadness overtook him. What would he do with the small girl, Toro? Could he forgo all his care and expenses on her at that late stage? Besides, dare he face Ma Sheyi and Grandma Gbemi with the news that he no longer wanted their daughter? He prayed to his God for guidance. And sure enough, powerful guidance came from above. What he could not have for himself he would arrange to go to his eldest son, Jacob, who was seven years older than Toro. In this way Elder Joshua's Christianity was saved.<sup>23</sup>

Joshua is portrayed as only skin-deep in his Christian convictions. He had hoped that, as a Christian, he would be allowed to take a second wife. But, as an elder in the church, it is necessary for him to try to attain 'the highest level of perfection' by having only one wife. Joshua's arrangement to pass Toro down to Jacob shows that, although he has openly embraced Christianity, he has not completely abandoned traditional beliefs and practices. He has not fully accepted the principle of individualized conscience which Christianity teaches and does not appear to recognize the right of Toro and Jacob to choose for themselves whom to marry. No wonder, the 'powerful guidance' which comes to Joshua turns out to be a disappointment. Jacob rejects Toro and asserts his individualism and the primacy of personal choice. So 'Joshua's Christianity was saved' applies to the situation only in an ironic sense.

The same type of irony is extended to the whole of Joshua's career. After a long period spent in open defence of Christian principles he dies in mysterious circumstances:-

The crowd waited in great suspense for the identity of the thief.

It was Joshua!

The name was whispered round with the greatest



incredulity. The man who had walked out of the Council of Elders in defiance earlier that night! The man they had all respected for his respectability, uprightness and fearlessness. Joshua - a criminal! Incredible! Astonishing! Lightning had exposed in the most sensational circumstances a criminal in the guise of a hero. Behold the judgement of Shango, the god of lightning!<sup>24</sup>

The situation is ironic in two ways. The first irony arises from the fact that many years after he has embraced Christianity Joshua is still vulnerable to attacks by Shango. Is the Christian God not strong enough to protect His followers from such attacks? This situation raises a fundamental problem: realizing that another divinity can intervene in our affairs or even ruin us, how far should we rely on the protection of one god to the exclusion of all others? To what extent, in fact, should man keep to any set of principles in his attempt to come to terms with the complexities of life? The other irony is based on the fact that a 'hero' - 'the man they had all respected for his respectability, uprightness and fearlessness - turns out to be a 'criminal'. Each of these two ironies plays such an important part in the details of Joshua's life that in the end one is left in doubt about the real motivation for Shango's action. Is Joshua struck by lightning because he is head of a criminal gang or because he abandons the gods of his fathers? The novel provides no satisfactory answer to this difficult question, nor can one fairly demand that it should. But Aluko shows clearly how cruel and unpredictable traditional gods can be. Consider, for example, the sustained irony of the life and death of Bada, the high priest of Shonponna. Bada becomes important in Isolo because of his ability to save those afflicted by smallpox. During frequent epidemics of the disease he saves many lives. At one stage even his

well-known enemy, the arrogant Royasin, is compelled to seek his help, and this makes him more popular and powerful still. But ironically Bada himself finally dies of smallpox, a situation which badly shakes the faith of the people in their gods and encourages Pastor David to greater evangelical work. It is through the use of such ironies that Aluko shows the effect on the people of the confrontation between Christianity and traditional religion.

### III

Benjamin Benjamin's use of language as a means of deceiving the people is the centre of interest in One Man, One Matchet. In his handling of National Affairs the author shows how completely unscrupulous Benjamin Benjamin can be. National Affairs is used as a rallying point of opposition to the economic plans of the Government. In the hands of a demagogue like Benjamin Benjamin the attempt completely succeeds. One is reminded of the Nigerian nationalists' reliance on the local press during the struggle for independence. The tactics are the same - you deny your opponents any kind of merit and, for effect, exaggerate the wrong that has been done to your people who but for the imposition of a Colonial Government would have been living a life of bliss. In a typical article in National Affairs Benjamin Benjamin complains of excessive tax assessments:-

The Ipajas as a people are known to be law-abiding. Even before they conquered the Apenos and ruled the whole country before the White Man came, they were essentially men of peace. But owing to the excesses of their neighbours they were forced to draw the sword, and to show them their supremacy in the science of war and military tactics.

Today the temper of the descendants of the brave Ipajas of old is being tried. This time the aggressors are not their traditional enemies the Apenos. At least not on the surface. The aggressors are the Administrative Officers who are asking the poor farmers to pay exorbitant taxes. Old men and women are being taxed most harshly. Tax assessments bear no relation to the proved means of income of the people. Fantastic and preposterous. Absolutely ridiculous, the taxes that infirm men and children are being called upon to pay in Ipaja.<sup>25</sup>

Benjamin Benjamin plays on the idea of the antiquity and military prowess of the 'brave' and 'law-abiding' Ipajas - 'men of peace' who were harrassed in ancient times by their neighbours and now by new 'aggressors'. The charge that Government officials, who are expected to be impartial in inter-village disputes like the Igbodudu Land Case, are supporting the Apenos against the Ipajas, if proved, could ruin the career prospects of such officials. Benjamin Benjamin knows that the charge is not true but makes it nonetheless in order to embarrass Udo Akpan, his mortal enemy. He uses highly emotive words like 'exorbitant' (in relation to the level of tax the people are asked to pay) and 'fantastic and preposterous' to describe the whole situation - all in an attempt to bring home to the people the enormity of the crime being perpetrated against them. The reference to 'old men and women' is the sort of sentiment he knows is capable of winning him support in a society which places such a high premium on age. On the other hand, the suggestion that 'infirm men and children' are called upon to pay tax is merely ridiculous. These misrepresentations and exaggerations achieve their purpose of finally inciting the villagers to riot and murder but leave the reader in no doubt of Benjamin Benjamin's ruthlessness and dishonesty.

Like Royasin in One Man, One Wife, Benjamin Benjamin is a semi-literate man who is extremely anxious to be regarded by

the illiterate villagers as a man of great learning:-

The White Man has a proverb. A beautiful proverb. You know what it is?

No, they did not. They wanted the great Benjamin Benjamin to tell them.

'Yes, I will tell you the proverb. "No one puts his hand on the plough and looks back." Again there is another proverb. "We have crossed the Rubicon." There is no going back.<sup>26</sup>

Here is Benjamin Benjamin performing at a village assembly which he turns into a lecture theatre. He insists on telling the people a White Man's 'beautiful' proverb, but ends up offering two; one of these is trivial and distorted, the other almost completely irrelevant to the situation. Benjamin Benjamin is 'great' not in any laudable sense, but in his pompous and shameless attempt to impose himself on others.

The novelist puts Benjamin Benjamin in several situations which expose his personal weaknesses and insincerity:-

'Fathers, Mothers; Elders, Youths. Fellow patriots of Ipaja - my comrades-in-arms. I salute you all for your great victory in this great battle of right against might. The victory is yours. I am no more than the unworthy medium through whom the founder of Ipaja has brought it to you.' He stopped. His words did not fail to bring the applause he intended. He continued: 'When I see you like this, solidly behind me, demonstrating in no uncertain terms your stand for freedom and right and your demand for the restoration of the land, the fertile land that your fathers owned before you but which was stolen by the White Man and given to your enemy the Apenos - I weep for joy.'

He wept. He brought out a silk handkerchief and wiped the tears from his eyes. It produced the desired effect.<sup>27</sup>

This display of emotion before his people may produce 'the desired effect' but it only helps to confirm our impression of his unscrupulousness. The operative phrase is 'unworthy medium'. Benjamin Benjamin uses this expression as an intentional understatement in an attempt to project a false image of himself as a humble servant of the people. But,

ironically, from the reader's point of view this is the most appropriate description of him, judged by his activities and their effects on the people. Even the 'great victory' he is celebrating here is wholly undeserved - he has been acquitted of charges of embezzlement of public funds not because he is innocent but because, as the magistrate makes clear, he has been charged under the wrong section of the law. Although Benjamin Benjamin calls the people of Ipaja 'my comrades-in-arms', it is these people whose ignorance he has been exploiting all the time to further his own selfish ends. He makes much of the fact that he understands the White Man's language and soon establishes himself as an intermediary between the people and the Administration. In this capacity he abuses the Apaja's confidence in him, robs Olowokere of £50 and lines his pocket from the three different Funds he gets going at the same time. This type of behaviour gives 'comrades-in-arms' an ironic significance in much the same way as 'the victory is yours' comes to acquire an ironic meaning in the context of the novel as a whole. Benjamin Benjamin uses the latter expression in the spirit of fraternal rejoicing, in a show of identifying himself closely with his people. But, as we shall see, the one great victory won by the Ipajas in the novel is the way they succeed in getting rid of Benjamin Benjamin where the British system of justice has failed. It is by continually bringing before the reader the difference between what Benjamin Benjamin says and what he does, the difference between what he pretends to be and what he actually is, that Aluko satirizes this character. Although he is regarded by the people at the height of his career as a national hero, the reader recognizes him all the time as an 'unworthy medium', a man with an unlimited

capacity for doing evil. That is why we find ourselves able to agree with this damaging description of him given by the magistrate:-

I find him to be a perfect example of the man with the proverbial half learning which is a dangerous thing. He is self-opinionated, with an extremely exaggerated idea of his own importance, and his mendacity is extraordinary. It is my considered opinion that he is a grave danger to the community in which he lives, a tragedy to the cause of education in this country, and a curse on humanity as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

That almost certainly is the point of view shared by the novelist.

It is also through his own use of language that Benjamin Benjamin's antagonist, Akpan, is satirized. The new African District Officer talks of tackling problems in an essentially African way but behaves like any expatriate District Officer, a situation which earns him the appellation of 'the black White Man'. He is an idealist who cannot bring himself to believe that any rational basis exists for the people's opposition to the Government economic proposals and for their longing for modern amenities while they refuse to pay tax. However, he is not portrayed, like Benjamin Benjamin, as a man without redeeming features. He shows great efficiency in his administrative work. For example, he conducts the Commission of Enquiry into the fund-raising activities of Benjamin Benjamin with remarkable speed and thoroughness and in his report uses language appropriate to his social status and office, though here we recognize the satirical note again:-

Mr Benjamin Benjamin, the Secretary-General of the Ipaja Descendants' Union, also failed to come to give evidence at the Inquiry. He no doubt was acting in accordance with the advice of the lawyer. My confidential inquiry at the office of

the Attorney General as to my powers in these circumstances has not been answered yet. No doubt the experts are still looking into the legal aspects. Needless to say how disappointing and sad it is that the person who should have been key witness in the Inquiry has absented himself from the Inquiry and at the time of writing we do not see our way clear towards taking any active measure against him. I refrain from saying anything further at this stage about Benjamin Benjamin, realizing as I do that a man must be presumed innocent until proved guilty.<sup>29</sup>

This is the language of the Civil Service, the style of a man aiming to be 'correct' in all he does. He writes to the office of the Attorney-General about the extent of his powers and refrains from making unofficial remarks about Benjamin Benjamin, a man who makes his work at the Enquiry infinitely more difficult. His 'correct' attitude is shown by his acceptance of the fact that 'a man must be presumed innocent until proved guilty', an admirable principle in itself, no doubt, yet partaking in its expression of the same clichéd 'officialese' as phrases like 'key witness' and 'active measure'. Akpan's addiction to the 'correct' is associated with his odd conviction that all that is needed for the people to accept the colonial situation is to make the system work efficiently - the people's deep-seated opposition to the system is of little importance to him. This is one reason why he devotes so much energy to the Commission of Enquiry and shows so much resentment against the law officers when Benjamin Benjamin is allowed to escape punishment for his offences on technical grounds. Again, characteristically, he blames the confused situation which follows the murder of Benjamin Benjamin on Pax Britannica:-

Before you came to this country with Pax Britannica, a citizen of proved anti-community activities like Benjamin Benjamin was easily disposed of. He just vanished ... After we in the Administration had failed to rid ourselves of the curse that was Benjamin Benjamin, an Ipaja man who had not heard of British sense of fair play and justice and in any case had no use for it got rid of the common enemy. He did it in a moment. We had failed to do it in two years.'<sup>30</sup>

Not only Akpan but also the Colonial Administration are satirized here. Akpan is over-reacting to the situation created by Benjamin Benjamin's death. We are presented with the ironical situation in which a 'modern' Administrative Officer advocates the revival of the old method of punishing criminals. Yet if the African idea of summary justice were to be applied in all cases, it would affect not only Akpan's enemy, Benjamin Benjamin, but also his friend, Rev. Olaiya who constantly violates customary laws. 'He just vanished', indeed, recalls what happens to Rev. Olaiya when he is taken away by members of a secret cult and becomes a wanted man for forty-three days. 'He did it in a moment', applied in contradistinction to 'We had failed to do it in two years', epitomizes the essentially simple-minded ideal of ruthless efficiency which Akpan desires for the Civil Service. He resigns his appointment when he realizes that 'there is just no future for the African in the present set-up of the administration of his own country.'<sup>31</sup> In him we have the portrait of a young African District Officer who finds himself in an invidious position - he is alienated from his fellow Africans because of his single-minded devotion to duty in the Colonial Service but finally has to leave the Service because 'there is no self-respecting African who would want to identify himself with the present set-up.'<sup>32</sup>



Minor characters brought into the novel to mirror a cross-section of Ipaja society are also given satirical treatment. They include Oba Apaja who is portrayed as an old status-conscious simpleton willing to accommodate Benjamin Benjamin's excesses because of the financial benefit he hopes to derive from them, Chief Ajayi who supports the Administration only because of the advantages such support confers on him, and Chief Olowokere who is Benjamin Benjamin's second-in-command until he discovers that he has been made a great fool of. Chief Momo is fearless and outspoken but, as we shall see, he is made the embodiment of the evils of illiteracy and ignorance. It is because of this situation in which nearly all the characters in the novel are satirized that Ngugi suggests that the kind of satire this novel represents lacks bite since the novelist does not appear to know what he wants:-

Amid his cry of 'One man, one matchet', and his delineation of the peasants as merely ignorant, incapable, and half-savage, we hear the voice, not of a satirist who passionately cares about certain standards, but that of a cynic who can't see the way ahead for Nigeria. I suspect that Aluko's true sympathies lie, not with the peasants and workers who after all are the main objects of colonial exploitation, but with Udo Akpan who is incapable of seeing that the whole system he is trying to work is wrong, that it is no good just criticizing one or two anomalies in the machine.<sup>33</sup>

Ngugi makes his statement after a very brief discussion of the novel. Even so, this conclusion is so important for all Aluko's works that it deserves close attention, since for many readers it may seem, at least initially, to point to their own problem of response and evaluation. In a situation in which many of the events described and the characters portrayed in a body of works are made to serve the purpose of satire it is relevant to ask whether a writer has been

constructive or destructive in his criticism of society - whether, in fact, any criticism which appears destructive has any constructive purpose behind it. For such an investigation to be fruitful, the critic must be willing to consider in detail the author's methods of presentation, illustrating the success or failure of these methods by close references to text. This is what Ngugi has failed to do. It is therefore not altogether surprising that he has reached a conclusion which, to say the least, needs a great deal of qualification to bring it close to the truth. For, although the later portion of the quotation which concerns Akpan is essentially correct, the first part contains a few inaccuracies. For example, while it is true that because of his interest in education Aluko portrays the villagers as 'ignorant' there is no evidence in the book that they are generally 'incapable, and half-savage'. Certainly Chief Momo and Benjamin Benjamin by their performances cannot be said to be incapable. Although Olowokere murders Benjamin Benjamin, he does so under great provocation - Benjamin Benjamin steals his money and tampers with his wife. A murder under such circumstances is hardly enough justification for calling a man 'half-savage'.

Furthermore, contrary to what Ngugi thinks, Aluko 'passionately cares about certain standards.' In fact, it is the complete lack of standards in many spheres of life that he 'passionately' deplores. For this reason, in each of his novels he embodies a statement which points to 'the way ahead for Nigeria'. For example, in One Man, One Wife Aluko indicates clearly that the future lies not with characters like Jeremiah and Joshua but with hard-working young men like

Jacob and Dele who, by dint of personal sacrifice, bring a number of social benefits to themselves and their community. In the same manner, Titus in Kinsman and Foreman is held up for admiration as the 'standard' which other characters should try to emulate. Even in his cultural references he often leaves the reader in no doubt about the standard of behaviour he approves of. His use of praise-names is a case in point. In Chief the Honourable Minister we get to know something of Chief Odole's attitude to Moses and of the Chief's readiness to change with the times when, on being greeted by Moses, he says

Greetings to you, my child. Do get up, get up, son of the tiger, son of the famous hunter of the Black Forest, the forest in which elephants abound in plenty - I've told you that when you greet me now you should not prostrate before me. I give you permission not to, my child.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, Chief Momo in One Man, One Matchet uses praise-names in a situation which portrays him as a stickler for tradition. With great delight he uses praise-names freely in greeting all those he meets on his way to St John's parsonage:-

Thank you, my son, son of the Tiger. Is your father well? - My son, get up, get up, son of the Lion, son of the Elephant, the Elephant of Ipaja, get up, get up - My daughter, is it well with your father? I have not seen him for some time.<sup>35</sup>

Praise names are special traditional titles given to individuals and family groups, known and utilized only by the older members of the extended family. Therefore it is quite legitimate for Chief Odole to employ them while addressing Moses who is a close relative. But the way Chief Momo applies praise-names to practically everybody on his route betrays his zeal for the propagation of this aspect of Yoruba culture. Judging

by their differing attitudes to the employment of praise-names, a reader might well suspect that the novelist's intention is to emphasize the differences between these two characters, portraying Chief Momo as a traditionalist and Chief Odole as a man prepared to come to terms with modernity. This, in fact, is the overall impression that is given of these two characters. The use of praise-names only happens to be one of the several methods of establishing this impression.

Ngugi's charge that 'Aluko's true sympathies lie, not with the peasants and workers ...' is clearly untenable. Such a suggestion can only result from a complete misunderstanding of the novelist's purpose and methods. Aluko concentrates his criticism on those aspects of society which he would like to see reformed; the greatest beneficiaries of any such reforms are the 'peasants and workers' who are shown in all these novels as the objects of exploitation either by the Colonial Administration or by other unscrupulous characters like Royasin, Benjamin Benjamin, Simeon and Franco-John. Take, for example, the matter of public education, in which Aluko shows considerable interest. The impression given in One Man, One Matchet, the novel on which Ngugi bases his comments, is that if the people had had a little education and enlightenment, they would not have opposed the beneficial economic policy of the Government. What is emphasized is that in a predominantly illiterate society it is difficult for the villagers to understand that the 'tree of wealth' can be sick and that, when this happens, the only remedy is to cut it. A chief speaks for all the people when he asks a series of sceptical, rhetorical questions on this matter:-

Cocoa trees are ill, do you all hear that? Do you all hear that trees are ill? Does disease not make man himself go ill? Does death not kill man himself? And does disease not catch the White Man himself? And did a white man not die the other day - was his brother the white doctor able to save him? No one was able to save him because that day on which he died was his appointed day to go back to the Land of the Dead. ... But can the White Man himself in all his knowledge change the appointed day? If therefore we cannot prevent a man from dying why should we worry so much because a tree is dying? If one dies, can we not plant a seed from which another will grow?<sup>36</sup>

These questions which end in a rejection of Government plans introduce a fatalistic strain into the whole argument. When a man is sick, we do not kill him for that reason. We leave him to die on the 'appointed day'. Why should man tamper with the destiny of cocoa trees by cutting them down, an act which, in the opinion of the speaker, amounts to killing them before their 'appointed day'. Such a line of reasoning shows clearly how limited the intellectual horizon of the speaker is. The argument that a diseased cocoa tree is a danger to the whole plantation is completely lost on the chief and his supporters, yet to recognize Aluko's intention here is hardly to accuse him of mere cynicism.

Consider, too, Chief Momo's belief that a mosquito is a harmless insect which should be left severely alone. He rebukes Rev. Olaiya for killing a mosquito and cannot understand, even after Olaiya's explanation, how such a tiny insect can be dangerous:-

You educated people are funny. Killing a mere mosquito as if you are killing an elephant!  
Why, why don't you let the little insect alone?  
How much of you can it bite to make any difference to you, Pastor?<sup>37</sup>

Plainly Chief Momo is one of those who would benefit from any programme of educational reform, but to say that is not

to assert that Aluko asks us to dismiss him with simple contempt. Ignorance, after all, is curable.

#### IV

The problems of communication which arise in Kinsman and Foreman are different from those of the first two novels. Here we have the type of breakdown in communication between groups and individuals which is such an important feature of Achebe's works. This breakdown results from Titus's attempt to challenge the traditional concept of family relationships. Because of the conservative outlook of the people this attempt fails. The fact that it is made with great determination and manly courage makes no difference in the circumstances. Udo Akpan is not trusted because he is not an Ipaja man. Titus's problems spring from the fact that he is posted to work in his own village, Ibala. His misgivings about such a posting are increased by the ominous warning given him by his British boss, McBain:-

I am afraid you will not find things here as easy as your college professors made you believe they were, back home in the University. You will find them not exactly answering to the methods you learnt in Differential Calculus and Theory of Structures and Fluid Mechanics - all the stuff in the books. Here you will be dealing with men, money and materials. And here in Nigeria you will find that all three behave most strangely.<sup>38</sup>

The differences between theory and practice, especially the difficulties which arise from any lack of correlation between the two, highlighted in this passage, look forward to the central pre-occupation of the novel. McBain's speech turns out to be prophetic. The reference to 'men, money and

materials' behaving 'strangely' is particularly important in the light of what happens later in the novel. Titus soon discovers that his foreman - his kinsman, Simeon - is a thoroughly dishonest man, that money and materials have a way of being embezzled or misapplied in Ibala P.W.D., that however much he tries, he stands little chance of being understood and accepted by his people. Members of Titus's family 'behave most strangely' in the support they give Simeon. The irony of the situation arises from the fact that Titus acts from the purest of motives, but he is constantly misunderstood. Simeon who is dishonest and unscrupulous in his activities as foreman is the one who is much liked by everybody, especially the older members of the family. So great is his confidence in the foreman that Pa Joel, head of the Oti Family, loses no time before handing over the newly-qualified engineer, Titus, to his senior relative, Simeon:-

Simeon, this is Titus the son of your kinsman Samuel, now gone to heaven. I hand him to you this day as your own son. You are to direct his going out and his coming in in the P.W.D. You know all the intricacies of Government work. Titus has only the book knowledge of Government work; he does not know the other side. You know it. If the railway train runs non-stop for a hundred years, will it not always find that land is still ahead of it? If a child boasts that he has as many clothes as his father, can he equally boast of having as many rags as his father?<sup>39</sup>

The whole speech is in character - it is the type of speech one expects from a man of Joel's age and status in the family - and the two proverbs at the end of it perform essential linguistic functions. They are used to drive home the points which Joel has been making. The one about the 'railway train' emphasizes Simeon's knowledge of the 'intricacies of government work'. The other about the child clearly underlines the

social distance, based on age, which should exist between Titus and Simeon and touches on a major area of conflict in the novel.

Because of his moral probity Titus decides to put his public duty as engineer before his private obligation to his kinsman. Even after he is told that Simeon is financially responsible for his last year in the University, he still decides to expose his inefficiency and dishonesty rather than cover up Simeon's vices as he is expected to do by the other members of the extended family. Titus's dilemma is well summed up by Elizabeth Akinsola:-

The author shows the common difficulty which confronts a young educated man with western influence fighting against the odds of his illiterate, pagan and corrupt ancestral background. He finds it almost impossible to reconcile himself with all his training and experience acquired in Europe, to the superstitious beliefs and extensive family demands he meets in his own country.<sup>40</sup>

What Aluko satirizes in this novel is the traditional concept of 'brother' and 'kinsman'. He does not advocate the total abolition of the extended family system but suggests through his portrayal of Titus the need to re-examine thoroughly the duties and obligations which traditional family ties impose on the individual. His approach, an extremely constructive one, is to make characters like Pa Joel, Deborah and Simeon embody the old concept while Titus embodies the new. Titus's intention is to introduce a new concept of kinship based on common interests, but the others prefer kinship ties to be based only on blood relationship and age. So, apart from the breakdown in communication between Titus and Simeon, we have also a clash of ideas between young and old. It is from these various conflicts that the novelist develops the



situations which he uses for his satirical purpose.

Consider, for example, the code of conduct which Pa Joel tries to impose on Titus:-

Titus, you must listen to the words of my mouth. Where Simeon tells you to go, you must go. Where he tells you there is no way, know there is no way; turn back. Associate with the men he tells you are safe. Avoid those he points out to you as dangerous. Let the eyes of Simeon be your eyes from this day on; let his hands be your hands. Does the thread not follow the path made by the needle?

It is in spite of the snake that the bush rat nurtures its young to maturity. Regardless of the activities of human snakes, you Simeon will pilot your child Titus to success in Government work...<sup>41</sup>

These are the words of an old man speaking within the narrow limits of his knowledge. He belongs mentally to an era in which social status is determined by the age of the individual. The fact that the older Simeon is on this occasion the employee of the younger Titus makes no difference to Pa Joel. He considers it his legitimate duty to lay down rigid rules of conduct for Titus who is advised to take his orders from Simeon and follow the latter's every footstep. No wonder that the imperative mood predominates in these sentences. Although his actions stem from a genuine desire to do good, Pa Joel's orders, if carried out, would effectively deprive Titus of any sense of responsibility and the right of individual judgement. This makes the word 'child' very important. Titus would need to be a 'child' again for him to allow 'the eyes of Simeon' to be his 'eyes' and 'associate' only with the men Simeon tells him are 'safe'. The author's mocking attitude comes clearly across through the ridiculous and extreme manner in which these orders are given.

Titus is the 'standard' by which all other characters are judged. It is through their interaction with him that the novelist shows them either as severely limited in their mental horizon or impervious to change. Titus's numerous encounters with his mother provide a classic example of this. Deborah makes no attempt to understand her son and wrongly accuses him of not showing enough respect to the elders of the family:-

I am foolish. Pastor is foolish - you know more than he does. Your father's father is foolish. Simeon Oke has been in Government work before you went to school. He too is foolish. Everyone is foolish.<sup>42</sup>

Deborah is not willing to consider any new definition of family relationships. Pa Joel, an uncle, is, to her, Titus's 'father's father'. What she is complaining bitterly about in this passage is her son's helpful suggestion that she should go to hospital as she is ill. It is difficult to see how this suggestion makes her look 'foolish'. She displays complete ignorance of the benefits of medical science - 'Going to the hospital. It's no use.'<sup>43</sup> In another encounter with her son, she stresses the case of Simeon. 'Why do you call him Simeon?' she asks. 'Is he not much older than you? You must call him brother'.<sup>44</sup> This situation provokes Titus to speak out his mind for the first time: 'But he is not my brother. He is not your son, not the son of any of my father's other wives. Therefore he's not my brother'.<sup>45</sup> Titus is no longer willing to use the word 'brother' as a cover term for all the male members of the extended family, as is customary in the society in which he was brought up. He prefers the more precise definition of the word which he learnt as a student in London. As might be expected, this new definition is completely beyond the

understanding of Deborah and the other illiterate members of the family. The unfortunate result of all this is that the more firmly Titus keeps to his conviction, the greater the gulf which separates him from his relations.

One method by which Aluko has dramatized Titus's strength of character is by making his chief antagonist, Simeon, so dishonest and unreliable. Simeon freely receives bribes before employing labourers for the P.W.D., often sends some of these labourers to work on his private farm, bribes Samson Odiachi and Isaac George in an attempt to stop his transfer to the Cameroons, gives official contracts out to people who have no knowledge of the job and claims mileage allowance for many months on a car which has been parked at the All Races Club for a long time. In spite of all these activities, he is very popular with the people, and at Ibalala All Souls he is highly respected by the congregation. At an annual Bazaar Simeon displays his generosity and charm:-

Drawing out from his wallet five red notes, he held them up for the crowd to see. He then gave them to the clerk recording the sales. He opened the tin of cigarettes and took out one. He lit it from a match someone held up for him. He then proceeded to distribute the cigarettes round the crowd.

Smoking, in a sophisticated manner, he began to dance among the group of women dancers. The head drummer beat out a special tune for him...

Simeon the foreman, Simeon the foreman  
The man that is money from head to toe  
Simeon the foreman, Simeon the foreman  
The handsome man beloved of beautiful  
women

The lion of the P.W.D.  
Master of all men that work on the road.  
The god that contractors worship.  
Simeon the foreman, Simeon the generous  
man. 46

In this novel Simeon is used as the means of bringing Titus into conflict with the people and the local church. While everybody else thinks Simeon is 'generous', Titus knows that he 'is a very bad man'.<sup>47</sup> According to Titus, Simeon 'is a rogue. When he steals money from Government he brings half of it to ... church. He pockets the remaining half.'<sup>48</sup> It is when it is considered against this background that the head drummer's effusive praise of Simeon acquires its full ironic significance. Simeon is 'money from head to toe' because of the numerous bribes he has taken as foreman. If he is 'beloved of beautiful women', it is only because of the easy money they make from him. He is 'lion of the P.W.D.' not in any constructive sense, but in the extent of harm he is capable of doing to the Department. Contractors 'worship' him because it is only by so doing that they can get official contracts for which they are not qualified. Selected characteristics, mainly love of ostentation and a weakness for women, are exaggerated for comic effect. Hence we are told Simeon held up the five red notes 'for the crowd to see.' 'He ... proceeded to distribute the cigarettes round the crowd.' 'He began to dance among the group of women dancers.' He smokes 'in a sophisticated manner' in a mistaken attempt to reflect his assumed importance. Simeon is clearly intended to be a foil to Titus. Although he is idolized by the people, the reader has no difficulty in recognizing him for what he is - an unscrupulous man who, because he had lived a reckless life, is afraid to die.

Nothing demonstrates more conclusively the intended contrast between Titus and Simeon than their different reactions to the activities of the Alasoteles, a splinter

group from the local church. In his presentation of this group, the novelist's intention may be to satirize the revivalist splinter groups of Christians, such as the Seraphim and Cherubim, which are such a common feature of life in Western Nigeria. By a display of excessive religiosity the Alasoteles work their members to a frenzy in the belief that the world will come to an end on Judgement Day fixed for August 12. While Titus rightly ridicules the idea:-

'The end of the world,' ... 'But this has been coming for nearly two thousand years. Surely it does not require a road-section man to remind the world that every twenty-four hours mankind is one step nearer Judgement Day.'<sup>49</sup>

the effect of Judgement Day activities on Simeon is entirely different. Simeon, at a court trial and a departmental Commission of Enquiry, is acquitted of all the charges of corruption preferred against him. But, ironically, he is so afraid of burning for ever in hell-fire that he confesses on Judgement Day, and in the presence of Titus, to committing the crimes of which he has been judicially acquitted:-

In particular I ask for forgiveness for the lies I told in the court about the P.W.D. labourers who were found working on the farm near Iwana. I instructed the section-man to take the labourers there.... The farm was mine. I am sorry to have lied in court that the farm was not mine. I ask for God's forgiveness for all my sins.<sup>50</sup>

Simeon is so different from Titus in his social beliefs and practices that there is no prospect of compromise and accommodation between the two. The breakdown in communication is complete, and it is to the utterly convincing demonstration of this that Aluko's communicative technique as an artist has been so successfully devoted in Kinsman and Foreman.

## V

In Chief the Honourable Minister Aluko dramatizes a situation in which language is used dishonestly by both Government and Opposition politicians to achieve undesirable political objectives. 'The misleading of ordinary people' is practised on a wide scale, and the Prime Minister himself sets a bad example in a passage like this, full of far-fetched comparisons and allusions:-

A great English scholar once observed that when we see genius come out of what looks like the gutter we should know that it did not begin there. If we take the trouble to dig beneath the surface we will discover that like Shakespeare the son of a wood-pedlar, Napoleon the son of a farmer, and Luther the son of a peasant, the genius from the gutter most probably descended from a line of kings and prophets. That observation was made about one of the greatest figures of history, Abraham Lincoln. It may well be applied here and now to your own son Alade Moses.<sup>51</sup>

The aim of the Prime Minister is to improve the image of Alade Moses by comparing him with some great names in history. The reader quickly appreciates the inappropriateness of these comparisons. Not only has Moses little in common, to put it mildly, with these heroes of the past; the comparison in nearly every case is made in a sloppy manner. But then the Prime Minister is addressing a crowd of illiterate and semi-literate people who are not in a position to discover the flaws in his comparisons. It is only in such circumstances that a speech like this succeeds in its purpose. It is mainly through the use of such ironies, usually arising from the conflict of ideas and personalities, that Aluko achieves in this work the purpose of satire which is his chosen method of establishing a link between tradition and modern experience.

The type of political instability presented in this work, the intrigues and rivalries vividly and sharply described and the many examples of clashes of personalities and ideas between Government and Opposition politicians take the reader very close to the pattern of politics in Nigeria which led to the Civil War. There are many instances of political jobbery, officially planned and carefully executed. One such example is the decision of the Executive Council that Government contracts should be awarded only to party supporters. This creates a problem for Alade Moses who does not know how to inform his Permanent Secretary and his Director of Public Works, both British, of the new decision which he himself considers outrageous and indefensible:-

He hardly knew how to begin it. Just how did one say to a civil servant that contracts for government works financed from public funds should not be given out to the men who by knowledge, experience, and financial standing were most suitable for them but that they should be given to the shoemakers, the barbers, and the unattached women with painted lips, the new class of society known as Party supporters?<sup>52</sup>

Moses states in this passage what criteria he would have liked to insist upon for the award of contracts - 'knowledge, experience and financial standing'. The reasonableness of his position is brought out clearly by the implied comparison with the sort of people to whom, for political reasons, Government building contracts will now go - 'the shoemakers, the barbers and the unattached women with painted lips' - people who know nothing about the construction industry. The whole idea is made to look ridiculous. The inclusion of 'unattached women with painted lips' sarcastically points to an important area of weakness among these politicians. Political malpractices, indeed, are so widespread that wherever the

novelist turns his attention he discovers crude political behaviour and an inordinate attempt to ride on the backs of others to political success.

There is little to choose between the Government and the Opposition. The Government is corrupt and the Opposition employs unscrupulous methods to destroy it. The Sentinel is made the voice of the Opposition and the means of exposing the corrupt practices of Government. As the Government becomes more unpopular with the people, the Sentinel increases in circulation and becomes a more effective means of articulating the wishes of the people. Aluko appears particularly sensitive to the powers of the Press in the formulation and direction of public opinion. In its attempt to reflect the feelings of the people the attitude of the Sentinel to the Government of the Freedom for All Party is one of antagonism and bitter hatred:-

The wrath of the God of Africa will descend upon them, the perpetrators of this monstrous crime against the electorate of the nation. And Nemesis will come to all the organs and institutions of society that have aided and abetted the crime. All of them that have made a complete mockery of the sacred institution of the ballot box, all of them that stood in the way of the people's exercising their inalienable right to choose who shall speak for them in the nation's assembly - all of them will pay the penalty at the appointed time.<sup>53</sup>

Although the objective of members of the Opposition appears to be a laudable one - the overthrow of a corrupt and unpopular Government - they do not inspire confidence that, in Government, they will do better than those they now seek to replace. They employ the same demagogic methods to whip up national emotion as those for which Benjamin Benjamin becomes famous in One Man, One Matchet. The exaggerations



and unnecessary repetitions in the passage - 'perpetrators of this monstrous crime', 'organs and institutions of society', 'aided and abetted', 'complete mockery' - the pervasive use of cliches - 'sacred institution', 'inalienable right' - adversely affect the way we respond to the situation. 'God of Africa' is a rhetorical ploy calculated to play on the passions and prejudices of the masses. And even though 'Nemesis' looks forward to the coup at the end of the novel when all politicians, whether in Government or Opposition, 'pay the penalty at the appointed time' for their greed and selfishness, the Sentinel uses the word only for its vague impressiveness.

As Leader of the Opposition, Dauda, in particular, uses the Sentinel in the most sensational way to embarrass the Government and create tension. When, for example, as a result of a petition organized by him Moses' election to Parliament is nullified by the High Court, he takes advantage of the occasion to come down heavily on the Government. The language of this article is typical of Dauda:-

We of this paper have been justified in our unshaken belief in the unlimited capacity of our judiciary to absorb the stresses and strains to which this unholy gang of rascals who have now forced themselves upon the nation have subjected the judges and the magistrates. In the dark days of every nation when rogues and dictators seize the reins of government it has always been the impartiality, fearlessness, and incorruptibility of the custodians of justice that have always stood between man and doom. We are proud to record here to the eternal glory of the judiciary of this land that in spite of threats and intimidation, most times subtle and concealed but sometimes open, they have carried out their sacred duty of administering justice, just justice, in the highest tradition of their most sacred calling.<sup>54</sup>

Members of the Cabinet are called 'this unholy gang of rascals', 'rogues and dictators' - all in an attempt to bring the

Government into disrepute. The impression given of Dauda is that of a man anxious to achieve his goal by any means, fair or foul. The reason the Bench is brought in for high praise is their recent verdict, favourable to him. But this praise is communicated in such stilted language that the reader takes it no more seriously than the blame directed elsewhere - 'In the dark days of every nation... it has always been the impartiality, fearlessness, and incorruptibility of the custodians of justice that have always stood between man and doom.' Other hackneyed expressions like 'to the eternal glory of the judiciary', 'their sacred duty', 'just justice', 'in the highest tradition of their most sacred calling' similarly point to Dauda's hollowness.

But for Alade Moses, on whose psychological development the novelist devotes much attention, there would have been a complete gulf between the two sets of politicians. His activities provide the only link, although usually an unhappy one, between the Government in which he is Minister of Works and the Opposition who take a special interest in his activities. He is usually the target of Dauda's vicious attacks. These attacks are not entirely without justification. For Moses drifts gradually, almost unwittingly, from a position of moral strength at the beginning of the novel to a deplorable situation at the end when he becomes almost as ruthless as his colleagues in the Cabinet. In this aspect of his development he reminds one of Odili. But the changes which overtake Moses come more gradually and imperceptibly. It is only towards the end of the novel that the reader begins to notice the effect of these changes, but they have been taking place all the time. The changes in Moses reveal themselves

more in the doubts and mental agony he exhibits than in overt actions. In the case of Odili, because of the autobiographical method of narration, we are put on our guard early. With Moses, the reader has to be particularly attentive if he is not to miss this important aspect of the novelist's achievement. Moses' psychological development is so subtly portrayed that, in the words of Norman Bruce, it is 'a suitable subject for a Ph.D. thesis in psychology.'<sup>55</sup>

It is by watching very closely the change in Moses' attitude to the developing situation that we come to discover his moral and mental deterioration. He comes into politics full of hopes and great expectations. But after a few Cabinet and Committee meetings, and separate consultations with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues, he soon realizes that these objectives are unattainable. Moses is so completely disappointed at the end of a particular Cabinet meeting, where most of the time is spent on trivial matters, that he openly deprecates the inexcusable behaviour of his colleagues:-

What struck him most about the meeting was the apparent levity with which his colleagues treated what appeared to him to be important matters. He wondered how Ministers of State spent so much time talking about their mistresses while serious problems of development and administration stared the nation in the face. He had himself taken little part in this side talk about women... he at least knew how not to contaminate serious matters of state with irreverent gossip about girl-friends.<sup>56</sup>

This is Moses at the beginning of the novel. Although already a Minister of State, he still retains the firm and businesslike attitude of the schoolmaster. He is drawn in sharp moral contrast to the other Ministers.

At no time does Moses' attitude to actual work change - he is just as anxious to get things done at the end as at the

beginning of the novel. What changes gradually is his attitude to the political situation in which he finds himself. Once Moses begins to enjoy some of the benefits attached to his new post, like Odili, he is not particularly anxious to forgo them. So he begins to invent unconvincing excuses for acting against the dictates of his conscience and for doing things for which he at first blames others. Consider, for example, his change of attitude to Geo. Abyssinia:-

Once more he was worried about the propriety of what he was going to ask his Cabinet colleague to do. He thought he knew what was right and what was wrong. But he also knew that since he became a Minister of State a good many things had been done by his colleagues which were not right. Sometimes done by the Cabinet collectively; most often done by individual ministers.<sup>57</sup>

Geo. Abyssinia is a semi-literate local contractor who wants to be principal of Newtown Grammar School. Moses at first rightly objects to Abyssinia's appointment but pressure is put on him by the Newtown Improvement Union and his girl friend, Gloria. The fact that he is 'worried' shows that he is still able to differentiate between right and wrong. But so far has he drifted away from his original purpose that he is now prepared to plead Abyssinia's cause. His excuse for this action is the nature of the decisions - 'which were not right' - at times taken by the Cabinet and individual Ministers. Thus he convinces himself that there is nothing wrong in referring Abyssinia's case to the Minister of Education. It is through Aluko's depiction of such rationalisations that the reader's attention is focused on Moses' moral decline.

Given this situation, the Prime Minister's eulogy of

Moses at a public meeting where the latter is installed  
Asiwaju of Newtown is important, in an ironic sense, in the  
context of the novel as a whole:-

We are all here today not just because he belongs to our great Party but because he is a great man with whom we are proud to associate... Above all we are glad that you have by conferring this chieftaincy on your greatest son helped him, you have helped us, you have helped this nation, to rediscover this great man, this prophet that has been going in and coming out among you in this progressive town without your recognizing his worth, his noble ancestry...<sup>58</sup>

Such high praise might just conceivably have been appropriate for Moses at the beginning of his political career. Considering the fact that he has now failed to live up to his lofty ideals, the reader can no longer regard him as 'a great man with whom we are proud to associate.' The repeated promiscuous emphasis placed on the word 'great' reveals Aluko's sardonic intent. The people of Newtown are said to have 'helped' Moses, their town and country by 'recognizing' Moses' worth. But, ironically, it is this 'recognition' that has 'helped' to expose Moses' personal weaknesses. Moses is a 'prophet' only in so far as he has, like other local 'prophets', successfully developed the capacity to deceive his people. By his constant 'going in and coming out' - Aluko's deliberately confused version of 'coming and going' - he has helped to turn a confused political situation into an explosive one.

In the same manner the activities of the Newtown Improvement Union (N.I.U.) are used to highlight some of the problems of communication between town and country. The Union declares that its main objective is community development. Unfortunately, its influence is not always for good. It is true that members of N.I.U. organize the

campaign to raise money to make it possible for Moses to study abroad and bear the financial burden for the two public receptions arranged for him on his return. However, they constantly interfere in the affairs of Newtown Grammar School and, for selfish reasons, support the candidature of Geo Abyssinia for the principalship. But the greatest harm they do is to encourage an attitude of complacency in their people who usually take an active part in the development of their community:-

In the last few months the people appear to have stopped doing anything for themselves. They now say that as their own son is Minister of Works, Government must look after all the work of construction in their community.<sup>59</sup>

This is the direct result of the impression created by the members and officers of N.I.U. that they can get the people practically anything they want by exerting pressure on Moses. The members contribute in no small way, especially through the misleading pronouncements of their secretary, to the atmosphere of tension and political confusion which pervades the novel. This explains why Aluko shows little regard for their type of 'improvement'. What it does not explain satisfactorily is why Aluko appears to be against all types of communication between town and country in much the same way that Achebe seems to be opposed to too much assertion of individualism. In One Man, One Wife Aluko regrets the introduction of the urban way of life into the village and, in One Man, One Matchet and this novel, he deplores the physical projection of the village into the town by way of tribal unions. For how long must the two stay apart? For how much longer does Aluko want to protect villagers from the

corrupt influence of the town? One cannot help feeling that these novels do not grapple sufficiently realistically with some of the problems posed by the continuing need for social intercourse between town and country. Any suggestion that the solution to the problem lies in keeping the two for ever apart must be considered unsatisfactory. Isolation offers no lasting protection against the deceitful use of language and demagogic activities of men like Dauda and Gorgeous Gregory. The only permanent solution lies in the provision of public education on such a scale that the villagers, unaided, will be able to recognize these characters for what they are - an 'unworthy medium'.

## VI

Aluko's works deserve better critical notice than they have had so far.<sup>60</sup> For, as Hough has pointed out,

great novelists, like great painters, are created today by advertising and a rigged market. It will in the future require more faith than it did in the past to trust to the common consent of mankind.<sup>61</sup>

Aluko's distinctive contribution to the Nigerian novel is the great variety of English which he uses appropriately in the various situations he develops. As this discussion has shown, his interest in the problems of communication covers a much wider range of linguistic activities than one finds in many another Nigerian novelist. His technical sophistication in the matter of handling language is shown in his deliberate use of clichés and hackneyed expressions to dramatize his very critical attitude to Yoruba culture.

Again, as we move from the first novel to the last, we observe a growing sophistication in Aluko's approach to his writings. In the first two novels satire is directed in a fairly broad, though effective, way at individuals of a basically simple kind. In the last two, though the intention remains satirical, Aluko is more concerned with the complexities of mental states. For example, Titus in Kinsman and Foreman emerges as a strong character because of his clear mental perception of his total environment. One reason we do not quickly notice Moses' psychological development in Chief the Honourable Minister is that it is his attitude to things which changes first. It is only later that this change affects his actions. Aluko's works draw attention not only to the foibles and weaknesses in society but also to the attitudes which must be changed if society must improve. To this extent, they are an important contribution deserving of better recognition than they have received up to now. The link they establish between tradition and modern life frequently exercises and sometimes extends our knowledge of the condition of man in society.



## Notes

- 1 Page references are to the following African Writers Series editions of the novels:
  - One Man, One Wife (London, 1967)
  - One Man, One Matchet (London, 1969)
  - Kinsman and Foreman (London, 1967)
  - Chief the Honourable Minister (London, 1970)
- 2 The period Aluko deals with, especially in his last three novels, is one of great unrest in Western Nigeria. For an account of this crisis which led ultimately to the Nigerian civil war, see, for example, relevant sections of Bernth Lindfors, 'Achebe's African Parable', Presence Africaine, No.66 (1968), pp.130-6.
- 3 Chief the Honourable Minister, p.105.
- 4 One Man, One Matchet, p.108.
- 5 One Man, One Wife, p.13.
- 6 Wole Soyinka, 'From a Common Back Cloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image', AMSAC Newsletter, Vol. 6, No.6 (1964), 4 - 5.
- 7 Dele Ojo: 'Alafia', Philips West African Records No. PFB 898 quoted in J. Awolalu, 'The Yoruba Philosophy of Life', Presence Africaine, No.73 (1970), pp 21-22.
- 8 Eldred Jones in his contribution to Wole Soyinka, 'The Writer in a Modern African State', The Writer in Modern Africa (Uppsala, 1968), pp.34-35.
- 9 One Man, One Wife, p.125.
- 10 Ibid., p.127.
- 11 Ibid., p.85.
- 12 See, for example, Bernth Lindfors, 'Characteristics of Yoruba and Igbo Prose Styles in English' (Unpublished Manuscript).
- 13 Ulli Beier, 'D.O. Fagunwa: A Yoruba Novelist', Black Orpheus, 17, (1965), p.53.
- 14 Lindfors, op. cit., p.7.

- 15 These similarities are extensively discussed in many books on Nigerian Languages. See, for example, Elizabeth Dunstan, ed. Twelve Nigerian Languages (London, 1969).
- 16 Chief the Honourable Minister, p.15.
- 17 Ibid., pp.15-16.
- 18 Flora Nwapa, Efuru (London, 1966), p.12.
- 19 One Man, One Wife, p.66.
- 20 Ibid., p.71.
- 21 Ibid., p.28.
- 22 This translation, which is a literal one, is mine.
- 23 One Man, One Wife, p.37.
- 24 Ibid., p.120.
- 25 One Man, One Matchet, pp.82-83.
- 26 Ibid., p.81.
- 27 Ibid., pp.138-9.
- 28 Ibid., p.133.
- 29 Ibid., p.131.
- 30 Ibid., pp.187-8.
- 31 Ibid., p.166.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 James Ngugi, 'Satire in Nigeria', Protest and Conflict in African Literature (London, 1969), pp.61-2.
- 34 Chief the Honourable Minister, p.127.
- 35 One Man, One Matchet, p.66.
- 36 Ibid., p.5.
- 37 Ibid., p.69.
- 38 Kinsman and Foreman, pp.21-22.
- 39 Ibid., p.6.
- 40 Elizabeth Akinsola in review of Kinsman and Foreman, Nigeria Magazine, No.92 (1967), p.84.
- 41 Kinsman and Foreman, pp.6-7.

- 42 Ibid., p.121.
- 43 Ibid., p.120.
- 44 Ibid., p.48.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., pp.44-45.
- 47 Ibid., p.49.
- 48 Ibid., p.101.
- 49 Ibid., p.76.
- 50 Ibid., p.193.
- 51 Chief the Honourable Minister, p.176.
- 52 Ibid., p.143.
- 53 Ibid., p.32.
- 54 Ibid., pp.154-5.
- 55 Ibid., p.149.
- 56 Ibid., p.28.
- 57 Ibid., pp.60-61.
- 58 Ibid., p.176.
- 59 Ibid., p.151.
- 60 The same point is made by Donatus Nwoga in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol.6, No.2, (1971), 17. Up to now the only known attempt to study Aluko as a novelist is that made in a recent short article by Bernth Lindfors - 'T.M. Aluko: Nigerian Satirist', African Literature Today, No.5 (1971), pp.41-53. There are, however, scattered, brief, usually uncomplimentary, references to his works in several books and articles. See, for example, Ulli Beier in review of One Man, One Wife, Black Orpheus, 6 (1959), pp.52-54; M.S. Dipoko in review of One Man, One Wife, Presence Africaine, 63 (1967), p.263; S.O. Anozie in review of Kinsman and Foreman, Presence Africaine, 62 (1967), p.203; Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons (London, 1968), p.170; Vladimir Klima, Modern Nigerian Novels (Prague, 1969), p.159.
- 61 Graham Hough, An Essay on Criticism (London, 1966), p.173.

## Chapter Five

## Onuora Nzekwu and Elechi Amadi

Onuora Nzekwu and Elechi Amadi are only two of the many Ibo novelists who are said to have been influenced in their writings by Chinua Achebe.<sup>1</sup> This influence is considered so profound by some critics that they have spoken of the emergence of a 'School of Achebe'.<sup>2</sup> The claim for a 'School' is based on the assumption that the themes, techniques and styles of these Ibo novelists have been learnt from Achebe, yet the amount of influence which one writer may have had on another must always remain a matter of speculation. While there is no need to deny the influence of Achebe on other Ibo novelists, with the exception of Ekwensi, it is important to add that what an original artist, like Amadi, learns from any other artist, like Achebe, whose talent may be different, is a hard kind of influence to define, even if we believe it to have had the profoundest importance. It must be emphasized that influences manifest themselves in likeness and unlikeness. If, for example, Nzekwu was looking for a novelist to learn from, Achebe was the only Nigerian novelist available, judging from the way their different talents have developed. The same cannot be said of Amadi who had the opportunity of studying other novelists closely. The influence on him of all these novelists, including Achebe, may be that kind of influence which makes a talented artist want to do something original and different.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that the problems of communication which arise in the writings of these three novelists are not the same and that similar themes are

usually handled differently. Religion is one of several examples. Achebe and Nzekwu make religion the basis of conflict between cultures. In Arrow of God Achebe shows how religion can become not only a cohesive and divisive force within a community but can also provide the motivation for conflict with an external force, in this case Christianity. In Blade among the Boys the inability of Patrick to choose between traditional and Catholic priesthood is used to highlight his dilemma and the conflict of ideas. But whereas in Achebe's novel the whole community becomes ultimately involved in the confrontation, with Ezeulu acting as standard-bearer, the choice for Patrick is essentially a personal one which, only remotely, is capable of affecting the fortunes of a limited number of people. Amadi, on the other hand, shows very little interest in external conflict as regards religion: he is more concerned with the problems of the collective survival of members of the community. Religion to him is an essential part of the life of every individual in the village and of the village community as a whole. In The Concubine and The Great Ponds religion is presented as an all-pervasive aspect of social, cultural and commercial life. It is not just an important aspect of life, as we find in Arrow of God and Blade among the Boys, but an essential quality of life without which man loses the protection of the gods so vital for his survival.

Therefore, in any discussion of Nzekwu and Amadi, Achebe provides a useful point of departure. Nzekwu's exploitation of the conflict of cultures and his use of individual characters to embody community ideals and dilemmas bring him, on the surface, closer to Achebe in intent and effect. Amadi, on the other hand, writes novels of situations in which, as we shall see,

individuals tend to be either agents of the gods or very often little more than symbols of the collective will of the people. It is important to bear these points in mind because they are referred to later in this study. However, the main emphasis of the chapter is on the different approaches to art between Amadi and Nzekwu and the way this affects the response of the reader - the fact that Amadi is a highly imaginative writer and Nzekwu is essentially a documentary novelist. There is a close connection between Nzekwu's approach to art and the problems of communication which his works exhibit. If, as opposed to what he sees in Amadi's novels, the reader finds the link between tradition and modern experience in the earlier works of Nzekwu rather unsuccessful, it is because of his tendency to present his facts in the most literal fashion. What, in particular, usually obscures Nzekwu's intention and interferes with his artistic purpose is the incorporation into his novels of long passages which have an existence independent of art:-

Among us, kola-nut is a highly valued and indispensable product. It commands our respect in a way no other produce has done. Though it is one of the commonest vegetable products seen in Nigeria, it represents, in our society, a vital social and religious element. Kola-nut is a symbol of friendship, the proper offering at meetings and religious occasions. Its presentation to a guest surpasses any other sign of hospitality which any host among us can show, even though in some places it costs only a penny.

Many hold that the presentation of kola-nut is one proof of the religious disposition of some African peoples. For, they ask, on what occasion have they met without kola being presented? And, when it is presented, has it not invariably been followed by prayers?<sup>3</sup>

This is only the beginning of what the novelist tells his readers about the use of kola in Ibo society. On another occasion this might have been very useful information but, coming as it does here, it reveals Nzekwu's inclination to explain rather

than to create life in his novels. This inclusion of tiresomely explicit sociological material, present in Wand of Noble Wood to the extent that makes it possible for a reviewer to describe it as 'almost a manual of popular anthropology'<sup>4</sup>, is the most prominent feature of the unsuccessful Nigerian Novel. This impulse to educate, which Professor Povey has attributed to the need to pay attention to a foreign audience, is the clearest evidence of artistic immaturity which these novels provide, appearing usually in first novels.<sup>5</sup> Wherever it is in evidence, the result is the same - the novel works mainly at the literal level and reveals little use of the imagination on the part of the novelist. It is the detailed narration of Ibo customs and lore which destroys Munonye's potentially powerful theme - the conflict between the attractions of a second marriage and the upbringing of an only son - in The Only Son. It is the same fault which results in the lack of balance between character and environment in Efuru.

Instead of instructing, Amadi dramatizes a point in such a context that its importance is directly conveyed. This is the way in which Achebe in Arrow of God establishes the importance of the New Yam Festival in the religious life of Umuaro. In the same manner Amadi impresses upon the reader the importance of kola in an appropriate setting. The occasion is one which combines tradition and history, when Chiolu and Aliakoro meet after one of the usual encounters at the Great Ponds to talk about the ransom for prisoners of war. The image of past grandeur is evoked, as is appropriate on historic occasions, by the use of praise-names: 'Men of Aliakoro, Growers of Big Yams, Leopard-killers, Eyes of the Night, Eight-headed

Warriors ... Men of Chiolu who use fish for firewood, Terrors of the forests, Hunters with Invisible Footprints, Greater Sons of Great Fathers'<sup>6</sup> These invocations help to emphasize the debt of the present to the past and to excite the people's positive collective response to the occasion by reference to their antiquity. It is into this important setting that Amadi introduces the importance of the kola:-

Diali broke the kola, took one piece and offered the rest to Okehi. Again the kola did the rounds. The wooden bowl was almost empty by the time it got back to Diali. The chief took one piece, broke it into smaller fragments and scattered them on the ground, thereby offering them to Amadioha, the god of thunder and of the skies, Ali the earth-god, Ojukwu the Fair and Ogbunabali, the god who kills by night.<sup>7</sup>

Not only are the principal actors in the drama of The Great Ponds willing to partake of the pieces of the kola from the same bowl, even the gods are offered their fair share. Kola is thus employed in the process of reconciling two warring villages on an occasion attended by god and man. Such a situation brings out more clearly the 'vital social and religious element' of the kola than Nzekwu's documentary harangues. One is made to see just how and why it is important without explicit instruction.

While Nzekwu explains Ibo names - Nwakego is 'a child is more valuable than money'<sup>8</sup> - Amadi gives the same type of information in a more helpful way. Here Ihuoma starts a dialogue between herself and Ekwueme into which the meanings of their names are integrated:-

'My mother says I have a lucky face'.  
 'Of course you have. Your very name means  
 "beautiful face" or "good luck".  
 'That is true. It is surprising how little  
 I ever think of my name'.  
 'That is natural. You don't use it much do you?'  
 'I don't. Let me see, what is the meaning of  
 your name?'  
 'It means "say and do".'  
 'And do you do whatever you say?'



'Yes, I do. I said I would marry you and I have as good as done it'.  
 'Can't you think of any other instance?'  
 Ihuoma said laughing.<sup>9</sup>

What the reader gains from this conversation is not only the meaning of the names 'Ihuoma' and 'Ekwueme'. Along with this comes some awareness of the developing situation. There is the painful irony which the English translation of Ekwueme's name - 'say and do' - carries with it. Ekwueme has confessed his love for Ihuoma but will not be able to 'do' - marry her. So, although he is quite sincere when he says 'I said I would marry you and I have as good as done it', the reader knows that this hope is unattainable and will lead to certain disaster. Ihuoma accepts his assurances in good faith. But from what we know of her up to this stage of the story, she would have dissuaded him from his plans if she suspected the outcome would be disastrous. Such is the use of irony by Amadi in this novel: his way of giving the reader more information about the principal characters than they know about themselves.

Consider, too, the ways in which the two novelists treat another common subject - burial rites: those of John Ikenga in Blade among the Boys and of Emenike in The Concubine. A detailed account of these rites is given in each case but it is only in The Concubine that the details appear necessary. The spontaneous display of fraternal feelings for Emenike during these rites influences Madume and, when he makes his tragic error of assaulting Ihuoma, prevents Anyika from coming to his rescue. It is also as much from the affection shown for Emenike on this occasion as from Ihuoma's personal qualities that Ekwueme derives the feelings of social inadequacy in his dealings with Ihuoma, feelings on which the novel thrives.

It is difficult to establish such connections in Blade among the Boys between the burial rites which follow the death of Ikenga and the later events of the novel. Admittedly, the death of his father affects Patrick's movements and, to that extent, possibly his career. But the funeral ceremonies, so extensively reported, do not strike us as functional, as they do in The Concubine.

While Nzekwu so often merely instructs, Amadi's use of language is always geared to the central imaginative concerns in his novels. The individual quality of an Amadi novel can often be seen locally manifesting itself in the quality of its prose. A representative sample will illustrate this:-

Ihuoma sat on the couch, her husband's head resting on her lap. Nnadi and other relatives ranged themselves on one side of the room. Emenike's children squatted on the floor, the oldest supporting his chin on his palm and peering anxiously into his father's face. Anyika occupied the most central position. An oil lamp stood on a ledge on the wall. For some time there was a disturbing silence. Then Emenike coughed. As if in answer an owl hard by gave vent to a long, eerie hoot. The sound died in a hair-raising diminuendo. The medicine man bowed his head. Nnadi exchanged glances with other members of the family. Clearly all was not well.<sup>10</sup>

The prose is structurally not at all elaborate, yet every stroke goes home. The posture of Emenike's oldest child, Anyika's actions, Nnadi's gestures and even the very silence are all ominous signs. What helps to establish fear as a permanent feature of the situation is the hooting of the owl employed here, as always, as a bad omen. There is sharp visualization - Emenike's head on Ihuoma's lap on one side, the relatives on the other, with Anyika, on whom all hope rests, occupying the most central position not only physically but also psychologically in the relative's anxious minds. The words, 'disturbing silence',

contrast appropriately the outward inactivity of those present with their inward agitations. The atmosphere of unusual silence is so successfully built up that when it is finally broken by Emenike's cough, the cough is lifted, as it were, from the page of the book to the reader's hearing. This passage comes early in the novel but, as is usual with Amadi, it has tentacular connections with central issues in the book - the key position of Anyika in society, Thuoma's good nature, Nnadi's quiet but essential role and a recreation of the domestic happiness disturbed by Emenike's illness.

## II

It is such control of language, selection of detail, and successful dramatization of events that one rarely finds in Nzekwu's first two novels. There are few highly imaginative descriptions of the kind we have just been analysing from Amadi, little exciting narrative capable of stimulating the sympathetic response of the reader. In these novels transliteration of customs and traditions, which is attempted in connection with potentially powerful themes, is marred by inadequate presentation. Wand of Noble Wood, for example, presents a confrontation between the old and the new in the matter of marriage. In the centre of this struggle is Peter, the measure by which we judge not only the novelist's attitude to the whole situation but also his success as a writer. Peter has been away from his village for some time, working in the city as a newspaper reporter. We are therefore not altogether surprised that he is no longer sure of the right way of greeting the Obi of Ado when they meet for an interview:-

I wondered what would be the most appropriate way to greet him in a dance hall full of people of different tribes and from different walks of life. Should it be the traditional method - kneeling on all fours, touching the ground with my forehead and at the same time calling out 'Igwe'? Should it be a low bow, beginning at waistline, accompanied by 'Good evening, Your Highness'? Or should I merely doff my hat? The doffing of hat roused thoughts of the strictest traditions of my people, which were deep-rooted in my own mind despite my Catholic upbringing. These traditions had been crammed into me by my uncle, Azoba.<sup>11</sup>

By making his hero vacillate between the traditional and modern methods of greeting, the author gives the impression that neither is considered adequate for the occasion. Peter would not kneel 'on all fours' or 'doff my hat'. Neither his experience of city life nor his strict Catholic upbringing would make him forgo an important aspect of the traditions of his people. However, his love of tradition has become so weak that he contemplates greeting an Obi with 'a low bow'. As a result of these doubts expressed by the hero the reader is given the impression that neither the old nor the new will be accepted without criticism. The novelist thus opens an interesting area of conflict which ought to have been fully exploited. The wand of the title might then have been regarded as an instrument of measuring the new against the background of the old, where neither the old nor the new is considered good enough.

It is only with this kind of treatment that the relationship between Peter and Nneka, which touches on the central concern of the novel, could acquire a real tragic significance. Unlike Obiageli, Nneka is a synthesis of old and new. She satisfies both Peter's romantic ideals of marriage and the traditional requirements of hard work and good family background. Peter and Nneka, like Obi Okonkwo,

belong to two worlds, traditional and modern. Although they are conscious of the advantages derivable from Western culture, they are unwilling completely to abandon traditional beliefs and practices. Their personal tragedy, as I have said elsewhere, reflects the failure of the attempt 'to effect a reconciliation between the past and the present, to find the right balance between inherited culture and acquired European values.'<sup>12</sup> If no such symbolic statement emerges clearly from the work, it is mainly because of the often appalling manner in which the novelist presents his material. Take, for example, the love affair between Peter and Nneka on which much else in the novel depends. This is so maladroitly handled that the reader cannot appreciate its importance. There is, for instance, the emotional and romantic scene in which the two lovers are made to employ the stale language of a tired romanticism and address each other in hackneyed phrases and borrowed expressions - 'How easily men can be swayed by little things ... Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds ... Why can't you men make your love constant?'<sup>13</sup> This is how Peter finally confesses his love for Nneka:-

Nneka, I love you with all my heart. I have loved you since March 21, the day you came to borrow dance-bells from this village. Since then you have haunted my thoughts and my dreams. Nneka, will you be my wife?<sup>14</sup>

What reader is likely to believe that Peter is genuinely in love? The whole speech is laden with clichés - 'I love you with all my heart. I have loved you since ... you have haunted my thoughts and my dreams' - and in its grotesque insistence on the very date in the calendar descends to the absolutely ridiculous. One cannot take this cliché-ridden

stuff seriously.

Nzekwu's failure in this scene contrasts sharply with the skill with which Amadi handles a comparable love scene in The Concubine. Ekwueme, after a long period of uncertainty and hesitation, goes to confess his love for Ihuoma. In this scene every action and reaction of the lovers is given - Ekwueme's clumsiness and initial failure to communicate, Ihuoma's external composure contrasted with her internal confusion. It is such marshalling of detail which makes Amadi so much more convincing than Nzekwu. Of particular significance for the purpose of the comparison here, however, is the sincerity of Ihuoma's reply to Ekwueme's proclamation of love:-

'Ekwe, listen,' the woman began. 'You know very well I like you. How can I deny it? You like me too, otherwise you would not want to marry me. But you need a young maiden who would obey you and give you the first fruits of her womb. Do not cheat yourself. I am too old for you. You would soon grow tired of me. My children would be a constant burden on you. No, Ekwe, I do not want to spoil your life. Since your childhood you have been engaged to Ahurole. She is young, well behaved and beautiful. Go and marry her instead.'<sup>15</sup>

Ihuoma's utter simplicity and candour cannot fail to impress a reader as something coming straight from a realistic intelligence - an essential part of the appeal which the total situation, of which this is only a part, has for the reader. Her speech carries conviction mainly because of its openness, a quality usually associated with rural characters.

To the reader, therefore, this matter of presentation remains important - so important, in fact, that it affects the final outcome. However, according to Nzekwu, this is not why Peter fails in his avowed purpose of marrying Nneka -

the girl is under the curse of 'iyi ocha' which must be revoked. The reader is entitled to ask why the problem posed by this curse is introduced so late in the novel, if it is going to be so crucial to the fortunes of the hero. In the way the story ends what purpose is served by Peter's sudden change from a city playboy to a serious country lover, a change which itself lacks plausibility the way it is presented? Such a change, to be acceptable, must come gradually and be the subject of detailed treatment. It is at this stage in the novel that one begins to wonder whether Nzekwu has not lost grip on his material and is, in fact, merely looking for escape through the use of the magic of 'iyi ocha'. If the novel must end tragically in such a way that neither traditional nor modern ideas triumph, the novelist ought to have dramatized in a number of given situations the inadequacies of both cultures. Instead he indulges in explicit comments which tend to suggest that traditional ideas are superior to modern ones:-

Go among the grown-ups who profess Christianity. The moment they can afford it they become polygamists and take ozo and other traditional titles. When they think it will do them good they consult fortune-tellers, make charms and wear them, and do a thousand and one other things which ... are purely 'idolatrous and un-Christian'.<sup>16</sup>

He ought to have exploited and capitalized on the warning which Agbata on his deathbed gives Peter:-

Peter, my son ... you have a bright future ... Do not swamp it by being foolish ... As much as possible ... live the way Azoba has taught you to live ... Do not neglect our traditions. ... They are so very rich. ... Women are your greatest weakness. ... Be careful ... and whatever you do ... do not marry any woman who is not from Ado ...<sup>17</sup>

Peter violates practically everyone of these injunctions. Not only does he get involved with Obiageli, who is not a native of Ado, but he treats her badly. This, no doubt, could be regarded as a justifiable reason for the anger of the gods and, adequately presented, might have been more convincing than the magic of 'iyi ocha'.

It is the same impression of an inadequate presentation of an important theme that is created in Blade among the Boys. In this novel traditional African values are pitched against Western values in matters of religion as they have been in matters of marriage in Wand of Noble Wood. Judging by the way the novel ends - the fact that Patrick is thrown out of the seminary - one may be inclined to conclude that traditional values have triumphed.<sup>18</sup> However, it is not the ending that is important, but the way it is brought about. The content of the novel does not lead us to expect tradition to triumph. The author has himself virtually made this impossible by allowing events to develop in such a way that confronts Patrick with a straight inflexible choice between the priesthood of the patrilineal lineage - becoming an okpala - and the priesthood of the Church. In the event, after a long period of vacillation between one and the other, both finally elude him. Neither tradition nor modernism wins. For, as Professor Povey has pointed out,

In this clash between mutually antagonistic but irresistible forces, both sides must inevitably be destroyed no matter which appears to gain the triumph of temporary victory. The old ways are untenable, the new unacceptable, and the application of educated rationalism is never victorious against the power of tribal taboos even though they are disbelieved.<sup>19</sup>



This emphasis on the inadequacy of both tradition and modernism would have been satisfying if it had been made to emerge as though naturally from the living situation of the novel. What, in the main, makes this impossible is the fact that in this novel the hero represents himself and no one else, his values are not typical of those of his fellow men, his dilemma reflects no general concern. This occurs because of the novelist's approach which denies Patrick alone the duality of the life of Christians, of which John Ikenga provides a good example:-

Had the priests gone behind the scenes they would have discovered that neither John Ikenga's brand of Christianity, nor those of many others he knew, was the model they preached each Sunday from the altar. They could have discovered for themselves the numerous charms John Ikenga hid behind photographs hanging on the walls of their parlour. His was quite a different brand of Christianity - a Christianity that allowed for the limitations of his upbringing in traditional surroundings, a Christianity that accommodated some principles and practices of his tribal religion.<sup>20</sup>

It is an artistic fault that Patrick is made to stand alone. His position as hero would have been enhanced if he had been made to embody the cultural experience of his people. Nothing has been gained by denying him the duality of life allowed to others in society. For if no accommodation is intended between the two sides, why has so much energy and creative attention been devoted to getting Patrick fully initiated into either camp? Uncle Ononye's insistence that Patrick should become the okpala and his mother's demand that he should marry and have children to ensure the organic continuity of the lineage are two compatible demands which are presented as reasonable and almost irresistible. After all, these two people, unlike the Catholic Church, have the first claim

on Patrick's allegiance. Moreover, he has come to accept much of his traditional training for the headship of the lineage and, after a brief exposure to the life in Lagos, is now a changed man, very far in his convictions and actions from the ideals of the Church:-

Patrick used the delaying tactics, as soon as he became broke each month, as a lever to get money from the merchants to tide over the month. Conscience, which pricked him when his Uncle Andrew paid Mr. Johnson five pounds and a bottle of whisky a little over a year ago, no longer bothered him. At first he was very cautious about whom he put the pressure upon, and then it was only very rarely. But gradually he warmed up to it and instead of his usual come tomorrow, and tomorrow it was still come tomorrow until the merchant gave him something, he now openly asked them whether they did not realize that a flautist sometimes cleaned his nostrils. The more he took, the greater became his desire to get more.<sup>21</sup>

Like Obi Okonkwo, Patrick begins to take bribes to solve his social problems. But the decision is not as painful as the one we see Obi take in No Longer at Ease - the change over Patrick comes more abruptly than that which overtakes Obi. What the reader is invited to believe here is that Patrick who, a short while before, was a dutiful student of a Catholic College has suddenly developed an insatiable appetite for taking bribes; that Patrick who, only a year before, openly blamed his uncle for giving bribes, now accepts bribes without any qualms of conscience. The reader may well begin to wonder whether Nzekwu really knows just what it is he wishes to communicate. The problem seems basic.

Inexplicably and unconvincingly, Patrick abandons the corrupt life of bribe-taking as suddenly as he had embraced it and enters the seminary to train to become a priest. If this dramatic change had seemed on reflection to be implicit

in what we already knew of him, all would have been well. True, it may be Nzekwu's intention to show by these events that Patrick not only stands alone but is also a hopelessly unstable character. However, a reader might well suspect that the novelist has again lost control over his material, especially as once more Nzekwu brings magic to the aid of art. Nothing said about Nkiru earlier in the novel could lead anyone to believe that she would deliberately put herself in the way of any man, much less tempt him into an affair by means of a love potion. Why, from what we know about Nkiru up to this late stage in the novel, would she go after a poor seminarian like Patrick instead of one of the prosperous suitors who, we are told, are available to her? Because of this unlikely turn of events every important character in the novel suffers in the inevitable tragedy which follows. The only triumph in the novel is a negative and ironic one. Veronica by her death sets off a chain of events which finally ends in Nkiru's pregnancy and the prospect of a child needed for the organic continuity of the family. This assumed victory is achieved in a costly manner which ruins for all time the clerical hopes of her son.

What helps to relieve one's feeling of disappointment with these novels are the few imaginatively presented scenes and convincingly dramatized episodes. One such scene takes place around the deathbed of Agbata, a sick old man who is literally hanging on to life by a thread which keeps a goat's heart firmly tied to his bed. Peter and his friends are embarrassed by the fact that the old man will not die unless he is killed and try in vain to find out his secret. It is

Agbata himself who gives them the clue: 'You know that goat that always refuses to leave the kitchen? It has no heart. If you can discover its heart then you'll know why you can't kill me.'<sup>22</sup> Then begins a thorough search of the house:-

Slowly the boards were removed. At first we saw nothing, for it was dark underneath the bed. The portable table-lamp was focused under the bed and its light shone on a black cloth which hung down, cutting off the space beyond and whatever was there. Ben raised the cloth and then we saw it....

The space was empty, but at a point underneath his pillow, hanging from the spring of the bed, was a string of black, red and yellow threads. At the other end of it was the fresh bleeding heart of a goat. Surprisingly the heart was contracting and expanding. It was suspended over a hole dug in the floor.

'Do you see the string there?' the dying man asked, and no one answered.

'That heart suspended from it,' he continued, 'is the heart of that goat in the kitchen.... It will always be... to you a wonder ... how it ever left the goat..... My powers are great.... I can give them to you... but you are too young... and you will misuse them.... That heart came to be there even before you were born.' He paused. "I am tired.... I want to go home." He paused again, breathing with more difficulty. 'Cut the thread,' he added, but no one moved.

'Cut the thread,' he said again, and one of the men who had followed us from the hospital went under the bed with a kitchen knife and cut it. As the heart fell into the hole, two things happened:- The dying man breathed his last. The old goat bleated urgently, 'Kpaa! kpaa!!' and became silent. A servant rushed in to report that the old goat had died from no apparent cause. Of course, we knew better how this man and his old goat had passed away.<sup>23</sup>

Here Nzekwu is at his best as an imaginative artist. He makes no attempt to explain the link between Agbata and the goat's heart. This is left at the level of mystery to which it properly belongs. Mystery functions here in a direct way, as part of religious belief, without any anthropological

footnotes. More is communicated about 'indigenous culture' in this passage than in all Nzekwu's miniature lectures put together.

Another scene of great dramatic power is found at the end of Blade among the Boys where Patrick repudiates his mother who goes to beg him to give up his training for the priesthood. Patrick's mother keeps a noisy vigil outside the seminary, demanding the release of her son - 'Fathers, give me back my son ... Why must you seduce my only child? ... Why must you make him a eunuch ... If you knew the pains of childbirth you wouldn't have dared to take him from me.'<sup>24</sup> Her cry goes unheeded, but the woman refuses to lose hope. When she sees Patrick, she exclaims:-

'Have they released you?' ... 'Where are your things? Get them and let's go.'

'Go home, Mother. This is no place for you. For three days now you have made yourself a nuisance in this compound. Do you see other women coming and disgracing themselves like this here?'

'Come with me and I'll no longer be a menace to them.'

'I cannot come with you. Why don't you leave me alone?'

She stretched out a hand towards him and he moved back from it. 'Don't touch me,' he warned.

This warning broke down her reserve of energy. Slowly she sank back on the steps and cried. Her whole frame shook with the despair that hit her then. Memories of the loss of her husband and of all she had suffered for her boy came crowding back in her mind and made her cry like she did only once before - when her husband died. Patrick watched her for a while and was touched by her weeping.<sup>25</sup>

So sympathetically is the mother drawn that the reader finds himself joining in her appeal. So agonizing are her experiences that, like Patrick, we are 'touched by her weeping.' Yet the passage is quite devoid of crude emotionalism.

Moreover, an important area of achievement in Blade among the Boys is indicated in the way Patrick's dilemma is

presented. Peter's choice has been somewhat unimportant; that of Patrick is real. The choice he has to make - between Christianity and tradition - becomes an extremely difficult one because both are made equally attractive. In the words of Robert July,

Powerful psychological and material forces are brought to bear by both sides. The Church offers education - the necessary ingredient for worldly success - while standing for progressive ideas and modern thought. But belief in the traditional religious hierarchy of spirits and ancestors is deep-seated, and life in a village can be markedly uncomfortable for the non-conformist who makes light of time-honoured custom.<sup>26</sup>

This situation is the cause of Patrick's mental doubts and agony, comparable to those of Simbi in Tutuola's novel, and his vacillation between one choice and the other. His final attempt to take a stand is responsible for the most memorable episode in the novel - the scene of great pathos already discussed - in which his mother has her last confrontation with him and the missionaries at the seminary. In that scene Nzekwu does indeed communicate, with concentration, power, and utter simplicity.

### III

However, it is in Nzekwu's third novel, Highlife for Lizards, that for the first time local beliefs and practices are handled with more than occasional insight and made an essential part of the novelist's imaginative scheme rather than a mere convenience, like 'iyi ocha'. An interesting achievement of this novel is that, in the midst of the domestic and public disorder which it projects, the ideals of society are constantly stressed so that the reader is made fully

conscious of the ethical standard by which the characters, irrespective of what they say or do, are meant to be judged. There is a strong suggestion of a common destiny. The villagers consider themselves collectively responsible for the peace of the village and think that an error committed by one of them may bring unhappiness, or even disaster, on all the others. Hence, for example, immediate steps are taken to stop Nwadi's late cooking. A wife is bound to her husband by a special bond, and any disagreement that leads to a fight between them can only be due to an evil influence. The way to remove such an influence is by performing a ritual and appeasing the gods. Hence the ritual of purification and peace-making which follows the fight between Agom and Udezue. So we have presented here, as in Amadi's novels, the villagers' collective will to survive through the observance of traditional rites, acceptance of the wisdom of the ancients and the worship of the gods.

Again, in this third novel many of the stereotyped expressions of the first two, like 'I ... consoled myself with the thought that punctuality was the soul of business',<sup>27</sup> or self-consciously 'literary' language, like 'With their permission apparently safe in his pocket, he began to nurse his desire',<sup>28</sup> are avoided. Some linguistic irritations, however, still remain. We still have, for example, possible obscurities of language resulting from an excessive reliance on the speech pattern of L1 and an unsuccessful attempt to translate L1 bodily into L2 - 'It's good to know so that I know what hand to give you',<sup>29</sup> 'Your brother no longer invites me to sleep.'<sup>30</sup> An even greater difficulty arises when the English expression is made to depend for its clarity

on the symbolic and multi-referential nature of Ibo. Such an example is provided when Agom tells Udezue: 'For some time now I've not been killing cockerels'<sup>31</sup> instead of saying she is pregnant. This is probably how an Ibo village woman will report the circumstances to her husband in Ibo. But here a non-Ibo-speaking reader may completely be at a loss as to Nzekwu's meaning.

Occasionally the problems of communication are such that part of the novelist's central meaning is obscured. The reader is hindered in his understanding of Onitsha village life in all its complexities:-

I'm fed up with Udezue insulting my mother and me on account of you. I'm sick of him citing you always as a model to me. Lazier women than I have made successful homes before, so why don't you leave me alone?

'This is interesting'.

'It may be to you but I'm not kidding. If you exert more pressure on me through Udezue who is in your clutches, I'll make sure you hit the trail ahead of me'.

'Ani Onitsha protect me from your evil designs!' Agom exclaimed. 'May our ancestors not grant you power over me! He who pursues a hen does all the falling. I am innocent and innocence is the only tool with which the weak earthworm burrows tunnels in the ground. If you chase me you'll land on your hands'.<sup>32</sup>

Udezue's wives, Agom and Nwadi, are quarrelling. The novelist evokes the right atmosphere for this village quarrel and shows knowledge of the type of altercation which does take place on such an occasion. Nwadi's insinuation that Udezue is in the clutches of Agom is significant in the way the three characters develop. Udezue becomes more and more subordinate to Agom who emerges as the dominant partner. But why is Nwadi, a character in a village setting, made to speak in a way that does not reflect Ibo idiom or patterns of speech? When she



plunges into the third paragraph she is employing the language of the worst kind of thriller, grotesquely incongruous when one considers the place and the serious situation in which she is involved:-

It may be to you but I'm not kidding. If you exert more pressure on me through Udezue who is in your clutches, I'll make sure you hit the trail ahead of me.

This, in itself, implies a fundamental verbal poverty in Nzekwu, a poverty which contributes in no small way to the failure of his first two novels. The inappropriateness of Nwadi's language becomes more obvious when considered against the background of Agom's reply. This brings out the symbolic nature of the Ibo language, and is made concrete and interesting with idioms and images. 'He who pursues a hen does all the falling' is significant not only in the context of the present dispute but assumes a greater significance in the wider context of the novel. Nwadi's final fall is not physical - the kind of fall implied in the proverb - but social and spiritual.

Such evidence of failure notwithstanding, this novel represents a definite advance on the earlier ones. As the novelist matures, his vision takes in the landscape as well as an ever-widening range of human activity:-

Whenever Agom travelled to any of the distant markets around Onitsha ... she occupied herself with the transformation accompanying the break of day. She would observe the gradual lightening up of the sky and, with it, the country-side. She would note the progressive return of life to each succeeding roadside village. Between two villages she would either concentrate her mind on memorising landmarks; try to work out the difference the time it took from one village to another made in the amount of activities in the two; or else puzzle out whether on the present journey they passed by a village earlier or later than they did on the previous one.<sup>33</sup>

The convincing portrayal of Agom, made possible by details such as these, shows Nzekwu's developing skill in characterization. In her private fears and hopes, her disturbed domestic life and flourishing oil trade, her successful public activities and humiliation by the District Officer, she is made an embodiment of all that is admirable in an Onitsha woman. She experiences the misfortune of a long period of childlessness, and the psychological problems which go with such an experience are exploited in depth to dramatize convincingly the difficulties which confront the childless woman in Ibo culture.

Nzekwu's overall achievement in this novel has been well summed up by Killam.

... here the descriptive element almost wholly gives way to a dramatic treatment. The dramatic treatment is enhanced and supported by an abundance of imagery and metaphor almost wholly lacking in the first two novels, which adds an extra dimension of implication to the story. There is hardly a page in the novel without something in the way of traditional verbal material transmuted by Nzekwu into English. Similarly, there is much more dialogue and less plainly rhetorical monologue than in the earlier books. The reader therefore has a sensation of life in the novel and feels that he is no longer merely a spectator to its action.<sup>34</sup>

Killam's reference to 'traditional verbal material transmuted by Nzekwu into English' points to an aspect of communication in which the novelist shows himself completely at home in this work - the use of proverbs to evoke the cultural environment in which the action of the novel takes place, to clarify conflict and focus on the values of Onitsha society. Proverbs play such an important part in keeping alive in the reader's mind the central concern of the novel that one useful way of interpreting the work is by studying the proverbs in detail. The novel's preoccupation is with

the problems of polygamy, the inevitable quarrels between two wives, the attendant domestic upheaval, the unhappiness for all concerned and the unsolicited interventions of neighbours. The excuse for a second wife in this case is the apparent childlessness of the first. With what might be called key proverbs the scene is set, appropriately by Onoli, the political head of the village, talking to Udezue: 'You brought ant-ridden faggots into your home. Why complain about lizards visiting you?'<sup>35</sup> The same proverb is repeated later. 'He who takes ant-ridden faggots into his home invites the lizard'<sup>36</sup> and appears in a more elaborate form as the author's preface to the whole novel: 'When ant-ridden faggots find their way into the home, lizards, the unbidden guests of honour, do a disgusting highlife during the feast which follows.' The title of the novel owes its origin to this proverb which takes the reader straight to the heart of the problem which the novelist has chosen to dramatize.

Once the stage is set proverbs are employed to emphasize the theme, bring home the sense of unrest in the family and evoke the bitter disappointment and misery suffered by Agom because of her childlessness. Udezue's regret is expressed in a group of colourful proverbs:-

What is needed in a seed yam is its crown. No one snaps his fingers without using a thumb. If only she'd had a child! What shall I tell my ancestors when I go to them? That while the dance lasted all I did was make preparations to join in it?<sup>37</sup>

Other constant reminders of Agom's childlessness and the atmosphere of mutual suspicion in the family are:-

Land was becoming a male child, very precious,  
and not at all easily parted with.<sup>38</sup>

The poor who cannot afford elephant meat call  
it meat-for-a-future-generation.<sup>39</sup>

Chewing and storing too many palm kernels in  
the mouth gives rise to a pain in the cheeks.<sup>40</sup>

One kills out of anger, but he buries his  
victim to avoid the stench.<sup>41</sup>

It's he who chases after a hen that does all  
the falling.<sup>42</sup>

The offspring of a snake never fails to crawl.<sup>43</sup>

One denied of a piece of chicken is saved  
the inconvenience of a toothache.<sup>44</sup>

The monkey says she can speak for her unborn  
baby but not for the young one on her back.  
It may have plucked and eaten the missing  
fruit.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from the situation in a polygamous household, the novel also presents, as has been pointed out, the abnormal situation in which Udezue comes to depend heavily on Agom for his happiness and derives immense joy from her domination. When Udezue says on the last page of the novel 'There can only be one helmsman to guide a canoe' no intelligent reader can doubt who has been at the helm all the time. Udezue, to use his own words, has 'degenerated into beautiful feathers'.<sup>46</sup> To emphasize this reversal of roles between husband and wife, we have some proverbs which betray a woman's unusual confidence and triumph and others which show man in a state of submission:-

So long as the bullet hits the mark ... what  
does it matter in what direction the gun is  
pointed.<sup>47</sup>

When a chicken goes flatulent, the earth gives  
it chase.<sup>48</sup>

An offending child is beaten with one hand,  
but then he is consoled with the other.<sup>49</sup>

That which one eats is what one takes along  
to the spirit land.<sup>50</sup>

Ilom says of Agom in connection with the latter's search for greater honours: 'You're like the proverbial hunter who carries the carcass of an elephant on his head and yet stops on his way home to dig up a cricket with one big toe.'<sup>51</sup> The general tone of the proverbs is either to stress Agom's personal achievement or to give the reader 'a sensation of life in the novel'. When, for example, matters come to a head during the public agitation in Onitsha against water rate, and Agom and Ilom are arrested, we are told: 'The rain has beaten the bull in the eyes',<sup>52</sup> 'The fat has dropped into the oil.'<sup>53</sup> In the midst of all these activities the novelist constantly emphasizes, mostly through the judicious use of proverbs, the values which are held dear by the society as a whole:-

No woman thatches the corner of a roof.<sup>54</sup>

The stick used in removing the millipede goes with it.<sup>55</sup>

A child in the belly is its mother's responsibility. Once it is born, its training becomes the duty of all.<sup>56</sup>

God who created the coconut gives it the water it drinks.<sup>57</sup>

When a child washes its hands clean it will eat from the same bowl as the wealthy.<sup>58</sup>

When you grab fish from one Anam citizen, you've taken it from all Anam people.<sup>59</sup>

So the purpose of the novelist becomes clear through a close study of his proverbs - to use the domestic situation in Udezue's family to discuss the problems of polygamy against the background of the customs and lore of his people. The proverbs act as the reader's guideposts to the author's treatment of the various aspects of his theme and help to achieve the

coordination necessary to bring these various aspects together in a coherent whole.

Amadi, too, employs proverbs but not to the extent or for the purpose that we find in Highlife for Lizards. Amadi's proverbs tend to have the limited but useful purpose of clarifying ideas by drawing meaningful comparisons. In his novels proverbs appear to be reserved only for important speeches and occasions. Consider, for example, this proverb which comes in the speech of the Eze of Aliji at the meeting of all the Ezes of Erikwe clan to mediate between Chiolu and Aliakoro:-

Weigh any amount of fish against your wives and children and you will see immediately that you are behaving like the tortoise who clubbed his wife Aliga to death in an all-out attempt to kill a tse-tse fly that had perched on her head. A fool exhausts what he has in hand before he grows wise. But you are no fools.<sup>60</sup>

The comparison drawn between fish and human beings, the reference to the stupid action of the tortoise and the advice to the people reveal the serious purpose of the speaker. Amadi's proverbs can be just as powerful and functional as any other. What appears to reduce their effect is the fact that, as we find here, they are almost invariably in indirect form unlike Achebe's proverbs or the ones just quoted from Nzekwu. If Achebe's success in this matter is anything to go by, it is that proverbs, as part of an indigenous culture, do better in translation in the direct form of village speech.

#### IV

In contrast to Nzekwu in his first two novels, Amadi, through his skilful organization and control of language, handles the descriptions of village life and the relationship

between man and god so successfully that the reader is hardly tempted to think of his books in terms of sociological data. For example, in Nzekwu's novels the gods are implacable instruments of fate, something like the Greek Parcae, who intervene only occasionally in the affairs of men to bring about disaster. In Amadi's novels the people live their daily lives under the superintendence of the gods; the myths and magic connected with these gods are instrumental in bringing about political and spiritual cohesion in the village. The dibia is the intermediary between god and man or village with the explicit assignment to transmit to the latter the divine will of the former; the Eze is the political and spiritual head who interprets to the village or individual the will of the gods which he makes sure is carried out. His position brings enormous prestige but also carries with it grave responsibility. But, however pervasive his influence, he is as subject to the control of the gods as any other man in the village:-

Eze Diali's influence permeated the whole village like the cult of Amadioha. Men stopped fighting and women ceased verbal exchanges at his intercession. Yet in a way Diali was a nonentity, just the man in the next compound. He did not interfere in his neighbour's affairs; he did not order anyone around. ... But Diali's subtle leadership was indispensable to Chiolu.<sup>61</sup>

It is this situation in which the gods are presented as an essential part of an organic whole that makes them carry conviction in Amadi's novels. Whether or not Amadi 'believes' the myths on which the powers of the gods are based is not important. What is important is that the people he presents in his works believe them and allow their everyday life to be affected by their beliefs. 'Communication' in Amadi is

thus very much a matter of the way in which this aspect of indigenous culture is brought home to the reader.

These gods are certainly made real enough. Amadioha is not a distant god of thunder, but a supernatural being who occasionally makes his appearance in the form of a snake. Ogbunabali is not an imaginary god which kills by night but one that has become a living symbol of the people's collective fear. The embodiment of this fear is Olumba who degenerates physically, mentally and spiritually from the strong personality, a leader of men in his own right, that we find at the beginning of The Great Ponds to a mere instrument in the hands of fate, a man tormented by doubts and uncertainties about his own safety and that of his family and community. His survival depends on the verdict of the gods - at least, so the people believe - and on his life hangs the fortune of the whole community. Such is the relationship between man and god in this novel that man's happiness depends on his keeping his proper ritual distance from the gods. This distance Olumba has always kept with regular sacrifices. 'No sacrifices were too great to placate the most insignificant of his household gods. It was a favourite saying of his that he would rather fight a whole village single-handed than defy the weakest god'.<sup>62</sup> This man ironically soon finds himself fighting against a god in circumstances where his outstanding devotion is of little avail:-

'We have no shrine for Ogbunabali,' Nyoma said. Olumba was startled at the coincidence of their thoughts.

'That is true,' he mumbled.

'Let's erect one,' she said.

'It is not wise.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

'Let us ask the dibia.'



'I shall do so in due course', the man said.  
 'Can't we see him this evening, my lord'.  
 'No.'  
 'We should not delay, my lord.'  
 'I know'.  
 'Let's go this evening then.'  
 'Don't worry I shall not die tonight.'<sup>63</sup>

The anxiety of Olumba and his wife is reflected in the speed with which this conversation is conducted. Time is running out, the end may come at any time, and monosyllables are pressed into service.

The sea-god in The Concubine, like many another god, is made real; he has often been seen and is known to possess the human feelings of jealousy. No mention is made of the connection between Ihuoma and this Sea-king until the very end when the details of the story have otherwise been made acceptable to the reader. The figure of Ihuoma as an elegant, beautiful, almost perfect, village woman, greatly respected by all, but, like every other person, capable of hopes and fears, has been fully established:-

The women adored her. Men were awestruck before her. She was becoming something of a phenomenon. But she alone knew her internal struggles. She knew she was not better than anyone else. She thought her virtues were the products of chance. As the days went by she began to loathe her so-called good manners.<sup>64</sup>

Because of the method of delineation the reader comes to accept Ihuoma as a rational human being. The result is that when the nature of her connection with the Sea-king is disclosed and the influence of supernatural forces on the events of the novel is revealed, it does not affect the unity of Amadi's organization as does the use of magic in Wand of Noble Wood and Blade among the Boys. For, as Eustace Palmer has pointed out,

The creation of perfect or near-perfect characters is a task of considerable difficulty,

which Amadi has undertaken with great success. Ihuoma's goodness, politeness, courage, chastity, modesty, good sense, selflessness, and beauty, are not only commented on but demonstrated. We actually see her selfless efforts to cure Ekwueme; her good sense in deciding to visit Ekwueme's young wife Ahurole in spite of everything ... her polite and tactful response to Wigwe's unreasonable visit and proposal ... Amadi, who is himself aware of the difficulty, attributes her perfection to her being a sea-goddess.<sup>65</sup>

Amadi appears to have limited the scope of his works in two important directions with deliberate artistic intent. He limits the geographical area he writes about to Omokachi in The Concubine and to the Erikwe clan in The Great Ponds. He also apparently shuts out all external influence in his area of operation, thus leaving the critic to judge him as a writer on his recreation of life in the village as a truly self-contained unit at a period of history not easily localizable, and on any symbolic interpretation such a picture may evoke. The novelist's fidelity to the period he writes about is impressive: the medium of monetary exchange is the manilla, characters tell time by cockcrows, the crying of cuckoos and the lengths of shadows:-

'I wonder how long the shadows are,' he said and went outside. He looked at his shadow and glanced at the sun.

'The shadows are still short,' he said.

'The shadow of your head is like a coconut,' Ihuoma said, smiling broadly.

'With that Ojongo hair-do your shadow should be indescribable,' Ekwueme retorted.<sup>66</sup>

When the sun is setting, it is 'going to Chiolu'. Rain falls 'only after the clouds had hung darkly over the shrines of Amadioha for several days in succession. Farmers watched for this sign.'<sup>67</sup> Distance is measured either by the length of the finger or the range of an arrow. Ihuoma's complexion is 'that of the anthill' and her age is arrived at in an interesting manner which gives us some information about village life.

'Every farm land was used once in seven years. The piece of land on which her father farmed in the year of her birth was farmed for the fourth time last year. So she was just about twenty-two.'<sup>68</sup> Images and allusions are consistent throughout with the village setting. When the men of Aliakoro and Chiolu reach deadlock in the negotiation for appropriate ransom for prisoners of war, we are told 'the two camps were poised like snakes ready to strike',<sup>69</sup> that the negotiators 'are like men about to disturb a nest of wasps'.<sup>70</sup> It is such fidelity to time and place, communicated in appropriate language and setting, that gives Amadi's works a timelessness unattainable by novels which concentrate on the clash between Western and indigenous cultures. The reader feels that, but for the hint given at the end of The Great Ponds, the period Amadi writes about, instead of being pre-colonial, might have been pre-historic. The setting would still be adequate and appropriate.

The many detailed descriptions of funerals, marriages, sacrifices and dances in The Concubine help to establish the feeling of reality. They reinforce the impression of a society which, at least on the surface, is orderly and stable as a result of its adherence to tradition and the worship of the gods. Religion, we are told, 'is a deep-rooted thing ... No one could really argue with a dibia'.<sup>71</sup> In the village propriety in inter-personal relationships is an important consideration. This situation provides an atmosphere in which people go about their business reasonably free of anxiety. Amadi is particularly successful in capturing this carefree atmosphere of village life:-

'Ekwe, you will always choose the easy job,'  
Wakiri said. 'I hoped I would stay outside'.  
'I pity you then for being unfortunate,'  
Ekwueme retorted.

'There is no question of misfortune here. It is a case of long scheming and cool calculations on your part. Ever since we came you have been edging away from the house.'

'Well then, let me trick you for once. Tricks are not meant only for you. You are not a tortoise.'

Nnadi burst out laughing in his rather high-pitched voice.

'I agree with you, Ekwe,' he said 'Wodu employs tricks in all things except wrestling.'

'You are wrong,' Ekwueme said, 'even there he employs unusual tactics. He tries to keep away opponents by ridiculing them and keeping them laughing all the time'.

'Go on you two,' Wakiri replied; 'today is your day. Ihuoma, please take note of those who are doing the greater part of the talking.'

'I shall be your witness if they accuse you of talking,' Ihuoma said, laughing.<sup>72</sup>

The dialogue is natural and convincing. The villagers are enjoying their jokes while working; the relaxed tone shows the degree of familiarity among the speakers. When Ekwueme tells Wakiri: 'Tricks are not meant only for you. You are not a tortoise' he rightly assumes that his allusion to the tortoise in this context will be easily understood by all present. The reader soon appreciates the usefulness of this remark, made casually in conversation, because the character of Wodu Wakiri as a village wag consistently bears out the insinuation. He is portrayed as something of a professional clown whose jibes are universally forgiven because of an assumed lack of seriousness on his part, but who always, as in this passage, exposes the foibles of the villagers: 'Go on you two ... today is your day ... take note of those who are doing the greater part of the talking.' This blame is a serious one and it immediately achieves the desired effect of getting Ekwueme and Nnadi to talk less and work more. When Wakiri says 'There is no question of misfortune here' his intended meaning in the context is clear but his statement is open to other interpretations. The word 'misfortune' is full of

significance in the context of the situation in which the speech is made and the wider context of the novel as a whole. Ekwueme, Wakiri and Nnadi are here thatching the roof of Ihuoma's hut. But for the misfortune of the death of Emenike, this situation would not have arisen. The word also looks forward to the painful experiences and tragic end of Ekwueme, to which most of the novel will be devoted from this stage. The reader soon realizes that Ekwueme's mental preference for 'the easy job' is a part of his mother-dominated psychology which makes Ihuoma an irresistible choice for a wife, and finally brings him to his ruin. There are hints about the character of Nnadi who gives Ihuoma much-needed moral support and is usually disposed to emphasize the good points in other people's character, as we see him do here. In a number of ways then, the passage refers by implication to matters that are central to the novel's preoccupations.

The same purpose is served by the realistic domestic situation which develops between Ahurole and her junior brother, Odum:-

'You should be ashamed to struggle with Ikezam over the dregs of ordinary pepper-soup,' Ahurole said with heat,

'Mark her language, mother! If she goes on I shall be compelled to deal with her.'

'She has not abused you yet, my son.'

'Are you waiting for her to abuse me outright before telling her to check her tongue?'

'Mother, why bother?' Ahurole said, 'we all know he always fights for food'.

'Look here, Ahule, don't take undue advantage of your seniority. I have had enough.'

'Will you slap me?'

'I won't but I sincerely hope your husband will give you a severe beating first thing when you get to his house.'

'Mother, do you hear him wishing me ill luck?'

'Odum, don't say that,' Wonuma intervened.<sup>73</sup>

Odum's greed, his vacillation between asserting his masculinity and showing respect for his senior sister, as demanded by custom, the silence of Ikezam, the most junior of the principal actors in the drama, Wonuma's unhappy intervention - all these resulting from a 'struggle... over the dregs of ordinary pepper-soup' - have a straight function as effective rural realism. However, what takes us right into the central preoccupation of the novel is the reference by Odum to Ahurole's future husband. The phrase 'ill luck', uttered by Ahurole herself, appears to cast a gloomy shadow over the rest of the story in which she is destined to play an ignoble role. Her connection with Ekwueme is not of her own choosing. Like the relationship between Nkiru and Patrick in Blade among the Boys, it results from a childhood engagement which, in this case, has to break down to provide Ekwueme an excuse for going back to Ihuoma. It is this feeling of tragic inevitability that is conveyed by the phrase 'ill luck' and, more forcefully, by Ahurole's childishness as shown in this passage. Why is Ahurole so peevish and immature while Ekwueme prefers for a wife 'a mature woman, soothing and loving. A woman who would act for him in an emergency if he were away. A woman ... a woman ... well, something like his mother'?<sup>74</sup> This is exactly what Ahurole is not. Because of Ekwueme's desire for a mother figure Ahurole is certain to be a disappointment. It is therefore difficult for the reader not to have the feeling that Ahurole has been used only as a means of drawing Ekwueme close to Ihuoma and, according to the novel, to his death. This is the full significance of 'ill luck'. For it is clearly of the author's deliberate making that, of all the women in the village, only Ihuoma

satisfies Ekwueme's requirements for a wife. The passage therefore points to the central concern of the novel - the disaster which results from the fatal connection between Ekwueme and his 'concubine'.

Despite the carefree atmosphere of village life there is a deep-seated urge for social change, and the way in which Amadi makes us aware of it opens up another aspect of communication in his work. The individual often seems helplessly to be trying to break through the apparently smooth surface of accepted corporate life. The background against which this change occurs is fully described:-

Omokachi village life was noted for its tradition, propriety, and decorum. Excessive or fanatical feelings over anything were frowned upon and even described as crazy. Anyone who could not control his feelings was regarded as being unduly influenced by his agwu. Anyika often confirmed this, as in Ahurole's case.

Even love and sex were put in their proper place. If a woman could not marry one man she could always marry another. A woman deliberately scheming to land a man was unheard of. True, she might encourage him, but this encouragement was a subtle reflex action, a legacy of her prehistoric ancestors. A mature man's love was sincere, deep and stable and therefore easy to reciprocate, difficult to turn down. That was why it was possible for a girl to marry a man without formal courtship. Love was love and never failed.<sup>75</sup>

The emphasis of the passage is on the inclusive togetherness of the people of Omokachi. Amadi presents in a mocking tone the basic assumptions which underlie the traditional beliefs of the villagers. Tradition, the novelist ironically implies, has made everything easy. It has prescribed a code of conduct for everybody, which allows for no personal judgements or any display of emotion - 'Excessive or fanatical feelings over anything were frowned upon and even described as crazy.' Every citizen is expected to put public policy above his private

sentiments or emotion merely because this is the tradition that has passed unchanged from one generation to another. The categorical manner in which some of these statements are put shows that they are not meant to be taken seriously - 'A mature man's love was sincere, deep and stable and therefore easy to reciprocate ... Love was love and never failed.' The reader realizes, however, that 'tradition, propriety and decorum' cannot always contain powerful emotions, such as love and sex, that these emotions cannot always be 'put in their proper place'. The concept of marriage as a purely social arrangement shows little consideration for personal needs and lacks real emotional fulfilment for the individual.

This situation creates a problem for Ekwueme whose personal wishes in the choice of a wife are brushed aside by his parents. He is attracted to Ihuoma and cannot reconcile himself to the arrangements made on his behalf for Ahurole. But his dilemma is not recognized by the society - 'No one had ever turned down a childhood engagement'<sup>76</sup> - and the requirements of tradition are fulfilled:-

Six months after the start of negotiations, Ahurole was being escorted finally to her husband's house. It was a pace-making marriage. The normal period of negotiations was a year, but Wigwe had rushed things. Each time Wagbara pointed out that a hen cannot lay eggs and hatch them on the same day, Wigwe had countered by saying that the slow-footed always fail in battle. And so Ahurole was home in six months.<sup>77</sup>

The use of Ibo proverbs in the narrative is symbolic of the half-way stage reached in the process of change. Although tradition is being upheld here, the marriage negotiations with Ahurole's parents are rushed - 'It was a pace-making marriage.' This, in itself, indicates that many aspects of tradition are no longer considered inviolate, and is



symptomatic of future changes. Moreover, the present arrangement fails to take into account the fact that Ekwueme and Ahurole are incompatible. The girl has an 'agwu' which cannot be overcome. So the uneasy relationship breaks up as quickly as it was formed.

This leaves Ekwueme apparently free to exercise the right of personal choice. He has cultivated his own ideas of the qualities which he most desires in a woman, qualities which are different from those prescribed by his parents, society or tradition. Ihuoma, in his judgement, embodies these qualities and she must be won at all costs. The ideal of a personally rather than a traditionally based love at last triumphs, and has beneficent effects on the two lovers:-

She carried herself proudly and gracefully and a new radiant form of beauty suffused her face. With Ekwueme near her she experienced an inner peace and security that had eluded her for a long time. She encouraged him to stroll with her on occasions through the village and did much to dispel his feelings of shame and humiliation over past events. He was amazed at her boldness. Here was an Ihuoma he had never known, a new Ihuoma - confident without being brazen, self-respecting yet approachable, sweet but sensible. His respect for her grew daily until he came near to worshipping her.<sup>78</sup>

The triumph of personal values amounts almost to a rebirth for each of the two lovers and increases their mutual respect. Ekwueme asserts his individualism by his rejection of Ahurole and his association with Ihuoma, thus suggesting that in the society the values and expectations of the individual should be far more important than the slavish adherence to established tradition. This makes him potentially an important instrument of change.

Amadi ensures that every detailed description of village life is relevant to the main theme of the novel.

He does not sentimentalize the society he presents or gloss over individual and communal defects of the villagers. In the village are good people like Ihuoma and Nnadi, clowns like Wakiri, bullies like Madume and Mmam. Ahurole, drawn in moral contrast to Ihuoma, recalls to mind the relationship between Agom and Nwadi in Highlife for Lizards. The cruelties which result from adherence to tradition are described. When, for example, Madume commits suicide, his body, like that of Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart, is thrown into the bad bush reserved for those whose bodies are 'rejected by the earth'. Even dibias are not put altogether above suspicion. Ekwueme's parents on one occasion feel obliged to confirm the truth of Anyika's divination from another dibia, Agwoturumbe. It is from such a balanced picture of village life that the reader is able to infer the attitude of the novelist to the villagers he portrays. He regards them as rational human beings, capable of love and hate, friendliness and conceit - in short, like all human beings, a mixture of good and bad. The projection of such a balanced picture is the kind of achievement which often eludes Nzekwu.

However, Amadi's greatest achievement in The Concubine lies in the fact that he uses the novel to criticize life at a symbolic level. His realistic description of life at Omokachi village serves only as a basis for making a statement of more than local significance. The novel is concerned with the circumstances of a marriage which ends in disaster for reasons which are deeply human and universally valid. After the death of Emenike and the pretender Madume, the way seems clear for a close relationship to develop between Ekwueme and Ihuoma. But there are many obstacles in the way - Ekwueme's

mother-fixation, Ahurole and, as has been pointed out, fate. These obstacles prove insurmountable and bring Ekwueme to his death. The final disaster is made to appear as unavoidable as it is startling. The reader is persuaded in the end that tragedy is inevitable because of the formidable forces against which Ekwueme and Ihuoma have had to contend; that, given similar forces, no marriage could be expected to survive anywhere, any time. This is the message of The Concubine and it is the universality of this message that makes it a major novel.

V

It is mostly to the irrational aspect of human nature that Amadi turns his attention in The Great Ponds. But this irrationality is made plausible. For, once the fishing grounds are mistakenly regarded as a great heritage, it is only to be expected that both Chiolu and Aliakoro would wish to fight hard to own them. To the reader, however, it soon becomes clear that this provides only an excuse for the fighting; the real reasons are the economic and social advantages which ownership of the Great Ponds confers. They are 'very rich in fish. Once a year these ponds were flooded and after the flood villagers reaped great harvests'.<sup>79</sup> It is to the conflict over these ponds that the novelist devotes his narrative skill and psychological insight, and it is with this conflict that he keeps the two rival villages alive with activities. Here, as in The Concubine, what gives a sense of completeness is the way each event treated in detail is linked with the central concern of the novel:-

Eze Wosu of Omokachi was perhaps the most richly dressed. The colours of his wrapper dazzled the eyes. One woman said: 'Eze Wosu's wrapper should provide enough bride price for four wives.' Massive rings of gold graced the Eze's ten fingers. His heavy flowing shirt with an inner lining of purple was made of that costly stuff known as Opukapa. It was a very rare material found only in the treasure chests of those who had traded with the white men from across the roaring Abaji now known as the Atlantic. Eze Wosu's walking-stick was a real wonder. The gold head was so intricately worked that it defied description. The little boy who said that the head resembled a vast collection of wrestling earth-worms perhaps got farthest in describing it.<sup>80</sup>

Eze Wosu is attending an important meeting, dressed in a manner befitting the occasion. The novelist's vivid description imparts to the reader a good deal of this importance. There is much local colour but it is of the kind which functions on a higher level than that of mere background. When the woman says 'Eze Wosu's wrapper should provide enough bride price for four wives', this merely leads the reader to appreciate the cost. But when we are told that the Eze's shirt is made of 'a very rare material found only in the treasure chests of those who had traded with the white men from across the roaring Abaji now known as the Atlantic', the consideration is no longer only cost. The emphasis has moved from the price in gold to its historical value. Presumably this 'rare material' is no longer available at any price. So the reader's mind is directed from the price of the material to the historical nature of the occasion. The reference to 'the roaring Abaji' helps to reinforce the distance in time. It is one of the few references to places outside the clan in the novel and the first hint we have that the events of the novel have significance beyond Chiolu and Aliakoro. It is not until the very last sentence of the novel that this initial

impression is confirmed. The word 'roaring' recalls in a simple way the noise of the Atlantic at its most turbulent. But so also has it significance for the turbulent events which lead to the peace meeting the Eze is attending and the continual exercise of passion in the novel.

The evocation of Chiolu and Aliakoro in The Great Ponds is just as convincing as that of Omokachi in The Concubine. Even in the serious circumstances on which the book is built, all is not work, fight, real and imaginary fear. The villagers still have time for unwarlike activities and the ordinary business of living:-

'Your demonstration was very good', she said.  
 'Of course it was,' he replied smiling.  
 'Nonsense, it was one of the worst,' she said.  
 'Do you know why the lips are horizontal?'  
 'No,' she said.  
 'Because people talk to the right and then to the left, particularly women.'  
 'That is the most silly proverb I ever heard.'  
 'Shut up.'  
 'Yes, dede.'  
 'Aha, you have learnt to call me dede at last.'  
 'Can't you distinguish flattery from sincerity?'  
 'I don't care which so long as you call me dede'.<sup>81</sup>

The young lovers, Chisa and Ikechi, enjoy jokes and tease each other. They are in no mood for any serious argument. Their mood is reflected by the novelist in the use of a light-hearted proverb, the trivial subject matter and the relaxed atmosphere in which the conversation takes place. The tone of speech is familiar, and sentences are kept short, simple and direct to show the degree of intimacy between the two. Amadi is capable of adjusting his speed and level of narration, description and dialogue to suit a given occasion. The atmosphere of the passage is one deliberately created to suit the need of these lovers who seem completely oblivious of the difficulties and dangers of the world of strife in which they live. But, although these two are engaged in a light-hearted conversation here, they

are not for that reason unimportant characters. They play in their different ways vital roles later in the novel. Chisa is snatched away to Isiali and sold into slavery, and the need to look for her gives Ikechi further opportunity for the display of his youthful idealism which in this instance, as with the fighting at the Great Ponds, fails to achieve the desired purpose.

An important feature of the novel is the way Amadi dramatizes the diminutiveness of man when compared with external nature. This relationship comes out in his concentration on the activities around the Great Ponds. While these activities go on, the ponds, in their primeval antiquity, remain as they are, unmoved and immovable. This treatment highlights the difference between the nervous energy with which the claims and counter-claims over the ponds are made and the permanence and lofty grandeur of these ponds, which put them above the mistakes and irrationality of man. Interpreted in this way, The Great Ponds is a successful attempt to contrast the narrow-mindedness and greed of man, which reveal themselves in this case in the form of an acrimonious struggle for fishing grounds, with the generosity of Nature for providing these grounds, without condition, for the use of all.

Partly for this reason and partly because of the way details are presented, the reader comes to share the novelist's view that the war is unnecessary; it has gone on for so long only because of the people's folly in putting community pride above reason. Individual feelings are suppressed and any advice, however sound, which does not accord with popular sentiments is rejected. In this type

of situation only a few people are willing to cry out the way Okehi's senior wife does. 'What good will that pond do us? Who has ever grown rich from the proceeds of the cursed Pond of Wagaba?'<sup>82</sup> If Chiolu and Aliakoro are sure of their claims, one might ask, why do they attempt, through the dibias, to interfere with the judgement of the gods? It is Wago's attempt to kill Olumba and thus prejudge the result of the latter's oath to the dreaded Ogbunabali that brings wonjo to the two villages and paralyses social life:-

No children played, no songsters sang, no irate husbands beat their wives. Villagers had the feeling of living in a vast communal grave where the processes of dying and being buried were compounded into just one quick simple motion of lying down.<sup>83</sup>

Life is now hardly worth living. The villagers are paying for their greed and unreasonableness. Since not even the Ezes and dibias are immune from the disease, the society is shaken to its very foundation and has little stamina left to continue the fight. It is only after experiencing the wrath of the gods on such a massive scale that the villagers set aside community pride and seek reason.

It is this situation that brings about the great dimension of social and cultural change which one finds in The Great Ponds. Faced with a choice between survival, achieved through compromise and accommodation, and complete annihilation, Chiolu and Aliakoro show a desire for peaceful co-existence. The meeting of the Ezes of Erikwe clan, to which reference has been made, in itself represents a change of attitude. The narrow outlook and inclusive togetherness of each village are being gradually overcome; a line of communication is thrown open for the first time among the villages for, as we are told,

this historic meeting is 'an important move which brought eight villages together for the first time. Before this, these villages had only met in twos and threes during wrestling contests.'<sup>84</sup> There now exists, as it were, a supra-village organization which individuals in the various villages and each of the villages in the clan can turn to as a court of appeal. It is only such an organization that can successfully put in check the jingoism hitherto displayed by Chiolu and Aliakoro.

'... the Ezes of the Ereki clan are learning to come together, and may in future settle all inter-village disputes before they flare up into real fighting.'

'I wonder what would happen then?'

'There would be peace.'

'Yes,' Olumba said, 'and boys would grow old without ever tasting a fight'.

'That is true', Diali said smiling.<sup>85</sup>

This conversation between Diali and Olumba reveals the extent of the change that is taking place. These villages cannot be the same again, their energies would have to be diverted to peaceful ends and more gainful pursuits than the frequent encounters at the Pond of Wagaba sought for their young men.

It is mainly through the detailed presentation of disappointed hopes that Amadi builds up the overall impression of the futility of war. Chiolu and Aliakoro devote all their resources to fighting a war over the Great Ponds and, in the process, bring untold hardship to their people - 'Men, beasts and crops suffered. It was a long war, a bitter war, a war of attrition.'<sup>86</sup> To the villagers these events must have been of world significance since their mental horizon is limited only to the village. The reader, however, is inclined to attach only local significance to them initially before the message of the novel begins to dawn on him. The



dreadful disease of wonjo has afflicted a number of villages, causing widespread distress, and the villagers sincerely hope the end of their suffering is in sight when we are told: 'But it was the beginning. Wonjo, as the villagers called the Great Influenza of 1918, was to claim a grand total of some twenty million lives all over the world.'<sup>87</sup> By the allusion and the date quoted a tacit comparison between the events of The Great Ponds and those of the Great War is implied, and the greater significance of the work becomes unmistakable. The war of the Great Ponds then emerges as part of a world-wide pattern. Limited as they are in their comprehension and knowledge, the villagers of Chiolu and Aliakoro in an obscure part of Africa engage in the same type of senseless conflicts which have been responsible for two world wars. They impress one as victims of their own limitations, unable to grasp the tragedy of the situation in which they are involved. The success of the novel is owed mainly to this use of the details of village life to make a symbolic statement of such tragic significance. Skilfully organized, convincing in every detail of character and incident, its central concern appropriately and feelingly expressed in the novelist's individual style, The Great Ponds, in the context of the Nigerian Novel, is a major work of art.

## VI

Nzekwu and Amadi provide an example of two writers who share the same cultural background, in this case Ibo, but exploit this background artistically differently. Nzekwu's works exhibit failures of communication, but, as his use of proverbs shows, he sometimes successfully utilizes the resources of Ibo language and culture to produce material of some distinction.

He is an interesting example of a writer who shows little promise in his first two novels but becomes more successful later. Much the same conclusion has been reached by Killam:-

Nzekwu ... is a writer of more limited scope than his peers ... Too often the narrative is marred by solid interpolations of anthropological and sociological data. It is for the most part a prose of explication rather than implication. In the third novel, Highlife for Lizards, he dramatises materials which he merely expounds in the earlier two novels and the result is more compelling and convincing than with the earlier books.<sup>88</sup>

Nzekwu succeeds when he is describing the Ibo village life and culture which he knows so well. It is only when he attempts to present this culture in conflict with some external force that he fails, mainly because of the lack of balance between local and external influences on the hero. Amadi's success, as has been shown, is the result of the way the situations in his novels are skilfully developed, his exciting description of village life, his judicious selection of details, his control of the written word and the universality of the experiences his novels provide.

The fact that Amadi is far more successful than Nzekwu in the use of language confirms the point I made in the last chapter about the influence of L1 on the language of Nigerian novelists. It is wrong to suppose that, because these two writers have the same L1, their use of L2 would necessarily be identical or, because the two write against the background of Ibo culture, they would make the same artistic use of this background. The weakness of Bernth Lindfor's argument in his article, to which reference has been made, is its conclusion that because Achebe, Amadi, Nzekwu, Flora Nwapa, Nwankwo, Ike and Munonye, to mention only a few, are all Ibo novelists, they

all employ the same kind of English, variously called 'Igboized English' or 'Igbo prose style'. It is erroneous to assert that Ibo novelists attain the same degree of success in their use of English prose or produce the same kind of effect by the employment of Ibo proverbs, idioms, words and images. As the work in this chapter shows, this is an area in which individual imaginative grasp and artistic intelligence are far more important than a writer's ethnic origin. For

Much more fundamental than the mere reproduction of syntax is the conveying in its totality of an experience in a way that reflects its environment without precluding it from general applicability. In looking at the African author's work we may be able to recognise its Africanness; we must be able to see its universality. Fortunately the two things often go together. A work which succeeds in realising its environment to the full often achieves this universality. The happy paradox is that, to be truly universal, one must be truly local.<sup>89</sup>

It is because, like Achebe, Amadi realizes the Nigerian environment to the full and, in the process, achieves universality that the link between tradition and modern life in his works is more successful than we find in the novels of Nzekwu.

## Notes

- 1 Page references are to the following editions of Nzekwu's novels:

Wand of Noble Wood, African Writers Series (London, 1971)  
Blade among the Boys, Arrow Books Edition (London, 1964)  
Highlife for Lizards (London, 1965)

and to the following African Writers Series editions of Amadi's novels:

The Concubine (London, 1966)  
The Great Ponds (London, 1970)

- 2 Bernth Lindfors, in particular, has shown considerable interest in the idea of a 'School'. See, for example, his articles 'Characteristics of Yoruba and Igbo Prose Styles in English' (Unpublished Manuscript), p.10 and 'Chinua Achebe and the Nigerian Novel', Research in African Literatures Vol.1, No.1 (1970), 77.
- 3 Wand of Noble Wood, p.67.
- 4 Review in West Africa, No.2312, 23 September, 1961, p.1055.
- 5 See Povey, 'The Novels of Onuora Nzekwu', Literature East and West, XII, 1 (1969), 68-84.
- 6 The Great Ponds, p.17.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Highlife for Lizards, p.119.
- 9 The Concubine, p.264.
- 10 Ibid., p.8.
- 11 Wand of Noble Wood, pp.8-9.
- 12 Oladele Taiwo, An Introduction to West African Literature (London, 1967), p.62.
- 13 Wand of Noble Wood, p.118.
- 14 Ibid., p.119.
- 15 The Concubine, pp.117-8.
- 16 Wand of Noble Wood, p.76.
- 17 Ibid., p.54.
- 18 Several critics have adopted this line of argument. See, for example, Judith Gleason, This Africa (Evanston, 1965) p.172; Anne Tibble, Africa/English Literature (London, 1965), p.112; Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons (London, 1968), p.192.

- 19 Povey, op. cit., p.76.
- 20 Blade among the Boys, p.29.
- 21 Ibid., p.127.
- 22 Wand of Noble Wood, pp.51-2.
- 23 Ibid., pp.55-56.
- 24 Blade among the Boys, p.163.
- 25 Ibid., pp.164-5.
- 26 Robert W. July, 'The African Personality in the African Novel', Introduction to African Literature, ed. Ulli Beier (London, 1967), p.224.
- 27 Wand of Noble Wood, p.7.
- 28 Blade among the Boys, p.10.
- 29 Highlife for Lizards, p.123.
- 30 Ibid., p.140.
- 31 Ibid., p.129.
- 32 Ibid., pp.123-4.
- 33 Ibid., p.39.
- 34 G.D. Killam, 'The Novels of Onuora Nzekwu', Africa Literature Today, No.5 (1971), p.35.
- 35 Highlife for Lizards, p.36.
- 36 Ibid., p.158.
- 37 Ibid., p.54.
- 38 Ibid., p.65.
- 39 Ibid., p.74.
- 40 Ibid., p.35.
- 41 Ibid., p.61.
- 42 Ibid., p.106.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid., p.109.
- 45 Ibid., p.128.
- 46 Ibid., p.54.
- 47 Ibid., p.18.

- 48 Ibid., p.30.
- 49 Ibid., p.111.
- 50 Ibid., p.183.
- 51 Ibid., p.184.
- 52 Ibid., p.167.
- 53 Ibid., p.78.
- 54 Ibid., p.34.
- 55 Ibid., p.57.
- 56 Ibid., p.73.
- 57 Ibid., p.79.
- 58 Ibid., p.123.
- 59 Ibid., p.159.
- 60 The Great Ponds, p.91.
- 61 Ibid., p.15.
- 62 Ibid., p.25.
- 63 Ibid., p.98.
- 64 The Concubine, p.199.
- 65 Palmer, An Introduction to the African Novel (London, 1972), p.120.
- 66 The Concubine, p.108.
- 67 Ibid., p.53.
- 68 Ibid., p.14.
- 69 The Great Ponds, p.22.
- 70 Ibid., p.19.
- 71 The Concubine, p.258.
- 72 Ibid., p.56.
- 73 Ibid., p.127.
- 74 Ibid., pp.179-80.
- 75 Ibid., pp.165-6.
- 76 Ibid., p.152.
- 77 Ibid., p.168.

- 78 Ibid., p.249.
- 79 The Great Ponds, p.5.
- 80 Ibid., p.90.
- 81 Ibid., pp.45-6.
- 82 Ibid., p.77.
- 83 Ibid., p.193.
- 84 Ibid., p.85.
- 85 Ibid., p.101.
- 86 Ibid., p.84.
- 87 Ibid., p.217.
- 88 Killam, op. cit., pp.22-23.
- 89 Eldred Jones, 'The decolonisation of African Literature',  
The Writer in Modern Africa ed. Per Wastberg (Uppsala, 1968),  
p.73.

## Chapter Six

### The Link between Tradition and Modern Experience: Five Nigerian Novels

In the previous chapters the transliteration of customs and traditions into modern terms in the works of some of the more important Nigerian novelists was examined. The discussion of five novels in this chapter - Shaihu Umar, Wind versus Polygamy, Many Thing You No Understand, Danda and The Voice - affords an opportunity to give further consideration to the salient features of this attempt and to assess how successfully in each case the link between tradition and modern experience has been established. The attitude of each writer to Nigerian indigenous culture will be closely examined and the problems of communication which arise in these novels will also be dealt with in detail.<sup>1</sup>

As will become obvious, in each of these novels the past and present are usually treated in a way which implies criticism. Wind versus Polygamy, for example, is an apparent defence of polygamy. But this defence is carried out so energetically, and in such circumstances, that the reader soon discovers that the author's aim is, in fact, to ridicule the idea. But the alternative system, monogamy, is also satirized. In Nwankwo's novel Danda represents the dilemma of many an Aniocha man. He is enticed by the dancing and feasting of pagan life; yet he is attracted by the claims to



modernity which many believe can only be fully satisfied if one embraces Christianity. The two positions are made mutually exclusive, and this results in tension for the individual and the society. This tension is described in a way which exposes the inadequacy of both paganism and Christianity. In whichever novel we turn to, we find the past and present satirized. A feeling of disappointment is everywhere in evidence. But while authors like Egbuna and Adaora Ulasi are content merely to present this feeling, Nwankwo provides the reader with a more exciting experience in the way he skilfully describes the tensions underlying the apparently smooth surface of accepted corporate life and the attempt of the individual to break through. The greater sophistication of The Voice is indicated in the manner Okara presents his total rejection of society and projects his vision of the future, all in a symbolic language which adopts the same transliterative device which he has used successfully in his poems.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Of the novels discussed here Shaihu Umar stands closest to first sources, to the roots of oral tradition. In a way, the story is like any of Tutuola's, especially Bush of Ghosts, deprived of its dream visions, monsters and ghosts. As with the boy-wanderer in Bush of Ghosts, the suffering of Shaihu Umar is real. Each returns to his country at the end of his journey and experiences a wiser man. Furthermore, Umar's mother's adventures, when she sets out to look for her

kidnapped child, take the quest pattern which was described in the Tutuola chapter. In her case, as with all Tutuola's heroes and heroines, many obstacles are interposed between her and the object of her quest in order to make the task difficult to accomplish. Her ill-treatment at the hands of Ago and the Tripoli slave dealer, Ahmad, is one of such obstacles. As is the case with Tutuola, what Balewa has done is to refurbish an old tale by employing well-known motifs and narrative techniques, thus giving a new depth and a different dimension to what might have been an ordinary story.

But there are also differences, which are far more significant than the similarities. While Tutuola is immersed in the cultural consciousness of Yoruba traditions, as embodied in cosmology, moral values and attitudes, Balewa derives his inspiration from history and Islam. Again, while in the Tutuola novel, the withdrawal or transposition of incidents, especially those in the middle, is usually of little structural consequence, the organization of Shaihu Umar is such that the withdrawal of any incidents would undermine the quality of the experience provided by the novelist. Shaihu Umar utilizes history to present an imaginative reconstruction of events. It is a story of intense, and at times alarming, individual experience which relies for its success on the devices of traditional verbal art, especially the simple speech rhythms of the story-teller. The story-telling session takes place with Umar sitting in the midst of his students, in the evening, anxious to instruct them. A high degree of motivation is provided by the question of an eager student. The conditions are therefore established for an important social experience, and all the essentials of a successful story-telling event

are present.<sup>3</sup> Because of their common interest rapport is achieved between Umar and his audience, and this generates continuous perceptual responses which are interpreted by both sides as feedback. As the story progresses, we find that the listeners continually try to decode what the storyteller has encoded. The tension building up within the message as a result of this story-teller-listener interaction reaches its peak in the adoration of Umar - 'Certainly this is no mere man, he is a saint.'<sup>4</sup>

This conception of Shaihu Umar as a story-telling event accounts for the predominance of habits of speech in Balewa's prose style:-

Amina, I want to say goodbye to you now, for it is my intention to set out before the call to dawn prayer. Now please be patient, you know what the boy is like; whatever he wants to do, if he's not allowed to do it, he'll cry, but if he is allowed to do everything that he wants to do, he'll suffer for it in the future. The best thing is for you always to keep a firm hand on him, and don't bother yourself with thinking, "This boy is not mine"; by God, you and I, we are one, since God has joined us together, and we have been living on terms of friendship.<sup>5</sup>

This is the style of one speaking direct to another. The human voice is lifted, as it were, from the page of the book to our hearing. As we read the passage we are struck by the rural simplicity and candour of the speaker. The anxiety she shows on having to leave her son with her friend is natural. In fact, this concern turns out to be justified. 'If he is allowed to do everything that he wants to do, he'll suffer for it in the future' may sound commonplace advice, but taken in the context of the novel as a whole, it looks forward to much that is important in the life of the hero. The word 'suffer', uttered here by his mother, later acquires a significance far beyond anything mother or child can conceive

of at the time of the speech. Umar, as Amina's ward, is allowed to please himself, is kidnapped and sold to a slave dealer. The story is largely devoted to Umar's sufferings during the journey from Kano to Tripoli with a slave caravan and how these experiences help to mould his character.

Directness of appeal is achieved through the very many speeches, reproduced in the direct form, and the openness of the villagers in their dealings one with another. This is how Makau takes leave of members of his family before he goes on a slave raid:-

Now you know that I am going on a raid to Gwari country, and I do not know when I shall return. Whether I shall be killed there, God knows best. For this reason I want to bid you all farewell, and I want you to forgive me for all that I have done to you, for any man in this world, if you live with him, some day you are bound to cause him unhappiness.<sup>6</sup>

The same method of direct communication is applied to dialogues:-

Then Isa enquired, 'Where is the girl, the native of Fatika, or has she already left?'

The wives said, 'No, no, there she is. She's been waiting all this time for a message from him.'

Isa said to her, 'Makau says you should go, but that you should hurry back and join him there. And when you set out, take your son with you.'

She replied, 'Very well. May God spare us, and grant us the good fortune to meet again'.<sup>7</sup>

The introductory sentences 'Then Isa enquired', 'The wives said', 'Isa said to her', 'She replied' may appear to us unnecessary, especially as they tend to slow down our pace of reading. But they have been reproduced in fidelity to the Hausa original which would have differentiated, in gender and number, between Isa, the wives, she and her - a unique characteristic of Hausa as an African language.<sup>8</sup>

Another attractive feature of Balewa's writing is his economy of style:-

Barely had we turned our glance towards the east when we saw something out there, jet black, like a storm cloud, rising up from the ground towards the sky, and making in our direction. For my part, I did not know what it was, but as for the others of our company, I saw each one begin to gather his loads together with cries of despair. I just stood still, staring, not knowing what was happening. Then barely had I lifted my head when I saw this thing in front of me, like a storm cloud. But it was no storm. It was the wind which had increased and turned into this. And in the wind there was nothing but sand.<sup>9</sup>

This is part of the account of the sand-storm in the Sahara. The impact of this storm, as one might expect, is tremendous. But what makes it particularly dramatic is the fact that it comes during the noon break when the travellers are scattered all over the desert. For some time there is terror and confusion among them, and this is vividly recorded by the expression, itself a direct transliteration from Ll: 'I saw each one begin to gather his loads together with cries of despair.' Immediately after, there is silence and stillness and then we are told: 'But it was no storm...' As soon as the storm subsides, the sameness of the desert is restored as if nothing has happened. In fact, a whole caravan has been wiped out. By this method the author gives an arresting impression of some of the hazards of the trans-Sahara trade route.

A direct and economical style is only one of the achievements of Shaihu Umar. Its real value lies in the light it throws on Hausa life and culture at the end of the last century, especially on the impact of the slave trade and Islam on the society. For example, Umar's mother's bitter

experiences as the domestic slave of Ahmad are used to illustrate the conditions of life at the time:-

He had her put in chains. All the hardest housework, she had to do it, and she was only given food at irregular intervals. For her part, because of her unhappiness and brooding on her misfortunes she became completely worn out, and she lost her good looks. When she finished work she would just sit down and weep.

When he saw this he said to himself, 'This slave is thoroughly disobedient, and beating is the only cure for it'. Time and again he beat her, but despite this she did not change her attitude. He went on punishing her in this way for about a year. But for her part, all this hardship that she suffered did not trouble her, for what always lay heavy on her mind was her failure to find her son.<sup>10</sup>

She gets into this pathetic situation when she goes in search of her son who himself has been snatched away in a raid. Her only opportunity of becoming free through the intervention of a *cadi* is lost. By making both mother and son victims of the traffic in human beings, the novelist emphasizes the insecurity to life which is an essential part of the slave trade. But this is done in a manner which must appear to most readers curiously detached - the slave raider shows no remorse, the slave no self-pity. All we are told is: 'for her part, all this hardship that she suffered did not trouble her.' It is typical of this author that nowhere in this novel does he display any moral indignation against a system as iniquitous as the slave trade. One might suspect that he has done this in order to show his approval of the teaching of Islam which permits slavery. Or is he merely anxious to demonstrate that the realistic acceptance of things as they are is an important feature of the Hausa character? Whatever the reason, the portrait we have of Umar's mother - her simple piety and

unlimited patience, her consideration for others and her preparedness to risk her life for the sake of her son - represents a Hausa ideal of womanhood. This picture is only partly redeemed by realistic descriptions which show her capable of ordinary human emotions and weaknesses - 'When she finished work she would just sit down and weep.' The author's attitude of tolerance is also reflected in the discipline he imposes on his prose. In this passage, for example, he avoids the use of highly emotive words in a situation that admits of some display of emotion. Nor is there any striving after literary effects. Even so, almost effortlessly, he succeeds in conveying to the reader the hardship suffered by Umar's mother and her resignation to her fate. The novel is a translation which is done in readable English; yet it preserves the spirit of the original Hausa. It is fidelity to the original that is responsible for a sentence like 'All the hardest housework, she had to do it...' It is also in an attempt to retain the flavour of the original story that the soliloquy at the beginning of the second paragraph of the passage is rendered in direct speech.

The same type of understanding sympathy is shown in other situations:-

Let us now skin the monkey for you, right down to its tail! In this whole town you will never find one who betrays your trust like this Makau. Why, it's Makau who shames you by revealing all your secrets to the common people, who you see, are giving themselves airs now. Why, there is never a secret that you tell him that some of them don't hear about. You know, from the time that we set out on this raid until we returned, this fellow never ceased to abuse you...<sup>11</sup>

Makau has incurred the hatred of his colleagues by being in great favour with the Chief. The result is this intrigue

by which his fellow-courtiers try to ruin him politically. According to the novel, such intrigues, although generally to be condemned, appear necessary for the survival of courtiers in their given situation. Any allegation, however groundless, can bring about a change of fortune to the victim, if it is believed by the Chief. Presentation is therefore of the utmost importance. That is why in the passage the expressive idiom of colloquial Hausa is everywhere in evidence. The symbolic language of the first sentence is not only meant to arrest the Chief's attention; it also serves as a warning of how detailed the account of Makau's alleged treachery is going to be. Expressions like 'Why, it's Makau who ...', 'Why, there is never ...', 'You know, from the time...' remind us of the oral basis of the narrative - the mode of speech adopted by the courtiers to convince the Chief of their sincerity has been carried over into writing. The phrase 'like this Makau', a non-standard English expression, also comes out of the Hausa original.

The novel regards Islam not only as a religion but also as a way of life. It is the source of the hero's inner strength from which springs his determination to live down the cruelty of the days of slavery and establish himself as a Muslim scholar. Balewa, himself a one-time Education Officer, writing with an intimate knowledge of the traditional system of Muslim education and the eagerness of the people for knowledge of the Koran, endows his hero with all the learning and piety of a Muslim divine:-

In this little town there was once a certain malam, learned in the stars, in the Koran, and in the scriptures, and an upholder of the Faith. This malam was one of the men of



this world to whom God has given the gift of knowledge. ... So great were his learning and wisdom that news of him reached countries far distant from where he lived. Men would come from other countries, travelling to him in order to seek knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Balewa presents Islam with great tenderness and admiration as the religion which has exercised a profound influence on the evolution of Hausa society. The effect of its teaching as regards predestination and submission to the will of God reveals itself in the way the characters in this novel submit to their environment without any conscious attempt to influence or change it.

### III

In Shaihu Umar Balewa is critical of certain aspects of life, like the intrigues at court and the evils of the slave trade. But his main interest appears to have been to use the story form to describe the moral and social conditions in which his characters live, with an implication of what is on the whole a mild criticism of society. In comparison with Shaihu Umar, Wind Versus Polygamy reveals different aims and methods. It is far more ambitious in scope but achieves much less because of the author's indulgence in overt documentary excessiveness to the detriment of a fully-realized relevant environment. Not only are the views of the various characters made explicit through a series of harangues, the characters themselves are portrayed in a way that lacks conviction:-

In our real African custom, marriage is only based on mature passionless analysis of two personalities. If they agree, they marry. If not, they don't. If a plant and a soil agree, the union produces good fruits. If not, it doesn't. African philosophy of

marriage is based on thorough understanding of the laws of nature. Because we live with nature, we cannot divorce ourselves from the law of nature. That was why I said that our ancestors were the world's number one in the art of marriage. It is the duty of the present generation to export this profound timeless philosophy to the peoples in faraway places who are beyond the reach of the wave-lengths of nature's inspiration.<sup>13</sup>

Chief Ozuomba, the leading advocate of polygamy, proclaims his views on the subject in a pompous and illogical manner. The first sentence of the passage cannot stand without a great deal of qualification, and the analogy between the plant and soil is, at best, a specious one. 'African philosophy of marriage is based on thorough understanding of the laws of nature' is a wild claim which cannot be justified on the grounds that Africans 'live with nature'. Living with nature does not make one's understanding of it necessarily 'thorough'. Ozuomba makes the unsupported claim of his ancestor's wide experience 'in the art of marriage'. Judged by the part he plays in the novel, the only inspiration he seems to have derived from the wisdom of his ancestors is to marry thirty-one wives. The novel deals in the main with the problems raised by his attempt to appropriate Elina, his thirty-second wife. This attempt constitutes an offence under the new Polygamy Act, which Ozuomba decides to fight. The novel therefore takes the form of a spirited defence of polygamy, led by Ozuomba. But this defence is based, as we find in this passage, on dubious claims and false analogies, and is made in stilted language, particularly noticeable in the last sentence of the passage. Polygamy is referred to as 'this profound timeless philosophy', which there is need 'to export' to peoples 'beyond the reach of the wave-lengths of nature's inspiration'. The talk of exporting a philosophy and the

use of words like 'profound' and 'wave-lengths' to discuss the domestic subject of polygamy show the extent to which Ozuomba is meant to be unrealistic.

False claims and sheer verbiage characterize Ozuomba's speeches throughout the novel:-

For marriage to be a success, the partners must be like the poles of a magnet. When the north and south poles are brought together, they are bound to attract; you can never make two north poles attract, no matter how beautiful to the eye the shapes are or how physically close to each other you place them. It takes a physicist, or at any rate a man who knows the individual properties of the poles, to make the polar combination. In our old African societies, parents were such physicists. And wisely too. After all, parents are the encyclopaedia of their products. A well-paired marriage can never fail.<sup>14</sup>

The reader cannot but be alienated by the dogmatic manner in which the opinion in the first sentence is expressed and by the empty philosophising which pervades the whole piece. This is brought to its absurd climax in the identification of parents with physicists and the reference to them as an 'encyclopaedia'. The word 'never' in the last sentence makes the whole statement unacceptable and shows how inflexibly Ozuomba's opinions are expressed.

Egbuna's method of satire is to get Ozuomba, 'the Black Solomon', to 'discuss with astonishing profundity'<sup>15</sup> many aspects of the subject of polygamy which are clearly beyond his comprehension. His opinion here on a highly controversial subject is a case in point:-

There is no such thing as the equality of the sexes. Either the man stays on top and plays the man. Or the woman stays on top and dictates to the man. The woman is more ruthless when she has the least opportunity of power. In the West, she has created the myth of gentlemanliness to achieve her purpose. A gentleman must, like a house-boy, surrender his seat to a lady. He

must not argue with a lady. He must, like a schoolboy before his head teacher, doff his hat to a lady. He must surrender his salary to his wife and queue with his own son every week for pocket-money. He bows when the lady genuflects. To qualify for a lover, he must drink wine from the shoe of a lady.<sup>16</sup>

The first sentence leads one to expect a reasoned argument against the equality of the sexes. This hope is immediately dashed. What follows is a series of exaggerations and a false picture of life, which confirm the extreme naivety of the speaker. The fact that this is advanced as part of a serious defence of polygamy, which has many convincing points in its favour, makes it all the more absurd. Considering the setting for this speech, the City High Court, it is highly unlikely that anybody present would believe, for example, that, to qualify for a lover, a man 'must drink wine from the shoe of a lady'. In his attempt to impress others with his extensive knowledge of life in the West, Ozuomba only succeeds in making himself an object of ridicule.

Ozuomba's insensitive use of language is further illustrated by a passage like this:-

Prostitution is the principal estuary of that sea of social maladjustments of which monogamy is the only source. In a monogamous community, you have three types of frustrated people. First, you have an overflow of women who are not married and who will not marry and yet have their biological assignments to fulfil. Secondly, you have wretched married men who want an outlet from their monogamous insularity. Thirdly, you have a regiment of terrified bachelors who prefer their freedom to the imprisonment of monogamy. Put all three together in one community and the result is a rich manure in which prostitution germinates in glorious profusion.<sup>17</sup>

This passage provides more examples of exaggerations and the type of confused thinking which we have now learnt to

associate with Ozuomba. His opinion is expressed in a needlessly grandiose language, which contradicts the traditional rural background of the speaker and the occasion. Expressions like 'an overflow of women', 'biological assignments', 'monogamous insularity', 'a regiment of terrified bachelors', 'the imprisonment of monogamy' give a false and stilted quality to the whole speech. Images abound, as we find in the first and last sentences of the passage. But they make little impression on the reader because their originality is undermined by the cliché-laden style of the speaker. His identification of prostitution with 'the principal estuary of that sea of social maladjustments' and the people in a monogamous society with 'a rich manure in which prostitution germinates in glorious profusion' is highly unimaginative and does little to convince us that the practice of polygamy can survive the social and economic pressures of contemporary society.

Not only is Ozuomba unconvincing in the way he defends polygamy, he is ignorant of his own personal failings. His hollowness and naivety are discernible in everything he says. A character so presented is unacceptable as the true embodiment of any laudable idea or custom. Ozuomba is a caricature; he is the means by which Egbuna satirizes polygamy as an obsolescent practice. The novelist's purpose becomes even more obvious when the views of Ozuomba are contrasted with those of Father Joseph:-

'Every one of those hills has been sun-baked into a monument of beauty. This is our Nelson's Column, our Statue of Liberty, our symbol of dignity. Legend has it that it stands for victory, the victory of peace over the chaos of change. It is a temple of serenity sculptured

for immortality by the greatest artist of all - Mother Nature herself ... At the very bottom of the valleys, you can see palms and coconut trees reside like men and women praying side by side in solemn silence. Ah - they are now swaying in the breeze like real people actually genuflecting before a shrine.'

'It is everything you say, Chief Ozuomba, but people cannot eat beauty, you know,' said the priest seriously. 'I should look at those hills as tombs. In their bowels lie the necessities of your people'.<sup>18</sup>

Ozuomba assumes once again an unrealistic posture and sentimentalizes trees, hills and valleys in a statement full of clichés and absurd comparisons. The area of conflict is widened to make 'the victory of peace over the chaos of change' a worthy objective. By making Ozuomba rhapsodize over the static elements of Nature in such a pretentious manner, and decry change, Egbuna may be suggesting that it is not only polygamy that is under attack but all traditional practices which are in the way of progress. Ozuomba's inflexible position - 'I will not exchange a single blade of grass out of it for a Rolls Royce industry, believe me'<sup>19</sup> - seems to confirm this impression. Contrasted with this is the cold realism of Father Joseph's statement in the last two sentences of the passage. This clearly is the voice of the author, with which the reader feels able to identify. It is no longer enough to dote on traditions; the urgent problems of food and shelter must be the villager's immediate concern - 'people cannot eat beauty.' Moreover, there is the pressing need not to complicate social problems by too rapid an increase in population, which is an unavoidable concomitant of the polygamous system.

In the conflict between the old and the new, between tradition and modernism, the old, as represented by Ozuomba

and other minor characters like Ofodile and Ojukwu, is presented as inadequate. But so also are the modern ideas which Ogidi, Jerome and Elina symbolize. Monogamy, no less than polygamy, is satirized:-

"By the way," Councillor Ogidi said as he sat down, "I have parked my - you know I have forgotten which car I came here in, my Cadillac or my new Citroen. It can't be one of my small cars because I've brought along a few cases of beer on the back seat for the occasion. However, whichever car it is, I have parked it just outside. I hope it'll be all right there, Mazi.

"All right, Councillor?"

"Yeah, I don't like the finger-prints of kids on my car. It's very embarrassing."

"Embarrassing, Councillor?"

"Yeah. People might get the idea I've got kids who don't wash their fingers after eating. Very embarrassing".<sup>20</sup>

Ogidi, in a 'very Americanized' manner, speaks condescendingly to his host, Mazi Ofodile, through whose help he intends to secure the consent of Elina for a monogamous marriage. As this passage shows, he is endowed with personal qualities which help to ensure Elina's dislike of him. As is the case with Ndulue in Danda, certain selected characteristics, like pride and material success, are exaggerated for comic effect. He is notable only for his mannerisms - 'Yeah', 'very embarrassing' - and the ridiculous habit of wiping his face with five-pound notes - 'I'm always making this mistake. Wiping my face with fivers!'<sup>21</sup> He makes a fool of himself by believing he can buy Elina with money or win her affection by an ostentatious display of wealth. He realizes his folly too late. Ogidi's contribution to the novel is the humour he provides by his antics. He is not the sort of character through whom any modern idea like monogamy or a better standard of living is likely to gain acceptance.

Ogidi deserves to fail in his bid for Elina who later falls in love with, and finally marries, Jerome. But the love affair between the two is so maladroitly handled that Jerome's achievement means little to the reader. The novelist devotes the whole of chapter four to a love scene between the two, but his treatment of this situation which calls for the use of imagination is highly unimaginative:-

"Thank God you are here at last, Elina."

"Oh Jeromy!" whispered Elina in return.

"Thank God too that you waited. Knowing your temper as I do, I was ever so afraid you might think I've let you down and go away in anger."

"Every minute I waited was like an eternity, believe me ....."

"I am sorry, Jeromy."

"But then, your being here has transformed every eternity into a fraction of a second."<sup>22</sup>

This is how the young lovers start their meeting in 'a lonely wood'. They employ the stale language of a tired romanticism and address each other in clichés - 'Every minute I waited was like eternity', 'Your being here has transformed every eternity into a fraction of a second.' These expressions are ultimately meaningless and succeed only in making this moonlight picnic totally unreal. And consider the following:-

You forced my father into nothing. Get that into your head, Elina. As far as he is concerned, you could be just any woman. My father sees you just as a number in the family register. To me, you are much more than a number. You are a figure.

"A figure?" said Elina in bewilderment. "But a figure is only a part of a number. A part can't be greater than a whole."

"In commercial arithmetic, yes. In arithmetic of hearts, it is the reverse."<sup>23</sup>

Here the conversation verges on the absolutely idiotic in the ridiculous attempt to establish a connection between 'commercial arithmetic' and 'arithmetic of hearts'. But the worst is yet to be. After a long spell, during which more inane words are



spoken, the dialogue continues:-

"Are you really having a wonderful time, Elina?"

"Yes, Jeromy. So wonderful it frightens me. I've never felt like this about any other man in my life. What do you think it is, Jeromy?"

"I can't be quite sure of my diagnosis till I've made one final test," Jerome replied, grinning with a mischievous expression he undoubtedly inherited or copied from his father.

"What kind of test is that?" Elina asked in all innocence.

"Oh, a simple test, really. The aim of the experiment is to measure the frequency of our heart-beats when our lips are pressed together. These palpitations are caused by a flow of a special type of inter-lipial current which incidentally can only pass between people diametrically poled. In unacademic circles, I believe they call it - kissing."

Elina blushed, turned and tried to change the subject.<sup>24</sup>

The passage lacks anything one can credibly associate with the speeches of young people genuinely in love with each other. Jerome's 'experiment' is described in a language devoid of sincerity and therefore incapable of exciting any sympathetic response from Elina. There is a blatant case of artistic failure here. Since the love affair between these two is meant to succeed, why, one might ask, is it presented in a way that bores rather than interests the reader? There is no full realization of the background against which monogamy is being considered or any dramatization of the social and cultural conditions in which the type of monogamous connection contemplated by Jerome and Elina might succeed or fail. How, in these circumstances, is the reader expected to bring himself to agree with Father Joseph that, with a beginning so unattractively presented, the future belongs to the young couple?

With the impartiality and the realism of an outsider, Father Joseph knew in his heart of hearts that, in the conflict between "Wind" and "Polygamy", the decisive factor was not

the whims of Chief Ozuomba and his generation but the action of Jerome and Elina, the younger generation who were, in the final analysis, the Africa of tomorrow, the vital specks in the "Wind" of history.<sup>25</sup>

It is Egbuna's artistic grasp, not Father Joseph's prognosis, that is at fault. If both the past and present are inadequate, surely a way must lie forward to the future if a social vacuum is to be avoided. This way is indicated in the type of relationship which has developed between Jerome and Elina. What has obscured this vision is the novelist's inadequate presentation of the relationship. This aspect of the work shows Egbuna as an author of very limited competence. Professor Dathorne must have had this weakness and the novelist's addiction to overt statements in mind when he wrote about the novel:-

This is the worst African novel I have ever read. It is the story of Elina and her problems of love and might have done well in the Onitsha series.<sup>26</sup>

The phrase, 'the Onitsha series', is, of course, used here in a pejorative sense. Even so, the comment does Egbuna only little injustice. An important consideration is his overall poor performance in this novel, especially the extent to which the love scene between Jerome and Elina is inefficiently handled.

Again, the use of stilted language in the narrative and descriptive sections of the work casts serious doubt on the novelist's creative intelligence. This is how the novel starts:-

A full moon and a blaze-red sun were just changing shifts over a quiet little village in the heart of New Africa. A tin-roofed cottage sat on top of a nameless hill as silently as the hibiscus flowers blossoming before it. The frontage of this peaceful house was where it all began. The twilight was golden. With the chirping of crickets for company and the domy blueness of the tropical sky before her eyes, Elina, an African girl of tantalizing beauty, sat like a tigress on a kitchen stool peeling yams in the moonlight.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from verbal infelicities - moon and sun 'changing shifts', a cottage and hibiscus flowers 'sat' on top of a hill - visualization is extremely poor, as is evident in the last sentence. Elina has for company 'the chirping of crickets; she 'sat like a tigress' - 'on a kitchen stool' - and only for the purpose of 'peeling yams in the moonlight'. If Egbuna had learnt the art of communicating local Nigerian concepts economically through a transliteration from Ll, as Achebe does when describing a situation like this, a more acceptable picture might have been drawn. But his prose style, unlike that of most other Nigerian writers, owes nothing to Ll. He appears on the whole more interested in dazzling the reader with exotic vocabulary than capturing the tone and relevant levels of speech of Ibo villagers. In a word, he is addicted to the worst kind of 'fine writing', which he obviously considers as constituting 'Style'.

The same defects result in the unimaginative description of Catechist Thomas and his room in 'Divinity', one of Egbuna's short stories:-

You could tell from his scraggy neck and overworked Adam's apple that he was a preacher. In spite of his fast-greying hair and other outward signs of age, he looked remarkably energetic, tough and resolute. Balanced on the bridge of his dilated black nose was an old pair of spectacles with one arm of the frame missing ... That the old man had long staked his hopes on the furniture of Heaven could be seen by the scanty furnishing of the room: a few wooden chairs arranged on the floor mat. Overhead was a bamboo ceiling and through open blindless windows one could almost see the sun's rays enacting photo-synthesis with the palm leaves.<sup>28</sup>

In Wind versus Polygamy, as in the short story, the first few lines set the standard for the language of the narrative and descriptive sections. This is the novelist's description of the situation which follows the arrest of Ozuomba:-

Done under circumstances which posed the chief as a martyr and a champion of patriotism, it meant the establishment had kicked up a stink they were to smell for a long time. Coupled with the fact that the chief in question was no other than great Ozuomba himself, it was like sounding a siren for war; the establishment had detonated a bomb of unrest and the report was country-wide. The news had rocketed into the headlines overnight and the papers were running to record editions. In no time at all, "Ozuombism" became a recognized philosophy of its own. Among the brains of the country, it became a subject of platform debates; among the brawls of the country, it was a slogan for fiscal debates. Two rival schools of thought sprang up like mushrooms.<sup>29</sup>

One could object on grounds of language to practically every line. The presence in such large numbers of stale expressions like 'the establishment had kicked up a stink...', 'sounding a siren for war', 'papers were running to record editions', 'had detonated a bomb of unrest', 'the news has rocketed into the headlines' 'two rival schools of thought sprang up like mushrooms' only serves to confirm the author's inability to use language sensitively. So does the infelicitous contrast between 'brains' and 'brawls', 'platform debates' and 'fiscal debates' in the last sentence but one. When clichés and bombasts occur in dialogues and speeches they may be regarded as intentional distortions introduced for humorous effect. But their use in the narrative detracts from the quality of the work and lays the novelist open to a charge of linguistic incompetence. From such a charge it would be difficult to absolve Egbuna.

## IV

Adaora Ulasi in Many Thing You No Understand, like Egbuna in Wind versus Polygamy, is concerned with the inadequacy of the old and the new. Her novel presents a confrontation between a colonial authority represented by Mason, the District Officer, and MacIntosh, the Assistant District Officer, and the traditional authority of Ukana represented by Obieze III and the village elders, Okafor and Chukwuka, on the obnoxious practice of burying several human heads with a dead Chief. Because of the demands of tradition a criminal offence is committed. Each of the expatriate officers tackles the problem in the way that seems to him best and each is worsted and humiliated in turn. On the face of it then, tradition triumphs. But at what price? Victory for tradition is achieved in particular cases either by a mean exploitation of group loyalty, which prevents offenders like Okafor and Chukwuka from being apprehended by the law, or by an unconvincing application of magic, similar to the use of 'iyi ocha' in Wand of Noble Wood. In order to prove to the expatriate officers that there are 'many thing you no understand here,... I no think say you go fit understand them for long, long time'<sup>30</sup> MacIntosh is made insane and Mason is ambushed and disgraced. By these events, as with the disappearance of the District Officer in Miss Ulasi's latest novel, the villagers intend to show their strength and unity of purpose.<sup>31</sup>

But with these activities come the systematic erosion of traditional authority:-

Chief Obieze, I no like for stay for fortress. And if A.D.O. stay here for Ukana he go catch me one day. I no know about Okafor. But for my own self I know say I no fit hide for fortress like animal him hunter look for, for the rest of my life! Fortress tire me. I no have woman for three day. I be married man with plenty wife and I live inside there like man who no get wife!<sup>32</sup>

Leaders of the community suffer as much as the expatriate officers. The experiences of Chukwuka and Okafor in the fortress are unpleasant, but they strike the reader as an inadequate punishment for the trouble they bring on the community as a whole by their actions. These leaders are in the end discredited and Chief Obieze's reputation is tarnished by the support he gives to criminals against innocent citizens. The picture of Ukana is that of a community where the people's inclusive togetherness and obscurantist attitudes result in injustice and block social progress. The situation here is similar to what we have in One Man, One Matchet. Where each side to an encounter comes in for a measure of satire, no side can claim absolute victory over the other. In the clash between tradition and modernism, as described in this novel, neither side appears sufficiently well-equipped to emerge unscathed.

Adaora Ulasi dramatizes far more effectively than Egbuna the breakdown in communication between the two sides:-

'Mr Mbaezue, you're on a charge of attempted murder. We all know that you were provoked, but there it is. Finding another man with your wife doesn't justify you attempting to kill him.'

'The A.D.O. said, killing people is very bad.'

'Do you plead guilty or not guilty?'

'He said, you sin or you not sin?'

The accused again addressed himself to the interpreter.

'Mr Mbaezue said, he not guilty.'

'You tried to take a man's life, Mbaezue. It's attempted murder. It's up to the court, though, to take into consideration the reason that motivated you, and perhaps be lenient. I find you guilty of attempted manslaughter. I sentence you to five

years' hard labour.'

'He said, you sin. You go for jail for five year.'

Mbaezue shook his head and mumbled: 'Appeal.'<sup>33</sup>

Apart from the power of 'juju' and the fierce loyalty to tradition and community, one other aspect of Ukana life which the expatriate officers get to know is its criminality. Each court case <sup>gives</sup> ~~provides~~ the novelist an opportunity to expose a member of the community to ridicule for some serious offence. Humour in this case results from the difference in quality between the opinion expressed by the Assistant District Officer and what the interpreter says. There is a vast difference, for example, between 'The A.D.O. said, killing people is very bad' and what the Officer actually says - the whole of the first paragraph of the passage. Since most of what the A.D.O. says, especially the reasoning on which he bases his final judgement, is lost in translation, the reader is not surprised that Mbaezue finds the verdict of the court unacceptable and decides to challenge it. In this, as in the other cases, the respective moral orientations of the judge and the accused are shown to be different, and this has an important bearing on the relationship between judge and accused. Mbaezue cannot bring himself to believe that killing a man found with his wife constitutes an offence. In this he is supported by tradition and the community. It is this delicate situation that the young inexperienced Officer, new from Scotland, with his fixed ideas of right and wrong, has to deal with. MacIntosh's attitude in this case of 'attempted murder' looks forward to his uncompromising stand against the leaders of the community when ritual murders are committed later. Why, one is entitled to ask, is MacIntosh, with his doctrinaire attitude, given primary responsibility in

these matters which might have been disposed of to the satisfaction of the villagers by the liberal and more experienced Mason? Throughout the novel Mason is drawn in contrast to MacIntosh both in his understanding of local customs and his anxiety to avoid direct confrontation with the villagers:-

I suggest that we shelve this matter, Mac. If the dead man's brother cares to come again and lodge a new complaint quite specifically - and doesn't change his story the next day when he's slept on it - then perhaps we'd be justified in having them in for questioning. But the way this matter stands now we just haven't a leg to stand on. Look, Mac, your man said one thing; then he changed his story; now with this letter he's gone back to his first one again. He's just not consistent, is he?<sup>34</sup>

This plea for caution and moderation by Mason is not heeded. MacIntosh pursues his perilous course and succeeds in alienating traditional authority from the Administration. It is clearly the author's deliberate doing that any chance of reconciling the views and positions of both sides is irredeemably lost.

Miss Ulasi is especially critical of colonial institutions. The Administration itself is shown to be in disarray with the D.O. and A.D.O. disagreeing openly on matters of fundamental principles. The District Commissioner conveniently disregards the opinion of his colleagues. The Mission hospital is an exclusive reserve of expatriates and the schools, from which the villagers might have derived some of the benefits of a colonial Administration, are presented as inefficient agencies of education:-

From these young voices, after the four days' holiday, came this recital:

'A cat.

'A fat cat.

'A fat cat sat.

'A fat cat sat on a mat.'

'Again,' said the young teacher.



'A cat ...'  
 'Well, school has certainly resumed in earnest,'  
 MacIntosh said, as the two stopped their car and  
 got out on their way to the office to watch the  
 children sitting under a tree in the school ground  
 take their first step into the English language.<sup>35</sup>

The children are said to be taking 'their first step into the English language' but the repetitive and chorus method adopted by the teacher would make learning difficult and school life an unpleasant experience. The author no doubt intends here a satire on the early methods of teaching English in Nigeria, which helped to make it the most difficult subject on the school curriculum. Not only are the Ibo villagers offended by the way MacIntosh carries out his duties, the services provided by his Administration are, according to the novel, of little intrinsic value to the village.

Ironies of situation abound in this work, and it is usually through them that the reader comes to realize how far apart the two sides have drifted:-

'I be D.O. for the whole of the Delta! If you touch me -'  
 'Shut up!'  
 'Look, I make bargain with you. Let me go, and I stop look for Okafor and Chukwuka. Agree?'  
 They shook their heads. 'We no agree!'  
 'All right. Make you take me. But let the court messengers and driver go,' he urged.  
 'Ah, what kind people you take us for? You think we be fool?'<sup>36</sup>

The irony here arises from Mason's new status as a virtual prisoner in the hands of the villagers. He speaks in an entirely different situation in which the reader realizes for the first time how implacably hostile to the Administration the villagers have become. Mason who, as a junior Administrative officer, is feared throughout Ukana for his ruthless efficiency and sternness is reduced to submission and, as a captive, finds

himself pleading for the type of leniency he has often denied others.

Mason's often-repeated remark about Ezekiel - 'You get good honest face, Ezekiel' - turns out to be the greatest irony in the novel. Ezekiel has earned his praise through hard work; he is mistaken for an 'honest' and dutiful steward, loyal to MacIntosh, but, in fact, his first loyalty is to his people. MacIntosh is yet to learn the hard way that 'the indigenes protected their own'<sup>37</sup> and takes Ezekiel into his confidence. Ezekiel betrays his master, helps Okafor and Chukwuka escape justice and thereby widens the gulf between the villagers and his master. Far from being honest, he brings so much trouble on MacIntosh by his dishonesty that in the end the latter openly regrets: 'Ezekiel did this for me, after all I've done for him.'<sup>38</sup>

However much he tries, MacIntosh fails to establish a bridge of understanding between his Administration and the people of Ukana. His fair decisions in court, his attempt to bring murderers to justice, his provision of amenities, his close attachment to his steward are all turned against him and lead to an inevitable personal tragedy. With his repatriation the Administration is discredited in much the same way as traditional authority has been. The author's treatment rules out compromise and accommodation and shows a more severe reaction to the weaknesses of both sides than one finds in Wind versus Polygamy.

The language of satire in this novel is pidgin English, and a critic may well question some of the situations in which it is used:-

'My countrymen, Okafor come this evening-time with disturbing news. We no talk about this bad news too much. We decide for you all to hear this news with your own ears and then we thrash the matter out together.'

Having spoken, Chukwuka turned to Okafor, for him to enlighten the newcomers.

Okafor began: 'You know when Chief Obieze die, we needed something, according to native law and custom and for the sake of him dignity, to bury him with. And so, you all decide that it fall on Chukwuka here, and myself, to do that necessary thing.'

There were murmurs of assent.

'So,' Okafor went on, 'we did the thing you ask us to do until nearly the finish. The last man we catch from the village of Ntu give much trouble. Him small brother come out and he see us.'<sup>39</sup>

The situation in which Ibo elders in conclave address one another in pidgin English on a matter which threatens the social foundation of their society is unconvincing and destroys the basis of effective characterization. The objection is not to the use of pidgin English which, as the works of Achebe, Soyinka, Ekwensi, Aig-Imoukhuede and other Nigerian writers show, can be as effective as any other medium of expression when used in the right situations. We have such situations in Many Thing You No Understand when Mason or MacIntosh addresses his steward in pidgin English, or even when MacIntosh addresses Sylvester Ndu in grammatically correct English (which, in the interest of brevity, will be called 'Standard English') and the latter replies in pidgin English (Pidgin). But, as the passage shows, Pidgin is used in this novel in circumstances which reveal an inadequate grasp of the importance and relevance of a developing situation. Pidgin, it must be pointed out, is an acculturated form of English spoken by urban dwellers but hardly ever by people permanently resident in the villages. So in the situation described in the passage, and especially on a matter of such

traditional importance, the elders are likely to address one another in Ibo. Why does the author render this discussion in Pidgin instead of Standard English, the structural equivalent of the Ibo in which the elders must have spoken? This would have removed the touch of triviality which the dialogue in Pidgin now lends to the occasion. The only possible justification for this lapse is that the author intends to reflect in her language the absence of acceptable moral standards which the elders have shown in their strong support of crime in the name of tradition. By putting the elders in an improbable linguistic situation, she may wish to underline the sense of disappointment and insecurity which has resulted from their loss of the moral leadership of their people.

However, this explanation, attractive as it is, cannot cover all the situations in which Pidgin is used in the novel. Husbands and wives, close relatives in intimate family situations address one another in Pidgin, a medium which is so artificial and far-removed from the commonplace idiom of home life. Okafor and Chukwuka usually talk to each other in Pidgin, and even Chief Obieze is made to address himself in Pidgin:-

'Small boy and foreigner threaten me, Obieze III' he shouted again, and smote his chest. 'All right, we go see what we go see! I send him poison snake for nighttime yesterday for bite and kill him so this palaver go end. I even put fear for him body when he run from him verandah into him house, but still, he no take warning!' He turned to a court retainer and ordered him: 'Go tell Okafor and Chukwuka that me say, when night come, and the moon stand full above the head and then shift small into the cloud, which mean say, we leave today and enter tomorrow, that me want see them here!'<sup>40</sup>

A soliloquy in Pidgin, such as we have in the first part of this quotation, is unrealistic. As anybody for whom English is L2 knows, the more difficult a problem is, the more likely thinking about it will be done in L1. Why does a character like Obieze speak in Standard English on one occasion and soliloquize in Pidgin on another without apparent justification? Why, as is the case in the second part of the passage, would a man in his exalted position talk to a court retainer in Pidgin, which introduces an unnecessary familiarity into their relationship? Certainly, this cannot pass for a frivolous occasion between Chief and servant, considering the serious situation which the novelist herself creates by her introductory sentence: 'He turned to a court retainer and ordered him.' One wonders if, when writing her book, Miss Ulasi had any clear idea of the social relationship between various characters.

The use of Pidgin in this novel reveals many other inconsistencies:-

Mason took a deep breath and launched into a last desperate plea. 'I no do nothing to you, Chief. You too no get palaver with me. I no be MacIntosh. Make you let me go.'

'No. You know too much now, Mr D.O.!!'

'Your Highness, you know say the men do bad thing when they take twenty heads -'

'Mr District Officer, it be too early for morning to stand around for chat!'

'Look, Chief Obieze. You go for school and you understand plenty things -'

'True. But I no think say you yourself understand plenty things.<sup>41</sup>

Obieze is a literate Chief who is always anxious to show that his education is not inferior to that of any other man, white or black. His literacy is confirmed by the D.O. when he says: 'You go for school and you understand plenty things.' Given the situation of Mason's 'last desperate plea', is he not likely

to raise the discussion to a level at which only he and Obieze can operate, by speaking Standard English? For in this alone lies any immediate hope of his regaining his freedom. Why, in any case, does a D.O. speak to a literate Chief in Pidgin, in a manner which is inconsistent with the character of both D.O. and Chief? Such lapses point to a defect in characterization. In a situation where practically everybody speaks Pidgin, it is difficult for the novelist to individualize her characters by differentiating their speech, and to face realistically the problem of having to represent in English the various levels of Ibo speech. Reference has already been made to Achebe's unique contribution in this matter, and we shall presently discuss how Nwankwo attempts to reproduce local Ibo speech in English. A novel which features Ibo villagers of different social classes provides Miss Ulasì an opportunity of making some contribution to the solution of the problem of transliterating Ibo thought and speech processes into English. This she throws away lightly by adopting a medium extraneous to the life of the village-resident Ibo.

The criticism against Many Thing You No Understand is not only that the author uses Pidgin where good artistic sense would counsel otherwise. The quality of the Pidgin is often so poor that it constantly distracts the attention of the reader whose ears are attuned to good Pidgin:-

'What you say you want?' the new Chief Obieze asked the messenger from MacIntosh.

'Mr A.D.O. he said he want you to see him face to face tomorrow when the hand for clock say ten o'clock.'

'What the A.D.O. say him want?'

'Me no know, Chief Obieze.'

'You think it be for anything bad?'

'I no fit know. I be only messenger.'

'As you know, I still stay for mourning for my father. Many people still come to comfort me. I no like for them to come and me no be

here for them to see and comfort.'<sup>42</sup>

Practically every sentence here is wrong Pidgin. The first word 'what' should be 'wetin'. 'What' is not part of the vocabulary of Pidgin. The clumsiness of the second paragraph of the passage, resulting mainly from the use of both 'Mr A.D.O.' and the pronoun 'he' side by side and the inclusion of unnecessary details like 'face to face', 'when the hand for clock say ten o'clock' is an indication of the author's limited knowledge of Pidgin, not a fault inherent in the medium itself. What we have here is neither Standard English nor acceptable Pidgin. 'Me no know', for example, is nearer Standard English than Pidgin. In standard Pidgin this would be 'I no sabi' and 'I still stay for mourning for my father' should be 'I still de mourn me fader.' The whole passage lacks the fluency which a dialogue in Pidgin is capable of producing mainly because of the author's difficulty in communicating effectively in her chosen medium.

Fluent standard Pidgin, such as we have in this passage from Achebe, would have adequately served Miss Ulasi's purpose:-

'I fit cook every European chop like steak and kidney pie, chicken puri, misk grill, cake omlette....'

'You no sabi cook African chop?'

'Ahh! That one I no sabi am-o,' he admitted.

'I no go tell master lie.'

'Wetin you de chop for your own house?'

I asked, being irritated by the idiot.

'Wetin I de chop for my house?' he repeated after me.

'Na we country chop I de chop.'

'You country chop no be Africa chop?' asked Chief Nanga.

'Na him,' admitted the cook. 'But no be me de cook am. I get wife for house.'<sup>43</sup>

Pidgin is used here in the right situation to expose to ridicule the African cook who specializes in 'cake omlette', whatever that means, but cannot cook 'African chop'.

There are also occasional attempts in Miss Ulasi's novel to introduce into Pidgin concepts foreign to the medium:-

'I think the chief him burial go well,' said Chukwuka digressing from the topic.

'Yes, everything go well.'

'He leave big gap. I no think him son, the new chief, go fit fill it.' Chukwuka observed.

'No. No great man son fill vacuum him father leave.'

'I wonder why this be so, Okafor?'<sup>44</sup>

Apart from poor expressions, like 'fit fill it', 'this be so', the notion of anyone having to fill a 'gap', not to talk of a 'vacuum' (itself a non-Pidgin word) left by another is too complex to be expressed in this manner through Pidgin. A good Pidgin writer like Ekwensi or Achebe would have circumvented this difficulty by substituting for 'He leave big gap' a simple expression like 'Him people go feel him death borku'. In the given context this would have been adequate.

It is important to stress that, after the use of Pidgin in common speech and as a medium of creativity for several years, it has come to acquire its own special vocabulary and syntax, which are not often identical with those of Standard English. Many of these are featured in this poem, 'One Wife for One Man' by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede. I quote only the first three stanzas:-

I done try go church, I done go for court  
Dem all day talk about di 'new culture':  
Dem talk about 'equality', dem mention 'divorce'  
Dem holler am so-tay my ear nearly cut;  
One wife be for one man.

My fader before my fader get him wife borku  
E no' get equality palaver; he live well  
For he be oga for im own house.  
But dat time done pass before white man come  
Wit 'im  
One wife for one man,

Tell me how una woman no go make yanga  
Wen'e know say na'im only dey.  
Suppose say - make God no 'gree - 'e no born  
at all?



A'tell you dat man bin dey crazy wey start  
 One wife for one man.<sup>45</sup>

Recognizable words like 'dem', 'dat', 'fader', 'di', 'wit' acquire new spellings which reflect the habit of speech of those who speak Pidgin most. Entirely new words, borrowings from the various vernaculars, are represented in 'borku' (plenty), holler (shout), palaver (trouble), oga (master), una (your), yanga (pride). Interesting stylistic features are revealed in 'Dem holler am so-tay my ear nearly cut' which, apart from being a symbolic expression, is an intentional overstatement, and in 'My fader before my fader' which is far more expressive in the circumstances of Pidgin than the Standard English equivalent, 'my grandfather'. 'A'tell you dat man bin dey crazy wey start' shows an interesting deviation from Standard English - it reflects the preference of Pidgin for the present and past continuous where normal English usage requires the simple present or past. It is only when such unique features of Pidgin are recognized that it can serve as a useful medium of creativity. Miss Ulasi has probably been away from Nigeria for too long - she is now permanently resident in England after a long spell of study in the United States - to be fully conversant with the linguistic development of Pidgin. By using an unorthodox form of Pidgin, and often in the wrong situations, she fails to communicate as effectively as she might have done, using a medium with which she is more familiar.

V

Nwankwo avoids in Danda the two main defects of Wind versus Polygamy and Many Thing You No Understand - the

tendency to point out the inadequacies of the past and present without suggesting a suitable alternative and an insufficient grasp of language which results in a muddle of the various levels of speech appropriate to different persons and situations. Nwankwo is just as critical of the old and the new as Egbuna and Miss Ulasi but avoids the first weakness by ensuring that the spirit of youth, as displayed by Danda, triumphs in a decisive manner against the forces of tradition. The novel takes the form of a portrait of an individual, impatient of the constraint placed on him by traditional society and longing for self-expression. The success of the novelist lies in the way he uses Danda, apparently a playboy kind of fellow, to indicate the need for social change. The second pitfall he avoids by adopting a form of prose which recognizes the fundamentals of Ibo language idiom, sound and flow without rudely shocking the basic English sentence pattern:-

The scorch season was dying. The happiest time of the year, the season for feasts, when men and women laughed with all their teeth and little boys, their mouths oily oily, ran about the lanes blowing the crops of chicken to make balloons. In a few days the rain season would come and bring with it a ceaseless round of labour. And men would leave their homes with the first cry of the cock and would not return until the chicken came back to roost. Already the bushes were on fire and the acrid smell of burning permeated the earth.<sup>46</sup>

Many features of Nwankwo's prose style are in evidence here. 'The scorch season was dying' is an apt, poetic description of the end of the dry season. 'Scorch' brings out forcefully the intensity of the heat and 'dying' significantly conveys the idea of a season which will soon pass into oblivion. The Ibo figures of speech in the next sentence are transliterated into English in a way which avoids distorting the basic

sentence structure - 'men and women laughed with all their teeth', 'little boys their mouths oily, oily'. The author's easy but firm control of English and the individual quality of his prose reveal themselves in expressions like 'a ceaseless round of labour', 'the first cry of the cock', 'bushes were on fire', 'acrid smell of burning permeated the earth.' Particularly striking are the flow of ideas and the skilful ordering of sentences which result in a convincing description of the activities marking the end of 'the scorch season'.

Nwankwo's prose reflects the linguistic characteristics of Ll in other ways:-

Araba waited for him to finish and then said:  
'People in your age group are doing things, marrying, begetting children, buying land-boats. What have you done?'

'Time is still big,' said Danda...

'And you are not to appear in the ebe for six moons.'

'Impossible.' Danda thought for a moment, finished the second cup he had been carrying and continued:

'I will attend the next dance.'

'It is not wise,' said Okelekwu. 'A man who is sensible does not, open-eyed, jump into the fire.'

'I will attend the next dance,' Danda said again.

Araba snuffed, sighed, and said:

'It is when a dog hungers for death that it begins to eat sand.'<sup>47</sup>

Araba's anxiety about his son's apparent lack of progress is expressed in a simple and homely language which relies on Ll for its effectiveness. 'Land-boats (for cars) and 'six moons' (for six months) are direct influences of Ll; 'ebe' (village square) is an Ibo word left untranslated in the text. It is one of several such words which constantly remind the reader of the cultural background against which the story is written. 'Time is still big' is another

transliteration from Ibo which is very appropriate in the context. We find in this passage examples of proverbs used to transmit to the young the wisdom of the ancients. The purpose here is didactic - to get Danda to see reason and respect traditional authority. When the terrifying image of a man jumping into the fire, 'open-eyed', does not seem to work, Araba, for effect, reveals a more alarming prospect in the final proverb. The whole piece is written in a prose style which recognizes the social relationship between Danda, Araba and Okelekwu, and attests to the novelist's firm control of language. It is such a control that one looks for in vain in Wind versus Polygamy and Many Thing You No Understand, and it is precisely this quality coupled, as will soon become evident, with the novelist's superior artistry, which makes Danda a more successful novel than either of the last two.

On the face of it, Danda is a man of shiftless irresponsibility. He is a picaroon whose knavery involves him in adventures which take him from one social class to another, a social parasite who often successfully exploits men and women in more elevated positions. Like Amadi's Wakiri, he is the village clown who escapes being taken to task for his misconduct because of an assumed lack of seriousness. Danda makes up for any personal defects, and the inconvenience caused others, by entertaining the villagers with his antics, singing and dancing. His jokes endear him to all the people:-

If there is a man to whom what is good is not good let him dig his own grave and see how he likes it.<sup>48</sup>

If there is any one to whom what is good is not good let him embrace the thorn tree and see how he likes it.<sup>49</sup>

(to boys): When your father quarrels with your mother take the part of the father for he owns the home. (to girls): Don't worry your heads over husbands; I will find them for you.<sup>50</sup>

(to a group of girls singing): All the men love you. If there is any man who doesn't love you let him put his head in the fire and see how he likes it.<sup>51</sup>

Some people say that Danda is a tortoise, others that he is mad. I am not mad, people of our land, but I am not so sure that I am sane. Give us palm wine.<sup>52</sup>

There is also the favourite saying for which he is popular throughout the village: 'That which is in the pot should be in the belly.'<sup>53</sup>

The villagers become so accustomed to enjoying Danda's jokes and witticisms that they often miss the underlying seriousness of what he says:-

The world is bad nowadays,' said Danda. 'Let the world be good. Let this Oji cleanse the world. Let it make us friends. May each man have what is due to him. The hawk shall perch and the eagle shall perch. Whichever bird says to the other don't perch let its wings break.'<sup>54</sup>

The importance of these remarks, made on a convivial occasion when villagers are treated to so much Oji (wine), is not likely to be fully appreciated. His listeners would no doubt endorse Danda's supplication, 'Let this Oji cleanse the world.' But, in fact, the type of 'cleansing' that he has in mind is one that could destroy all that the villagers hold dear and shake the fabric of society to its very foundation. This difference between Danda and the others is underlined by his wish for the 'bad' world to change to 'good'. In this context Danda is 'good', or at least potentially so, and the others are 'bad'. The plea for friendship and accommodation, especially as symbolized by the reference to the hawk and the eagle, looks forward to issues that are

central to the novel's preoccupation - the confrontation between paganism and Christianity, the numerous encounters between Danda and the ozos. 'May each man have what is due to him' is a piece of advice which, if heeded, would have averted the acrimonious dispute between Nwokeke and Araba over the Nwadiiegwu ozala, which destroys the unity of the extended family and leads to such an important member as Araba being ostracized from it - 'No Uwadiiegwu was ever to enter his compound, no one was to gossip with his women, if he fell sick no one was to visit him.'<sup>55</sup> So this apparently frivolous speech refers by implication to matters which are of paramount importance to the listeners.

Danda is accorded a far more important place in Nwankwo's imaginative scheme than at first seems obvious. Underneath his playfulness lies a serious purpose, and he himself occasionally gives us an indication of this - 'They smile in my face but as soon as my back is turned they say: "Do not take notice of Danda. He is no good."<sup>56</sup> Just as he finds out the hypocritical attitude of the villagers, so he soon discovers the hollowness of Christianity. By giving offence to each side in turn, as it were, he becomes the agent by which the deficiencies of both tradition and Christianity are exposed, the touchstone against which the success of the old and the new is measured. Danda, the apparently irresponsible clown, acts from a position of moral strength, and this gives him the courage to do what others like Ndulue would have liked to do, but shrink from doing either because of the fear of reproach or the consciousness of status:-

'Who is this fellow?' he said glaring at the driver.  
 'He got in when I went to drink water. And I cannot pull him out.'  
 Ndulue looked more closely, and recognizing the intruder, smiled. 'Ah it is you, brother,' he said. He liked Danda.  
 'Is it Ndulue's voice I hear?' asked Danda.  
 'Yes, come out!'  
 'Take me home in this our land-boat.'  
 'No, you can ride in it any other day but not today.'  
 'Now.'  
 'No, come out,' said Ndulue, raising his voice slightly.  
 'Well, if I were you I would listen, Danda,' said the herdsman, conciliating Ndulue.  
 Danda thought for a moment and then said: 'You think you can turn me out of this land-boat?'  
 'Yes.'  
 'You are not fit to.'  
 'Danda is right,' murmured the old woman. 'Does the law say now that when a man has a land-boat he should forget his kindred!'<sup>57</sup>

Ndulue's attitude to Danda is the typical reaction of a man who lives in a community still bound by custom. His first inclination is to assert his ownership of the 'land-boat' after Danda has outwitted his herdsman (driver). But he finally agrees to accept Danda only because he cannot openly reject his 'brother' and thereby set aside the norm of behaviour laid down by custom - 'Does the law say now that when a man has a land-boat he should forget his kindred!'

The same ambivalence is responsible for Ndulue's action in building, outside his new residence, a shed in which he entertains the villagers, some of whom like Danda refuse to recognize the demarcation. One is rather amused by the way Ndulue seeks to solve the problems posed by his material success. Each of his devices fails in its purpose. Although impatient of constraint, he allows community spirit to prevail in a matter in which he ought to have asserted his personal liberty. It is left to Danda to throw away such constraints in the spirit of freedom and provide a new stimulus and sense of direction to a community long accustomed to the loss of

its liberty. In this new spirit, and in a moment of triumph as he is being driven away in the car, he tells the other villagers to 'stay on the ground and eat sand. Danda is flying to the land of the spirits on the wing of the eagle.'<sup>58</sup>

Nwankwo's method is to use Danda's antics to present a society which is quietly undergoing social change. Danda's quips and abundant vitality prevent the villagers from noticing the strains and tensions which are already disturbing the apparently smooth surface of communal life. The values of the society to which change is coming are well documented:-

The quantity of feathers had come to be an index of a man's standing in the community. The more of it there was the more the number of chickens he could afford to kill and therefore the greater his wealth would be taken to be.<sup>59</sup>

Araba's claim to recognition are based on:-

a long barn, ten women, an obi of which much noise was made. Araba was known too to have always been a fighter for Aniocha and Uwadiegwu. Finally and most important of all, he had taken the ozo before anybody alive.<sup>60</sup>

These are the values which Danda rejects and seeks to undermine. But, even before his actions begin to achieve the desired results, society has started to suffer a moral decline. The situation degenerates so fast that an elder complains openly: 'Many things have been spoiling in our umunna. Men sleep with widows, others make nsi to stop other people's wives from delivering.'<sup>61</sup> The author records devastating criticism of the people's appalling behaviour and their attitude of mind which makes them prefer pleasure to work:-

Aniocha men, as Nwafo Ugo would say, were always punctual to feasts.

'Call them to work,' says Nwafo, 'and on that day they would first go to their farms - "to repair a little thing" - and would need a messenger to come and remind them. Call them to a feast and they would start very early to watch the sun, every



now and then saying to their wives: "Is it time?"<sup>62</sup>

These words are put in the mouth of Nwafo, but, to the extent that they help to describe a society ripe for change, they might have been credited to the novelist. The same type of criticism is implied in the way he presents the cutting of the *ici* (tribal mark):-

The great point of the *ici* is that it is a test of fortitude. The *ogbu ici* rips off pelts of flesh in a traditional pattern that stretches from ear to ear. The operation is excruciating. But the victim is to bear the pain if not with a smile at least without any visible show of sorrow. If he winces or cries out, he breaks the magic of the ritual and lets down himself and his kindred.<sup>63</sup>

Nobody enjoys an 'excruciating' experience, whatever the purpose. By his detailed description of the procedure, his use of phrases like 'rips off', 'pelts of flesh' and his indication of the extent of the pain - 'from ear to ear' - the author makes the practice abhorrent to us. What, the reader is tempted to ask, is the whole point of this 'test of fortitude'? Nwankwo clearly disapproves of this traditional practice and, in so doing, justifies Danda's refusal to be subjected to the 'operation'.

The emphasis throughout the novel is on Danda's conscious attempt to be different from other men, which makes him a constant source of embarrassment to the established order:-

'When I spoke to him he said that the *ngwu agelega* was his father's.'

'No man can hold on to what Danda says. What Danda says has neither head nor tail.'

There was laughter.

'It does not amuse me!' roared the *Ikolo* man. 'It is long since Danda began pouring sand into our eyes.'

'But is the ngwu agelega his or his father's? We want to know.' ....

'Araba', he said to the big-headed ozo. 'Is the ngwu agelega yours?'

Araba stirred and said calmly: 'This is a question for Danda himself. I haven't been home to know whether the ngwu agelega he carried is mine or his.'

'Why should he have one? Is he an ozo man?'<sup>64</sup>

Danda continually asserts his individualism. His use of the ngwu agelega (ozo staff) without being an ozo is a serious offence, but he gets away with it, as with his other breaches of custom, because the elders believe that 'whatever concerns Danda is different'<sup>65</sup>, 'no man can hold on to what Danda says.' He comes to be accepted as an enigma in society. By reconciling themselves to Danda's antics and failing to punish his abuse of tradition, the people are unconsciously adjusting to the changes which will inevitably overtake them. His antics and quips serve only as the thin end of the wedge which rips society apart to make way for a new order. 'It is long since Danda began pouring sand into our eyes' expresses the regret of a man who, before his fellow-villagers, foresees the disastrous effect of allowing Danda to continue to defy traditional authority with impunity. Compared with the extract from Many Thing You No Understand, quoted on page 373, this passage presents far more convincingly the deliberations of Ibo elders in council. Practically every sentence in the first part of the discussion features an Ibo proverb translated direct into English - 'What Danda says has neither head nor tail.' In discharge of their responsibility, and in accordance with traditional practice, the elders hold themselves in a state of judicial inquiry - 'But is the ngwu agelega his or his father's? We want to know.'

Araba's reply - 'This is a question for Danda himself.' - may sound evasive, but is the best in the circumstances and confirms his genuine paternal concern for his son. The use of the word 'ngwu agelega' in this passage is typical of the way Nwankwo employs Ibo words in this novel. The word appears a few times and a final clue to its meaning is given in 'Why should he have one? Is he an ozo man? In this way the novelist makes the meanings of the words obvious in the given context. It is through the use of Ibo words and proverbs, the reflection of Ibo idioms of speech in his prose, that Nwankwo succeeds in ensuring that the elders speak 'in character' and that their discussion is conducted at a level appropriate to their status.

Not only is the reader held contentedly spell-bound by Danda's activities, the novelist's sense of humour is also everywhere in evidence. Nwankwo scoffs mildly at man's foibles and employs a method of gentle ridicule to expose the seamy side of village life. There is, for instance, the important meeting of the umunna, to which the whole of chapter seven is devoted. In his description of the events at this meeting Nwankwo shows an eye for detail and evokes to perfection the villagers' delight in long speeches which defeat the purpose of the gathering. The chief participants are introduced in a laughable sort of way: Esili is 'a mite of a man with sharp features and a cringing manner.'<sup>66</sup> Nwego, the cynic who swears falsely before the Alusi and turns the whole occasion into a farce, is 'a gaunt fellow with a goatee; bright, lazy, eyes; who smoked a long slightly charred pipe.' The Alusi, the object of the people's fear and the focus of attention at the meeting, is described as 'a conelike god

dressed in skins, blood and leaves' and his priest, as 'a tall lanky man, who carried a twenty-year sore festering in his leg.'<sup>67</sup> Of the conduct of those at the meeting the behaviour of the palm wine tapper is typical:-

'My bottom is hot,' he cried. 'How long are we going to stay here? People get up and talk and talk as if they were never going to make an end. Is there a law that a man must be long-winded? Is there any alu in being brief? If you have nothing to do, I have. My palms are waiting for me!'

The rest of the umunna nodded their heads in support. But the tapster having now cleared the ground, and created sympathy for himself, went ahead and made the longest speech of all.<sup>68</sup>

The reader is not surprised that the meeting ends in a fiasco.

Humour arises at times from the difference between people's estimates of themselves and their real worth, as is the case with Nweke Alusi:-

The poster read:

'Nweke Alusi, native doctor.

'Registered in Nigeria.

Man-pass-Man!

Come to me for power medicine - To kure madnes, hatfelior, "akpu" foming in the maut (epilezi), venerable disease e.t.c. Money back if not satisfactri.<sup>69</sup>

The satire here is directed against quack herbalists who make false claims and usurp the place of trained doctors. Alusi's incompetence is displayed on the 'poster' for all to see. The illiterate spellings - hatfelior, kure, satisfactri - the mixture of vernacular and English - 'akpu' foming in the maut - and the confusion of words - 'venerable' for venereal - make the claim of 'Man-pass-Man!' laughable. The obscurity which results from his inadequate means of communication may be intended to depict, in some measure, the potential for evil which men like Alusi possess.

Occasionally the humour results from the use of a particular word:-

'She is from Umukrushe.'

'From where?'

'Umukrushe.'

There was a burst of laughter.

'Okelekwu, my brother, what did you say it was?

People of our land wait a moment. Let the name reach the depths of my ear.'

'Umukrushe.'

'Ahai! The names that exist in this world!'<sup>70</sup>

The word 'Umukrushe' sounds extremely funny and fulfils the author's expectation of provoking laughter. The people of Aniocha cannot bring themselves to believe that any such place exists. According to them, 'no village has the right to give itself such a name.'<sup>71</sup>

Sometimes it is the people's habit of speech which provides the humour. Ibo words are made to acquire the force of a deliberate affectation in style:-

I am afraid of death, the way it attacks.

No matter how strong a man is, when death comes, chololom! he goes.

Man is little, with a sound, fium! he dissolves like sand.<sup>72</sup>

'Chololom' and 'fium', in their onomatopoeic effect, are funny mannerisms.

The author shares with his main character an abiding interest in the pleasantries of village life. It is through a series of humorous situations, in which various aspects of life are ridiculed, that the inadequacy of tradition is presented. The elders are shown to have become so remiss in their duty that the impatience of young men like Danda is justified:-

'My voice is low. The proverb says that the word biko (please) never leads to a quarrel.'

'True! True!'

'If I have wronged you, my knees are on the ground. After all I am your son and a father doesn't bear ill-will against his own son for long.'

'No! No!'

'If a man cooks for the community, the community will eat it all. But if the community cooks for a single person he cannot eat the cooking.'

'Say no more!' roared the umunna, scrambling for their cups.

'You have come like a man,' said Nwafo Ugo.  
The matter of the ofo was again shelved ...<sup>73</sup>

Araba's plea for pardon to the umunna is made in moving prose, and in a manner which deserves sympathetic response - 'my voice is low.' But no action is taken at the meeting because, with food and drinks provided in abundance, the elders, 'scrambling for their cups' completely forget the important purpose of their meeting, as the last sentence of the passage shows. Elders who behave in this way have no moral right to lead others and only help to bring into disrepute the traditional order which they represent.

But, if the old order is no longer adequate, the substitute, according to this novel, is not Christianity. For the Local Church comes in for a more pointed satire than the ozo men. There is a concentration on those aspects of Christianity which would make it unacceptable as the alternative to the traditional religion of the people:-

'Look over there and see your friends.'  
Danda looked and saw. He jingled up to them.  
'Have you finished the water of God?' he asked.  
'Why were you not in the church?'  
'I was coming there but stopped to take some palm wine.'  
'So you were drinking with spirit-worshippers!'  
'What is wrong with that?'  
'Don't you know it is a deadly sin?'  
'Ahai,' said Danda scratching his head, 'deadly sin? Your word is bent, stretch it.'  
The catechist was going to say something more but the priest stopped him and said: 'Tell him to come with us.'<sup>74</sup>

It is the author's deliberate device that the features of Christianity selected for presentation are those which make it impossible for the religion to command the people's allegiance. To become a Christian involves denying one's traditional past. In a situation in which 'to take some

palm wine' with your neighbour - something you have always done - is suddenly proclaimed 'a deadly sin', it is not difficult to understand Danda's reaction. He considers that the catechist's 'word is bent' and orders him to 'stretch it'. The catechist's failure to 'stretch' his word straight and clear on this crucial occasion implies failure for Christianity. By allowing Danda who does not take Christianity seriously - he refers to the most sacred element of Christian worship as 'the water of God' - to triumph over the catechist in a public debate, Nwankwo is suggesting that Christianity, like tradition, has no hope of surviving. Danda's contact with Christianity might have helped to release him from the norms of the past but it has failed to instil any new norms into his consciousness. For him, as is the case with the other villagers, Christianity has played only a static social and cultural role, a part which is wholly unsatisfactory in a society longing for change.

The new social order is to be achieved by removing the worst abuses of the present and not by the imposition of alien ideas and way of life. The ultimate goal is to change society with its limits and prescriptions on individual liberty into a more open, and therefore more democratic, community in which the freedom of speech and action is guaranteed. We recognize something of this new order in Danda when he makes his last dramatic appearance in the novel:-

'Son of our fathers,' said Nwokeke, his eyes laughing, 'where do you spring up from?'

'Did they tell you, your father's house is crumbling?' bawled Nwora Otankpa.

'Leave it to me,' said Danda. 'I have come to take possession of my obi and nothing will crumble.'

In the face of such assurance there was nothing more to be said.

'Let's hear the drummers then,' said Nwokeke.  
'The day is going home slowly, slowly.'

The drummers found a place, tuned up their instruments and began to play.

Danda stood staring at them with bright-keen eyes, drinking in their tunes. In a moment they began to work on him. The calves of his legs shook, his whole body simmered with excitement. He went mad.

'My father bore me well, my chi created me well.'<sup>75</sup>

Here is Danda, the gay, high-spirited village clown, in his greatest moment of triumph. He is the harbinger of a new era in which life will be less circumscribed by taboos and rituals, and individual self-expression will not be hampered by tradition. All this he has successfully demonstrated by his own actions. He has acquired the ozo title without fulfilling the traditional requirement of cutting the *ici* and rejects the assertion that his father's house 'is crumbling'. Furthermore, by his enthusiasm he gives badly-needed confidence to all those who may wish to follow his example - 'My father bore me well, my chi created me well.' The novelist's continued use of Ibo idioms and figures of speech to capture the spirit and flavour of Ibo village life - 'his eyes laughing', 'The day is going home slowly, slowly', 'drinking in their tunes' - helps to establish a link between the present and the future. Coupled with Danda's interest in singing and dancing, it constitutes an assurance that all which is of lasting value in the present system will survive in the new social order which Danda seeks. Given this situation, Thomas Cassirer's opinion that in Danda 'Nwankwo stresses permanence rather than change in the African scene ...'<sup>76</sup> must be regarded as mistaken. It takes the limited view of Danda as a 'jester' and ignores his more important role as an instrument of change. It is the clear indication both of the need for change and the direction it should take that makes Danda a more relevant link between



tradition and modern experience than either Wind versus Polygamy or Many Thing You No Understand.

## VI

The process started in Danda is carried a stage further in The Voice. Nwankwo dramatizes the individual's struggle to break through the narrow confines of traditional society and achieve self-expression. Okara does much more than this. He probes deeply the inner consciousness of his main character, converting his mind, in the process, into something of a battleground. Once his internal doubts are resolved, he rebels openly against a corrupt social order. The conflict in The Voice is not so much one between the old and the new as one between progressive and reactionary forces in contemporary society. It is a direct confrontation between Chief Izongo, the Elders and people on the one hand, and Okolo and the very few who believe in him and his mission on the other. Okolo asks questions about the true meaning of life and, for this reason, is considered a threat to the established order. He is accused of behaving in a way tribal society cannot tolerate and made to pay the prescribed penalty. Okolo's problems therefore are those of a man who finds himself unable to fit into the social framework of a society in which the individual does not exist in his own right but is required to lose his identity in the interest of social cohesion. The novel comes down clearly on the side of an individual code of conduct and the primacy of personal judgements, and shows an inherent distrust of a society which erects barriers against the free movement of the spirit.

Okara's method of attacking the corrupt social and political order in Amatu and Sologu is to expose the people to ridicule as they consciously try to defend their moral decadence and morbid hatred of Okolo. By this method he continually provides the reader <sup>with</sup> an opportunity of analysing and evaluating character and conduct:-

'It was a great task I performed, my people. A great task in sending him away. A dangerous task, but it had to be done for the good of us all. We did it with our eyes on our occiputs, for it is a strong thing be to send away one who is looking for it. Only a mad man looks for it in this turned world. Let him look for it in this wide world if he can find it. But we don't want him to stay here asking, "Have you it? Have you it? Have you it?" Even in our sleep we hear him asking. We know not what it is. We do not want to know. Let us be as we are. We do not want our insides to be stirred like soup in a pot'<sup>77</sup>

Chief Izongo claims to have acted in the interest of his people by banishing Okolo. His hypocrisy is brought out in the use of words like 'great' and 'dangerous' and the distortion implicit in the highly technical language: 'We did it with our eyes on our occiputs...' In fact, all Izongo has had to do is to order Okolo's banishment, which is carried out without hesitation by his henchmen. He partly justifies his action by asserting that 'only a mad man looks for IT in this turned world.' But the reader can only regard this statement, judging by the way the story develops, as motivated by fear. In admitting that this is a 'turned world' he might have gone further to acknowledge his own ignoble role in making it 'turned'. Okolo is a 'mad man' only because he attempts to fight Izongo's moral and spiritual bankruptcy with the traditional weapons of honesty and integrity, values which Izongo, in his position, ought to be defending. There is a

clear indication that, because of Izongo's resolute opposition to change - 'Let us be as we are' - the conflict will be long-drawn and fierce. So, although this speech is enthusiastically received by a gullible people who sincerely believe that their Chief has done them a great service, the reader easily sees through Izongo's pretences and realizes that he has acted out of crude self-interest.

This passage is also useful in the way it introduces us to some of the features of Okara's prose style, which will be discussed in detail later. It is important to note that in The Voice detail matters as it does in a highly organized poem. Only the reader who is not deceived by the apparent simplicity of the prose and is willing to work his way carefully through the novel, taking note of the different levels of meaning attached to various words and statements, can benefit fully from the concentrated experience provided by this work. As in most of Okara's poems, the significance of the various parts of the novel, from which a clear statement finally emerges, dawns on the reader gradually because of the time it takes to decode the writer's symbols. It is often through these symbols, as we have in this passage, that Okara achieves clarity of expression - 'We do not want our insides to be stirred like soup in a pot.' The obscurity which might have attached to 'insides', an important word in the novel, is removed by the comparison with 'soup in a pot' being stirred. This type of comparison leads us to believe that what Okara translates as 'inside' in the novel is the Ijaw word 'biri', the belly as the seat of human passion and will. This is why the word is used frequently to indicate a character's disposition - one's 'inside' usually depends on one's state of mind at any given moment. Your

'inside' smells or stinks when you are annoyed and is sweet when you are happy. In difficult situations you consult your 'inside' on what course of action to take. It is only against such background knowledge that the reader can fully appreciate the significance of semantically unusual but highly expressive statements like these:-

His [Okolo's] inside then smell bad for the town's people...<sup>78</sup>

Tuere turned and faced Chief Izongo and the crowd, her inside smelling with anger.<sup>79</sup>

Okolo ... talked to his inside.<sup>80</sup>

I [Okolo's father] have a sweet inside and clean as the eye of the sky.<sup>81</sup>

Thoughts knocked each other down in Okolo's inside.<sup>82</sup>

Do you think a person can his inside change like you change a loin cloth?<sup>83</sup>

There are other uses of this word in more elaborate contexts to indicate introspection, but these will be discussed later.

Another case in point is the gradual unfolding of the meaning of the word IT, the object of the hero's search. Several details contribute to the meaning; to arrive at the intended meaning requires the ability to set these details in the correct order of priority. The meaning emerges in three stages. First of all, we are told what IT is not in statements like 'You have your M.A., Ph.D., but you have not got IT.'<sup>84</sup> From this we know that the acquisition of advanced University degrees does not necessarily bring one closer to the knowledge of IT. We are also given several indications of the pattern of behaviour of people who lack IT. Okolo's involvement with Ebiere on the journey to Sologa, and the events which result from it, provides a suitable example. In this episode Okolo's moral purity is contrasted with that

of the other villagers who can only conceive of his kindness to Ebiere as one motivated by lust. As the next stage we are given what IT might be through the activities and utterances of Okolo's few associates. When, for example, Tuere asks Okolo: 'How do you expect to find IT when everybody has locked up his inside?'<sup>85</sup> we get the impression that Okolo's search would entail the exploration of life's depths. But it is not until the final stage is reached that the full significance of IT is appreciated. We arrive at Okara's meaning through the assimilation of details, in stages, each of which is important for the final analysis, and through the interaction of the hero with various other characters, including those who have IT and those who have not. As the meaning gradually dawns on us we think of the Ijaw word 'iye', from the most to the least tangible of things. This word is sufficiently wide in its connotation to cover the various suggestions made in the novel. However, from the hero's stand for the truth in circumstances which spell danger - 'Am I to run away? No! The straight word never runs away from the crooked word. I will go.'<sup>86</sup> - we come to realize that, apart from all else, the possession of IT calls for great personal sacrifice. Interpreted in this way, The Voice is a dramatization of the myth of a hero who dies in order to bring salvation to a community which has rejected him. But the myth is presented in a way that the human significance may not be fully grasped unless the artist's controlling hand is seen working beneath an apparently simple surface made up of a new register of words like IT, inside, chest, bile and shadow.

The rejection of Okolo by the people shows the extent to which they support Izongo in his nefarious purpose:-

Who is the leopard in town?

Izongo!

Izongo!

And who is goat in town?

Oko-lo!

Oko-lo!

Can goat fight leopard?

No, no!

No, no!'<sup>87</sup>

The Elders and villagers, in a state of excitement at a drinks party, work themselves into a frenzy in their admiration of Izongo and their hatred of Okolo. Izongo is accorded the attributes of a leopard, a symbol of strength; Okolo, those of a goat which represents weakness. They rejoice that the leopard will slay the goat. But, because of the information we already have on these two characters, these symbols acquire an ironic meaning. Izongo's apparent strength lacks moral foundation and is put to corrupt use while Okolo's weakness stems from a genuine spirit of enquiry. So a defeat of Okolo by Izongo can only be regarded as a temporary triumph of falsehood over truth.

The same type of irony informs Abadi's public rebuke of Okolo:-

Why did you skulk in Tuere's house instead of coming to face the people? You should have still been in there hiding if not for the unparalleled gallantry of our leader who brought you running out like a rat. Listen not to him, fellow Elders. His mouth is foul. You and I are comrades in arms and we must see this thing through to its logical conclusion... We are in a democracy and everyone has the right to express any opinion.<sup>88</sup>

Abadi, Izongo's deputy, speaks of Amatu as a 'democracy' where 'everyone has the right to express any opinion.' But the only

reason Okolo is hounded from place to place is that he expresses an opinion unacceptable to the community. Tuere is ostracised because she too expresses an opinion from which it is inferred that she is a witch. Abadi considers himself 'in arms' against Okolo and promises to see 'this thing through to its logical conclusion.' But he is later affected by Okolo's 'spoken words' and virtually withdraws from Izongo's camp. An ironic contradistinction between truth and falsehood is achieved by the use of expressions like 'unparalleled gallantry' for Izongo and 'His mouth is foul' for Okolo.

The Elders, as the acknowledged leaders of the people and the custodians of traditions and public morality, are the constant target of Okara's attack:-

Izongo: 'I am he-who-keeps-my-head-under-water!'

Second Elder: 'He-who-keeps-my-head-under-water!'

Izongo: 'Yes! His cloth will also touch water.!!'

All Elders: 'Correct! Correct!'

Izongo: 'What is yours?'

Third Elder: 'You are asking me? I am fire!'

Izongo: 'Fire!'

Third Elder: 'Yes! He who touches me his fingers will burn! What is yours?'

Izongo: 'You are asking me? I am pepper.'

Third Elder: 'Pepper!'

Izongo: 'Yes; I am pepper. Pepper hurts but without it food is tasteless. And what is yours?'

Fourth Elder: 'I am bad waterside.'

Izongo: 'Bad waterside!'

Fourth Elder: 'I am! You will roll down if you are not careful.'<sup>89</sup>

The Elders offer praise names ostensibly to illustrate the creative power of words in a traditional society. But none of these amounts to any distinct praise. Each name implies some disservice either to the owner or the community. By

making the Elders delight in platitudes - 'Pepper hurts but without it food is tasteless' - Okara gives the impression that they are a confused group no longer certain of the values they claim to be defending.

The situation in The Voice bears interesting parallels to that of A Man of the People. Nanga is to Odili what Chief Izongo is to Okolo. The young rebel in each case is in conflict with a local dignitary who, although part of a reactionary and corrupt political system, is popular with the masses. This situation poses a problem for the rebel who cannot fight the corrupt system without appearing to the people as a whole as a common enemy. In A Man of the People, partly for this reason, Odili's attitude to the people is detached. Even so, his alienation from society is not complete since what he desires most is the reform of the existing system. But in The Voice a similar situation produces an entirely different result. Since the battle here is one for the mind, what is required is a radical change of attitude. A complete break with the greed and egotism of the present is therefore necessary so that the inherent goodness in man may be discovered. In order to show how arduous the task would be and the magnitude of the sacrifice that would be required, Okara presents a society afflicted by a moral disease at all levels. 'Man has no more shadow', we are told, 'trees have no more shadow. Nothing has any more meaning but the shadow-devouring trinity of gold, iron, concrete...' <sup>90</sup> The nonchalant attitude of people in the village is summed up by the messenger who says: 'Any way the world turns I take it with my hands. I like sleep and my wife and my one son, so I do not think' <sup>91</sup> and by Tebeowei, an Elder, who has given up his attempt to change



other people's 'insides' - 'I just sit down and look. If they say anything, I agree. If they do anything, I agree, since they do not take yam out of my mouth.'<sup>92</sup> The spiritual bankruptcy of the city, as one might expect, is even greater. Here, as in the village, there is the same attitude of resignation to a corrupt system. For example, the owner of the restaurant in Sologa tells Okolo: 'The people who have the sweetest insides are the think-nothing people and we here try to be like them.'<sup>93</sup> On the walls of his restaurant is the inscription: 'Even the whiteman's Jesus failed to make the world fine. So let the spoilt world spoil... Eat and drink O, die one day we go.'<sup>94</sup> Even the police chief, a white man, in his plea to Okolo does not show he is much different from others: 'Be sensible and be a good lad. This country will need men like you, if only you learn to shut your eyes at certain things.'<sup>95</sup>

Okolo fights a well-established evil which has engulfed the whole of society. The outcome is an immediate and tragic separation from his people:-

Some of the townsmen said Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct. This they said was the result of his knowing too much book, walking too much in the bush, and others said it was due to his staying too long alone by the river.

So the town of Amatu talked and whispered; so the world talked and whispered. Okolo had no chest, they said. His chest was not strong and he had no shadow. Everything in this world that spoiled a man's name they said of him, all because he dared to search for it. He was in search of it with all his inside and with all his shadow.

Okolo started his search when he came out of school and returned home to his people. When he returned home to his people, words of the coming thing, rumours of the coming thing, were in the air flying like birds, swimming like fishes in the river.<sup>96</sup>

The individual quality of Okara's prose manifests itself in this passage which is at the very beginning of the novel. It describes the growing divorce between Okolo's idealism and Izongo's materialism. It also provides a good example of the correlation which exists in the novel between the theme - the tragic separation of the individual from his traditional society - and the language which, in many of its aspects, demonstrates the difficulty of communicating with words in ordinary usage. This point will be elaborated in the next section. As the passage shows, Okolo's isolation is achieved through a number of groundless accusations. The novelist intentionally renders these in a prose style that is a direct transliteration of Ijaw in order to underline their vagueness - 'Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct.' 'Okolo had no chest ... he had no shadow.' Further evidence of Okara's fondness for symbols and images is provided by expressions like 'His chest was not strong', 'He was in search of IT with all his inside and with all his shadow' and the whole of the last sentence of the passage. The first sentence of the second paragraph, with the repetition of 'talked and whispered' and the graduation from 'the town of Amatu' in the first part to 'the world' in the second, is a vivid presentation of the people's continuing effort to discredit Okolo.

It is through his preoccupation with his hero's 'inside' that Okara gives the reader an insight into Okolo's disappointments and mental agony:-

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

At last the black black night like the back of a cooking pot entered his inside and grabbing his thoughts, threw them out into the blacker than black night. And Okolo walked, stumbled, walked with an inside empty of thoughts except the black black night.<sup>97</sup>

This is the language of a lyrical poet who communicates almost exclusively through images and symbols. The 'inside' of his hero is, as it were, laid bare for the reader to see. It is turned into a living room invaded by thieves and the helplessness of the man is emphasized by deliberate repetitions - 'walked, stumbled, walked', 'shut and opened, shut and opened.' His confusion is symbolized by the untidy state of the room and his disappointment, by his failure to replace darkness with light. The emphasis on darkness - 'the black black night like the back of a cooking pot' - helps to make this evocation of desolation convincing.

Out of these doubts and disappointments emerge an inflexible resolve to continue the fight against Izongo and his henchmen. Given the circumstances of this confrontation, Okolo cannot be expected to win. But he makes spectacular gains. He enlists the active support of Tuere and Ukule and through the latter Okolo is given the assurance: 'Your spoken words will not die.'<sup>98</sup> The second messenger vacillates in his support of Izongo; Ebiere, her husband and her brother throw aside traditional constraint and assert their youthful liberty. Even Abadi seems to accept Okolo at last. Furthermore, the hero's strategy for future action gives confidence:-

This time he would the masses ask and not Izongo and his Elders. If the masses haven't got it, he will create it in their insides. He will plant it, make it grow in spite of Izongo's destroying words. He will uproot the fear in their insides, kill the fear in their insides and plant it. He will all these do.<sup>99</sup>

Okolo has changed his tactics and decided on a new method of approach. Since he has failed with Izongo and the Elders, he will turn to the 'masses' in his attempt to eradicate the materialistic value system with which the former have contaminated society. The struggle is not only political but ideological as well. The hero's determination to fight for the truth to the bitter end is suggested by the repetition of his declared intention - 'plant it', 'make it grow'; 'uproot the fear', 'kill the fear' - and confirmed by 'He will all these do.' Such a struggle between an established oligarchy and the masses, between truth and falsehood, has relevance for places and situations outside Amatu and Sologa. It is from such considerations that Okolo's activities derive their universal significance. Although not fully understood and accepted, Okolo's has been, to use Wole Soyinka's words, 'the voice of vision in his own time'<sup>100</sup> and its ultimate victory is assured.

This vision is presented at both the human and symbolic levels. Throughout the novel Okolo's dominant symbol is water: When Okolo gets no response from his 'inside' it is because 'silence has flooded it.' He recalls an early life spent 'with his mother in a canoe'<sup>101</sup> and he dies in a canoe 'aimlessly floating down the river.'<sup>102</sup> His fiercest encounter with falsehood takes place on a river on the voyage to Sologa. Water, as we are frequently reminded in the novel, is the source of power - 'the river was full up to its brim and the water's power passed power.' The canoe is pushed 'against the formidable power of the water.'<sup>103</sup> More important, without water, we are told, life is impossible:-

You say water has my inside entered. But you know not the power of water?

Your eyes, don't they see the river? Your eyes, don't they see the yams, coco-yams, sugar canes, plantains? Can they grow without the power of water? And what is behind the power of water? Without water can you in the world live? Water is soft but is it not the strongest thing be?104

On the other hand, the dominant symbol of Izongo and his henchmen is 'a dried pool with only dead wood and skeleton leaves':-

Belief and faith in that something we looked up to in times of sorrow and joy have all been taken away and in its stead what do we have? Nothing but a dried pool with only dead wood and skeleton leaves. And when you question they fear a tornado is going to blow down the beautiful house they have built without foundations.105

As the quotation on page 401 shows, these men are 'pepper', 'fire', 'bad waterside' - nothing particularly beneficial to the community. Here they are 'beautiful houses ... without foundations'. By representing Okolo as the source of life and power and Izongo, as power fossilised and on the brink of extinction, Okara projects a vision of a future which belongs to Okolo and all who support his ideals.

On the human level what is stressed is that man everywhere can benefit from Okolo's experiences:-

Okolo sat with his knees drawn up to his chin trying not to touch anybody's body. This little he had now learned. He smiled in his inside. But is it possible for your body not to touch another body, for your inside not to touch another inside, for good or for bad?

Is it possible to make your inside so small that nothing else can enter? Are spoken words blown away by the wind? No! Okolo in his inside saw. It is impossible not to touch another's inside. It is impossible to make your inside so small that nothing else can enter. ... What of spoken words? Spoken words are living things like cocoa-beans packed with life... So Okolo turned in his inside and saw that his spoken words will not die.106

Okolo gets into trouble on the way to Sologa when he is accused of 'touching' Ebiere. On the return journey he tries to avoid this type of situation by keeping to himself, far away from any other passenger - 'This little he had now learned.' The only way he can maintain this self-imposed separation is to sit 'with his knees drawn up to his chin' - an inconvenient sitting position. Okara ridicules the idea of individual isolation, and we find ourselves agreeing with him - 'Is it possible for your body not to touch another body, for your inside not to touch another inside, for good or for bad?' The Izongos of this world who believe that all they have to do is to keep all the Okolos away to be secure in their wickedness and corruption deceive themselves. They are still exposed to the influence of 'spoken words' which are 'living things'. It is the assurance that Okolo's spoken words 'will not die' which makes the universal message of the novel an extremely hopeful one.

## VII

Okara's prose style is so unique and contributes so significantly to the success of the novel that it deserves further consideration. We are told by the novelist himself that his style is influenced by Ijaw way of thinking and that his principal aim in all his writings is 'to capture the living images of African speech.'<sup>107</sup> But to call his style 'experimental', as Professor Roscoe does in his book, is to suggest that it is capable of improvement, modification and possible future use.<sup>108</sup> I believe that Okara's adopted prose style has grown out of the artistic necessities of

The Voice and represents the kind of achievement which cannot endure repetition. Okolo means 'voice'; in this case, the voice of wisdom, 'the voice of vision'. Okara's strange English prose is his peculiar invention in which his hero expresses his 'voice', his self-identity, declares his total awareness of human experience and defines his relationship with a changing world. Again, since Okolo in his social and moral orientation is different from the other villagers, there is need for him to emphasize this difference in his 'spoken words' which, as I have just shown, are the weapons of ultimate victory. This is the rationale for Okara's language, the circumstances which justify his unusual English syntax. I regard the symbolic language of The Voice as an integral part of what is created and one which cannot be separated from the total meaning and the universal message of the novel.

Contrary to what Okara's declared intention would lead one to expect and the impression given by a number of critics, Okara's prose style is not entirely dominated by the linguistic characteristics of his native Ijaw.<sup>109</sup> His language is, in fact, a compound of many simples. The Ijaw influence is no doubt important but there are other influences as well, providing linguistic features different from those of Ijaw. Whichever features are most noticeable at any particular time depends on the developing situation:-

Third messenger: 'Your nonsense words stop. These things have meaning no more. So stop talking words that create nothing...'

First messenger: 'Listen not to him. He speaks this way always because he passed standard six. Because he passed standard six his ears refuseth nothing, his inside refuseth nothing like a dustbin.' ...

Third messenger (Angrily): 'Shut your mouth.  
You know nothing.'

First messenger (Also angrily): 'Me know nothing?  
Me know nothing? Because I went not to school I  
have no bile, I have no head? Me know nothing?  
Then answer me this. Your hair was black black  
be, then it became white like a white cloth and  
now it is black black be more than blackness.<sup>110</sup>

Many of the features of Okara's prose style are present here. The Ijaw influence is noticeable in sentences like 'I have no bile, I have no head?' and the inverted command: 'Your nonsense words stop.' The Ijaw method of simple repetition for emphasis is responsible for 'black black' (Standard English: very black) and the modified form 'white like a white cloth', 'black black be more than blackness'. This method of emphasis is used throughout the novel:-

You have been silent more than silence.<sup>111</sup>

He ... came and sat near Okolo with smile  
smile in his mouth.<sup>112</sup>

On this cold cold ground we have been walking.<sup>113</sup>

Whatever they do to Okolo is nothing nothing.<sup>114</sup>

But other influences, apart from those of Ijaw, are discernible from the passage. The whole of the first speech of the first messenger is in the type of Standard English appropriate to his status except for the use of the biblical ending 'eth' in 'refuseth'. 'Shut your mouth. You know nothing... Me know nothing?' is pidgin English, which may well be used by messengers in these circumstances. Even a short statement like 'He will come. He worked overtime. Let us wait small.'<sup>115</sup> has the first two sentences in Standard English and the last in pidgin English.

When there is need for speed in the action of the novel Okara often reflects this need by abandoning his adopted prose style and writing in Standard English:-



When day broke the following day it broke on a canoe aimlessly floating down the river. And in the canoe tied together back to back with their feet tied to the seats of the canoe, were Okolo and Tuere. Down they floated from one bank of the river to the other like debris, carried by the current. Then the canoe was drawn into a whirlpool. It spun round and round and was slowly drawn into the core and finally disappeared. And the water rolled over the top and the river flowed smoothly over it as if nothing had happened.<sup>116</sup>

'Then the canoe was drawn into a whirlpool' is particularly significant. It shows Okara's growing fascination with an idea which provides the objective for all his works. 'I think the immediate aim of African writing,' he once declared, 'is to put into the whirlpool of literature the African point of view.'<sup>117</sup> Here the hero is submerged in a whirlpool and, with him, the noble ideals for which he stands. Since we are already told that his spoken words 'will not die', this manner of death is a symbolic way of assuring us of his re-appearance in a new and more hopeful form.

Okara's ability to regulate his speed of narration according to the requirements of art is particularly attractive in the way it frequently enables the reader to assimilate gradually the numerous details necessary for a correct assessment of the work:-

The people snapped at him like hungry dogs snapping at bones. They carried him in silence like the silence of ants carrying a crumb of yam or fish bone. Then they put him down and dragged him past thatch houses that in the dark looked like pigs with their snouts in the ground; pushed and dragged him past mud walls with pitying eyes; pushed and dragged him past concrete walls with concrete eyes; pushed and dragged him along the waterside like soldier ants with their prisoner. They pushed and dragged him in panting silence, shuffling silence, broken only by an owl hooting from the darkness of the orange tree.<sup>118</sup>

The brisk movement of the first two sentences reflects the swiftness of the initial actions of the people. But later

different circumstances. Those critics, like Eldred Jones and Ronald Dathorne, who dismiss Okara's prose style lightly do not seem to have given sufficient consideration to its many features and the various aspects of its use in the novel.<sup>121</sup> His style, especially in those sections dominated by Ijaw syntax and ways of thinking, has the overall effect of slowing down the action and inducing a quality of contemplation which fits the theme of the novel:-

It was the day's ending and Okolo by a window stood. Okolo stood looking at the sun behind the tree tops falling. The river was flowing, reflecting the finishing sun, like a dying away memory. It was like an idol's face, no one knowing what is behind. Okolo at the palm trees looked. They were like women with hair hanging down, dancing, possessed. Egrets, like white flower petals strung slackly across the river, swaying up and down, were returning home. And, on the river, canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling.<sup>122</sup>

Here we see the dramatic effect of Okara's prose as it rises to fine poetic heights. By placing his verbs close to the end of the sentence, the novelist is no doubt reproducing the Ijaw sentence structure of subject - object - verb. This gives the prose a sense of cadence and provides an appropriate setting for 'the day's ending', with the various objects either coming to rest or withering away. 'The finishing sun', 'dying away memory', 'canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling' are some of the very expressive statements which result from Okara's transliteration of Ijaw idiom and word order into English. As Charlotte Bronte points out,

When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence wakens in them, which becomes their master - which will have its own way - putting out of view all behests but its own...<sup>123</sup>

on, by means of repetitions, and the jerky movement which results from them, we are made to feel the cumulative effect of 'pushed and dragged', and, to that extent, the difficulty of the hero who suffers in silence. The hooting of the owl underlines the gravity of the situation.

An entirely different kind of impression is given by a passage like this, also written in Standard English:-

'You speak English, of course?'

'Yes,' answered Okolo.

'You want to see the Big One?'

'Yes.'

'What about?'

'I want to ask him if he's got it'.

'Have you ever heard of the word psychiatrist?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know what a psychiatrist does?'

'Yes.'

'Have you consulted one?'

'No.' 119

Okolo and the white police chief have little in common and would be glad to be rid of each other quickly. This impatience is reflected in the dialogue, especially in Okolo's short answers. On the other hand, a character like Tuere communicates mainly in symbols and takes all the time she needs to make her point:-

Don't you see it in your inside that when everybody raises his hand for you and sings your praise in song, you are turning the insides of the people against them? So you were a big tree fallen across their path. They could not move it or cut it as they did me because you have been to school. And so they had to cut a path around it by passing the word round that your head is not correct. 120

Okara is remarkably successful in achieving the various levels of speech appropriate to character and situations, and in adapting the relevant features of his adopted prose style to

The motivating force, in Okara's case, is undoubtedly his determination to devise consciously an English prose style, influenced by Ijaw and other factors, suitable for his creative purpose in The Voice.

It is significant that Okara's language comes close to that of Tutuola wherever the predominant influence is Ijaw. The influence of Yoruba on Tutuola's English, as was pointed out in chapter two, is an innocent one. But in Okara the influence of Ijaw is part of a deliberate device. However, because of some basic morphological and syntactical similarities between Yoruba and Ijaw vis-a-vis English, the English translations of certain items from Yoruba and Ijaw, whether the result of a deliberate policy or not, are the same. If these translations often result in non-Standard English expressions, as we find in Okara and Tutuola, it is because both Yoruba and Ijaw are tonal languages, non-structural but symbolic and multi-referential while English is an inflected language, structural but non-symbolic.<sup>124</sup> Given below are the Yoruba equivalents of short extracts from The Voice, which were originally transliterated from Ijaw, to prove my point. Okara's version in each case would have been adequate for a Yoruba original of the same item. The translations are literal.

His head was not correct.<sup>125</sup>  
Ori re ko pe

He wanted to look him to death.<sup>126</sup>  
O fe wo o pa.

I just sit down and look.<sup>127</sup>  
Mo joko jeje mo nwo.

It was rain's time.<sup>128</sup>  
Akoko ojo ni.

If one has a lucky head.<sup>129</sup>  
Ti enia ba ni orire

Look at the eye of the day.<sup>130</sup>  
Wo oju ojo

His breathing reached the ground.<sup>131</sup>  
O mi konle

The day is finishing.<sup>132</sup>  
Ojo ndari

It is interesting to compare these with a few extracts from  
The Palm-Wine Drinkard, given with their Yoruba translations.

If she would die she would die.<sup>133</sup>  
Ti o ba ma ku, a ku.

They loved themselves.<sup>134</sup>  
Nwon feran ara won.

He would come and barb his own at night.<sup>135</sup>  
Oun a wa ge tie lale.

All the parts of his body were completed.<sup>136</sup>  
Gbogbo ara re lo pe.

There was no palm wine for them to drink.<sup>137</sup>  
Ko si emu fun won lati mu.

From these two sets of extracts Okara's greater reliance on symbols and images becomes obvious. These symbols come off well in Yoruba, as the translations show, because of the linguistic affinity Yoruba bears to Ijaw. In English they sometimes give Okara's prose a quality that is too physical for a non-symbolic language and, in extreme cases, lead to artificial dislocations of some aspects of English syntax - 'Who are you people be?... If you are coming-in people be, then come in.'<sup>138</sup> However, it must be emphasized that these symbols usually perform essential linguistic functions in the novel. As has been pointed out, it is through the use of concrete images that the novelist offers us glimpses into the inner life and experiences of his hero and other characters. It is also in a symbolic manner that he presents the vision of hope, the ultimate triumph of truth over

falsehood, which is the universal message of The Voice. Again, it is his use of symbolic language that enables Okara to draw Izongo and Okolo in moral contrast to each other and, in the process, to demonstrate his very critical attitude towards the traditional elements in contemporary society.

## Notes

1 Page references are to:

Tafawa Balewa, Shaihu Umar, translated by Mervyn Hiskett (London, 1968)

Obi Egbuna, Wind versus Polygamy (London, 1964)

Adaora Ulasi, Many Thing You No Understand (London, 1970)

Nkem Nwankwo, Danda (London, 1970)

Gabriel Okara, The Voice (London, 1970)

2 These devices, which are discussed in detail later, are most noticeable in poems like 'The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down', 'Piano and Drums', 'The Mystic Drum'.

3 For a set of postulates on story transmission see, for example, Robert A. Georges, 'Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events', Journal of American Folklore, Vol.82, No.326(1969), 313-28.

4 Shaihu Umar, p.18.

5 Ibid., pp.38-39.

6 Ibid., p.22.

7 Ibid., pp.37-38.

8 For the possible effects of this linguistic characteristic on Hausa stories see, for example, H.A.S. Johnson, A Selection of Hausa Stories (London, 1966), p.xxxii.

9 Shaihu Umar, p.76

10 Ibid., p.69.

11 Ibid., p.24.

12 Ibid., p.18.

13 Wind versus Polygamy, pp.94-95.

14 Ibid., p.95.

15 Ibid., p.33.

16 Ibid., p.98.

17 Ibid., p.71.

18 Ibid., pp.39-40.

19 Ibid., p.40.

20 Ibid., pp.16-17.

21 Ibid., p.45.

- 22 Ibid., p.76.
- 23 Ibid., p.77.
- 24 Ibid., pp.78-79.
- 25 Ibid., p.127.
- 26 O.R. Dathorne, a review in Black Orpheus, 17(1965), p.59.
- 27 Wind versus Polygamy, p.7.
- 28 Egbuna, 'Divinity', Daughters of the Sun (London, 1970), p.1.
- 29 Wind versus Polygamy, p.53.
- 30 Many Thing You No Understand, p.188.
- 31 See Adaora Ulasi, Many Thing Begin for Change (London, 1971).
- 32 Many Thing You No Understand, p.147.
- 33 Ibid., pp.8-9.
- 34 Ibid., pp.75-76.
- 35 Ibid., p.110.
- 36 Ibid., p.189.
- 37 Ibid., p.179.
- 38 Ibid., p.177.
- 39 Ibid., pp.78-79.
- 40 Ibid., pp.115-6.
- 41 Ibid., pp.189-90.
- 42 Ibid., p.92.
- 43 A Man of the People, p.52.
- 44 Many Thing You No Understand, p.41.
- 45 Anthologized in Modern Poetry from Africa, ed. Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (London, 1970), p.128.
- 46 Danda, p.81.
- 47 Ibid., pp.36-37.
- 48 Ibid., p.22.
- 49 Ibid., p.54.
- 50 Ibid., p.19.



- 51 Ibid., p.83.
- 52 Ibid., p.80.
- 53 Ibid., p.158.
- 54 Ibid., p.13.
- 55 Ibid., pp.155-6.
- 56 Ibid., p.117.
- 57 Ibid., pp.8-9.
- 58 Ibid., p.9.
- 59 Ibid., p.17.
- 60 Ibid., p.45.
- 61 Ibid., p.49.
- 62 Ibid., pp.185-6.
- 63 Ibid., p.194.
- 64 Ibid., p.29.
- 65 Ibid., p.193.
- 66 Ibid., p.48.
- 67 Ibid., p.60.
- 68 Ibid., p.58.
- 69 Ibid., p.52.
- 70 Ibid., p.84.
- 71 Ibid., p.85.
- 72 Ibid., p.152.
- 73 Ibid., pp.158-9.
- 74 Ibid., pp.79-80.
- 75 Ibid., p.201.
- 76 Thomas Cassirer, 'Profile of a Jester', a review in African Forum, Vol.1, No.4(1966), 128.
- 77 The Voice, p.72.
- 78 Ibid., p.31.
- 79 Ibid., p.36.

- 80 Ibid., p.63.
- 81 Ibid., pp.105-6.
- 82 Ibid., p.106.
- 83 Ibid., p.50.
- 84 Ibid., p.44.
- 85 Ibid., p.34.
- 86 Ibid., p.117.
- 87 Ibid., p.118.
- 88 Ibid., p.45.
- 89 Ibid., pp.98-99.
- 90 Ibid., p.89.
- 91 Ibid., p.25.
- 92 Ibid., pp.48-49.
- 93 Ibid., p.84.
- 94 Ibid., p.82.
- 95 Ibid., p.88.
- 96 Ibid., p.23.
- 97 Ibid., p.76.
- 98 Ibid., p.127.
- 99 Ibid., p.90.
- 100 Wole Soyinka, 'The Writer in a Modern African State',  
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- 101 The Voice, p.105.
- 102 Ibid., p.127.
- 103 Ibid., p.58.
- 104 Ibid., p.93.
- 105 Ibid., p.89.
- 106 Ibid., p.110.
- 107 G. Okara, 'African Speech...English Words', Transition,  
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- 108 Roscoe, Mother is Gold (London, 1971), pp.113-121.
- 109 See, for example, Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons (London, 1968), pp.196-8; Anne Tibble, African/English Literature (London, 1965), pp.91-92.
- 110 The Voice, pp.24-25.
- 111 Ibid., p.65.
- 112 Ibid., p.83.
- 113 Ibid., p.91.
- 114 Ibid., p.97.
- 115 Ibid., p.107.
- 116 Ibid., p.127.
- 117 Cultural Events in Africa, No.102 (undated), p.4.
- 118 The Voice, pp.38-39.
- 119 Ibid., p.86.
- 120 Ibid., p.55.
- 121 Eldred Jones, 'Locale and Universe: Three Nigerian Novels', Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.3 (1967), p.129; Ronald Dathorne, 'The African Novel - document to experiment' (Unpublished Manuscript), p.11.
- 122 The Voice, p.26.
- 123 Letter to G.H. Lewes, 18 January, 1848 quoted in David Lodge, The Language of Fiction (London, 1966), p.83.
- 124 For further linguistic consideration of this point see, for example, the relevant sections of Twelve Nigerian Languages, ed. Elizabeth Dunstan (London, 1969).
- 125 The Voice, p.23.
- 126 Ibid., p.46.
- 127 Ibid., p.48.
- 128 Ibid., p.58.
- 129 Ibid., p.60.
- 130 Ibid., p.71.
- 131 Ibid., p.82.
- 132 Ibid., p.100.

- 133 p.21.
- 134 p.47.
- 135 p.87.
- 136 p.18.
- 137 p.8.
- 138 The Voice, pp.26-27.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

The attempt to create a link between tradition and modern experience poses many problems which each of the authors dealt with in this thesis has tried to solve in his or her particular way. Some solutions, as we have seen, have proved more successful than others. Balewa's didactic use of folktales, his recreation of the glory and achievements of the past, especially the equanimity and stoic dignity which Shaihu Umar displays in the face of great odds, the convincing presentation of a society willing to be guided by high moral principles - all these are positive contributions from which the decoders of his message can benefit. This achievement has been possible partly because of the way in which the author, although relying on the resources of Hausa culture and language, has tried to avoid some of the problems of communication exhibited in Tutuola's works. Tutuola appears to have successfully solved many of his linguistic problems by depending almost entirely on Yoruba. For this reason he has been described by Roscoe as 'a writer without problems'.<sup>1</sup> But, as was argued in chapter two, his excessive reliance on Ll imposes some restrictions on his writings: by reducing the effect of any criticism of Yoruba society, past and present, it helps to create the impression that the novelist's attitude to indigenous culture is that of near uncritical total acceptance. It also sometimes obscures the intended link between tradition and modern life. This kind of solution holds very little promise for the future since it is based

on a medium hardly capable of development. It would require the strange inventiveness of another Tutuola for the English Language to be made to perform so successfully again the functions of the vernacular.

The way ahead to the future lies in the realistic manner in which novelists like Achebe, Aluko and Amadi tackle the problems of communication which arise in their works. These novelists intelligently adapt the English Language to the need for presenting a rural culture and of criticizing traditional life at the literal and symbolic levels. This dual purpose which, according to Achebe, is 'to help my society to regain its belief in itself' and 'to expose and attack injustice'<sup>2</sup> appears to have provided the best motivation for the successful Nigerian novelist. Achebe's works are extremely useful in the way they demonstrate some of the conditions which must be satisfied if the Nigerian novelist concerned with indigenous culture is to communicate effectively: there is the need to employ themes which have a significant bearing upon real life and give a clear insight into the aspirations, hopes and fears of the age or society the novelist is writing about. The background must either be fully realized as in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God or convincingly consistent pictures of any changing or developing situations presented as in No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People. Just as important as the material is the language. Achebe's successful example results from the skilful way he renders Ibo language-process and speech patterns into English without rudely shocking the basic English sentence structure. Through a judicious use of the more symbolic elements of the Ibo language, such as proverbs and idioms, he makes it possible

for his characters to speak in a manner any native speaker would recognize as natural to them. As was demonstrated in chapter three, Achebe's successful projection of the strengths and weaknesses of Ibo culture depends largely on his selection of episodes and skilful use of language.

An important theme, a consistent imaginative scheme, a language which recognizes the characteristics of LI and skill in the use of language would therefore appear to be the essential requirements for the establishment of a successful link between tradition and modern experience. Only works which fulfil many of these conditions have a chance of achieving satisfactory results. Where an essential requirement is lacking, as in the first two novels of Nzekwu, the link is unsuccessful. Even though Nzekwu's attitude to Ibo culture may be one of great reverence, Wand of Noble Wood and Blade among the Boys evoke no sympathetic response from the reader partly because of the novelist's documentary harangues, which in themselves reveal a failure in communication, and partly because of the way he brings in the supernatural as an easy means of rounding off a story he cannot conclude satisfactorily - matters which have been attributed to social factors are usually resolved in Nzekwu by supernatural intervention. Unlike Nzekwu, Amadi offers so much detail in the situations involving the supernatural that he gives the illusion of truth. Supernatural forces are made such an essential part of his imaginative scheme that the reader is virtually forced to suspend his disbelief, and therefore does not subject the material offered to any rational or sceptical scrutiny. Amadi's works clearly show that the introduction of the supernatural need not destroy the unity

of organization of a work of fiction, pose an insuperable problem of communication nor prevent the reader from appreciating the novelist's attitude to his country's indigenous culture.

In the same manner Aluko's works demonstrate how successfully a novelist can exploit to his advantage his personal interest in the English language as written and spoken in his community. The use of English for satirical purposes often makes it necessary for Aluko to concentrate on the types of absurdities which are inherent in the linguistic situations he develops. The result is a wide variety of English registers through which he shows clearly his disapproval of much that is happening in his society, especially those failings which result from the people's adherence to customs and traditional practices. The link he establishes between tradition and modern experience is a frightfully disturbing one. The only hope for the future, according to these novels, lies in rapid social and educational reforms directed towards improving the standard of living of the people and of rescuing them from the economic and political exploitation of men like Royasin and Benjamin Benjamin.

No clear statements emerge from the works of Egbuna and Adaora Ulasi because in each case the novelist displays a lack of creative intelligence. Transliteration of customs and traditions into modern terms, as attempted by them, provides the reader with little valuable experience. Although, like Okara and Nwankwo, they subject indigenous culture to critical scrutiny, their works are too limited in intellectual and emotional range to form the basis of any assurance, in the circumstances of the twentieth century, that tradition will



not be an obstacle to progress. However, they have been useful in the way they expose the type of artistic problems which must be solved in an attempt of this kind. In Danda and The Voice, which grapple with these problems realistically, satisfactory results are achieved. The link between tradition and modern life is valuable only if it widens satisfyingly our experience of what it is to be human and thus contributes to the solution of the political and social problems of the present, even if it does this in ways not at once materially obvious.

A significant feature of many of the novels considered in this thesis is the recognition of the tensions which exist between the impulse of the individual to experience life fully and live by a code of personal conduct, on the one hand, and the awareness, on the other hand, that one cannot, in spite of oneself, do without others, and, consequently, the assumptions and conventions which govern their lives. Achebe's works provide classic examples of this dilemma: If Okonkwo had had his way, he would have tried to circumvent the sanctions of society which prescribe banishment as the punishment for a female 'ochu'. However much he detests his stay at Mbanta, he finds that, once there, his best plan is to observe the customs of the people and rely for support and encouragement on his uncle, Uchendu, whose material help proves indispensable. Obi, too, would have preferred to sever all connections with the Umuofia Progressive Union and the people of Umuofia so that he could act freely, unhampered by any prejudice or traditional constraint. It is only without reference to the traditional elements in society that he can marry Clara. In spite of his drift towards modernity, such reference becomes necessary, and

inevitably leads to disaster. In Arrow of God Achebe achieves a delicate balance between the heavy responsibility which Ezeulu's position as Chief Priest of Ulu imposes on him and his personal desire to be associated early with Christianity. He acts with considerable foresight and sends his son, Oduche, to be his 'eye' among the Christians. But his action is widely misinterpreted by the traditional forces in society, and is partly responsible for his eventual downfall. It would appear from these examples that in any confrontation between traditional and modern forces as the determiner of the fate of the chief character, traditional forces gain the upper hand.

The same conclusion will be substantially correct in respect of many of the other novels to which this work is devoted. Although the customs, conventions and traditional practices of the people are usually criticized, the message seems to be that any individual who defies tradition does so at his own risk. Tradition is usually presented as a force strong enough to make people comply with the social and cultural expectations of their society. So we find, for example, that, although the two main characters of A Man of the People oppose each other violently, neither of them feels strong enough, even in their modern setting, to defy tradition. Balewa's characters are able to live down successfully the cruelty of the days of slavery because of the inner strength provided them through their strict adherence to religious traditions. In Nzekwu's novels the attempts made by Peter and Patrick to circumvent traditional requirements in the matters of marriage and religion respectively result in disaster in each case. In order to

satisfy the judgements of society and against his personal inclination, Ekwueme in The Concubine goes through the marriage ceremony with Ahurole even though, we are told, he does so as a 'sleep-walker'. Even Titus in Kinsman and Foreman, known for his respect for the truth and his great display of courage, fails to disclose in court and at the departmental Commission of Enquiry all he knows about Simeon in deference to public, mostly traditional, opinion. It is only in Danda and The Voice that we have examples of chief characters who live by a code of personal conduct and get away with it, although not without a great deal of opposition from traditional and reactionary forces in society. The conflict between the past and the present, as these novels show, is the most important aspect of the attempt to create a link between tradition and modern experience. The unique achievement of the successful Nigerian novelists like Achebe, Amadi, Okara and Aluko in this attempt has been made possible by their incisive analysis and evaluation of character and conduct, carried out with a subtlety and penetration which continually exercises and extends our understanding of human nature.

#### Notes

- 1 Roscoe, Mother is Gold (London, 1971), pp.98-113.
- 2 Chinua Achebe, 'The Novelist as Teacher', Commonwealth Literature, ed. John Press (London, 1965), p.204.

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