"FORM AND STYLE IN THE NIGERIAN NOVEL"

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DEDICATION

TO

MY WIFE

GRACE OVIUGWENYE

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out

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ABSTRACT

In the relatively short period (1952-1978) of its life so far, the Nigerian novel has displayed a remarkable growth in which various forms and techniques have been exploited. The most significant stimulus for this rapid growth had been the novelists' interest in the portrayal of the realities of contemporary Nigerian world and experiences, and by the faithful representation of these aspects, to correct the prejudices which generations of Europeans have created about the black man, and his culture. In doing this most of the novelists have ironically drawn upon the pre-established western fictional forms and the English language. In their use of these forms, however, the Nigerian novelists have not been merely imitative. Rather, starting with the example of the western forms, they have gone to "till new grounds" by utilising themes of specifically African experiences and culture, and by exploiting new narrative and linguistic modes based upon African oral literary forms of expression. Indeed, in their use of the western fictional modes, the novelists have been particularly conscious of the need to Africanise the forms and styles which they have inherited. In this respect, many of the novelists have not only experimented with, but have realised successfully, the literary implications which the background of African culture and socio-historical experience can have for the structure of the novel and the aesthetics of character presentation, plot development, and language use.

The variety of forms thus achieved and the stylistic techniques

utilized have not only given a genuine African flavour and tone to the forms they have inherited from the colonial literature. These strategies are also indicative of the "realism" and maturity which they have attained.

The basis of "realism" presented in the novels is not a static element, but one that shows a continuous development in form and point of view as the novelists relate to changes in the economic, social and moral life of the nation. In the initial stages of the growth of the Nigerian novel, "realism" was achieved largely in terms of an insistent evocation of the cultural forms of the African world. But following new and unexpected experiences in the political life of the nation, there has been a significant shift away from the earlier focus upon social and cultural realities towards a more objective representation and critique of the modern society and its values.

In its vision, style, and fictional experiences embodied, the Nigerian novel is clearly establishing for itself a distinctive form characterized not only by the novelists' interest in the imaginative representation of the social and cultural realities of contemporary Nigerian life, but also by the intense humanism which they bring into their narrative art.

By vigorously exploiting specifically African experience, narrative modes and linguistic habits, in a manner relevant to the moral development of their world, the novelists have been able to lay the foundations for a truly Nigerian national literature.

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To the University of Lagos I wish to express my gratitude for granting me study leave from July 1976 to December 1977. This enabled me to spend some time in the Department of African Languages and Literature of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. This period which was in every way carefree and pleasant enabled me to undertake close reading of my texts and to start developing and writing up my ideas. In addition, the year gave me an invaluable opportunity to meet other literary Africanists, particularly Bernth Lindfors, Professor Daniel P. Kunene, Professor Jan Vansina, Sara Fabio, Dr,

Atiboroko and Professor Harold Scheub and Edris Makward, with all of whom I had very enlightening discussions. I am grateful to Dr. Atiboroko and Professor Daniel P. Kunene who were always ready to meet my personal needs. I am also grateful to Professor Harold Scheub who introduced me to Structuralist criticism, Semiology and Semiotics, and the possibilities which these offer in the criticism of African oral literature. Although these approaches have not been of immediate relevance in the present work, they widened my intellectual horizon and indirectly affected the development of the ideas in this thesis.

To my dearest wife, Grace Akporobaro, I owe such gratitude in many respects: for the deep devotion, understanding and loving care which she showed throughout the entire period of this research project, and for the marvellous way she helped by typing many of the chapters in readiness for this final form.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the structural organisation and stylistic techniques of a representative number of Nigerian novels. The primary aim of this is to present a view about the emerging formal pattern and distinctive stylistic features of the Nigerian novel as so far developed. As a number of sensitive critics have been quick to point out, the modern African writer's interest in the use of the Western novel form includes also, an interest in the imaginative search for an authentic African novel form and style.

The readers' awareness of the achievement of the African writer in the adaptation of the western novel form to the representation of African experiences and world view has led to the use of the concept of "the African novel". In using this term, the aim of both critic and writer has not been merely to suggest the novels' geographical context. It is also to draw attention to a range of presuppositions related firstly to the nature of the experiences delineated in the novels, and, secondly to the formal structure and techniques which are thought to be the results of a peculiarly African aesthetic sensibility.

However useful this critical concept may be, the assumptions underlying its use raise a number of meta-literary issues. Central to these issues, is the problem of the nature of the achieved formal

features and techniques of the novels. How far can we meaningfully talk about the "African novel" as a literary category? Out of the variety of methods and themes being developed, has there crystalised a specific style, structural format, or point of view that can therefore be meaningfully designated as African sui-generis. Further, not only does the view invite a critical analysis of the formal identity of the novels, but it also poses the problem of the actual basis of the uniquely African character of such forms of narrative presentation. In response to these kinds of critical issues, this thesis tries to analyse and evaluate, in detail, a number of selected and representative novels. In this way the thesis hopes to provide answers to such questions as (a) the extent to which there is a common underlying form or varieties of forms implicit in the various Nigerian novels. (b) the characteristic structural pattern of this common form, and (c) the extent to which this common form can be meaningfully described as distinctively African, having its peculiar rhetoric and structural innovations.

The attempt to provide answers to these questions involves two methodological problems. First, there is the danger of offering a purely personal interpretation of the form and style of the novels rather than what the novelists actually achieved.

It is on account of this type of subjective and rather arbitrary approach that as we point out later (p. 50). Charles Larson's discussion of the achievement of the African novelists in his The Emergence of African Fiction is in many respects unsatisfactory. In order to arrive at a much more objective interpretation of the form and style of the novels, our analysis is guided by one major consideration, namely, our interest in only those themes and narrative techniques which the novelists persistently utilise in the organisation of their novels. It is in this regard to what the novelists try to achieve that their stylistic performance in the novels will constitute our primary source of information. Where possible, and relevant, information drawn from such sources as the literary essays of the authors, and the interviews held with them will be used to illuminate our discussion.

Second to the issue of the actual narrative format of the novels is the problem which arises in the attempt to evaluate how far the African novel is indebted to the background of African oral literary methods on the one hand and on the other, to the aesthetic forms of western literary models. This problem arises from the fact that since a wide range of narrative techniques are part of the universal repertoire of narrative art which are common

to all societies and from which writers do naturally draw, irrespective of their cultural background, the representation of these narrative modes as being characteristically African, European, or other, becomes rather problematic. This becomes more so as there is little or no literarily satisfactory basis for the ascription of such general narrative strategies to one specific culture rather than to another. In the light of this consideration, our examination of the Africanness of the modern African novels will not be so much concerned with the identification of the utilized techniques in terms of their uniquely African cultural origins. Rather, the approach we have adopted throughout the thesis is to elucidate the extent to which, in the case of each novelist, the African aesthetic experience and world view have conditioned the organisational modes and style of his art. This we do by analysing the specific ways in which the novelist has modulated the structure and language of the western novel in order to accommodate his peculiar artistic sensibility and personal experience of the realities of the contemporary African world.

To do justice to the examination of the Nigerian novel form implies analysing all the written novels to date, if our conclusion is not to rest upon induction. However, since this approach is neither practically feasible within the scope of this work, nor

even desirable as a method, we have chosen to deal with only a limited number of significant novelists. In doing this we have left out a number of historically important novelists like Cyprian Ekwensi, Onuera Nzekwu and T. M. Aluko. It is not that these novelists have not contributed significantly to the development of the Nigerian fictional tradition. Our exclusions results from the fact that the thesis is concerned with the use of techniques in terms of the "indegenisation" of the inherited English novel form, rather than with the historical development of the genre in Nigeria. Hence the authors we have chosen are those whose works show a significant creative response to the structure of the western novel form and the English language in ways that are of special importance to the evolution of a Nigerian tradition of fiction.

The thesis is divided into three sections: Section I (Chapters 1 - II) is a theoretical discussion of the problem which the thesis sets out to investigate. Section II (Chapters III - VIII) presents the analysis of the selected novels from the point of view of the aim of the thesis. Section III (Chapters IX - XI) offers our conclusion about the major elements of form and style which are significantly characteristic of the Nigerian novel.

Chapter I discusses, generally, the notion of 'form' in

the novel. This is examined especially from the point of view of the relationship between the achieved novel form and style, and the socio-cultural realities in which the novelist writes. Chapter II reviews the contemporary criticism of African literature which relate specifically to the issue of what the African novelist has done creatively to the Western novel form. Chapter III presents how in My life in the Bush of Ghosts and The Palm-Wine Drinkard, Amos Tutuola exploits the techniques of oral narration and traditional African mythical beliefs to create a fictional form and experience that is authentically African. Chapter IV analyses Arrow of God, and shows that Chinua Achebe, by using contemporary African socio-historical experience, and the role of traditional religion in the organisation of socio-political life, has given a fresh and distinctively African quality to the conventional novel of social-realism. In Chapter V, we describe how Elechi Amadi in The Concubine achieves the same effects through a more emphatic representation of two similar themes: the traditional African belief in supernatural forces and the pattern of life in a typical African rural community not yet exposed to the values and stresses which result from colonial experience.

By contrast chapter VI analyses Gabriel Okara's essentially poetic approach to narration. It demonstrates that in The Voice,

Gabriel Okara through the use of the 'synecdochic' method coupled with his highly deviant use of the English language, has created an "allegorical" novel that is vividly expressive of the contemporary African moral and political dilemmas. Chapter VII is a critical examination of John Munonye's novel A Dancer of Fortune. By focussing upon John Munonye's satiric-comic view-point and narrative simplicity, the chapter seeks to illustrate two distinctive aspects of the development of the Nigerian novel:- the gradual shifting of the novelists' main focus from the initial emphasis on cultural realities towards a more satiric treatment of Nigerian society and individual behaviour, and the adaptation of both language and narrative form to create a 'popular' medium of social communication.

Chapter VIII analyses two major new novels: Wole Soyinka's Season of Anomy, and Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty. These two novels are discussed to show how through their use of the Nigerian civil war of July 1966 to January 1970, they have been able to add a significantly new experience to the growth of the Nigerian novel. By evaluating the structural formats of the novels, their peculiarities of style and moral point of view, the chapter also seek to demonstrate the nature of the originality of the novelists, and the extent to which they are

indebted to the Stream of Consciousness novel form with which they have some affinities.

Chapter IX describes the selected novelists' literary use of the received English language. In doing this, the chapter brings out how far each of the novelists is aware of the need to naturalize the English language, and evaluate the significance of their stylistic contribution towards the establishment of a national literary language. Chapter X on the other hand, examines the overall achievement of the novelists at the level of narrative form, themes, and characterisation. In particular, it presents three dominant features which define the form and orientation of the Nigerian novel. These are:- the insistent use of what we describe as a cultural image as a basis of narrative action, the presentation of characters whose consciousness are dominated by social rather than purely personal problems, and lastly, the intense concern with social values.

With reference to these distinctive formal and stylistic features of the novels, chapter XI concludes that on the whole, the Nigerian novelists have not been merely imitative in their deployment of the alien novel form; they have demonstrated their originality in terms of the same methods which novelists from other countries have utilized to give a cultural identity and social relevance to their national literatures.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AWS.	African Writers Series
BAAL	Bulletin of the Association for African Literature in English (Ibadan).
BO.	Black Orpheus (Lagos).
JAF.	Journal of American Folklore. (New York).
JCL.	Journal of Commonwealth Literature. (Leeds).
JNESA.	Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association. (Ibadan).
PA.	Presence Africaine. (Paris).
PMLA.	Publication of the Modern Language Association of America. (New York).
WAJML.	West African Journal of Modern Languages (Ibadan).

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF FORM IN THE THEORY AND CRITICISM OF THE NOVEL AS A GENRE

A history of the process through which the novel has come into being is, in a sense, a history of the continuous discovery of new narrative forms and techniques, evolved for the imaginative representation of man's changing vision of reality, his understanding of himself, and his relationship to society. The artists' interest in the moulding of words into artistically significant forms and the critics' views about the aesthetic relation between form, experience and meaning suggest a sense of the literary importance of the formal mode of being of the literary artefact. In particular, it not only provides for the given work a basis of its identity and uniqueness but also, it can be an expression of the aesthetic and socio-cultural assumptions of the community within which the creative object exists. The form of the given work then becomes a mode, an index reflecting the artist's sensibility, his creative aspirations, as well as the system of social values within which he operates.

While in the plastic arts, say, sculpture and architecture, the sense of the achieved form tends to be feadily perceptible as a result of the vivid co-presence of determinate and sensuously given qualities, the idea of "Form" in a purely verbal medium such as the novel raises a range of problems. These problems can be classified into two categories: (a) those which are bound up with the meaning of the concept of 'form' in the novel generally, and (b) those which are bound up with the general validity and adequacy of our critical assumptions about the mode of being of the novel form as a genre. The problems of type (a) can be elicited in the following set of questions -

(a) How far can we justifiably talk about 'form' in the context of the novel?

(b) In talking about "the novel form", what are we specifically referring to?

(c) How far are there transcendent and universally valid narrative techniques and structural principles which define the identity of the genre, and hence constitute the set of criteria for distinguishing between the novel, and the non-novel, and between the "good" and the "bad" novel?

The second set of issues are more or less semiological in character, and concern the complex relationship between social values and our developed sense of what good novels are. These

may be outlined roughly as follows:

(i) How valid is it for us to view the form and quality of a given novel in terms of narrative principles and expectations that are outside its own literary objectives and the aesthetic norms of its socio-cultural context? In other words, how far are our criteria of the appropriate novel form universalisable?

In order to provide some answers to these issues, we shall survey some of the existing theories about the formal identity of the novel. The aim of this is to assess the extent to which such assumptions about the novel genre are valid and useful, particularly for the aesthetic evaluation of new novel-types such as we have emerging from Africa today.

II

With the emergence of the various narrative forms in the course of the novel's development since the 18th century to the present, the process of evaluating new works and the attempt to evolve the right bases for the criticism of the novel have resulted in a wide range of theories and attitudes about the structure and function of the novel as a genre. These interpretations vary from the most basic and pragmatic ideas which underlie the general reading public's attitude about the forms to the rather fustian conceptions of Alain Robbe-Grillet which emphasise the process of narration as an end in itself. Here

however, we shall be concerned with the critical review of only some of the main approaches selected on the basis of their influence in the shaping of our assumptions about the structure, form, and function of the novel.

a. The Novel as a Narrative form. The first and most popular representation of the nature of the form, is that in which the novel is seen as a framework for fictional narrative. In this sense, it is maintained that what typifies the novel, its raison d'etre, as a literary type is that it is a fictional narrative in prose of substantial length.[1] Central to this conception is a tacit view which maintains that whatever other values the novel may aspire to, the necessary and sufficient task it must perform is story telling.

Concurrent with this formulation, there has also developed a kind of 'tale' oriented critical standard which the good novel ought to seek to fulfill. These include such items as (a) the writer's narrative ability and verve, (b) the quality of suspense generated, (c) the general aesthetic effects of the tale and sometimes (d) the moral interest of the story. In terms of this perspective, the role of the novelist, is fundamentally, not an

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[1]. Maurice Shroder, , "The Novel as a Genre" in The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism. Ed. Murray Davis (Prentice Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs. 1969) p. 43.

issue of style in the sense of the imaginative organisation of verbal structures and subtlety in the creation of characters, or the achieved architectonic quality of the tale. More pragmatically, it is a matter of his ability to invent moving and dramatic situations and experiences.

One of the major exponents of this view of the novel is E. M. Forster. In his Aspect of the novel,[1] E. M. Forster sees the essence of the novel to consist in its tale content

> "The novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect, without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different."[2]

This sense of the primacy of the tale-content has been emphasized in the criticism and theories of many practitioners of the novel form, including[3] Anthony Trollope, Arnold Bennet, Ford Madox Ford, Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens.

Significantly, it is to be observed that although a sizeable number of major theoreticians of the form as well as the reading

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1. E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel. (Edward Arnold, London, 1927). Reference to Penguin books edn. London, 1961, Chapter 5.

2. Ibid.

3. See M. Allott, Novelists on the Novel. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1965), pp. 241ff.

public are generally unified in the emphasis upon the tale content, the individual viewpoints tend to differ in a number of respects: First, there is a lack of agreement in the respect of what other items - what ideas and what types of experiences could be brought within the narrative structure as necessary additional aspects of the form. What sort of story should the novel be telling, and in what sense is this different, if at all, from the historical story, the folktale, the biography, travelogue, and the autobiography?

Secondly, there is also a striking divergency in the level of technical expertise, and the degree of formal complexity which the given narrative must attain before such a story can be meaningfully regarded as "a novel." E. M. Forster[1] and the Russian formalist critic Tomashevsky have made a distinction between the story simpliciter, and the novelistic story. Establishing the distinction between "plot" and "story", E.M. Forster suggests that in the novel proper, the sequence of events entails necessarily, the notion of plotted action, that is, the arrangement of events in such a way that elicits the question of "why" things happened. This implies in effect that in the novel the narrative emphasis is upon the principle of causality. In contrast, in the

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[1]. E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel. loc. cit.

non-novelistic story, events merely follow one another "as in dinner coming after breakfast, and Tuesday after Monday."[1] In a more or less similar distinction between "sjuzet" and "fabula" in "Thematics", Boris Tomashevsky[2] has emphasized the element of causal temporality which determines the structure of narrative events in the novel, and the sheer chronological sequence which characterize other non-novelistic forms, such as the chronicle or history. As he affirms:

> "The weaker the causal connection, the stronger is the purely chronological connection. As the story-line becomes weaker, we move from the novel to the chronicle, to a simple statement of the sequence of events."

Although the tale content is essential to Henry James' view, his conception of the novel places less emphasis upon narrativity than it does on such formalist-aesthetic aspects as the organic unity and architectonic sense of its story.

Generally, in spite of differences in the critics' view about the type of story which the "novel" tells, the notion that

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1. Ibid.

2. Boris Tomashevsky, "Thermatics", translated by Lee T. Lemmon and Marion J. Reis in Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays. (Lincoln, 1965) pp. 66 - 67.

the novel is fundamentally "a narrative in prose of some substantial length" constitutes the basic view which has determined the general public's intuitive understanding of the requirements of the form.

b. Realism and the Novel as a genre. Our second critical view of the novel form is that in which "realism" is seen as its generic approach to the representation of experience. Within this critical conception, the distinctive function of the novel genre, is not merely the presentation of human experience through the tale. In effect, the form of the tale told in the novel, must have some referential quality to the condition of man in society, by simulating within the story's narrative movement an "image" of the living processes of life as we know it. The ideal form of the novel, becomes in the words of Auerbach[1] the "completely unschematized fixation of social milieu." For many realist novelists, this process of "fixation" is conceived in terms of the Aristotelian concept of Mimesis (mimesis praxeos), that is the imitative presentation of the actualities of life through fictive action.

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[1]. E. Auerback, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Trans Willard Trask. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1974 edn.), p. 20.

In the 19th century, and in particular, in the works of Balzac, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Henry James, and the Goncourt brothers, in which fictional realism reached its apex of development, realism (social and or psychological) was conceived as the paradigmatic mode which individuates the novel from all other genres. In this respect, realism also, constituted the principal testing ground of the novelists narrative competence.

In her criticism, George Eliot, like Jane Austen, developed a metaphoric distinction between the[1] "pictorial" mode which is of the essence of the novel, and the "diagramatic" which is not of the novel proper. As she contends in her essay, "The Natural History of German Life[2] what we owe to the novelist, and his justification as an artist, is "the just representation of life in all its details," for, "art is the nearest thing to life". In The Art of the novel, Henry James develops to its logical extreme this realist criterion by maintaining that "the air of reality "the solidity of specification" is the supreme virtue of the novel, the merit on which its other virtues depends"

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1. See W. J. Harvey, The Art of George Eliot, (Chatto and Windus, London, 1965), p. 30.

2. George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life" rpt. in Essays of George Eliot, ed. George Pinney (Routledge and Kegan Paul London, 1963), pp. 270-271.

But "the air of reality" which the novelist has to realise is not a picture of the surface of things, but the "intensity of the illusion that genuine life is being presented."[1] In Studies in European realism, Lukacs while explicitly accepting social realism as the basis of the novel, develops this beyond the mere fixation of social milieu or the mere description of "biological processes." Realism must lead us beyond pure aesthetics. As the works of the great realists like Balzac and Tolstoy demonstrate, true realism, he contends, must transcend the achievement of mere typicality to the level of praxis - to the concern with action and the further development of man and society.

While most of the realist novelists aim at the achievement of the mimetic ideal, the stylistic modes developed for this over the novel's historical development vary from period to period. From a survey of these, certain features and modes persist, as the definitive narrative approaches of the realist novel form. Here we note the following five modes: namely, the insistent interest in human psychology, the emphasis upon the typical and or probable action and motives, the concern with the description of social background, the use of causal-chronological structure as a basis of ordering action, and finally, the imaginative presentation of issues of significant human interest.

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1. Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1961), p. 44

2. George Lukacs, Studies in European Realism. (Grosset and Dunlap, New York 1964), pp. 7, 9.

These organisational features will also be used as the definitive techniques of what we shall be referring to as the realist novel form, throughout the course of this work. In relation to these posited criteria of the novel form, many critics' criteria for narrative competence are correspondingly cast in such terms as the achieved realism, human interest, and probability of the plots and motives delineated in a given novel.

c. Formalism and the novel. Another influential formulation of the identity of the novel emerges out of the formalist's approach to literary criticism as developed independently by the 'New criticism' in America, and in the Russian formalist movement of Shklovsky, Tomashevsky and Roman Jakobson. Central to this approach is the separation of the idea of the 'form' from the content, and the marked excessive emphasis on the primacy of the form over the subject matter. For the formalist critic, 'form' implies the internal morphology or style of the novel, that is the controlled interconnection of the elements of syntax, linear structure, characters, pattern of metaphors and symbols fashioned and unified towards the actualisation of an aesthetic-organic form.

This carefully orchestrated form, in its coherence, logical

beauty, and aesthetic objectivity becomes the prime justification of the work as an art. Through this it "discovers" its meaning and achieves a significance. As Mark Schorer observed in his influential essay[1] "Technique as Discovery". "To speak of content is not to speak of the art at all, but to speak of experience." On the basis of this poetics he contends:

> Technique alone objectifies the materials of art: hence technique alone evaluates these materials...And as the final lesson of the modern novelist that technique is not the secondary thing... some external machination, a mechanical affair; but a deep and primary operation...Not only that technique contains intellectual and moral implications, but that it discovers them.

Similarly, in his essay "Art as technique" Victor Shklovsky stresses the technical and aesthetic aspect of the work of art by developing an affective theory of the literary activity and applying this to the discussion of the function of literary artefacts, including the novel. For him, as for his fellow formalist critics, the value and function of the novel lie in its affective quality,

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1. Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery" in the Hudson Review 1, (1948) rpt. The Theory of the Novels ed. P. Stevick. (The Free Press, London, 1967.) pp. 71 - 72.

especially, in the reader's aesthetic experience of the "artfulness" of the form. Generalizing his viewpoint he says:

> "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar" to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception, because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself, and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object, the object is not important". 1

What does emerge from the formalist critic's interpretation of the identity of a literary artefact such as the novel is a state of affairs in which the novel has become essentially, a matter of narrative technique, and our sense of what it is has also come to be identified with the complexity and "literariness" of the process of its narration. Further this emphasis upon the "artfulness" of the creative process is seen as the justification of the work rather than its philosophical, moral, or social content and function.

In addition to a-c, other criteria have been posited. These views, though of less

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1. Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique". trans. and ed. by Lee T. Lemmon and Marion J. Reis in Russian Formalist Criticism. op. cit. p. 12.

general currency than some of the foregoing, have nonetheless been of some significance in the criticism of the novel. Important in this group are the views of F. R. Leavis,[1] Alain Robbe-Grillet[2] and the Structuralists critics.[3]

d. The novel and human values. In The Great Tradition, Leavis describes the novel form in terms of its concern for human values and culture. For him, the critical criteria for the novel, is what he describes as the "seriousness of the work," its concerns with the possibilities of life and the treatment of this concern as a creative issue. In this respect those who could be regarded as major or significant novelists, are those who exhibit this creative interest. As he says:

> ...the major novelists who count in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they do not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of that human awareness they promote; an awareness of the possibilities of life." 4

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1. F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, (Chatto and Windus, 1948), reissued Pensuin Books, London, 1967), p. 10.

2. A Robbe-Grillet, For a new Novel: Essays on Fiction. Trans. by Richard Howard (Grove Press Inc. New York, 1965).

3. Notably:- Roland Barthes, S/Z, (Seuil, Paris,)(b) T. Todorov, and Philippe Sollers in Preface to Drame(Seuil, Paris 1965. For a detail discussion of these ideas of novel form, see S. Heath. The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the practice of writing,(London Elek, 1972).

4. F. R. Leavis, op. cit., p. 10.

In adducing this quality of concern, Leavis does not speak as if his criterion is really what may be used for the discussion of the kinds of classics which he had chosen, but seems to make this the essence of the "literary" novel.

III

If these various viewpoints have been concerned with the analysis and description of the structure of the novel, they are also normative theories of the form, prescribing what the good novel ought to be doing. Each of the theorists hardly speaks as if the good novel can be achieved in terms of other equally valid modes. On the contrary, the formulation of these ideas often go with the quiet dogmatism that their stipulated stylistic forms are the objective and generally applicable "generative rules" of a fixed form, called "the novel".

In his activity of critical evaluation, the western critic has often approached works in terms of either one or a combination of these criteria, seeing them more or less as paradigmatic modes that provide him with the objective basis for the critical assessment of any form of the novel, irrespective of its peculiar aesthetic basis, and social-cultural context. In this indiscrimi-

nate manner, the early western literary critic, interested in African literature, and, indeed, those not interested, have tended to use, much to the dismay and chagrin of the African critic, the background of mental attitudes shaped by these concepts in the evaluation of the emergent African forms. In this way, he expresses his judgements in terms of the ways in which the new literature has failed to actualize significantly these theorists' "blue prints" of the form.

From the limited point of view of our interest in the concept of 'novel-form', these interpretations can be examined critically in terms of two criteria, viz (a) how accurately each is an effective and satisfactory description of our intuitive sense of what novels are: and (b) the general applicability of these formulations to new instances of the novel, developed out of different socio-cultural contexts. In other words, how really useful and relevant are these kinds of criteria to the critical discussion of novels coming out of an entirely different cultural milieu such as the contemporary African world?

Concerning (a), that is, the intrinsic validity of each of these representations, the following observations may be made, First, that even within the context of the western literary milieu out of which these ideas have been formulated, neither of the

schools of thought represent either a theoretically satisfactory account of what things we regard ordinarily as novels, nor an adequate basis for the critical evaluation of all possible instances of the novel form. For each of the adduced defining features, counter examples can be found at the level of individual text, as well as of whole novel types which develop satisfactorily from entirely different stylistic premises. For instance, on the model of mimetic representation, as espoused by the "realist" theorists, such popular sub-genres as the thriller, science fiction and detective stories become either non-novels or bad or mediocre novels. In terms of this critical perspective, such basic African fictive forms as Tutuola's Palm Wine Drinkard, My life in the Bush of Ghosts and some of the Onitsha market fiction have been regarded as non-novels or merely puerile juvenelia of no serious artistic significance and relevance. Interestingly, from the perspective of an Allaine Grillet type of formalism, Tutuola's work passes easily as highly imaginative novel forms in which there is a significant exploration of the possibilities implicit in the genre. Stated in other terms, the mimetic model demanding the concentrated slice of life is not only one of many narrative possibilities, but the use of it as a paradigmatic model constitutes a limitation of the creative inventiveness that is so germane to the process of good story telling, whether oral or written. As a reading of the scientific

realism of the Goncourt brothers does show, the detailed presentation of the actualities of life does not necessarily make for a novel, or a good novel. On the contrary, it may result only in a historical document, or a realistic text that is tedious to read. In restrictively adducing the ideal of "pictorial" representation, the realist view of the novel does exclude other possibilities in which insight and new experiences can be revealed through the use of such alternative modes as the mythical, the symbolic and the allegorical.

The objections which we observe in respect of the realist school of thought also hold, mutatis mutandis, for the formalist and such other critical schools as the Leavisite, and the new formalism of the nouveau roman.

This is because of the fact that the kinds of limits which each sets for the novel in the respect of its structure, function and style are much too narrow and rigid to cover the various possibilities latent in the genre. Considered as critical models, what each of these theories amounts to is merely an àpriori formulation which often lies outside the perspective of both the general reader and the novelist himself. Thus, frequently, the novelist finds to his dismay, his work being used as a field for the exploration of ideas which have little or no direct relevance to the created interest of the given work. Thus, by

being insensitive to the author's creative intentions and positive achievements, critics have condemned Okara's art in The Voice for not being realistic in its characterisation and narrative form.

Similarly, Amos Tutuola's novels have been criticised for not being directly involved with contemporary socio-political reality as well as for allegedly being deficient in organic unity. Ayo Bamgbose's[1] critical observations on D. O. Fagunwa's plots and narrative structures indicate not only the inappropriateness of using preconceived western aesthetic concepts as a basis for the critical analysis of every narrative form, but also, how irrelevant such a framework can be in the discussion of some writers' works. For the general reader, the critics prescribed norms often fail to correspond to his sense of the source of aesthetic pleasure and relevance of the given work. The implication of considerations such as these is that in his purely academic interest, to formulate his theory the critic often reveals ironically, a lack of a realistic grasp of the dynamics of the novel form.

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[1]. Ayo Bamgbose, The Novels of D. O. Fagunwa, (Ethiope Press, Benin City, 1973), pp. 46 - 47.

Thus with respect to (b), attention has to be drawn to one major factor, namely, the phenomenon of "cultural determinism." This brings into focus the element of creative interaction between the conventions of the form, the realities of its social context, and the ways in which our intuitive sense of the appropriate novel form are modulated by the socio-cultural milieu of which the artist and we as readers are participants.

The realities of this close alliance between literary form and its social context have been systematically analysed and emphasised in Marxist literary theory and criticism in which the link between art and social experiences is generally used as a basis for the aesthetic evaluation of literary works. Interestingly, the possibilities latent in the alliance between literary form and cultural environment in the context of African literature has been the subject of a number of studies, notably, by Leopold Sedar Senghor,[1] Jaheinz Jahn, E. N. Obiechina[2] and Oladele Taiwo.[3] Whatever limitations a sociological or Marxist approach to literary criticism may have, they do illustrate in principle, the theme of the variation of literary style and form as the novel finds itself in a new socio-cultural context with different experiences, life-style, and epistemological outlook.

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1. See chapter II of this study.

2. E.N. Obiechina, Culture, Tradition and society in the West African Novel. (Cambridge, University Press, Cambridge 1975.

3. O. Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian Novel. (Macmillan, London, 1976).

IV

Indeed, as it has been observed earlier, the growth and continuous social relevance of the novel are the result of the development of new forms from older models through the creative response to new political, cultural and economic realities of the cultural continuum within which the novels are written. This may be seen generally in the gradual evolution of the genre, from its origins in the 18th century to the modern, and more specifically in the sharp stylistic contrasts between the Victorian (1940 - 1900) sense of the novel form and that of the moderns.

In The Rise of the Novel,[1] Ian Watt has brought out in principle, the ways in which "realism", as the formal mode of the English novel was inspired and fostered by the 18th century social milieu, as defined and created by an amalgam of the growth of empiricism, the growth of economic individualism and the influence of the simple and direct style of expression as recommended by the Royal Scientific Society. Although some of Ian Watt's assumptions are contestible, his arguments reveal a more than contigent link between these background ideas, the social experience of the time and the

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I Watt, The Rise of the Novel, (Chatto and Windus, London, 1957).

development of literary naturalism. For Defoe, for instance, the background of 17th century scientific realism gave force, interest, and value to the use of the concrete and the quantifiable circumstancial detail as technique for effecting the illusion of truth. For Richardson of Pamela, it had encouraged a higher level of psychologism, the analysis of natural feelings, in a degree hitherto unprecedented in fiction.

The structuring modes developed by Richardson, Fielding and Sterne in the early 18th century persisted in essentially the same form through Jane Austin to George Eliot, Dickens, and Thackeray and the Victorians generally. In the hands of the Victorian novelists, however, this traditional realistic structure was pushed towards a point in which it took on new bearings, becoming the essence and justification of the novel. The physical size and internal structural organisation took on new formal dimensions in the size and multiplicity of characters, not only because of the demands of the serial mode of publication and the needs of the reading audience, but because of the new social vision - the Victorian conception of society and of the place of the individual within it. Central to this social vision was the intense sense of social determinism, and the conception of society as an organic unit. As George Levine rightly pointed out, for

George Eliot, society and the universe at large is:

> A marvelously complex unit in which all parts are intricately related to each other, where nothing is really isolatable and where past and future are both implicit in the present .... For her, every man's life is at the centre of a complex web of... causes, a good many of which exert pressure upon him from the outside and come into direct conflict with his own desires and motives.[1]

Such a vision of nature was considered a major discovery which the thinkers and novelists - Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, Trollope, and Thackeray shared.

This social vision of the age affected in a profound way, the structural organisation of the novels of the period. In the hands of the major novelists who were in touch with the ideas of the age, the concept of plotting was significantly refined and extended beyond the achievement of ordinary suspense to a more complex and realistic level at which it was more or less identified with the natural movement of life, in its rhythm of everyday occurrences, and in its changing moments of deep passions and vicissitudes. For George Eliot especially, "plotting" the novel was no

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[1]. George Levine, "Determinism and Responsibility in the works of George Eliot" PMLA 77, 1972, p. 270.

mere contrivance but the mimetic presentation of what she describes as the "ever-enlarging perspectives' of life".[1] This for her and her contemporaries entailed a specific mode of structuring the novel, especially, in the form of the interweaving of the lives of the characters, resulting in an intercalation of the main, parallel and sub-plots. The use of these prevalent ideas and techniques of the period, resulted in the novel of "social realism," a period form, characterised by the comprehensive description of the varied details of people, places, human motives and the subtle gradations of emotions. The linear development of the narrative action also entailed the sense of the moral and psychological growth of the characters. But whereas these novels often achieved an intense illusion of real life, they tended at least from the modern stand-point, to be painfully disproportionate and labyrinthine.

With the gradual transition from the Victorian world view to the modern over the period 1900-1930,[2] the Victorian novel in its solid integrative form of intense social realism was rendered

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[1]. W. J. Harvey. The Art of George Eliot. Reference to third impression, 1969, p.41. (Chatto and Windus, London, 1961).

[2]. See Walter Allen, Tradition and Dream: The English and American novel from the twenties to our time. (Phoenix house, London, 1964 Edn.), pp. 1ff.

increasingly obsolete and unrealistic. Indeed, the novel, following a period of increased experimentation with new formal approaches experienced a turning-point. In particular, it saw a radical redefinition of its aesthetic form and assumptions as used by George Eliot and her contemporaries by having its creative emphasis placed upon new themes and techniques. This "shaking" up of the traditional novel structure was a response to major change in the epistemological outlook and social faith of the period. This new affecting forment and sensibility had its basis in a complex network of ideas and socio-economic conditions. The more important of these factors were Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious level of being, the traumatic experiences of the first world war[1], and the popularisation of existentialist philosophy and its highly pessimistic view of man's ontological loneliness. These background "realities" coupled with the socio-economic uncertainties of the period produced a generation of new writers with a new social vision, - another view of reality in which the social and religious ideas which had given the Victorian novel its basis of formal coherence were first brought into question, and gradually subordinated to more pessimistic and non-theistical view of man and of his place in the universe.

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1. See Walter Allen, Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to our time. (Phoenix House, London, 1964), p. 3. Also David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern world. (University of Chicago press, 1960), pp. 3ff.

In drama this new outlook created a way towards a new theatrical form, the Theatre of the "Absurd."[1] For the novel, the new outlook led towards the development of new narrative techniques in the attempt to represent more adequately, the new realities beneath the surface of everyday life. Of the varieties of newly fashioned styles and forms, the stream of consciousness novel, and its stylistic structuring features as developed by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust represents the most outstanding achievement that revealed the entirely new and untapped possibilities in the representation of the human emotions and the workings of the mind at its prelogical phase. After the modern stream of consciousness approach of Marcel Proust and James Joyce in which the novel seemed already pushed to its limits, it was felt by a number of critics that the novel was in a crisis, or dead. This was because it was felt that the novel was not capable of further development. Yet in the last two decades important and highly drastic experimentations in style and form have been introduced that show a significant movement away from Joyce and Proust into newer bearings. Prominent in this new "Modernism" are the approaches of Robbe-Grillet, Raymond Queneau and Phillipe Sollers. In

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[1]. See M. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Anchor books, Doubleday, New York, 1961), p. 5.

response to the form and mood of these novels the term "nouveau roman" (new novel) has been coined to designate the sense of departure from all other models and past approaches. Formulating his own novelistic practice in his For a New Novel,[1] Robbe-Grillet expresses a more or less new formalist view of the nature of the novel. Criticising all other criteria of the novel form, especially the realist's, as non-modern, unrealistic, and irrelevant to contemporary experience, he sees the novel from an evolutionary perspective. The novel's criterion of identity, its justification as a narrative form is neither anything in the world, nor anything within the novel. The novel neither represents nor expresses, nor is it imitative of nature. "It simply is": offering itself as a medium for the exploration of the narrative possibilities it is potentially capable of.[2]

Against this background of "narrative radicalism," Grillet has evolved a narrative style in which nature is viewed non-anthropomorphically and, in which things, actions, and situations, are emptied of all fringes of cultural realism, especially, traces of psychological realism, metaphysics, morality, and commitment to

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[1]. A. Robbe-Grillet, For a new Novel: Essays on Fiction. Translated by Richard Howard (Grove Press, New York, 1965), pp.25ff.

[2]. A. Robbe-Grillet, op. cit. pp. 134 - 135.

a humanistic perspective. These, he considers, are human additions, whose removal gives to things, their pure essence. In terms of this approach to narrative, he has tried to demonstrate the naivete of the realist's norms of narrative "probability," "typicality" and realism, as criteria of judging contemporary literature. Thus, what must hold the attention of the modern novelist is not verisimilitude....."the little detail that rings true, but the little detail that rings false." Representing the role of the novel in the modern world, he writes:

> The novel is not a tool at all. It is not conceived with a view to a task defined in advance. It does not serve to set forth, to translate things existing before it, or outside it, It does not express. It explores, and what it explores is itself. 1

Although Grillet's ideas do echo the formalists aesthetics of the novel, his actual creative achievement especially in Jealousy, and The Voyeur represent major departures from the heritage of James Joyce and Marcel Proust.

What appears evident from the historical development of the novel is the way in which both form and style are not static modes but the result of responses to new experiences and background of socio-cultural realities. In this way, the modes of one period

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1. Ibid.

or place often render irrelevant their counterparts in other periods. This element of the creative interaction between form, social background and history has been well articulated by Lukacs when he observes:-

> "New styles and new ways of representing reality though always linked to old ways and forms never arise out of any immanent dialectic within the form. Every new style is socially determined, and historically conditioned, and is a product of social development" [1]

But while the influence of the social and sociological background upon the form and content of the novel is thus of a profoundly insistent nature, this does not imply that the achieved works of any period are necessarily of one voice or stylistic form. A society at a particular phase of development is neither entirely homogenous in its outlook and aspirations, nor can the pressures it exercises totally encapsulate the individual creative instincts, personal tastes and ideosyncracies. Thus, whereas certain creative individuals in tune with the new realities have striven towards the attainment of new forms in terms of the new experiences, others through conservatism or response to audience interest, or even personal interests channel their energies towards the more established modes such

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[1] George Lukacs, Writer and Critic and other Essays. Ed. and translated by Arthur Kahn (Universal Library Press, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1971), p. 119.

as the "Thriller" the "Popular" or the "avant garde", bringing into co-existence with the mainstream, a broader spectrum of forms.

This co-existence of novels of different formal modes and stylistic orientations underscores the complexity of factors involved in the determination of the viable form. It also indicates that though the sociological influence is in certain cases of profound consequence, often more than the merely contingent, such a process of interaction has not at the same time, the rigid historical causality which Lukacs, Goldmann, and the Marxist analyst of literary forms would suggest.

This non-historical sense serves to indicate the relevance of the non-social factors, especially of the individual sensibility in the shaping of the basic form. Thus, while the social milieu and the conventions of the form may impose constraints upon the individual creative genius, the individual is not necessarily a slave to the form and techniques that he has inherited. This may be seen in the many instances in which artists have consciously abandoned established forms for the avant garde. that these realities imply from our understanding of the formal identity of the novel is that while a given work exists within a cultural milieu that imposes constraints upon its formal possibilities, the nature and quality of the achieved work remain fundamentally a product of the artist's own personality and humanity

as shaped by his private experiences and by the peculiarities of his environment.

In this complex relation to the individual and cultural ferment the achieved form of the novel takes on a significance, for both the artist, the novel and the outer society in which it is created."Form" becomes not simply the externalisation of generic conventions, but a mode through which society and the artist conceive and externalise their emotional and psychological experiences. Through the novel's receptivity to the social ferment, it achieves a sense of place and national identity, becoming in the process, an extention of the cultural wealth of the given community. For the artist, the level of imaginative response to the formal structure of the genre, his subtle control of the various aspects of the form provide an index of the quality of his artistic imagination as well as of his distinctive contribution to the literary tradition of his community. In this respect, the element of form in the novel, is ultimately an image, mediating between the private inner world of the artist, and the structures of society.

V

The element of diversity and constant changes in the critic's formulation of the "true" form of the novel, and the

intimate relationship between what may be considered as the appropriate form and the nature of its socio-cultural milieu, indicate the limitations inherent in the various normative theories of the form. In addition, these factors suggest a number of conclusions about the nature of the novel as a genre, and hence, what the critic must constantly bear in mind in the appraisal of works set in a cultural environment to which he is an outsider.

First, these factors indicate that it is a misconception to think about the novel in terms of an a priori set of generic rules and procedures that constitute objective standards in terms of which all other instances of the form can be judged irrespective of their social backgrounds and specific narrative interests. In other words, within the limits of the narrative prose-medium, the novel has to be viewed as a fluid form, that is highly susceptible to different transformations in relation to the specific experiences, modes of thought and feelings of its immediate social context, time and place. It is also for this reason that D. H. Lawrence has seen the novel as an a-historical genre, a kind of open form "incapable of the absolute".[1]

Secondly, this sense of diversity entails a high level of

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[1] D. H. Lawrence, "The Novel" in Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine (1925), reissued in A.A. Inglis. ed. D.H. Lawrence: A Selection from Phoenix, (Penguin Books, Hammondsworth, 1968), p. 161.

several possibilities in the stylistic modes adopted towards the achievement of new narrative forms and meaning and experience. Thus, the sense of form in the novel is realisable not necessarily through a unique or limited set of narrative codes or human interest, but in a variety of ways, - through the novelists commitment to political, moral, or socio-cultural realities, and through the quality of the relationship established between the constituent elements of its structure.

Finally, the almost limitless variety of modes and schemes which can give rise to the sense of form in a given novel indicates also the built-in element of vagueness in the use of the term "form" in literary theory and criticism. This state of affairs indicates as Rene Wellek has rightly observed, the difficulties of defining the term in a generally applicable manner,[1] especially in the context of the novel. On account of this ambiguity, the notion of "form" in this thesis will be used to designate methodologically, the idea of the characteristic structural format and organisational principles which individuate a particular novel as a type. "Style" denotes the creative use of language and narrative techniques for the realisation of novelistic form and vision.

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[1]. Rene Wellek, Concepts in Criticism. Stephen Nichols, Jr. ed. (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1963), ref. to the Yale University paper back edn., 1975), p. 54.

As a result of the wide ranging nature of these organisational modes, our analysis will be directed to three specific levels viz: (a) the structure and movement of the narrative action, otherwise referred to as the linear structure; (b) the characteristic thematic vision, and (c) the established relationship between these elements.

Further to the above considerations, the foregoing discussion also suggests the possibility of a distinctively African novel-form. The link between socio-cultural milieu and the nature of the narrative modes evolved implies that the novel in coming to the African world stands the chance of being moulded into a new mode of being as it readjusts to new experiences and social assumptions. While many critics of modern African literature would readily agree that the African writer has succeeded in giving the borrowed novel form a distinctively African quality, there are others who for a number of reasons feel that the African writer has not achieved much in this process of the naturalisation of the novel. The next chapter reviews the criticism of African literature which deal specifically with this question of what the African writer has done to the form and style of the novel which has come to him through the colonial experience.

This discussion is undertaken in order to suggest firstly, those elements of narrative form which the African writer can relevantly exploit towards the naturalisation of the novel, and secondly, that the African novelists'approach entails the creative use of these elements.

CHAPTER 2

I

THE CONCEPT OF FORM IN THE AFRICAN NOVEL

Whereas African forms of oral literature - oral poetry, prose narratives and traditional dramatic modes - have long existed in Africa, the novel is very much a new development which has come about partly as a result of the African experience of colonialism.[1] In spite of the generally recognised foreigness of the novel genre to the African cultural tradition, contemporary African literary criticism has shown an insistent interest in the use of the term "the African novel". The basic rationale for this is to emphasise the specific qualities, style and themes which inform the African novels and secondly, to liberate the criticism of the novels from irrelevant standards based upon western literary models and aesthetic values.

The interest in the "Africaness" of these novels is in

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1. For a fuller explication, see E. N. Obiechina, "Cultural Nationalism and African literature" in African Literature Today Ed. E. D. Jones (1968) No. I, p. 6.

itself only a small but central aspect of a larger concern to establish African literature as a literature that is expressive of uniquely African experiences and sensibilities. For the novel, the interest in its "Africanness" has come about as a result of a number of factors.[1] Central to these are the assertions of some of the African writers themselves. From an intimate understanding of their creative intentions, a number of the African writers have insistently tried to educate their critics at home and abroad that, as African writers, they are engaged in fashioning new literary strategies and, or adapting the borrowed forms towards the satisfactory representation of the realities of the contemporary African world.[2] In this regard, the writers, as well as a number of critics and reviewers believe that the novel in coming to the African world

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[1]. Important to this range of factors has been the use of the term "African" by early European critics to suggest the exotic quality of the literature. In their review of Amos Tutuola's The Palm Wine Drinkard, Dylan Thomas, Calder Marshall and Eric Larabee' use of the term was to indicate more of the sociological context of the novel and consequently its exotic character than the idea of Tutuola's successful transformation of the form into a new mould. For these reviews see Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola ed. B. Lindfors, (Three continent Press, 1975), pp.7,9,11.

[2]. See for instance, Chinua Achebe, "English language and the African writer" in Morning yet on Creation Day. (Anchor books, Doubleday, New York, 1975), pp. 74ff.

is being given a new form, a new individuality, by being shaped in a relevant relation to the African cultural continuum and its contemporary socio-historical experience.

One of the earliest suggestions of this possibility is J. P. Clark's observation during the course of an interview in 1962. As early as this date, he suggested the need to see the emergent African novels in the light of the possibility that they could represent the transformation of the inherited English novel form into a new mould determined by African social values and experiences. As he argued, the critics rather than using impatiently and uncritically the standards and expectations derived from European art forms as the criteria for the artistic excellence of the works of the African writer, should be alert to what it is that the African writer is trying to do with the form which he had imported. As he observed

> ...the novel is the one genre of art that is not Nigerian...the one art that Nigerians have really borrowed. But critics have not so much concerned themselves with what our novelists have done to their derived form as with the amount of traditional ritual and modern rottenness and rheum that is to be found in them. [1]

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[1]. J. P. Clark, "Our literary critics" Nigerian Magazine, No. 74, September 1962, p. 60.

Like J. P. Clark, David Rubadiri[1] made a similar suggestion at a relatively early period in the development of Modern African literature. Speaking to Lewis Nkosi in an interview recorded in 1964, he suggested that the emerging African novels should not be seen as merely poor imitations of the western forms. Rather, he contended they should be seen as representing a new development, a new form fashioned in relation to the African aesthetic sensibility and social experiences and hence, involving a new focus of creative interests. In its context, Rubadiri's observation is at once an insightful comment as well as a defensive statement in respect of the quality and nature of the emerging African novels. His contention is that the deviations of these novels, from say, western formalistic emphasis and realism should not necessarily be construed as flaws resulting from the African writers' creative incompetence, but as the result of the "reformation" of the borrowed form in the process of its naturalisation to the African cultural milieu.

The type of ideas registered by J. P. Clark and Rubadiri have also been shared explicitly or implicitly by a number of

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[1] Televised interview with Lewis Nkosi 1964 : Presented in Nigerian television as "Interview With African writers" July 6, 1975. Copy of the film is preserved in Nigerian television Archives, Ikoyi, Lagos.

African writers and scholar-critics. The discussed attitudes of those who share such views are often revealed in the context of the discussions of the issue of the right aesthetic basis for the criticism of African literature.

In one of his early essays "Where Angels fear to tread", Chinua Achebe, responding to adverse criticism of the form and style of modern African literature by Europeans who easily presume they understand the realities of the African world, expressed his feelings about how deluded and, indeed, dangerous it is to uphold such assumptions. In this respect he warned that "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak."[1] Such a presupposition, he argues, was a manifestation of a false "cocksuredness" about the universal applicability of Eurocentric aesthetic ideas. Through the uncritical use of such preconceptions, Achebe seems to imply, the Western-oriented critic fails to recognize the individuality and bases of social relevance of modern African literature.

It is partly for these kinds of reasons that the Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo once stressed in an interview in 1967 that a valid

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[1] Achebe adds parenthetically that "language" here does not simply mean words, but a man's entire world view. See Nigerian Magazine No. 72, December 1962, pp. 61-62.

and useful criticism of a particular literature can come out only from people of the same socio-cultural context as the literature itself. As she argues:

> I do not see that there is any validity in having someone who does not belong to the society from which the literature itself springs telling you how to write. What I mean is, if the writing is from a certain background, it's only the people who are from the background who can tell the world "This is good," and then the world takes it.....[1]

II

Historically, the emphasis upon the "Africanness" of African cultural forms (including the literary) and the projection of this perspective is not new. On the contrary, the emphasis can be seen as an application to the modern literary forms - poetry drama and novels - of a much older concern to suggest and vindicate the uniqueness of the African world and its art

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[1]. Interview with Maxine MacGregor, reprinted in African writers talking ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (Heinemann London), 1972, p. 25.

forms by a number of African patriots, scholars and nationalists.[1] Having rightly perceived the direct influence of traditional African culture and aesthetic values in the determination of African socio-cultural forms, these Africanists tried for various reasons to explain to a highly prejudiced European world, the aesthetics and logic of traditional African institutions and art forms. An early and prominent spokesman in this context is Edward Wilmot Blyden. As early as the late nineteenth century, he invoked the notion of an African personality and also used this in his speeches and writings to vindicate the nature and quality of the blackman's creative imagination and genius.

More recently, the basic idea of an "African personality" has been developed more systematically within the framework of Negritude Philosophy. In "De la Negritude Psychologie du Negro Africain"[2] Senghor, at the early stage of

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[1]. See G.O. Olusanya, "Cultural Revival for how long?" an unpublished paper presented at the Centre for Cultural Studies Seminar, University of Lagos, Tuesday, February 13th 1979.

[2]. L.S. Senghor, "De la Negritude:Psychologie du Negro-Africain" in Senghor:prose and poetry. trans and ed. by John Reed and Clive Wake (OUP London,Three Crown Books 1965), pp. 29-35.

his philosophy of Negritude sought to rationalize and articulate the "roots" of the formal features of African art forms, particularly, African poetry, prose narratives, music and sculpture. In developing his 'philosophy' he used concepts drawn from his own views of African "physio-psychology" particularly, the notion of African emotivity, and the African's "intuitive" rather than logico-rational basis of experience and cognition. In the development of these ideas, Senghor had stressed how through the traditional African mental traits and socio-cultural realities, the achieved African art forms reveal distinctive differences from their European counterparts.

Although Leopold Sedar Senghor had jettisoned the philosophy of negritude, his emphasis upon specifically African aesthetics appealed to many scholars who subsequently pushed his ideas to the entire field of African arts including narrative form and the African use of the English language. Thus, as in Senghor, Jaheinz Jahn's major concern in Muntu[1] and in A history of Neo-African literature is the explication of the uniquely African aesthetic qualities and philosophy which have informed traditional African cultural

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[1]. Jaheinz Jahn, Muntu: The New African Culture. (Grove Press Inc., New York, 1961) esp. chapters 6 and 7.

institutions. For him, not only is there a uniquely African style of artistic expression, but even contemporary African writing such as the stories of Tutuola, Thomas Mofolo, and Ogotomeli, display in some form, this distinctive African style. This unique style of contemporary African literary expression he has chosen to refer to as "neo-African."[1]

III

Although not necessarily supportive of the negritude ideas of Leopold Sedar Senghor and Jaheinz Jahn, many African literary critics and scholars have now come to share the views of the writers about their achievements in the adaptation of western literary models. Further and even more interestingly, some of these critics have also emphasised the view that, since the new literature is socio-culturally bound, it is only Africans who are adequately equiped with the right critical sensibility to judge the literary efficacy of the forms and techniques being evolved.

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1. Jaheinz Jahn, A History of Neo-African Literature. trans. Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger (Faber and Faber Ltd. London 1968). See pp. 22ff.

Developing this kind of view point to its, rather, extreme limits, Joseph Okpaku even suggested that the European, in his alien aesthetic sensibility must leave off the business of the evaluation of the new literature to the African, whom he seems to presume understands naturally, and adequately, the aesthetics and structure of the African world. In what he once prepared as a kind of "prolegomenon" to the development and criticism of African literature, he states amongst other things that:

> "The present practice of judging African Literature by western standards is not only not invalid, it is also potentially dangerous to the development of African arts.....The primary criticism of African literature and arts must come from Africans using African standards. We cannot use the existing approaches to the criticism of African literature. An African trying to relate African literature to Africa must do so against the background of African culture. He must draw upon the patterns of African aesthetics." [1]

In making these judgements Okpaku, like many other critics of similar persuasion, does not seem to take cognizance of the fact that the novel genre and the basic modalities through

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[1]. J. Okpaku, "Culture and Criticism: African critical Standards for African literature and the Arts", in New African Literature and the Arts. Ed. J. Okpaku (Thomas Crowel, New York, Apollo edn., 1970), p. 13.

which it seeks to structure thought and experience into an artistic form, are fundamentally western in their origin. Further, little or no allowances seem to be made for the fact that at the level of actual narrative performance, it is not every African writer who is interested in the achievement of an authentically African literary style and form. Some, it could be argued, are disinterested for reasons which are not only personal but bound up with the acceptability of their novels to the European audience.

Partly, out of an awareness of these kinds of factors, Abiola Irele's[1] attitude to the debate about the formal identity of modern African literary forms is one of caution. Thus, in one of his essays, he eschews the dogmatism of Joseph Okpaku by arguing that the new literature has to be seen in its "double relationship to two imaginative traditions"[2] - the native, and the foreign. In the light of this recognition of the fusion of two artistic traditions within the new literature, he has expressed the guarded observation that, while there must be a readjustment of the western critical standards and principles in order to harmonise with the peculiarities of the new literature, what these standards and principles are in the first place need not

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1. See A. Irele, "The Criticism of Modern African Literature." in Critical perspectives on African Literature, ed. C. Heywood. (Heinemann, London, 1968), p. 20.

2. Ibid.

be totally different from those of the older literature. They can, he argues be the old ones "readjusted to the peculiar modes and sensibility which feature in the African works."

IV

Even though there has been a considerable amount of support for the African writer's assertions of his adaptive response to the novel form, it must be noted too that a number of scholars do seem to disagree with such claims. One of the major reasons for such disavowals arises out of the consideration of the actual nature of the creative performance of the novelists generally, and in particular, from the critics' view of the limited level and quality of the creative adaptation displayed in the handling of the structure of the novel-form. In his Introduction to the novel,[1] for instance, Eustace Palmer has maintained that technically, the African novelist has not done much to alter or extend, significantly, the form of the English novel which has come to him. For him, the English novel in coming to the african world has clearly retained its western aesthetic

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[1]. Eustace Palmer, Introduction to African literature, (Heinemann, London, 1972), p. x.

structure. In The Mind of Africa,[1] W. E. Abraham argues a similar point of view by lamenting that basically the African writer has not awakened to the important task of the indegenisation of the allien form towards the accommodation of the African sensibility. Instead, he asserts that modern African writers have merely "accepted the noulds offered to them externally... and have crammed themselves into these noulds driven neither by inspiration nor even by conviction."[2]

If the objections of Palmer and Abraham arise out of their sense of the limitedness of the African novelists adaptive response to the novel, other critics have expressed their reservations on account of their uneasiness about the active basis for the achievement of such forms. From their different perspectives, Ben Obumselu[3] and Stanislaus[4] seem to have rejected literary "afrocentricism" as a basis for the aesthetic criticism of African literature. Their view is that no empirical evidence can be found to back up the notion of a uniquely African physio-

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1. W. E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa, (Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962), p. 98.

2. Ibid.

3. Ben Obumselu "The Background of Modern African Literature" Ibadan, 22 June, 1966, pp. 46-59.

4. See J. Stanislaus "The Growth of African Literature", Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Montreal, 1952, p. 22.

psychology or consciousness whose singularities determine the structural format and stylistic features of modern literary expressions. Adducing a historical account of the origins of literary forms, Ben Obumselu affirms:

> The traditions of literature belongs to a cultural history, and attempts to explain African literature in terms of racial consciousness or unconsciousness, no matter what support it may receive from Jahn's Muntu or Professor Abraham's The Mind of Africa or the Jungians are bound to fail. 1

Developing his argument further, he goes on to delimit the originality of the modern African writer by suggesting his continued indebtedness to European literary models. As he contends "although contemporary African literature has taken a number of motifs from the folk tradition, these are occasional acknowledgements only." In terms of form and style, he seems to argue "the more highly educated author is clearly European, perhaps we should say 'modern' or 'international' in his orientation." Like most critics of his persuasion, Obumselu strengthens his argument with reference to the fact that besides the problematic belief in the suggestion of a uniquely African mode

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1. Ben Obumselu, "The background of modern African literature" in Ibadan. No. 22, (June, 1966, p. 54.

of artistic response, there is also the use of a foreign language, English, which alienates the new literature by removing it from the base of traditional African "vernacular rhythm, allusions, and sound textures capable of making it rich and resonant with originality."[1]

In The Emergence of African Fiction,[2] Charles Larson seeks to undermine these types of criticisms by seeking to demonstrate that the African novelist has fashioned excitingly new forms by creating "new unities which give his fiction form and pattern."[3] While this basic observation seems to have been well founded, at least in the respect which we explicate later, Larson fails to bring out in a convincing and useful manner, what specifically are the new unities and forms which the modern African writer is fashioning, and in what ways these are related to the African psychology and conditions of aesthetic experience. Are these new unities peculiar in being the automatic reflections of the African unconscious, or can these unities and forms be simply expressions of unique individual idiosyncratic literary

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1. Ibid. p. 59.

2. Ibid. p. 50.

3. Charles Larson The Emergence of African Fiction, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1971), p. 21.

creative responses to narrative art? Larson no where addresses himself to a consideration of these important questions. Indeed, as Nancy Schimdt[1] has rightly observed in her review of the book, Larson's representation of the African writers' developed forms and unities, remain his own subjective and arbitrarily determined conceptions imposed on the novels he has chosen to study.

Generally, the reasons underlying the views of the critics who do not seem to like the emphasis being placed upon African realities in the criticism of African literature are many. Of these the most common may be stated in the two following forms. First, that such an insistent emphasis seems to derive from a false dogmatism whose basis is not entirely literary, but also involving nationalistic interest.[2] Secondly, given the performance of many of the writers, to insist upon the uniquely African"aesthetic logic" of their work without qualification is to strike a posture and create an air of mystification that may be harmful to the healthy criticism of their work.

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[1]. Nancy Schmidt, "Selected Introductions to African literature" in The Conch Review of books Ed. S. Anozie, March 1973, Vol.1, No.1, p. 10.

[2]. It can be convincingly argued that the invitation to discard western aesthetic attitude as a basis for the evaluation of contemporary African literary style is part of the African nationalistic rejection of the encroachments of European culture and psychological attitudes of racial superiority.

These kinds of observations are not, however, well founded. This is because the achieved Africanness of the novels is of central importance to the literary question of whether the African novelist is imitative or innovative. This is so in two very important respects. First it is his being creatively concerned with the realisation of the African quality of his narrative experience that constitutes whether he has tried at all to relate the novel to the peculiarities of his environment. Further, it is this order of representation that indicates the quality of his adaptive skill and originality in exploiting the "openess" of the novel form by subjecting its aesthetic logic to the singularities of local experience and world view.

V

Given the uniquely African tone and texture of much of traditional African art forms, particularly, traditional poetry, sculpture and music, the suggestion of the shaping and conditioning impact of a specifically African imagination and sensibility seems self-evident. In the context of the novel genre, a new and borrowed form, the idea becomes less readily apparent. First

it might be asked - Has there emerged an African novel form? What is the basis of its Africanness and or uniqueness?

From our survey of the various arguments relating to the Africanity of the African novel form, a wide range of arguments emerge. Generally, these range from those which are formulated in terms of concepts and ideas which are merely of peripheral relevance such as factors of colour and geographical context to the more basic notions of African psychological modes of response. Here we shall discuss very briefly only three types of ideas, namely, the nature of African metaphysical assumptions and ontology; contemporary African socio-historical experience, and finally, the background of African rhetoric, and socio-artistic values. The purpose of our discussion of these is to indicate not only the socio-cultural background of the literature, but also, how this background is considered to affect the logic of narration, and the development of plot, and the presentation of characters and vision in the novels.

The African Novel form and the structure of African social reality

As argued in chapter 1, the formal style and thematic orientations of the novel form are at least in part, the results of the nature of the values and conceptual assumptions of the cultural continuum within which the artist operates.

In relation to this, one of the frequently adduced basis of the idea of the Africanness of the African novels is the nature of its uniquely African ontological world, and the complex milieu of metaphysical beliefs in terms of which human life and social order are conceived. The studies of John Mbiti,[1] Fr. Plaides Tempels[2] and Bolaji Idowu[3] are different representations of the basic African system of traditional beliefs which J. P. Taylor[4] describes as constituting the 'African primal vision'. Central to the understanding of the nature of this vision is its essentially social-religious character.

Of particular relevance is the way in which the world projected through this traditional vision of nature consists distinctively of a hierarchy of spiritual beings and forces. Thus the background against which the traditional man believes he lives, acts and works, is a complex supersensible world of many orders of beings and forces. At its apex, is the supreme deity, below whom is a multiplicity of gods, powers, and spiritual beings, such as the dead-living and the ancestors,

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1. J. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (Heinemann, London, 1971), p. 75ff.

2. Fr. P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy. (Presence Africaine Paris 1959), p. 31ff.

3. Rev. B. Idowu, Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief (Longmans, London, 1964).

4. J. P. Taylor, The Primal Vision (S.C.M. Press, London, 1965).

ghosts and the gods and spirits of things. In addition to these there are believed to be other occult forces commonly referred to as "witchcraft", "juju", and "African magic". In his perception of the ubiquitous nature of this order of invisible forces, Fr. Tempels has referred to the African world in terms of what he describes as "Force vitale".[1] By this he means the idea of a world whose essence consists in the existence of powers which are considered to be immanent in nature, and which are responsible for every possible being and happening.

The varieties of these beings and forces in the African universe do not merely constitute an esoteric system of concepts for the rationalisation of experience per se, but provides the religious principles which condition the traditional African man, modulating the nature of his aspiration and achievements. As Elechi Amadi often seeks to show, these metaphysical realities function as limit concepts in terms of which man perceives the meaning of human life, and the roots of tragic experience. Through their supposed regulative activities, these forces are used to bind the individual, society and the super-sensible realm into a corporate world of "unbroken unity[2] and

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1. Fr. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy op. cit. pp. 31-33.

2. J.P. Taylor, The Primal Vision, p. 9.

mutual obligation rather than of self interest.

This element of the close relationship between the individual, society and the religious realm is thought to affect quite profoundly, the formal identity of traditional African artistic expressions. Thus both the religious and the purely artistic interpenetrate, each giving meaning and significance to the other. The artistic often has its basis of meaningfulness in the religious sphere, and the religious assumptions confer beauty, order and relevance upon the artistic, relating it to the needs of society and the individual. In relation to this transcendent ideal of oneness, the traditional art form, as Senghor rightly states it,[1] is at once collective and committed. It not only has its meaning and value in a semiotic system corporately evolved and defined by the community; but in its social function, it seeks to enjoin the individual to a group of common purpose and ethnic character.

The nature of this background of an integrated society dependent upon spiritual powers has a number of implications for the achievement of an authentic African novel form, at least for the class of novels set in those areas and social groups in which the African primal vision is still of practical significance.

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[1]. L. S. Senghor, "Negritude and Marxism" in O.R. Dathorne and W. Feuser, Africa in Prose (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1969), p. 341.

First such a background of realities imply that the adequate and psychologically satisfying representation of "realism" entails not only an engagement with the presentation of quotidian reality, the domain of the world of sense, but also a shift of the narrative focus to the presentation of the significance which the supersensible realm has for the narrative action. It is out of the recognition of this possible relation between African ontology and modern African literary forms that the Ghanaian writer Kofi Awonoor[1] concluded in a lecture delivered in May, 1973, that:-

> No critical approach to African writing in English French or Portuguese can ignore the aesthetic concepts of time, ontological systems and perceptions of the world which most of the writers bring to their work. It is from this that the literature will have to be judged.

VI

The second set of possible determinants of the form of the developing African novel derives from what we have referred to as "the realities of contemporary African socio-historical

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1. See K. Morell, ed., In person: Achebe, Awonoor and Soyinka. (Publication of the Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, Washington, Seatle, 1975), p. 140.

experience". In his essay "The limitation of universal literary criteria"[1] Donatus Ibe Nwoga has argued a view of the creative influence of this background of national experiences on the evolution of style and form in modern African literature as a whole. In the development of this line of thought, he has made the eminently valid point that the realities which have shaped the present African sensibilities and line of historical development are not "personal" issues, but are deeply entrenched "external phenomena".[2] In the description of these shaping forces he has outlined a wide range of socio-historical experiences. These include, the realities of colonial domination, the exigencies of Eurocentric economic values, the struggle for independence, the problems of modern government and the clash between modern and traditional values.

The characteristic formal nature of these events is their commonality, rather than purely individualistic character. The "public" nature of these events is of a kind that has to be expected to affect the tone, thematic content, and style of the new literature. As Nwoga explains:

> One aspect of these events referred to above is that they are public, communal events. Their predominating impact on the mind and attention of the intellectual elite, to which the writers and

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1. D. I. Nwoga, "The limitations of universal critical criteria" in Ufahamu, (University of California Press, 1973), Vol.IV, No.1, pp. 10ff.

2. Ibid., p. 15

> their audience belong makes for an audience oriented literature.....Events of traumatic nature to the whole community have taken place and are taking place. These are concerns felt, not so much by the individual, in his personal capacity, but shared by the generality of the people. There is a sense of participation...."[1]

In effect, this argument seems to suggest that the communal nature of these events renders appropriate the tone of commitment to "public" issues not merely in terms of topicality, but as basis of the total significance of the work. For, in their totality, these ideas and experiences constitute the social ethos, which determine the realities of individual and social consciousness, of which the novelist is a part. Hence, it is the level of his engagement with these, and the imaginative search for meaning, order, and value out of the dilemmas which they generate, that represents the <u>essence</u> of his artistic <u>realism</u>, as well as the basis of his relevance for his contemporaries.

VII

<u>African Aesthetics</u>

If the background of African metaphysical assumptions and

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[1]. Ibid., pp. 15ff.

the nature of contemporary African socio-historical experiences, do seem to have significant bearing on the thematic orientation of the African novel form, the system of traditional African cultural norms - the oral literary forms, social values and mores represent also another level of "realities" that constitute a significant shaping force in matters of style in the novels. Thus, just as in the case of the African spiritual beliefs, the experience of the background of socio-cultural norms is considered to be such that can have profound practical effects on the determination of the aesthetic basis and techniques which the writer may resort to for the structuring of narrative action and the representation of characters and dialogues. The more palpable instances of this recourse to the background of oral forms and stylistic techniques are the use of proverbs, riddles and certain syntactic forms of expression. Further, the background of oral literary values may also affect significantly, the nature of the writer's imaginative response and moral attitudes to the situations being presented, as well as the emphasized area of imaginative representation.

The precise manner in which this level of socio-literary values affect the development of form and style appear to present itself to critics in rather different and sometimes

incompatible terms. Ben Obumselu[1] and Omolara Leslie's essays represent two interesting discussions of this, and its actual or possible implication for the development of modern African literary forms. In her concern with the need to establish a valid basis upon which a truly indigenous tradition of African literary forms can be builts, Omolara Leslie[2] made an impassioned plea for African scholars and writers to turn their attention to the oral traditions for the discovery of the authentic principles and techniques of structural organisation which have animated these art forms. The objective of such an exercise, she suggests rightly, is to provide necessary tools by which the artists "can bring together the old and the new." Through such an effort the contemporary artists can "portray a truer Africanity than hereto fore."[3] While she does not herself succeed in the isolation and presentation of what these categories and values are, like those who espouse the cause of African aesthetics, she asserts the sense of the peculiarities of African mode of aesthetic response. As she writes:

> For criticism, we might be able to discover, establish criteria which will be classical for African Art. For instance standards of epic

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1. Ben Obumselu, "The background of modern African Literature" op. cit.

2. O. Leslie, "African aesthetics and literature" in Ufahamu (University of California Press, 1973), Vol. iv, No.1, p.6.

3. Ibid.

> narration can emerge from a theoretical study of the Mwindo epic or that of Sundiata. These forms must have satisfied something in the African which Idanre and Ozidi do not in the African who can read them. The intent of such a theoretical study will not be to tie the hands of our artists but to enrich their possibilities and to provide the means for judging their effectiveness, inventiveness and originality. The more important end I believe will be to discover what appeals to the African sensibility in the literary arts so that we may discover an African audience for the modern African arts beyond the superficial level of ornamentative stylistics, so that we may be able to define the African novel. We must discover and conceptualize why African audience laughs when it does in the cinema and the theatre; these phenomena imply a cultural sensibility.[1]

By discussing the issues in these terms, Omolara Leslie sees the significance of the African cultural background as a matter of the peculiarities of the African modes of thinking and reactions to experience. Commenting on these humanistic aspects in the course of his search for an African aesthetics, Joseph Okpaku affirms:

> The next place to search for these standards would be an examination of those common aspects of life most frequently dramatised in the arts. This would include love, life, hate, humor, duty,

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[1] Ibid.

> death, destruction, pride, prejudice, friendship, fear, violence, birth, and the reality amongst others. Different cultures not only have different conceptions of these, but have different attitudes to them. 1

In his own discussion of the influence of the background of African culture on the modern literature, Cyprian Ekwensi[2] also speaks in terms of the ideas itemised by Joseph Okpaku. He argues that there are peculiarly African modes of life and shades of thought which are inaccessible to the European mind.[3] Emphasizing the influence of "centuries of African history, different customs, and different modes of life",[4] he seems to conceive the uniqueness of modern African literary expression to derive from basic differences in the moral and aesthetic presuppositions which have animated African art on the one hand, and on the other, the European.

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1. J. Okpaku, "African critical standards for African literature", op. cit., p. 19.

2. C. Ekwensi, "Challenge to African writers" West African Review, 23, March, 1952, p. 259.

3. Ibid.

4. "Problems of Nigerian writers", Nigeria Magazine, No. 78, Sept. 1963, p. 218.

Whether or not one agrees with the notion of a specifically African mind or sensibility which in some ways shapes the form and style of African creative works, one can still see from the foregoing discussion that generally, it is this ethnic factor, and the associated realities of modern African socio-historical experience and customs, which Africanists have adduced as the bases of the "Africaness" of Modern African literary expressions. The artistic projection of these realities represents also the major ways in which continuity is being established between the modern scriptic text, and the background of African traditional literary methods and cultural experiences.

The insistent suggestion of most African critics and writers that a socio-cultural perspective be adopted in the criticism of African literature express not only a need for the adoption of such a perspective as a necessary pre-condition for the valid criticism of the novel. It is an expression of the fact that it is these elements that can provide the necessary and relevant basis for the adaptation of an artistic form such as the novel to a new cultural environment. The various ways - explicit and implicit - in which these elements can be used to modify the logic

of narration in the novel represent also the ways in which the aesthetic form of the novel can be said to be "extended" into a new form.[1] Indeed, the use of such elements as these constitute the basis of the novel's continuous self re-discovery. It is the condition of its social relevance. These judgements are implicit in the development of the novel form as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The emphasis upon the "Africanity" of modern African literary form including the novel may sound to a foreign student of African literature like chauvinistic rhetoric projected for nationalistic rather than for purely literary reasons.[2] Against this attitude, one must note that the kind of critical approach which the "Black aesthetics" critics are espousing is only an application to the discussion of African literature of an already established "sociological" approach to literary criticism. Thus, in the enunciation of his "genetic-structuralism", Lucien Goldmann[3] has initiated and

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[1]. For a discussion of the problem of what has to be the case for one to be able to say that a given novel is "a new" novel-form, see p. 401 of this study.

[2]. See R. July, "African Literature and African Personality." in Black Orpheus Vol.14, 1964, pp. 33-44. Also Ulli Beier "In Search of African Personality" in Twentieth Century 165, April 1959, pp. 343-349.

[3]. Lucien Goldmann, "Genetic-structuralist method in the History of Literature" reissued in Marxism and Art Ed. Berel Lang and Forest Williams (David McKay Co. Inc. New York, 1972), pp. 243ff.

emphasized as a more useful route to the understanding and analysis of a given literary work the creative link,(a more or less direct homology) between distinctive "mental structures" which organize the empirical consciousness of a particular group, and the imaginary universe created by the writer operating within such a group.[1] The validity of this sociological approach generally does not concern us here, except in the specific respect in which some of the pre-suppositions on which it is based are in fact borne out by the African writers' creative performance.

What must, however, be considered very briefly is the often adduced notion of an African psychology or "aesthetic sensibility"and the ways in which these, according to the "black aesthetist critic" or the philosophy of Negritude , represent the determinants of the aesthetic form and texture of modern African literary expressions. As evident in Stanislaus[1] criticism, the reason which many critics have for being uneasy about this kind of sociological approach are bound up with their perception of the moral and or racial problems which could arise from attributing some peculiarities or characteristics to a race or a given nation. In this respect, the point of view adopted in this study is that the kind of moral and or epistemological problems which may arise from talking about an African personality, mind or sensibility do not nullify necessarily their relevance in a

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[1]. As his criticism suggests, the individual writer does not just create a world vision. He or she expresses the collective mental production of a group. See L. Goldmann, "Interdependencies between industrial society and new forms of Cultural Creation." in Cultural Creation in modern society. Trans. Bart Grahl Telos Press, Saint Louis, 1976), pp. 76ff.

serious discussion of the formal qualities of African works of art. For instance, the kind of problems adduced by Stanislaus and Ben Obumselu in rejecting the possibility of an African mind and sensibility are also the same of epistemological problems which beset any theory about the real (empirical) indentity of mind and soul, and for which John Locke, David Hume, and Gilbert Ryle had first rejected both the idealist and commonsense view of these phenomena, and later offered an equally unsatisfactory behaviourist account of their ontology. Generally, the aesthetic bases and structural format of much of traditional African artistic expressions like painting, sculpture, architecture and music seem to point insistently to the possibility of a plastic power and a mode of apprehension capable of being described like W.E. Abraham as "The Mind of Africa."[1]

Given this as a possibility, the correct formulation of the problem of the aesthetic identity of modern African literary works becomes the question of whether this "African mind" or "Genius" has been mirrored forth in some specific and literarily significant manner in the modern African novelist's handling of their novels.

Considered in this light, the question of what the African novelists have done to the borrowed form raises a number of problems which may

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1. W. E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962). See also T. Vincent "Africanity in Modern African Literature" op. cit. p. 12.

stated in the following manner: What is the nature and level of creative adaptation displayed?

Further, in what does the Africanness of the emergent form consist? These questions demand an analysis of three aspects of the formal organisation of the novels: First it requires a consideration of the quality of the experiences delineated, - how far these are treated as essentially local issues of unique and autogenous nature, and how far they are treated in terms of literary patterns of universal human experiences? Second, they require the analysis of the given writer's response to the English language as a basis for the development of a national English reflective of local speech patterns and cultural assumptions. Third, the issues concern also the problem of narrative organisation, requiring a study of the narrative patterns, especially, the relationship established between culture, local experience and the logic of plot-development in the novels. If we use "T" to designate the area of thematic organisation, "L" for Language, and "S" for structuration, our investigation can be clarified by asking whether our belief in the African writers' creative adaptation of the novel genre is intended to mean any one of the following:-

1. The creative modification of the basic linear framework of narrative action as often developed through the use of causal-chronological presentation of incidents towards the achievement of some other modes of combining incidents, or,

S_2 A matter of the creative shift of narrative focus from the traditional novelists' interest in character presentation and the dramatized presentation of experience to other radically different centres of narrative interest?

T The acceptance of the rhetoric of the traditional novel form as developed through such modes as outlined in S(1-2), and imaginative infusion of new experiences and social setting into this basic western mode

L The development of new linguistic registers, or language structures for the analysis of the new experiences presented.

What is being suggested by these questions is that the issue of what the African writer has done to the "borrowed" narrative form has to be seen not only as an issue of the novelists' description of cultural realities per se, but also of their capacity to express these realities through the logic of plot-movement, character presentation and the use of language.

Although naturally, most of the novelists have not responded to all these three dimensions of creative originality at once, they have clearly demonstrated their adaptive capacities at the level of either one or two of these aspects of novelistic form and style. Through the choice and imaginative exploration of these areas, many of the novelists have been able to make a worthwhile contribution to the growth of the Nigerian novel. In the chapters that follow, we shall analyse in detail, the selected novels. We still do this in order to reveal the kind of adaptive response displayed by the different novelists, and the specific areas through which each has tried to give an African identity to the inherited novel form.

PART II

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN SOCIAL REALISM

CHAPTER III

AMOS TUTUOLA: MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS

I

Amos Tutuola: Narrative Style and its critical appraisal

From the formal perspective, the problems which Amos Tutuola's literary *oeuvre* poses are essentially of two main kinds, namely: the nature of the relationship which his narrative form has with the novel genre, and secondly, the problem of the critical evaluation of the kind of originality which he has displayed in the handling of the elements of traditional African narrative art form.

Following the publication of his first two novels *The Palmwine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* in 1952 and 1954 respectively, the critical response to these aspects of his work has been mixed and controversial. On the one hand, there has grown up a sizeable number of critics who have been sufficiently impressed by the formal quality of his work as to see him as an "innovator", and "a pioneer" novelist in the development of Nigerian literature. In the first essay ever devoted to the serious literary exegesis of *The Palmwine Drinkard*, Gerald Moore[1] praises Tutuola for his "intuitive grasp of

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[1] G. Moore, *Seven African Writers*: (O.U.P. 1962), pp. 38ff.

basic literary forms," and the originality he had displayed in "setting all chance models aside, to forge matter, form and style anew for himself".[1] From this perspective, Moore seems to see in Tutuola's work the qualities of "a visionary".[2] Amos Tutuola's narrative forms, he however contends, are not those of the novelist, but are of the kind that have to be seen in terms of the logic and moral assumptions of the heroic monomyth as described in Campbell, The Hero with a thousand faces.[3] Like Gerald Moore, Harold Collins[4] has registered the same type of enthusiasm about Amos Tutuola's artistic powers, and novel form, which he describes as "ghost novels". From his perception of the relationship between Tutuola's narrative form and the nature of African cultural assumptions, he contends that Amos Tutuola deserves to be called "the founder of Nigerian Literature."[5]

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1. Ibid., p. 44.

2. G. Moore, op. cit. p. 57.

3. J. Campbell, The Hero with a thousand faces, (Millins Press, New York, 1949).

4. H.R. Collins, "Founding a new national literature: The Ghost novels of Amos Tutuola", Reprinted in Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola, Ed. Bernth Lindfors. (Three Continent Press, Washington, 1975), pp. 60, 70ff.

5. H. R. Collins, op. cit, loc. cit.

In contrast to the kind of commendatory criticism of Moore and Collins, a number of other critics have responded to Tutuola's work in an uncompromisingly deprecatory attitude. In this type of response, Tutuola's achievement is evaluated not in terms of significant "inventive powers" or "originality", but rather in terms of his embarrassing translation of traditional African tales into English. Typifying this kind of response, Sabasola Johnson[1] sees in Tutuola's work little or nothing beyond the presentation of traditional Yoruba tales cast in his (Tutuola's) 'strange lingo'. In his view, Tutuola cannot be meaningfully regarded in terms of the idea of originality, since what he really offers, is "largely translating Yoruba ideas in almost the same order sequence as they occur to him".[2] From his linguistic analysis, Afolayan passed the same judgement by maintaining that "the subject matter of Tutuola's novels is Yoruba oral literature, set in contemporary Yoruba community."[3]

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1. B. Johnson, Letter to West Africa, April 10 1954, reprinted in Gareth Lindfors, op. cit. pp. 31ff.

2. Ibid.

3. A. Afolayan, "Language and sources of Amos Tutuola", in Critical Perspectives on African Literature. Ed. C. Heywood (Heinemann, London, 1971), p. 49.

Between the extremes of Gerald Moore's early commendatory criticism, and that of Babasola Johnson's censuring attitude, there has also emerged in relation to the development of an African oriented critical perspective, a number of 'corrective studies'[1] intended to redress the misconceptions about the nature of Tutuola's works and artistic powers.

Heuristically, the viability of each of these judgements about the formal quality and significance of Amos Tutuola's work depends not only upon Tutuola's narrative performance, but also, on the evaluator's mental perspective. In particular, it depends upon his understanding of the theoretical issues which we tried to deal with in chapter I. These are the nature of the novel genre, the varieties of possibilities implicit in it, and what constitutes the basis of newness and or originality in given instances of the novel form. Second, these types of issues also demand an understanding of the literary and intellectual background of the writer himself. In the specific case of Amos Tutuola, and his use of traditional materials, the perception of the scope of his originality in the development of the traditional

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[1]. These studies are now numerous. The most illuminating of these include:- (a) Omolara Leslie, "The Palmwine Drinkard: A Reassessment of Amos Tutuola" in Journal of Commonwealth Literature, (1970); (b) E.N. Obiechina "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition" in Presence Africaine, 65, (1968), pp. 86ff; (c) Bernth Lindfors, Amos Tutuola: "Debts and Assets" in Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola, op. cit. pp. 275ff.

forms entails an awareness of the element of creativity that is generally involved in the process of 'transliteration' or the handling of pre-existing conventional materials. In order to chart a route towards our views of Tutuola's work, we shall look very briefly at his intellectual background and early influences.

From the numerous interviews[1] which Amos Tutuola has given, and from the brief biographical sketch which he had published along with the 1954 edition of The Palmwine Drinkard, a picture of Tutuola's personal life, and circumstances to-date emerges. The significant factor that does come to light from this background is that Amos Tutuola is, literarily, a self-made man who had come into the limelight of authorship through foresight and chance, rather than through the consciously sustained approach which a good formal education and literary training often give. Although the standard six which he achieved in 1937 could fit a man for

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(a) Eric Larrabee interviewed Amos Tutuola in 1953. His observations are published in The Reporter, May, 1953, and summarised in Bernth Lindfors, Ed. Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola. op. cit. pp. 13-14 and 191.

(b) Bernth Lindfors corresponded with Amos Tutuola in 1968. He later interviewed him in 1972. The relevant points given by Tutuola may be found in Bernth Lindfors Critical Perspective on Amos Tutuola op. cit. pp. 291, and 294.

(c) John Agetua also held an informative interview with Tutuola in July 1974 at Ibadan, where Tutuola had been store keeper in the N.B.C. The discussion is published in J. Agetua ed. Interviews with six Nigerian Writers (Ethiope Press, Benin City), pp. 5 - 8.

a humble career as a clerk in an office, it was by no means a training that offered any notable level of literary education capable of opening the pupil's eye to the complex aesthetics of the novel form, and the subtle problems of adapting the novel to the Nigerian cultural environment in the same way Elechi Amadi and Chinua Achebe were to do. Put in other items, it seems evident that his background was of such a limited kind that could, and did put out of his creative reach two possibilities:- (a) the direct use of the aesthetic conventions of the western novel form, and (b) the intellectualized interest in the extension of its formal mode into new dimensions in any radical manner. It is in the recognition of this essentially limiting background, that the "placement' of Tutuola's form and style within the indigenous framework of oral literary conventions and techniques as recently suggested by E.N. Obiechina, [1] Omolara Leslie, [2] and Oladele Taiwo [3] and Adetugbo [4] represent very broadly, the view of this thesis.

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1. E. N. Obiechina, "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition" in Presence Africaine, loc. cit.

2. Omolara Leslie, "The Palmwine Drinkard: A Reassessment of Amos Tutuola" in JCL, loc. cit.

3. O. Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian novel. (Macmillan, London, 1976), Chapter 3, pp. 79 ff.

4. A. Adetugbo, Form and Style" in Introduction to Nigerian Literature. Ed. B. King (University of Lagos & Evans, Ibadan, 1971), pp. 174 ff.

Significantly however, while these studies seem to have rightly suggested the broad framework for the understanding of Tutuola's narrative form and techniques, the basic issues of his uniqueness and the authentically African form of the stories remain yet unclarified. Further, in the frequent representation of Tutuola's creative process in terms of "translation" or "transliteration" of traditional tales, or at the other extreme, in the rather simplistic evaluation of the stories as written texts or novels, critics have often failed to appreciate fully the totality of the Tutuolan narrative mode, and in particular, the singularities of his modes of narrative structuration. It is in the appreciation of the complex and unique nature of Tutuola's modes of literary presentation that we shall take and develop the view that the formal identity of Amos Tutuola's work cannot be adequately described in terms of either the folktale genre simply, nor of the modern novel. Rather his insistent literary form has to be viewed as an instance of the "aural-oral" narrative medium, whose aesthetics derive from the creative interaction between the narrator and his audience. What we wish to emphasize in this formulation are two important points: First is the idea of the aural quality of the stories in spite of the imposed scriptic framework, and second,

the role of the dramatic context of 'audience - narrator' situation, and the subtle but distinct impact this has upon the evolved modes of narrative structuration.

III

Narrative Structure and Experience

In order to provide the experiential content for our view of Amos Tutuola's achieved narrative form, we shall first examine very briefly, the kind of story presented in Amos Tutuola's second novel, My Life in the bush of Ghosts.[1] In describing this, we also seek to articulate the kind of creative interest pre-supposed in his delineation of the experience.

Unlike its predecessor, The Palmwine Drinkard, the basis of narrative movement in My Life in the Bush of Ghosts is not a characteristic passion or moral force in the psychological or moral make up of the protagonist. Thus, unlike the drinkard, who sets out in search of his tapster, and consequently pits himself

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1. References throughout are to Faber paperback, 1954 edn.

against a variety of hostile forces in the process of fulfilling his insatiable desire, the boy - hero of My Life in the Bush of Ghosts is emotionally and morally a passive character. Like Sindbad, he is a "journeying" character who is acted upon by the hostile forces in the world in which he is a stranger. In this sense and situation, his pre-occupation throughout the course of the novel, is simply to survive the many difficult situations in which he unwittingly finds himself. In the imaginative development of this experience, of vicissitudes, the story presents 29 dramatic situations, each of which constitutes an episode in the linear progression of the story.

The literary development of these situations represents a continuous narrative of closely 'interlocked',[1] and dramatically integrated experiences. For the purpose of our discussion, rather than as a description of a significantly objectified structural pattern, the linear movement of the novel can be seen in terms of three phases: The first, the 'setting' comprises chapter I; (p. 17 - 21); the second, comprising chapters 2-27, deals with the boy - wanderer's experiences in the bush of Ghosts; and the third, chapters 28 and 29 presents the experience of his reunion with

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[1]. For what we mean by this see Diagram 1 "Suspense and Narrative interlocking in Amos Tutuola".)p. 92 of the thesis.

his family after a traumatic twenty-four years absence spent in wandering through the bush of ghosts.

In the first section, the 'setting', the story presents an account of the historical background to the boy's traumatic experiences, especially, the facts of his domestic situation, - the jealousy of the mother's co-wives, and the outbreak of the slave raiding war. These circumstances result in the unhappy event of the co-wives' wicked abandonment of the young boy, now aged only seven, to take care of himself in the ensuing confusion. In this section, the experiences offered are located in the world of every-day experience and social reality, in contrast to the abnormal world of the ghost which form the locus of the middle section. In the middle section, the story recreates the wanderings of the boy in the bush of ghosts, putting emphasis on his acute sufferings, trials, hair-breath escapes, and the sadism of some of the ghosts. These experiences, together, represent the bulk and focus of the narrative interest of the novel. Central to the delineated experience of suffering, and the sheer sadism of the various ghosts which the boy encountered are: the presentation of the horror and cruelty of the smelling ghost (pp.29 - 33) the monstrous Flash-eyed mother and her baby ghosts (pp. 96ff) and his sharply contrastive idyllic life with the super-lady(pp. 112ff). Throughout the novel, the presentation of the boy's pain and

suffering, and the almost sadistic behaviour of the ghost to the boy is terrifying. Beneath the narrative verve and light humour of the story, there is as Taiwo has rightly observed, "a morbid obsession with pain, suffering, torture, humiliation, smell and dirt."[1] While occasionally, there is an intermission, in the boy's suffering, as in the chapter where he meets the super-lady, and consequently enjoys an idyllic life reminiscent of the drinkard's life with the faithful mother. Pain and suffering seem to colour and or constitute the underlying experiences being presented.

In the limited nature of the kind of experiences offered, and the dramatic situations presented, My Life in the Bush of Ghost has a number of important affinities with the Homeric Odyssey theme, particularly in the limited respect that it is a tale of sustained vicissitudes which befall the protagonist, as he seeks to return to his home from which he had been estranged by adverse historical circumstances. In a more "homely" and significant respect, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts is a literary rendition of a distinct category of the Nigerian folktale form, in which the protagonist undergoes many difficulties and trials

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[1]. O. Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian novel (Macmillan Press, London, and Basingstoke 1976), p. 97.

not for any particular reason, but, as part of the rich and varied experiences of travelling in a strange and unfamiliar land of both positive and negative moral forces. Not only is its form, its general thematic orientation and content conditioned by the traditional African folk imagination but also its distinctive narrative aesthetics, -- its rhetoric, and organisational techniques can be readily seen to have their roots in the established procedure of traditional African narrative art and the impact of the oral medium in the determination of these modes.

IV

Individualism, folk-sensibility and the rhetoric of fantasy

This recognition of the role of his narrative medium and folk narrative procedure upon the development of his style and form, does not suggest, however, that Amos Tutuola's response to this basic conventional narrative form can be described simply in terms of translating or transliterating simpliciter. This is so in the particular respect that, in his handling of the core plots, and rhetoric of the folktale genre, Tutuola has also displayed a remarkable flare for narrative art. In this respect, he shows even in the new literary medium, a genuine instinct for the effective modulation of the element of the form, in a way that

shows that he is a highly talented and individualistic reconteur. Thus in his creative hands, and with the mediatory effects of the alien English Language interracting with his mother tongue, his stories, including even the stock situations of the folktale form seem to undergo metaphorically, "a prismatic refraction", taking on new colouring, and new intensities that bear the imprints of his own personal creative sensibility. In effect, while preserving certain aspects of the folktale form, the direct effects of his own creative sensibility, and the constraints imposed upon him by the new medium of English language have been to modify significantly some of the aspects of the folk rhetoric into new forms and levels of emphasis.

One of the areas of Amos Tutuola's own personal responses to the folktale form is the nature of his narrative point of view and interests. Whereas in the general folktale form, the narrative tone and form of incidents tends to be developed in relation to a didactic moral interest, in My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, for instance, there is really no direct concern with the moral 'instruction' of the reader. Instead, as we shall discuss later, the basis for the development of narrative action and the criterion for the selection of given narrative situations derive from Tutuola's own intuitive recognition that story

Serial Order	[illegible] Movement of Narrat[illegible]	Sentence Context
1	(she) ... Sat on the ground in the centre of the town permanently;	26 - 27
2	She did not stand up or move any where at all	27 - 28
3	She was all the time beaten by both rain and sun, both day and Night	28 - 29
4	She filled the town as a round vast hill	30 - 31
5	Billions of heads ... like a baby's head appeared on her body	41
6	Each of these small heads had two very short hands.	45
7	With two .. eyes shining both day and night like fireflies	46
8	With small mouth and numerous sharp teeth	46 - 47
9	With voices which sound like church bells,	50
10	like market noises	53
11	(she) Had a special huge head above everything in the town.	56
	It showed her out four miles from this town.	57 - 59
12	Had a large mouth that can swallow an elephant uncut	60
13	Had two large flashing eyes on the front of her head	61
14	Had over a thousand thick teeth in her mouth.	65 - 66
15	Each was about two feet long and brown in colour.	66
16	The hair on her head was just	68
17	like bush ... all could weigh more than one ton	
18	Both her hands were used in stiring soup on the fire.	74
19	like spoons.	
20	She did not feel pain of fire or heat	75
21	Her finger nails were just like shovels	76
22	She had two short feet ...	77
23	These feet were just like pillar as thick as pillars	79
24	Her eyes were bringing out splashes of fire all the time	80
25	Her eyes were used to bring out fire on firewood...	81 - 82
26	like petrol, inflamable spirit or gunpowder	84 - 85
27	Her eyes were floods of light which served as electricity for the town at night.	86

Page references are to My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.

telling is basically a strategy firstly, for social entertainment, and only secondarily is it for a didactic end.

V

The technique of a-logical predication

Of the varied repertoire of techniques that are so germane to the Tutuolan personal style, by far the most insistently pervasive is what we describe here as "the technique of a-logical predication." Tutuola uses this as a basis of narrative and imagistic presentation. In its general form, this technique consists in a representational style in which the subject 'S' of a narrative situation, and its predicables 'Y' are presented and developed in an a-logical manner that startles the reader, and challenges his habitual view of things. What is involved in this relates firstly to the nature of his narrative descriptions, and secondly to the presentation of events and experience in his fictive universe. Let us take for instance two general narrative statements:

(a) S. $(Y)_{s}$.....^{S}doing^{Y} (1.....r)

and (b) $S = Y \ldots {}^{S}\text{being}^{Y}$ (1.....x)

where (in a and b) the subject 'S' is a variable which in terms of the story may be a character, - a ghost, a tree, an animal, an action, and 'Y' the predication, is also a variable in the field of properties which may be predicated of the subject 'S'. What is interesting to note is that in the Tutuolan Rhetoric the relationship normally established between 'S' and 'Y' is never urbane, rarely normal, and almost always extremely dramatic. In effect, while his mode of fictive development renders the hyperbolic and the unusual as the normal, the ordinary and the dull has little or no place in his perspective on reality. Amongst the most basic of the examples of this mode of presentation of being and happening are (a) the drinkards wife who carries her pregnancy on her thumb instead of in her womb, and who delivers, not through the normal channel, but by the bursting of the finger.[1] Next is the presentation of the people of 'red' town.[2] They are not only peculiarly red, and 'had their eyes on their knees,' but could also change themselves to anything, and did change themselves on one occasion to a great

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1. A. Tutuola, The Palm-wine Drinkard, (Faber and Faber, London, 1952), p. 31.

2. Ibid., p. 75ff, p. 81.

fire that burnt away their houses, including all their belongings.[1]

As in The Palmwine Drinkard in My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, there is an equally persistent development and use of this technique. Amongst the simple but quite graphic presentations are (1) the land that is said to talk and scream like a human being,[2] (2) the two red trees which can move about and with their leaves singing like human beings,[3] (3) the people of "Heaven town" who build their houses "bent downwards as if they were going to fall", and "whose children were always rolling down from these houses" without their parents caring.[4] Stronger still are the nature of the presentation of the identity of the ghosts, such as "the smelling ghost"[5] and "the television handed ghosts"[6]. The near arbitrary juxtaposition of images and motifs is most strikingly evident in the description of "the Flesh-Eyed Ghost" and her short ghost children.[7]

What seems so singularly characteristic of this descriptive presentation, is the tendency not only towards concreteness and

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1. A Tutuola The Palm-wine Drinkard. p. 81. The people of Heaven's town are good examples of strangeness. They are represented as doing "everything incorrectly", p. 58.

2. A Tutuola, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (Faber and Faber, London, 1954), p.85.

3. A. Tutuola, The Palm-wine Drinkard, p. 82.

4. Ibid., p. 59

5. A. Tutuola, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, p. 29.

6. Ibid., p. 161

7. Ibid., p. 97.

arbitrary juxtaposition in the choice of narrative images. There is also the way in which Tutuola's interest in what is exciting seems to lead him into new and ever-enlarging image perspectives.

Table A. T. 1 giving the image-line index of the description shows the nature, source and diversity of the kind of images and ideas Tutuola has drawn upon to paint the picture. For this description alone there are no less than twenty seven strikingly spectacular images. The evocation of so many images and the strange admixture of such characteristics as: her sitting permanantly "in the centre of the town... six mile in circumference" (line 1), her being "as round as a vast hill", (line 4), her harbouring so many thousands of small ghosts who kill animals ...(line 5-10), her having over a thousand thick teeths ... (14), as well as her insensitivity to "the pain of fire or heat" and her possession of eyes which are "bringing out splashes of fire, ... and which could catch firewood like petrol, spirit, gunpowder", together with the other ideas of her eyes serving as flood light to the town at night, are all indicative of the unique nature of Tutuola's descriptive mode, and the kind of creative versatility which he has called into play in his narrative form and style.

The use of this style which persists through <u>My Life in the Bush of Ghosts</u> is also strikingly evident right from his first

novel, The Palm Wine Drinkard. The presentation of the Red fish is an effective simple use of this mode.

> 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. [1]

The nisus here is towards the 'cumulative' presentation of the surprising, and the intensification of the fictional reality through a cluster of highly dramatic images. The evoked "red" of the fish helps to set the matrix of the fantastic. "Its head small like a tortoise's head", directs the reader's consciousness towards its dimunitive size. The next sequence of sentences (2-11) builds up the sense of its strangeness through the sustained compilation of other extraordinary qualities. In lines (2-3) the fish's head which "is just like a tortoise's head", is presented also as being "as big as an elephant's head", and having at the same time, over thirty horns

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[1] A. Tutuola, The Palm Wine Drinkard, pp. 79-80.

and large eyes arranged circularly around it. In the sentence that follows (4-5), all the horns are spread out like an 'umbrella'. From the image of the umbrella-like horns, a similitude with a snake is invoked, through an unexpected twist in the description. With everything that it is already, it also glides like a snake. Following this, the next sentence (7) identifies it with the bat. Besides, it has similarities with a bird in the respect that it can also fly. Further, it can speak, and when it shouts, its voice can be heard about "four" miles away. Coming into the electrical field, "Its eyes", Tutuola says, "were opening and shutting as if some one was pressing a switch on and off" (11-12). In effect, within this single narrative description, Tutuola invokes a medley of images and phenomena summoning into the reader's consciousness, such items as water, fish, colours, elephant, tortoise, snake, umbrella, and electric light. Whereas in the description of the Flash-Eyed Mother, the presentation had been aggressively concentrated, and overwhelmingly prolix, in the case of the red fish as in some others, Tutuola reconciles diversity with a measure of conciseness, order and meaningfulness. Here too, there is the same element of the imaginative organisation of the familiar and the homely to achieve the effects of the bizarre through the peculiar stylistic mode of presentation involved.

The Dramatic Incident and Narrative Structure.

Amos Tutuola's consistent interest in the use of incidents and images that are highly dramatic, spectacular and unusual defines the formal structure and quality of his novels. Thus, in a manner shaped by the continuous use of the spectacular as a narrative paradigm, the linear structure of My Life in the Bush of Ghosts is essentially a sequence of "the dramatically unusual", rather than the expression of a naturalistically patterned plot and fictional experience in which both the ordinary and the extra-ordinary have a place. Through this focus upon the spectacular, the effective line of narrative experience is only the continuous progression from one Ghost situation to another, creating in the process, a medley of ghosts of many 'colours' and temperaments. These embrace in the most comprehensive manner, the silver ghost, the copper ghost, the golden ghost (chap. 4) the burglar ghost (chap. 5) the corpulent ghost (chap. 9), the ugly ghost and the armless ghosts (chap. 11) the equatic ghosts (chap. 11) and the jocose ghosts. Each of these is presented distinctively in terms of its different but equally striking qualities. As in the stylistic ordering of the descriptive images, as outlined above, the presentation of the ghosts is 'cumulative', and tending towards the random. The length of the story thus derives more

from the sheer number of ghost-situations presented. The general narrative movement of the story as charted through the presentational order of the ghosts, and the narrator's journey through the ghost town in the strange order:- 7th, 8th town, 9th town, 20th, 4th, 10th, and 13th towns.....all reveal the basic high level of arbitrariness involved in the Tutuolan style, its source of effective power as well as the problematic nature of his narrative originality.

The ordering of narrative images and the form of the linear movement of his story has generated the impression that Amos Tutuola's stories are structurally defective in being episodic and unplotted. This impression registered for instance by Omolara Leslie[1] seems to be almost the general critical concensus in respect of Tutuola's formal orchestration of his stories. As we have had occasion to point out, Tutuola's stories when read seems to lack the kind of thematic unity characteristic of the novels of Achebe and Elechi Amadi in which a higher level of didactic perspective has provided a basis

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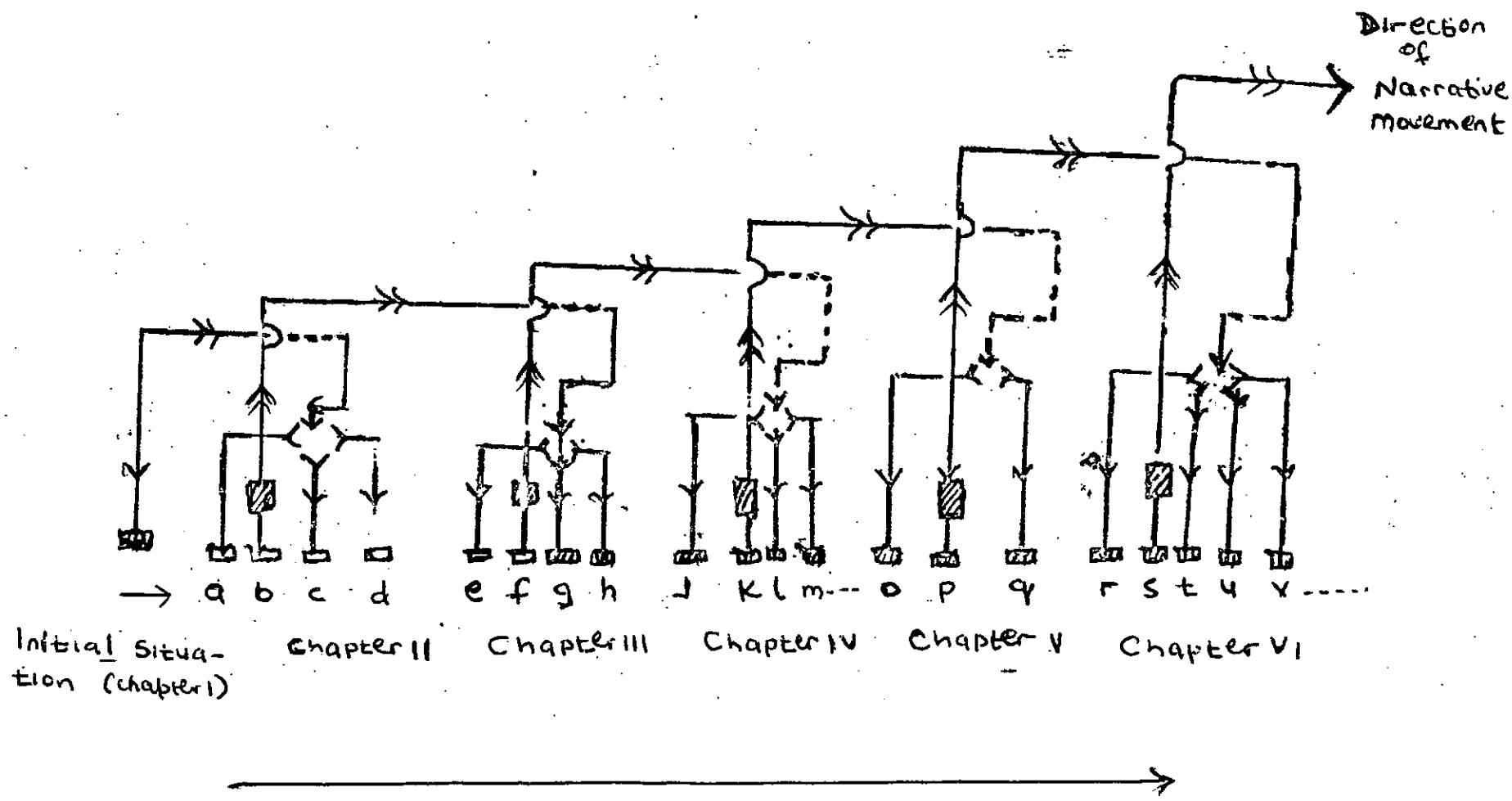
1. O. Leslie, "The Palm Wine Drinkard: A Reassessment of Amos Tutuola" in Journal of Commonwealth Literature, (1970), p. 48-56.

of narrative continuity. To use this kind of impression as a basis for suggesting that Tutuola's stories are defective is, however, to fail to appreciate the dynamics of Tutuola's narrative form, and its peculiar basis of structural unity. Indeed, such a critical verdict reveals a lack of awareness of the wide range of structuring elements which are implicit in narrative art form generally, and in particular, the ways in which a given narrative medium determines its own appropriate unities. As may be readily seen, organisational unity in the Nigerian folktale from which Tutuola's work is derived, is shaped in terms of a number of narrative modes. Sometimes, the unity of the form may be derived from the moral purpose of the tale, while at other times, this could be in terms of either the continuing identity of the protagonist, or the nature of his mission. In some cases, and very often, the unity of the narrative may be derived from the aesthetic qualities of its rendition, especially, from the code of suspense. In <u>My Life in the Bush of Ghosts</u>, <u>The Palm Wine Drinkard</u> and <u>Feather women of the Jungle</u>, the aesthetics of narration derive essentially from the conditions of oral narrative art. Specifically, it derives from the code of suspense which working in alliance with the rhythm of narration, provides the major structuring

T.11

SUSPENSE AND NARRATIVE "INTERLOCKING" IN AMOS TUTUOLA



force, and source of the pleasure of its narrative presentation.[1] In relation to this aspect of the work, Tutuola's narrative form and style here consists in the progressive ordering of images, situations and themes capable of soliciting the element of suspense, surprise, and the sense of the marvellous.

Central to this mode of narrative integration is Tutuola's characteristic style of "embedding" and "interlocking" of dramatic episodes and situations. Chart T III is a diagrammatic representation of these two modes of narrative presentation. As shown,[2] Tutuola's narrative tendency is to develop a given situation, not only in terms of one or two intensely dramatic fictional experiences but of a nexi of incidents: 'a b c d', 'e f g h i', 'j k l m n', 'o p q r s'...z. For the forward movement of his stories, Tutuola's manner is to pick out of the given chapter of multiple dramatic events, "a b c d", any one episode, "b" say, and to develop this in terms of another closely knit cluster of dramatic events 'e f g h' out of which any one "embedded" event 'f' can be picked up, and developed through a further set of

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[1]. What is specifically implied in this is the fact that an auditory experience of Tutuola's story is not one of discontinuity, but an integrated and dramatically sustained fictional experience.

[2]. The small letters 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f', 'g', 'h', 'i'; ...z denote given dramatic or "unusual" incidents, episodes or descriptions which feature in a given chapter. The arrow ⟶ indicates the direction of narrative movement. 'b', 'f', 'k', 'p', 's', are "integrating" links in the narrative experience.

sub-events. This pattern of sustaining narrative interest may be seen in the above diagramatic representation of the narrative continuity between the first five chapters.

Through this characteristic mode of narrative organisation, the various chapters, juxtaposed images, and episodes, are 'locked' into a central continuous story, creating a quasi-plot line, that develops and sustains the aesthetic element of suspense. This organisational pattern constitutes the dynamics of Tutuola's plot form, its basis of movement and growth. Within it, narrative integration is effectively realised by the established pattern of presentation in which the "embodded" episode on situation is 'carried' forward and expanded in a way that carries the narrative action progressively from its initial situation through a wide range of other connected events to its final resolution.

The importance and relevance of this element of narrative suspense to the appreciation of the aesthetic logic of Tutuola's narrative form is crucial. Equally, it is crucial to an understanding of the relationship of commonality between Tutuola's narrative procedure, and that of the conventional novel form. In his 'Introduction à l'analyse des récits,'[1] and in his

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[1] R. Barthes, "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits" in Communications, 1966 pp. 1-27 translated in New literary history vol. 1, pp. 20ff.

analysis of Balzac's Sarrasine in S/Z,[1] Roland Barthes has rightly outlined, in the process of the formulation of his organising codes of the realistic fictional forms, the code of suspense. This he refers to as "the hermeneutic code,"[2] the code of "mystery" and "enigma" that arouses interest to know the end and the truth. Although there is something subjectively arbitrary in Barthe's idea of the five codes, what he has to say on the organising force of suspense in the effective creation and reading of a text, underscores the central role which the implicit code of suspense plays in narrative as a genre.

Tutuola's insistent resort to this element of aesthetic suspense is basic to the appreciation of the African identity of the work. Through this mode he succeeds more than most of his contemporaries in maintaining a high level of artistic continuity between the modern literary form, and the whole background of traditional African literary values and aesthetics. Specifically, through the imaginative exploitation of this code, he succeeds, as Ramsaran has rightly pointed out in

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1. R. Barthes, S/Z: (Seuil, Paris, 1970), p. 56ff. For second hand discussion see below.

2. J. Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Cornel Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 210ff and 195ff.

"preserving the essential dramatic quality of the African folktake form".[1]

In his explication of Amos Tutuola's stylistic tendency towards the 'dramatic image,' Professor Babalola has adduced the idea of the influence of the Yoruba love of the marvellous when he observed:

> The Yorubas are lovers of the marvellous, the awe-inspiring, the weird, and the eerie. It is a small minority of Yoruba tale that concern human beings only. The great majority of the tales feature human beings, animals, behaving like human beings, and often also superhuman beings, demons, ogres, and deities.[2]

While this observation reinforces our view of the influence of

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1. J. Ramsaran, "African Twilight: Folktales and myths in Nigerian Literature", Ibadan, 15 (1963), pp. 17-19.

2. A. Babalola, "Folktales from Yorubaland", West African Review Jan. 1962, pp.14-15.

The use of the "weird" is not of course peculiar to the Yoruba, but is a general feature of many African oral literature-forms. In Isoko society the exceptional constitutes an insistent poetic technique (see Akporobaro, F.B.O. "African oral poetry. Three modes of communication" Oduma vol.2, No.1, ed. T. Vincent 1975. Also Herskovits, Dahomean Narratives shows the spread of the fantastic in West African narrative art.

the imagined audience (folk) aesthetics upon the evolution of Amos Tutuola's narrative style and perspective, it is important to realise too that the literary significance of Tutuola's style transcends the love of the marvellous *per se*. Through the creative emphasis upon the 'unusual' there is achieved throughout his novels an insistent 'metaphorical transformation' of experience from normality towards the level of the mythopoetic. Through this process, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* achieves a mythopoetic form imbued with a peculiar symbolic force, and capable of generating a wide range of psychological effects in the reader. The form and force of the achieved vision and style highlight in a way, the literary possibilities of the traditional African mythic imagination and narrative methods. For the effects of the style consist not merely in the realisation of an exciting world of marvellous images, and situations, but also, a form of literary experience to which the general reader can hardly remain detached.

VIXI

Tutuolan narrative form and Literary Development

Through the period 1952-1967, Amos Tutuola wrote a number of novels including *Simbi and the Satyr of the dark jungle (1955)*,

The Brave African Huntress (1958), Feather woman of the jungle (1962), and Ajayi and his Inherited Poverty (1967). Even if during this period Tutuola's work does reveal, as Taiwo[1] has observed a marked change from "the position of a total acceptance towards that of a critical questioning of traditional values", in the area of the formal organisation of his stories, Tutuola has not shown, in principle, any significant change in his basic approach. Although the intensity of narrative images and the quick inventive powers of the early two books seems to have petered off, and a new tone of strident satire and moralism has begun to emerge, the modalities in terms of which the later novels are fleshed out remain the same. Thus, in spite of the new moralistic tone of Ajayi and his Inherited Poverty, the basic modes of the spectacular and the hyperbolic, the technique of à-logical predication, the exploitation of suspense and the "embedding" of situations and episodes remain still the characteristic features of his narrative art. While he has grown more experienced and more acquainted with modern novels, there is little or no sign of any consciousness of cultivating the aesthetics of the western novel form, or the redefinition of the narrative structure of the earlier novels into line with the conventional western novel form.

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1. O. Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian novel, op. cit. p. 110

XIX

The realities of Amos Tutuola's world and the highly oblique relationship existing between those and what is normally considered to be the contemporary African social reality have generated a controversy about the novelistic status of Amos Tutuola's work, and the significance of his achievement in the development of modern African literature. In his early appraisal, Gerald Moore's verdict had been to the effect that Tutuola's work cannot be legitimately seen as novels, which according to him "deals with man in society", while Amos Tutuola is

> concerned with man alone, suffering, and growing amid the images thrown forth by his own mind and the imagination of his race. [1]

In his study, Izevbaye[2] seems to endorse Moore's views in respect of the idea of the 'private' nature of Tutuola's narrative interests. Developing the argument that Tutuola's experiment in form has not found imitators, he argues that the major reason for this "is the remove which Tutuola's narrative interests are from the contemporary Nigerian world."[3] on the

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[1]. G. Moore, Seven African Writers: (O.U.P. 1970), p. 42.

[2]. D. Izevbaye, "The Relevance of Modern Literary theory in English to Poetry and Fiction in English speaking West Africa." Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, December, 1968, pp. 271 - 275.

[3]. Ibid.

other hand while Martin Tucker sees in Tutuola the making of a novelist, he has reservations as to whether Tutuola is in a technical sense, a novelist. In his view, Tutuola is more of a mythologist than a novelist. As he suggests, Tutuola's work is merely "cast in the guise of fiction" while "his heroes are more of dream figures..."[1]

Judged in terms of the realist criteria of the novel form, the peculiarities of Amos Tutuola's style, and the nature of his ontology, can and do generate a lot of doubts about whether Tutuola's work are to be read as novels and what relevance they do, in fact, have for contemporary African experience, and the development of the African novel form. In fairness to his critics, many aspects of Tutuola's world may be significantly described in terms of 'fantasy', and hence of little relevance to contemporary reality. In spite of this, it must also be pointed out that not every aspect of his world can be described as being of little relevance to contemporary life. On the contrary, the cosmology presupposed in his story and the beings persistently invoked constitute as Amadi[2] has rightly pointed out, the traditional African

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1. M. Tucker, Africa in modern Literature, (Ungar Publishing Co. New York, 1967), p. 69ff.

2. E. Amadi, "The novel in Nigeria" in Oduma, Vol.2, No. 1, ed. T. Vincent, pp. 33ff.

ontology which is of continuing practical relevance for the contemporary African even in his city situations. Indeed, the high level of relevance and significance which Tutuola's fictive reality has in the African context brings into focus the often forgotten element of cultural relativism involved in our discrimination between realism and fantasy.[1]

Further, given the organisational structure of My Life in the Bush of Ghosts as we have tried to present it, on the one hand, and on the other, a more theoretically viable understanding of the structure of narrative art-form, one wonders whether the misgivings registered by Martin Tucker, Gerald Moore, and Izevbaye do not in fact arise out of a basically too narrow and rigid understanding of the nature of the novel form and its function. Indeed, from the kinds of ideas which have emerged out of a number of structuralist analysis of the nature of narrative form as well as from the more orthodox discussions[2] of the novel form it may be seen that much of the critics deprecatory comments about Amos Tutuola's

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1. As may be readily seen, what a given age or society considers to be "real" may be seen to be otherwise at different times or place.

2. The major relevent works here include (a) R.H. Prince, The Grammar of Stories. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1975, (b) R. Barthes "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récit" in Communication" Ed. R. Jacobson, (c) R. Barthes, S/Z(Seuil. Paris, 1970), (d) F. Jameson, The Prison house of Language: A critical account of Structuralism and Russian formalism. (Princeton University press, Princeton, 1972) (e) E. Muir The Structure of the Novel, (London, 1955), (f) R. Kellogs and R. Scholes, The Nature of Narrative (Princeton University press, Princeton, 1966). These studies are illuminating not only in the way they indicate the formal possibilities and techniques implicit in the novel but also in their discussion of which features are basic to the genre.

work are manifestations of two factors which the critic must seek to correct. First such attitudes are indications of predilection for a particular type of novel form - namely the outdated 19th century idea of the "well made novel".

Secondly, such attitudes are symptomatic of a failure to understand what items are fundamental to the identity of the novel form. Thus, whereas Amos Tutuola's verbal style, and the dynamics of his narrative form look backwards towards the conventions of the oral narrative medium, the general aesthetic interest of his stories, represent also the basic requirements of the novel as a narrative form. Specifically, the insistent mode of 'interlocking' of motifs and episodes, the central role of aesthetic suspense, the element of the causal chronological sequence implicit in the movement of his story, and finally, the established links between the imagined audience aesthetics and the style of the narrator constitute the basic narrative universals which are internalised within most novel forms, and generally modulated in relation to the specific function of the story teller.

Without doubt, Tutuola's exploitation of the folk imagination and sensibility does render 'remote' the style and

experiential content of his work. But significantly, this "deviant" quality does achieve significant literary effects. Like the highly idiosyncratic approaches of Kafka in The Castle, Mrs. Radcliffe in Mysteries of Udolpho and Robbe Grillet in The Voyeur, Tutuola's deviations from the conventions of contemporary western realism function as a mode through which his imaginative experience and vision can be dramatically projected. His insistent exploitation of African folk beliefs and traditional artistic sensibility represent a kind of cultural nativism which, as a literary style, is not peculiar to him. What is, however, significant is that with Tutuola, this nativism has been raised to a level of prominence and form that reflect most distinctively, the African primal vision of reality.

In recent years, many critics especially Nigerian literary scholars, have been able to realise not only Amos Tutuola's originality, but the more significant fact that his work represents a major contribution to the development of Nigerian fiction. The basis of his significance as an African novelist has however been conceived in terms that rather vary from scholar to scholar. In his study, Culture and the Nigerian novel, Taiwo appraises Tutuola's significance in terms of the realised cultural content

of the stories. Concluding his discussion, he highlightes the way Tutuola "has extended the traditional fantasy of the Yoruba folktales to cover aspects of the modern industrial civilisation while at the same time reminding people in contemporary society of their ancestral past."[1] While Wole Soyinka and Vincent[2] are aware of this achieved cultural dimension of the novels they see Tutuola's significance to lie in his blend of the oral and modern literary heritage, particularly, in the way he succeeded in uniting traditional lores, patterns and manner of oral composition to create a new and powerful work which is specifically African. Lindfors on the other hand, directs the reader's attention to the innovative quality of Tutuola's work. As he puts it:

> Amos Tutuola is most important as an innovator. He was one of the first African writers to contribute something new to Western literature. Although few of his innovations were conscious or calculated, and many were borrowed from Fagunwa and Yoruba oral traditions, he deserves to be called the father of experimentation in Nigerian fiction in English. 3

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1. O. Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian novel, p. 110

2. See T. Vincent, "Africanity in Modern African Literature." An unpublished paper presented at the 1977 Festac Colloquium, p. 33.

3. B. Lindfors, Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola, p. 306.

These representations are indications of the different respects in which Amos Tutuola's narrative form does succeed in the artistic extension of the western novel into a recognisably African form. An aspect which is not often stressed enough but which is most central to the quality of his achievement is the form of his fictional world. By this we mean his insistent recreation of the invisible beings and forces which define the traditional African world view. Although presented in an essentially mythopoetic form that may sometimes lapse into the surrealistic, or the comedic, and although no one deliberately imitated his style, his re-creation of this ontology constitutes in the context of Nigerian fiction, the beginning of the insistent focus upon specifically African concepts, ideas and experiences which later day novelists like Achebe and Amadi were to explore and project in terms of much more refined literary forms and techniques.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL REALISM

CHAPTER IV

CHINUA ACHEBE: ARROW OF GOD

I

If the form of Tutuola's novels represents the triumph of the mythopoetic imagination, in which realism has been dissolved into a metaphoric mode, the novels of those who wrote after him represent the development of "social-realistic form," in which a profound concern with the expression of distinctively African socio-cultural experiences is reconciled with an intensely artistic interest.

As evident in Chapter I, "realism" in fiction is a relative concept whose meaning is often individualistically or socio-culturally conceived. In using the term 'social-realism' in the description of the form of some of the Nigerian novels in the following chapters, we shall mean any one or combination of the following two levels of fictive representation:

(a) The comprehensive representation of the defining details of Nigerian reality (social and metaphysical), to the extent of making the text a "picture" of every day life.

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[1] References are to the 2nd. edn. Heinemann, London, AWS. 1974.

(b) The depiction of the typical Nigerian moral consciousness, as revealed in various patterns of individual behaviour and experiences and presented with or without recourse to the details of local cultural elements.

The emergence and growth of these serious and realistic fictional novel forms through the period 1958-1968 did not start as a consciously embraced literary movement concerned specifically with the exploration of the novel form for its own sake. Rather its beginning was essentially the result of a number of highly individualistic responses to the colonial experience, especially to its devaluation of African cultural values.

In the formulation of his subject-matter and the development of stylistic techniques, Achebe's work (including his essays) represents the most formative influence in the growth of the African social realistic novel form.[1] Not only did his ideas blazon the way for the representation of themes of specifically African experience, but he also brought into the handling of prose style an awareness of the need for forging new

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[1]. By the "African social realistic" novel we mean the type of novel characterised by the items we have described in (a) and (b) above.

techniques for the effective communication of the distinctive qualities of the African world and social experience.

Historically, however, Achebe's Things Fall Apart is not the first original work of fiction in the growth of Nigerian literature. A number of fairly realistic novels and novelettes had been written in English, and in the indigenous languages before its publication in 1958. Of this class of early fiction, the Onitsha market stories,[1] People of the City, Jaqua Nana, and The Palm-Wine Drinkard serve as examples that imaginative 'novels' can be written not only by Europeans, but also by Nigerians. Significantly, however, the impact of these forms of early fiction on the general reading public and the development of Nigerian fiction seem to have been marginal. Whatever success they achieved they never transcended the level of 'popular' light reading materials. Like Tutuola's work they remained interesting examples that found few or no imitators.

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[1]. E. N. Obiechina, Ed. An Onitsha Market Literature, (Heinemann, AWS, London), 1972.

The basis of Achebe's unique significance and influence in the development of the 'realistic' tradition in modern African fiction consists fundamentally in his redirection of the emergent populer styles and forms into a more intensely realistic form characterised by a high level of seriousness in the expressed social concerns, and a greater sophistication in the technical control of the form.

The infusion of this new approach is imaginatively realized in his work not only in the seriousness and relevance of his themes but in his displayed level of narrative competence. Indeed, of the various Nigerian novelists he is the only one in whose organizational process the architectonic sense seems intrinsic, and at its apex of sophistication. This he has displayed throughout his novels in the formal relationships which he established with remarkable ingenuity and delicacy between theme and the structure of narrative action, and between character, socio-historical ethos and the fate of the individual and society. Indeed, given the scope, form, and quality of Arrow of God, it may be said of him as Ford Madox Ford said of Conrad that "he had a significant hold on the architectonic of the novel, - over the way a story should be

built so that its interest progresses and grows to the last word."[1]

In order to see Achebe's formal response to the realistic novel form, we shall examine the types of structural techniques he uses, and the complexity of the relationships established between social vision and narrative style in Arrow of God where Achebe's art is at its maximum intensity.

II

In one of his early essays, "The novelist as Teacher"[2] Chinua Achebe gives an insight into the aesthetic and moral bases of his art. In addition to other social responsibilities, the writer in a new nation must seek to give a true and honest picture of his world.[3] This he can do through the sensitive depiction of its social experience, problems and aspirations, and by the imaginative representation of the pattern of human

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[1]. Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A personal remembrance (Boston, Little Brown) 1924, p. 9.

[2]. Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" New Statesman, 29 January ,1963, pp. 161-2.

[3]. Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" loc. cit.

behaviour and beliefs which give a distinctive cultural identity to that world. In the particular context of Arrow of God the conception of the central theme is such as to give concrete expression to this concern with realism. Explicating his creative intentions in an interview with Lewis Nkosi,[1] he says that in the novel:

> I'm handling a whole lot of... more complex themes... like the relationship between a god and his priest. My chief character in this novel is a village priest not a Christian priest - a traditional African religion. And I'm interested in this old question of who decides what shall be the wish of the gods, and ... that kind of situation.

Evident in these discussion is the relevance and complexity of the themes which are being handled in the novel. In treating these themes the creative scope of the novel is not restricted to the depiction of the moral issues involved in the psychological conception of Ezeulu. As we shall show later they derive also from exceptional sensitivity to a network of contemporary social-political experiences which Achebe has brought within the logical scope of the story. Further, just as the novel presents these many interrelated issues, so too is it intensely "particularised". In dealing with

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[1]. An interview with Lewis Nkosi, in African Report, 9/7, July 1964, p. 20.

its nexus of complex social issues, it carries into its narrative focus a considerable range of local characters, all of whom are presented with striking particularity. Thus, within its 260 pages, the novel presents some forty characters presented so as to indicate the various aspects of Umuaro social life and current socio-historical experience.

But for all its affected element of narrative expansiveness, thematic comprehensiveness and dedication to the defining details of social life, Arrow of God is neither diffuse nor a structurally unstable novel. Indeed, part of the strength and literary significance of the novel consists in its thematic coherence and structural integratedness achieved through the interlacing of the diverse issues into a single dramatic plot movement.

III

Narrative Infrastructure and the Matrices of African Reality

In its inner structure, Arrow of God is a carefully orchestrated novel which develops through a pattern of human interaction. Through the insistent concern with the realistic presentation of the particularities of the African cultural life,

Achebe has developed narrative drama which moves progressively to its apex of dramatic interest through the continuous interaction of three aspects of social reality, viz. - the personal, the societal and the spiritual. Each of these represents a different basis of the narrative action and are telescoped and blended into a unified experience presented mimetically through Ezeulu as focus. In this way, each works within the novel form not only as a matrix of the action, but as a functional concept for the analysis of the socio-historical experience of Ezeulu, and his world of Umuaro.

Within this "tripartite" narrative frame, Ezeulu, the central character provides the individual perspective and major motive force of the narrative action. He is the protagonist whose complex personality and conflict with the social life and destiny of Umuaro society constitute a cardinal part of the realities which the novelist has set out to explore in their moral and philosophical implications.

In his interview with Lewis Nkosi,[1] Chinua Achebe indicated the complexity of the issues he has set out to express in the novel. This he outlined as the problem of man's dealings

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1. Interview with Lewis Nkosi, African Report 9/7, July, 1964, p. 20.

with the gods, and the role of Ezeulu's intellectualising tendencies on his effectiveness as a bridge between the god Ulu and the society. This range of issues is successfully transformed in terms of the underlying narrative logic into the dramatic action, through Ezeulu's conflict-ridden responses to issues, to people, and to the god Ulu. In his vague and somewhat deluded reliance upon his own judgement, he is apt to create conflicts between himself and his world. This he does in his dealing with Nwaka and Esidemili faction; in his ill-judged and unbefitting response to the rise of education, and in his highly undiplomatic dealings with the colonial regime as well as with the people of his own clan in their quarrel with Okperi. The established connection between Ezeulu's psychology, moral temperament, and plot movement is a dramatised realisation of the natural link between character and fate. The three dimensions of his personality, - his psychology emotions and intellectual sensibility are treated from two

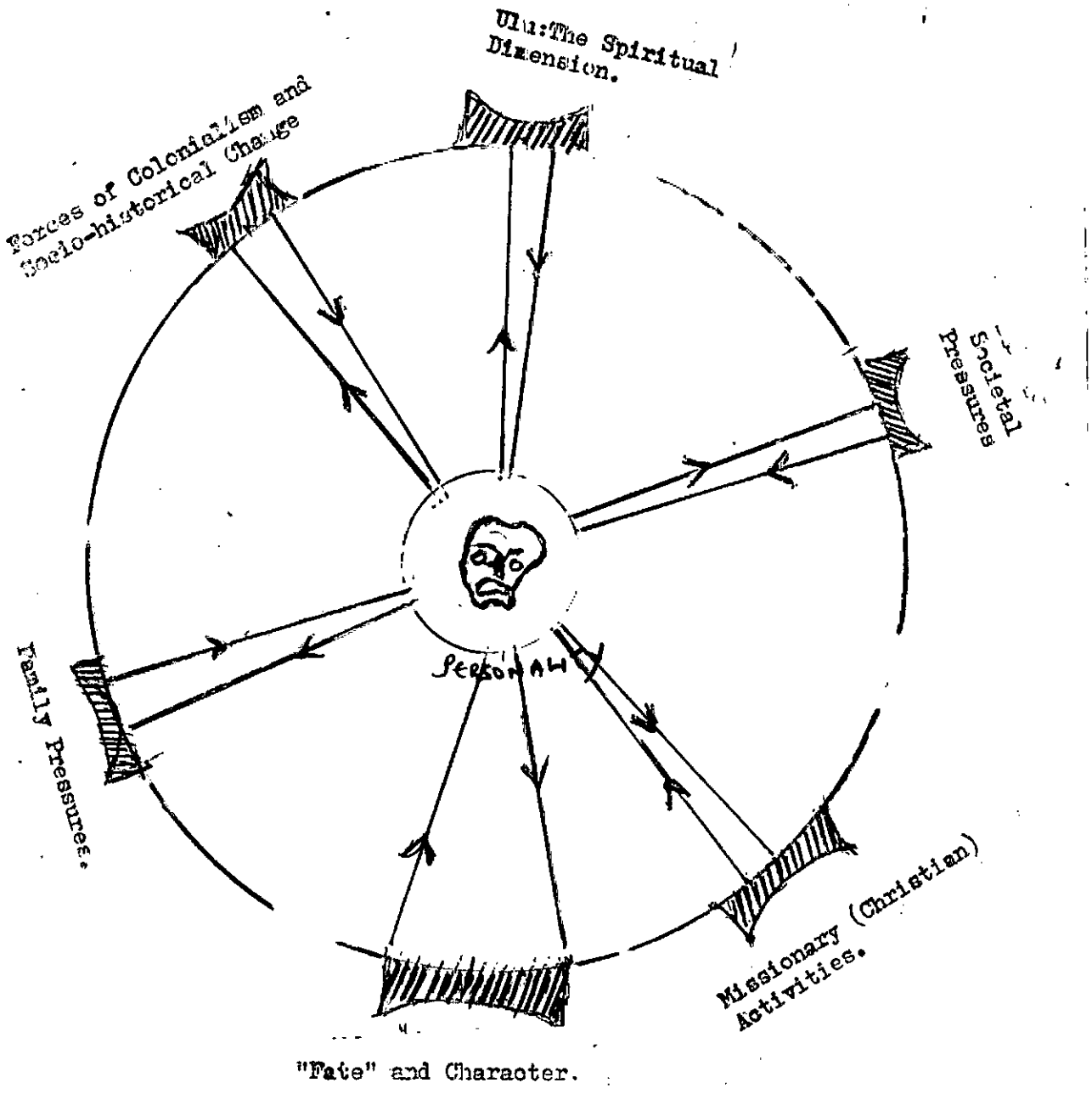
points of view. First as they affect the fortune and life of Umuaro society of which he is the custodian, and second, as they determine subliminally, the moral decisions, upon which his actions become based rather than their being received from Ulu, whom he should normally wait upon like an arrow in a bow.

Second to the personal, the novel also sets up and explores another perspective, namely the level of societal forces which we shall refer to as the "cyclical frame" on account of its inherent element of the vicious circle of intra-social conflicts and reactions. Through its stylistic orchestration, this perspective represents a range of socio-historical forces through which the novelist seeks to analyse and dramatise the traditional group-consciousness, - its communal spirit, and solidarity by which it seeks to "connect" all into a social web enjoining a common purpose and will. Further, through this frame, the activities, psychology, and aspirations of individuals not in the centre of the dramatic action are projected and revealed in their remote and yet often decisive influence on the central experience of Ezeulu. With the novelist's intimate knowledge of the psychology of the people of Umuaro, and its pattern of human relations, he creates the impression of a mesh of people, a densely populated and closely knit world of individuals of different self-

Chart A1

THE "CYCLIC" FRAME IN ARROW OF GOD.

EZEULU AS CENTRE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FORCES.



As may be seen in the above diagram, a particularly interesting aspect of Ezeulu's condition is the wide range of human problems which he has to deal with. This state of affairs derives from the fact that he is not only deeply enmeshed in, but also right in the centre of his world. Consequently, he cannot remain a passive observer.

interests, like Ogbuefi Nwaka, Mr. Clerk, and John Jaja Good Country whose personal interests and interactions add complexity to the narrative action. Thus, in the pursuit of their self-centred aspirations, not only do they affect one another directly or indirectly, but also, they generate actions and reactions that are highly critical to the experience of Ezeulu. These actions and reactions operate like social pressures transmitted along the radii of a closed world of which Ezeulu is the central hub. See Chart A1 "Ezeulu as centre of Socio-Cultural Forces". Through the effects of his character, his commonsense as well as his moments of irrationality, he too reacts in terms of other decisions and actions whose effects reverberate to the outer periphery of his society and disturbing in the process the stability of his world.

By means of this established transmission line from Ezeulu to society, and from society to Ezeulu, an intricate web of several socio-historical themes is woven into one intensely dramatic narrative mythos without resort to the use of a parallel or sub-plots. The emphasized pattern of cyclic exchanges of "actions" and "reactions" with all their disruptive possibilities function as an effective narrative structure conveying relevantly, the pattern of social pressures inherent in the traditional African world and whose balance depends most

heavily upon its chief political figure.

Thirdly, towards the end of realizing the African theme in its totality, Arrow of God establishes another perspective and source of dramatic experience, namely, the spiritual dimension. This expresses, realistically, the realm of various spiritual forces beyond the world of sense-perception. While the overt dramatic action is set in historical time and space, and concerned effectively with personal and socio-historical issues, it invokes in its characteristic development of African realism, the consciousness of the ancestral gods, - Ulu, Idemili, Eru, and Chukwu, - by subtly establishing the reality of their influence upon the social and personal lives of the people. Like Tamara in Ozidi and the Sea-god in The Concubine, Ulu's influence on the narrative action of the novel is direct and yet not as strident and improbably forced like a deus ex machina adduced for the resolution of the moral theme. Rather, like the traditional African spirits and occult powers, the gods are invisible, but are yet part of the fabric of life through their transcendent reality in the consciousness of the characters. Thus, as revealed in Ulu's relation to Ezeulu and Idemili to Exidemili, these two gods have a strong hold on the consciousness and life of the characters. This is to an extent that effectively adds for the realistic African novelists

a new dimension in the representation of character, society and the logic of the narrative action.

In the characterisation of Ezeulu, Achebe brings further into focus, the dramatic significance of this spiritual dimension on the course of the narrative action.[1] He does this through the ambiguous overlapping of the power of Ezeulu as priest, and that of Ulu as god. This ambiguity creates a real difficulty for the people in drawing the boundary-line between what really is Ulu's command, and what is merely a reflection of Ezeulu's arrogant and stubborn personality. Ezeulu himself recognizes[2] this ambiguity, and from time to time exploits it for his own ambitious interests. Thus in his secret desire to have more power, he shows a tendency to present his own will as Ulu's. As will be evident in later discussion,[3] this highly overbearing and presumptious tendency results in a pattern of dramatically critical reactions (metaphysical as well as societal) which have a crucial bearing on the socio-political life of Umuaro society and the fate of Ezeulu.

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[1]. Further, in the narrative action Ulu is of special significance not only because of his historical role as war god but because in such a profoundly religious world as Umuaro, power clusters around him and his priest. Hence the status of his priest is presented also as the source of the political rivalry which polarizes Umuaro into the two factions of Nwaka-Nzidemili and that of Ezeulu.

[2]. Ibid., p. 208.

[3]. See pages 122-123.

Through Achebe's narrative inter weaving of the three perspectives - the personal, the social and the metaphysical presented simultaneously as the dynamic source of the narrative action, Arrow of God achieves a considerable range of aesthetic effects. Of particular artistic significance is the almost palpable sense of dynamic life, the vivid impression of movement, action, personal interactions and multiplicity of characters and communal activities. By this comprehensive realism and deftly controlled narrative structure, the novel achieves impressively, a sense of density and largeness that makes it touch the level of the epical. By this distinctive form, Achebe captures magnificently the realities of the traditional African life at a specific historical period.

Stylistically, this illusion of real African life and socio-historical experience is the result of a creative alliance of several factors. First, it is a by-product of Achebe's intuitive understanding of the texture and nuances of traditional African life, as manifested particularly in the Ibo society of Umuaro. Equally, it is also the result of Achebe's masterly use of the basic strategies of the realistic novel form. Specifically these include (a) the realistic control of plot movement in relation to social and psychological factors,

(b) the use of the conflict resolution pattern as the armature of the narrative action, (c) the insistent embodiment of socio-cultural details within the focus of the narrative presentation and (d) the sophisticated handling of the causal chronological framework in terms of which the narrative experience is presented. We shall consider the creative use of each of these modalities in relation to the formal effects and quality of experience generated through them.

IV

Structure and Plot-Movement

In its narrative movement, Arrow of God is as much an image of the social experience of Umuaro as it is of Ezeulu, the focus of the narrative action. In terms of construction, the novel, which is composed of 18 chapters, can be seen to fall into three distinct sections, each of which develops the different phases of the dramatic experience presented. The first section comprises chapters 1 - 4, the second, 5 - 12, and the third 13 - 18. In the first section, chapters 1 - 4 (pp. 14 - 54), the narrative establishes both the geographical locus

and historical background of the narrative action. In the first chapter, Ezeulu, as the principal character, is presented at "home" in his religious role as chief priest of Ulu, and as watchman for the new moon. In the following chapters (pp. 14 - 54), the novel presents the setting, the world of Umuaro. Retrospectively, the narrative shifts five years into the past, to give a history of the clan especially, the coming together of the six villages of Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuso to form one united village group "Umuaro" capable of withstanding the attacks of its ancient enemy, Abame.[1] It was during this time that Ulu had been "installed" as the guardian war-god of the clan.[2] It was at this time that the Ezeulu family was also chosen to be the house of the chief priest. Along with this background, the present social life is presented as being lived against a background of various forces of disruption. Okperi with whom they had a land dispute stands as threat to their solidarity and harmony. The forces of social change are also at work. These are mainly in the form of the new western influences, the colonial administration, with its concern "to

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1. Arrow of God, p. 14.

2. Ibid., p. 14ff

lead the backward races into line"[1] to establish the system of indirect rule and the new education in response to which Oduche is sent to school.

The second section of the novel continues the presentation of the first section. Basically it develops largely through detailed presentation of the day to day life of the community, focusing, particularly upon the typical events in the life of Ezeulu and the society of Umuaro as an organic unit. Of the wide range of dramatic events presented,two are of special relevance to the central theme and experience of the novel. The first is Oduche's indiscretion in imprisoning in a box the sacred python of Idemili.[2] This act of sacrilede generates and furthers the society's hostile reaction to Ezeulu and his entire family. The second is the construction of the road from Okperi to Umuaro by the Otakagu age group. This provides a context in which Obika is severely flogged[3] by Mr. Wright. This incident not only symbolises the high-handed and blind attitude of the colonial masters to the local population; significantly, it constitutes an indirect

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1. Arrow of God, p. 33

2. Arrow of God, chapter 6, p. 59.

3. Ibid., chapter 8, p. 87.

attack as well as a slur on Ezeulu's social standing which is already being undermined in several respects. Along with these two dramatic incidents, is the celebration of the Festival of the Pumpkin. In this we see dramatically enacted Ezeulu's nebulous identity as priest, man and god.[1]

In the last section of the novel, chapters 12-18, the dramatic movement is intensified and hurried to a dramatic resolution that movingly evokes the traditional African sense of what is really tragic. Against the background of the social tensions already built up in the first two sections, the narrative action of the novel now begins to close in. The atmosphere "thickens" with suspense as crisis begins to follow upon crisis. This intense dramatic quality is realised largely from the fact that now, the three basic motive forces in the narrative action are simultaneously presented as the motive forces of the tragic experiences of Ezeulu. First, there is the presentation of the mounting attack and criticism of Ezeulu following Oduche's sacrilege, and Ezeulu's defiant attitude to the people. Superimposed on this charged social atmosphere are the new plans for social change being introduced by the colonial regime.[2]

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1. Ibid., chapter 7, p. 67ff.

2. Ibid., p. 108.

This historical development begins to strain Ezeulu's mind, and to test his political skill and power. This development doubles the matrix of the narrative drama. Finally, the reality and power of Ulu is brought into the foreground, complicating further, Ezeulu's life and concerns. Thus as already observed, Ulu reacts to Ezeulu's decision by asserting his supremacy and power. He questions the wisdom of Ezeulu's decision to fight his people as a means of protecting his (Ulu) power, instead of waiting for the god's action patiently like an arrow in a bow.[1]

In the realistic presentation of the historical issues involved, the novel develops dramatically, a series of highly critical actions and situations which, working cumulatively enhance the tragic possibilities of each other, bringing Ezeulu to an inevitable and yet unforseen disastrous end. Two of these decisive developments may be noted as they illuminate Ezeulu's character and the intricate nature of the forces which he is compelled to deal with. First is his nonchalant handling of the

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[1]. Ibid., p. 191. Here Ulu asks "Who told you that this was your own fight?...I say who told you that this was your fight to arrange the way it suits you?"

call from the colonial office at Okperi. On the one hand, there is the extremely arrogant message he sent back: "You must first return, however, and tell your white man that Ezeulu does not leave his hut. If he wants to see me, he must come here."[1] On the other hand is also the extremely inciting way he handled the summon as it affected his own people who are indirectly involved in his fate. He fails really to seek or even take their advice in his overbearing self-assurance. As he surprisingly confessed "when I called you, together, it was not because I am lost...As for what I shall do, I had set my mind on it before I asked Ikolo to summon you."[2] This incident continues and accelerates the process of alienation already set in motion.

Second to this is his ill-advised and undiplomatic confrontation with Mr. Clark the deputy to Mr. Winterbottom and the representative of the colonial power. Responding to the offer of the post of paramount chief, in the new system of indirect rule, Ezeulu refuses with the same infuriating air of arrogance and insensitivity to the mood and feelings of the

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1. Arrow of God., p. 139.

2. Ibid., p. 145.

people he is dealing with. The sequence of his replies, and his final refusal with the words: "Tell the white man Ezeulu will not be any body's chief except Ulu"[1] indicates a quality of pride and self assurance that are, however, vitiated by the element of naivete in dealing with people. This pose of excessive pride not only prolongs his detention,[2] but also it sets up whole sequence of new incidents that create a charged atmosphere of mistrust, anger and bad faith that culminates ultimately in his alienation and final overthrow. On the one hand, he succeeds in alienating himself from the colonial powers - represented by Mr. Winterbottom and Mr. Clark. By the same undiplomatic sensibility, he also alienates himself from his people including his friends. Characteristic of the extremely difficult situation he occupies is that his decisions are often fraught with highly ironic consequences through the complexity of the socio-political factors around him and partly as a result of his insensitivity and lack of communicativeness.[3] The net result of the charged social state of affairs which he thus brings

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[1]. Arrow of God, p. 175

[2]. Ibid.,

[3]. "Even at the best of times, Ezeulu only spoke when he wanted to, and not when people asked him". Arrow of God., p. 158.

about in Umuaro is that Obika is compelled to perform the rite of Ogbozulobodo even at the time when he is not physically fit to perform such a stremuous task. As he says:

> If I say no ... thwy will say that Ezeulu and his family have revealed a second time their determination to wreck the second burial of their man who did no harm to them.

As a result of Obika's consequent death, Ezeulu is physically and psychologically shattered. The event is a tragic blow that is beyond his comprehension. As the novel represents it:-

> Ezeulu sank to the ground in utter amazement. It was not simply the simple blow of Obika's death great though it was. Men had taken greater blows: that was want made a man a man. For did they not say that a man is like a funeral ram that which must take whatever beating comes to it without opening its mouth; that the silent tremor down its body alone must tell of its suffering? At any other time Ezeulu would have been equal to any pain not compounded with humiliation. But why he asked himself again and again why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him to strike him down and then cover him with mud? 2

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1. Ibid., p. 224.

2. Ibid., p. 229

This overwhelming personal loss and humiliation constitutes the central dramatic irony implicit in the novel. Basically, it underscores Ezeulu's lack of attunement to the realities of the world of which he is the spiritual custodian. To the people of Umuaro, his fate and suffering is a direct visitation of the god Ulu; - it is an act of divine retribution in support of their struggle against his (Ezeulu's) self arrogated power and selfish schemings. From the point of view of the tragedy, the untimeliness of the death of Obika, his most promising son, coupled with his own alienation from his god and people together represent the basis of the tragic character and pathos of his experience. In their total effect, these experiences represent Ezeulu's loss of those very things which within the traditional African system of values, have given worth and meaning to his life.

The analysis of Ezeulu's character in connection with his slow but steady alienation from his society underscores the sense of the complexity of his character as an individual, it also indicates the distinctive nature of the tragic pattern which Achebe is evolving in the novel. Specifically, the story presents a number of indicators in the form of incidents which

help to establish the local (African)[1] character of this tragic experience. This it does by bringing into focus why his fate is felt (or could) be felt to be particularly painful to the people of Umuaro. First, is the death of his favourite, mature, and indeed, most promising son Obika. This is an experience which most traditional people regard as a tragic blow to any man. Second, there is also his fall from his unique position of social eminence and great respect due to his office. After the toll of the various incidents, he lives the rest of his life in "the haughty splendour of a demented priest." Further, there is also the emphasized connection of his suffering with other

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[1]. In spite of the much discussions of various aspects of African literature there has been little or no discussion of the traditional African sense of the tragic and the influence of such a perspective in the development of character and narrative action in the modern African novel. Chinua Achebe's quotation from W.B. Yeats in the opening pages of Things Fall Apart seems to have suggested to some critics the idea of the direct influence of W.B. Yeats theory of tragedy on Achebe's tragic form and vision. A.G. Stocks paper "W.B. Yeats and Achebe" Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe Ed. C. Innes, and B. Lindfors. 1979. pp. 86ff, which promises to treat relationship between Achebe and W. B. Yeats rather dissappointingly fails to evince the points of similarity and divergence in the two writers' philosophic response to the problems of individual fate and socio-historical change. Other critics have superficially analysed Achebe's tragic pattern in terms of Aristotle's description of the form of tragic experience. Our study of Achebe's novels shows that these foreign models are not significantly pertinent. In actual fact the quotation from W.B. Yeats is of a limited direct relevance to the understanding of Achebe's tragic pattern. The use of the quotation is that it functions as an effective metaphoric expression of the process of social disintegration in an age in which change has become rather inevitable. W.B. Yeats tragic vision as expressed in his poetry is essentially doctrinaire, being a kind of dispassionate expression of the idea of the cycle of social change that is recurrently steeped in blood and violence.

intangible but insistant forces - the force of history, and especially, what we have referred to as the "Cyclic frame". A basically intelligent man, prompted at times by both good sense as well as stubborn impulses, Ezeulu suffers precisely because, as a typical traditional African, he is enmeshed in his society and entangled almost inexorably in a network of social pressures borne of inter-personal rivalry and complicated further by the introduction of new and unfamiliar forces into his social system. Indeed, in its narrative form, the development of Ezeulu's fall from his initial position of social importance to his final ruin is a finely realised dramatisation of the dialectical conflict between the inner forces of personality and the outer objective pressure of social milieu and history.

By working within this thematic structure, Achebe makes Ezeulu's condition and experience permanently enthralling. Affectively, the structure enables the narrative action to chart and evoke the fatal complicity between personal responsibility and the accident of history, and between the personal and the unforseable bound up with man's political-social nature. Basically, the central position Ezeulu occupies in society as Chief priest and the unique role this confers on him impose a set of moral

constraints and obligations which require him to act in conformity with the social will. Even when his own moral judgement differs significantly, his position becomes one that requires extreme diplomacy, caution and wisdom to handle successfully. It is however part of the condition of his tragic fate that he lacks most of these necessary qualities at the precise historical time in which they are most needed.

In his characterisation and in the development of the fictional experience, Achebe combines a subtle rather than strident satirical interest with his intensely realistic approach. Specifically, in the portrayal of Ezeulu's fall through pride and excessive self-confidence, and in the presentation of the colonial masters, - in their blind conduct and overbearing attitude towards the traditional people, - there is delicate fusion of satire and realism. This mixed mode is a continuation of the non-idealising attitude which underlie Achebe's first novel Things Fall Apart and continued through the second novel No Longer at ease to his fourth novel A man of the people. Throughout Arrow of God this satirical perspective is, however, deftly muted and subordinated to the mimetic presentation of narrative vision and experience.

This mimetic emphasis is realised effectively in the novel through the recourse to several creative factors. Besides the realistic structure and theme which we have elucidated, Achebe also draws upon and makes imaginative use of specifically African cultural motifs and conceptual schemas, for the ordering of fictional reality and experience.

One of these which he puts to creative use in the novel is the traditional African awareness of the time and the seasons. The importance of the seasons as a temporal basis of social activity is evoked in a number of references throughout the novel. The novel opens with the evocation of the time image the appearance of the moon, thus anchoring the readers consciousness in the natural movement of the year, and the importance which this plays in the life of the community. From the first paragraph, when the narrative action begins, it is not only dusk, but the entire society is eagerly expectant of the new moon which would mark the progress of the year, and usher in new life activities and social rites.

The two modes in terms of which time is experienced in Umuaro are the dry season with which the novel opens, and the wet season with which it ends.[1] These two seasons correspond to the

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[1]. Arrow of God. pp. 29, 181.

dry, hard period of sowing, labour and hopeful anticipation, and the period of harvest and joy respectively. Their effects and alternation suggest symbolically, the continuous cycle of death and regeneration that represent the eternal rhythm of nature. This time frame, which determines human activities makes man extremely conscious of the rhythm of nature. This link between seasonal time and social activities is part of what gives Ezeulu his enhanced social and political importance in the scheme of Umuaro society. The foundations of the life-continuity of Umuaro and of the harmony between the different spheres of life - the individual, society, the realm of the spirits and the world of nature are ritualistically vested on him as priest and watchman who has to announce the new moon and also perform the necessary rites for a peaceful transition to new forms of social activities.[1] In this double role he is symbolically, the umbilical cord, the nerve centre that connects society to the processes of nature. It is precisely against this background that Ezeulu contemplates the immensity of his power.[2]

Chapter 18 dealing with the political confrontation between Ezeulu and the elders of Umuaro led by Ezekwesili and Onenyi

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1. Arrow of God, pp. 201ff.

2. Ibid., pp. 3 - 4.

Nnanyelugo brings into focus some of the indirect ways through which Achebe can give imaginative expression to some of the social realities of his world. The background of the conflict is the elders' awareness of the passage of time and the fact that Ezeulu had not named the date for the New Yam Festival and hence preparing the stage for the performance of the propitiatory rituals to mark the beginning of the harvest season. Exasperated by his uncompromising decision not to accept the elders' practical suggestion to eat the remaining three yams[1] and name the date for the new yam festival, the entire society is stunned and thrown into a state of panic. They are driven towards a rebellious attitude, and finally to reject Ezeulu's authority. Ezeulu's externalisation of his own recalcitrant sensibility becomes significant not only in personal terms, but in a larger frame, in terms of the way it ruptures the religious link between the life of society, and the ordered rhythm of nature. The intensely dramatic rupture of this transcendent unity between man and nature is one of the significant aspects of the narrative action. It expresses and enhances at once, the tragic scope and ironic implications of Ezeulu's selfish act. In contrast to the comedic form, the linear progression of the protagonist and his

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[1]. Arrow of God., p. 207

society entails a painful transition from order to disorder. For Umuaro, the development marks a retrogression - a movement from a relatively stable order to that of dissolution. For Ezeulu, the tragic denouement symbolises the irreversible fragmentation of the pre-established order of things which form not only the basis of the continuity of his world, but also that of his god Ulu, and by implication, that of his own social significance as chief priest.

VI

Culture and Narrative Texture

Although Arrow of God may be seen to fall systematically into the thematic structures outlined above, it is also a novel in which there is no palpable impression of didacticism. On the contrary, the basis of its richly realised sense of social experience consists in Achebe's highly realistic presentation of life as a living process. Achebe's stylistic approach in the novel is one in which spontaneity in the use of narrative motif is reconciled with a controlling sense of design and order. This studied mode of narration may be seen partly in the range and quality of the cultural motifs, experience, and images synthesised into the novels prose texture. An examination of the organised

structure of the narrative incidents in the first chapter may serve to illustrate the point. Right from its first paragraph, the narrative brings insistently into the reader's consciousness a variety of concrete images and details of life. This may be seen in the insistent evocation of both significant and insignificant incidents and experience in the course of his narration. Thus, the first chapter begins with the evocation of the moon-image and of the role of Ezeulu as the watchman:

> This was the third nightfall since he began to look for signs of the new moon. He knew it would come today but he always began his watch three days before its time because he must not take a risk. In this season of the year his task was not too difficult; he did not have to peer and search the sky as he might do in the rainy season. Then the new moon sometimes hid itself for many days behind rain clouds so that when it finally came out it was already half-grown. And while it played its game the Chief Priest sat up every evening waiting. 1

From this powerfully evoked moon-watching situation, and with it, the role of Ezeulu as priest of Ulu, the narrative slowly develops, bringing into its scope a variety of events and images, all of which are not necessarily related either

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1. Arrow of God. p. 1

literarily or symbolically to the thematic interest of the novel. First, there is the sighting of the moon. This is followed sequentially by the detailed and successive evocation of the incidents typical of the flow of social life. Thus, the narrative sequence consists of:-

The watching of the new moon ..... p. 1
The description of Ezeulu's Obi

The beating of the Ogene ..... p. 1

The joyful thrill of the children ..... p. 2
and wives on sighting the moon.
Women's comments on the sitting
position of the moon..... p. 2

Ezeulu's barn described ..... p. 3
Ezeulu's meditation on the nature of
his priestly power..... p. 3

The entrance of his youngest son Nwafor ....p. 4
The roasting of the ritual yam.
Introduction of Edogo.....p. 4
Ezeulu's calls of Edogo.
Ezeulu's discussion with Edogo about the
carving of deity. ..... p. 4

Ezeulu's scraping and cutting of the
ritual yam into two halves ..... p. 5
Obiageli singing and watching her
father eat the yam and hoping to
be given..... p. 5

His eating manner ..... p. 5

Ezeulu and his Ikenga ..... p. 6
Ezeulu and his Ofo
Ritual thanksgiving to Ulu..... p. 6

The return of Ezeulu's wives from
the stream side. Time of day
indicated..... p. 7

Ezeulu's anger questions ..... p. 7

Obika's story about his sighting
of a spirit near Umuachala ..... p. 8

Ojiugo bringing a bowl of foofoo
and bitter-leaf soup ..... p. 9
Ezeulu's anger with her for
bringing the food late..... p. 9

The evocation of these narrative images with such keen sensitivity to the defining details of Umuaro cultural life is however, not limited to this opening chapter only. Rather, it constitutes the more insistent organisational mode of the entire novel. In the opening chapter, these aspects of the natural movement of life are more of family items, designed to present comprehensively Ezeulu's family life. In the rest of the novel, however, these presentations include a wider range of realities, featuring in particular, various kinds of festivals, religious ceremonies, the gathering of elders, and a relatively large number of social occasions peculiar to the cultural life of the community.

What is significant in the development of this basis of cultural verisimilitude is not simply the imaginative fixation of the flow of local life as composed of both significant and insignificant occurrences. It is also the kind of sophistication and confidence which Achebe has brought into the handling of the logical structure of the traditional realistic novel form. In this respect, he seems to modify the structure of his novel in a variety of subtle ways capable of projecting vividly, both the illusion of real life, and the sense of the play of chance, causality and circumstantial happenings. Three types of stylistic approaches may be noted in the novel.

First, the basic logic of narrative presentation, and hence what provides the basis of the stability of narrative form and experience is insistently causal-temporal. In other words, in the orchestration of the novel, Achebe seems to look towards the aesthetic structure of the social realistic novel form, whose orderliness derives largely from the use of the basic connective modes of chance, contingency and a deterministic view of the relationship between character, society and human destiny.

Ezeulu's final isolation and his suffering at the close of the novel elicits in the reader, the feeling that it is an

inevitable and natural result of the chain of ac tions and decisions, which, he, in his arrogance has initiated.

Whereas a range of contiguous events are presented as causal continuities of initiated actions of the protagonist, occasionally, Achebe does, however, vary his narrative mode by presenting sequentially, a number of events which may have little or no overt causal connection, but whose contiguity elicits in the reader, the impression of their direct causal connectedness. The contiguous relationship between Ezeulu's imprisonment and Winterbottom's illness in chapter 5; between Ezeulu's conflict with Ulu and the unhappy death of his son Obika in chapter 9, and thirdly, between the sending of Oduche to school and his consequent decision to kill the sacred python of Idemili represent some of the sophisticated touches which Achebe has introduced into the consequential logic of the novel. What is being exploited in these situations, is the psychological effects of the elements of chance, causality and the circumstantial. The achieved effects of the circumstantial nature of these events is a type of ambiguity that generates various responses for both reader and the fictional characters. For example, the suggested connection between Ezeulu's imprisonment and Winterbottom's illness is a particularly clever strategy that elicits various

types of responses. It creates a great deal of stir in the world of Umuaro.[1] Some people even interpret the apparent relationship as a demonstration of his magical power as well as of Ulu's readiness to protect his own priest.[2]

In addition to these two modes Achebe's narrative focus can forego consciously or unconsciously, the choice of narrative incidents in terms of the mode of synthesis which Henry James describes as "one centre of interest"[3] that is, the selection of events as they are considered to be strictly relevant and necessary to the central theme. Indeed, in Arrow of God Chinua Achebe, like the really mature realistic novelist, seems to have the intuitive understanding that to tie up every detail to the end of producing a rigidly controlled and connected sequence of narrative experiences, is, in fact, to produce a structure that is too neat to square with the rich and flowing welter of

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1. Arrow of God, p. 155

2. Ibid., p. 178.

3. See Jonathan Raban: The Technique of Fiction (Camelot press London), p. 68 and Henry James: Theory of Fiction Ed. J. Miller Jr. (Nebraska University press, Lincoln), p. 247.

impressions which life in its various forms presents. Thus, while resorting to the principle of causality and consequentiality in the presentation of the experiences of his characters, it is also part of his development of African realism that he strives to catch the feel of local reality in all its motivated and unmotivated occurrences.

Some critics reacting to Chinua Achebe's use of culture-suggestive images have accused him of gratuitous sociologism. Commenting on the book, Ronald Christ asserts that Achebe is "long on native customs and idioms and short on narrative interest."[1] In his review D. J. Enright has similarly observed that Arrow of God "has too much anthropological documentation" which has rendered the novel "perhaps too elaborate, too worked out, too insistent, and a little too tendentious.."[2] In our assessment of Achebe's concern with the naturalisation of the English language,[3] the usefulness and limitations of these images will be discussed. What must be noted here is that whatever short-comings these types of narrative

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[1]. Ronald Christ, Review of Arrow of God New York Times Book review. Dec. 17, 1967, p. 22.

[2]. D. J. Enright, Review of Arrow of God New Statesmen (April 3, 1964), p. 531.

[3]. See p. 345-349 of this thesis.

images may have, they define the ethnic "locus" of the novel. But they not only recreate the socio-cultural background of the narrative action. As we shall discuss later, these details are often used effectively as means for the depiction of local ways of thinking and as subtle commentary upon individual behaviour and the course of the narrative action.

What we see from the formal construction of Arrow of God and its attentiveness to the movement of social life is an African society vividly pictured in its entirety. The world of Umuaro is pictured broadly and in detail. In particular there is an imaginative treatment of the tensions between the individual and the manifold realities of the socio-cultural milieu of which he is an integral part. It is on account of the vivid articulation of the concern with African social life and historical experience that we describe the novel as a novel of "social realism" based upon some of the aesthetic conventions of this novel-type. In order to identify the scope of its narrative focus, and to contrast it with the emphasis of other slightly similar but limited Nigerian social realistic fictional forms, we identify its approach more specifically, by saying that it is paradigmatically extensive in form. By this we indicate specifically not only

its large, narrative experience, but also the analysis of that experience in its total socio-historical process.[1]

The significance of this narrative form in Chinua Achebe's art is that he uses it persistently as the framework for the narrative communication of his social concerns even though the other novels do not achieve the concentration characteristic of Arrow of God. Three distinctive aspects of this form may be noted:

First, the narrative action often begins from, and has its bases in the psychology and moral nature of the central character (or characters). Second, this initial situation grows through a single dramatically presented plot-line to a more complex and generalized social issue due to a number of social factors, reflective of the peculiar nature of African society.[2] Third, in the novels, the protagonist is not simply

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1. It is an index of Chinua Achebe's creative intelligence that in treating the fate of Ezeulu and Umuaro society in this form, he also touches the norms of the classic historical novel in which the dialectical conflict between the various segments of society are brought within the scope of the narrative action to express the complex mechanics of social change.

2. Particularly, its communal structure and the moral dilemas introduced by the colonial experience which often have significant moral consequences for the protagonist.

an individual, but functions as a representative of society. His dilemmas or failures have significant consequences and meaning for the society of which he is also the representative. With respect to these formal modes, coupled with the often achieved tragic pathos towards the end of the novels, it may be said that on the whole, the conventions which inform Achebe's novels have affinity with the conventions of tragedy rather than with comedy. But there is, however, no imitation or equation with any specific conception of tragedy, whether this is Aristotelian or Yeatsian. The tragic pathos evoked by the downfall of Ezeulu results essentially from Achebe's intuitive understanding of the suffering of the African person as a result of the forces inherent in his social context.

In his evaluation of Chinua Achebe's artistic achievement, G. D. Killam has raised an issue that is a part of our central concern, namely, the nature of Chinua Achebe's contribution to the development of the English novel form which he has inherited. Discussing this question he observes:-

> The modern African novel of which to date Chinua Achebe is the major exponent is similar to and yet different from fiction written within

> the established tradition of novel writing in English. It follows the main historical development of the English novel and it makes an addition of its own to that development". [1]

While Chinua Achebe's craftmanship in story telling has generally been recognized, the specific respect in which his novels make "an addition" of their own to the development of the English novel tradition has not been clearly stated. These who like W. E. Abraham have maintained that the African novelist has merely utilized the English novel form without originality and "inspiration" are no doubt referring also to Chinua Achebe. To regard Chinua Achebe's work as imitative of foreign models and of no significance in the development of the novel is in fact to fail to realise the following vital point, namely, that valuable contribution can be made to the development of the novel in several ways - through the quality of the themes and human experiences utilized in the formal organisation of the novel, through the achieved structural format of the novel, and in terms of the original use of language.

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[1] G. D. Killam The Novels of Chinua Achebe, Heinemann (London, 1969), p. 2.

Thus, although Chinua Achebe worked within the aesthetic framework[1] of the western novel form, our analysis shows that his originality in the use of this form is of a very high order. This order of achievement has its basis in the first instance, in the nature of the central vision which has animated his novels. Central to this is Chinua Achebe's concern with the cultural education of the contemporary African towards a new and deeper awareness of the African cultural heritage - in its strength, dignity and peculiarities. This focal vision constitutes a humanistic awareness that is of profound and continuing relevance in the social, political and cultural development of the contemporary African world.

In addition, in his imaginative transformation of this thematic interest into novelistic form and style, Chinua Achebe has clearly shown a considerable adaptive skill. Indeed, the repertoire of his narrative techniques bring into focus the quality and scope of his creative response to the western novelistic form. The carefully established relationship between

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1. Because Chinua Achebe accepted the basic conventions of the social realistic novel form, his innovative spirit cannot be felt to be as spectacular as that of Amos Tutuola or Gabriel Okara. Significantly, it is his use of this novel form which has made his novels much more readily acceptable to the public and to exercise a great influence in the development of the African novel.

the African cultural realities and the structure of the narrative action, the approach to the presentation of his characters, the vivid depiction of the communal identity and history of his society, coupled with the use of traditional religion as a force in the life and politics of his society, do indicate Chinua Achebe's deep interest and success in the development of a narrative style that is fertilized by the African sensibility and world view.[1] Indeed, in this respect, it can be said that while he draws on the conventions of the western social-realistic novel form, he succeeds most remarkably in giving it a new blood and outlook by skilfully adapting it to the new and peculiarly African cultural milieu.

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[1]. Chinua Achebe also makes effective use of language as a mode for the naturalisation of the novel. In chapter IX we discuss this use of language to reflect local speech habits.

CHAPTER V

ELECHI AMADI: THE CONCUBINE

If the success of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and No Longer At Ease resulted in the emergence of a group of new writers who had sufficiently used him as a model to be called "his followers",[1] there are amongst these, a few who, while looking up to his themes and techniques, had also succeeded in fashioning a different basis of African realism as well as new stylistic techniques for the development of the authentic African novel.

In his first two novels, The Concubine,[2] and The Great Ponds,[3] Elechi Amadi has achieved one of the purest expressions of a specifically African experience and world view. The notion of 'purity' implies here the idea of Amadi' imaginative shift away from the contemporary African world of highly eclectic values and socio-cultural experiences to delve into the rural African life with its traditional social norms and primal vision of reality.

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1. Bernth Lindfors, "Nigerian Fiction in English 1952-1967", Ph.D. thesis (University of California, Los Angeles, 1969), Anne Arbor Xerox Company Michigan, pp.177-178.

2. Elechi Amadi, The Concubine, (Heinemann, A.S, London, 1966).

3. Elechi Amadi, The Great Ponds, (Heinemann, A.S, London, 1970).

The new interest which he offers in these two novels consist in the way in which in seeking to represent the characteristic African social reality, he is able to extend the aesthetic logic of the realistic novel into a localised form that evokes most impressively, the traditional African religious temper. This distinctive achievement derives from Amadi's understanding of the actualities of the contemporary African world. In a discussion held at Lagos University[1] in 1973, and addressed to the issue of what the contemporary African world consists of, many African novelists and critics outlined a range of factors, such as modern economic pressures, bad government, development problems and corruption. In contrast to these sorts of answers, Amadi had pointed out the role of the "supernatural" as a reality as well as an explanatory concept in traditional African thought. Speaking to the issue, he developed the following argument which we quote fully in order to indicate his line of thinking.

> "Let me come to what I have in mind... There is this idea of the supernatural. In the typical African society, you find the so called supernatural, plays a very vital role. The man in the village is enmeshed in his religion. He does not merely go to fish. There is ritual in fishing. He had gods of the

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[1] For this transcript of Amadi's views, see The Novel and Reality in African and America: Transcript of a symposium held Jan. 26, 1973, University of Lagos, under the joint sponsorship of the University's Department of English and the U.S. Board of Foreign Scholarships. ed. T. Vincent, p. 13ff.

> sea, gods of the stream. The farmer does not just farm, there is a ritual to it. There is a god of the farm. And so an African writer, who really wants to interpret the African scene has to write in three dimensions at once...There is the private life, the social life and what you may call the supernatural. So you may find things happening in the African novel which normally would be quite untenable from the western point of view. Why should a man die because some gods are angry... It is childish...
>
> And yet down in the village this is the reality. If someone is sick in the village it is not enough for the medicine man or even the doctor to give him injection. It may be a purely organic disease. Now if he has not lost his innocence you will also find that he will not recover until he has also satisfied his gods.

While this idea of the role of the supernatural in the traditional African life forms the centre of his creative interests, Amadi exploits other aspects to achieve the peculiar aesthetic effect of the novel. Of particular significance is the way in which he addresses himself to the depiction of the nature of tragic experience in the rural African world. In this respect, a vital part of the merit of his novels lies in his artistic handling of the supernatural theme in a way that reveals the mystery of human tragedy and the continuous struggle of the human spirit against the many obstacles of life. In his highly realistic response to this complex experience,he

has developed a narrative form in which the conventions of the social realistic novel-type are fused with a peculiarly African world view. In this way, his two novels, The Concubine and The Great Ponds are major novels which express effectively, the classic African world-view. In this chapter, we examine particularly, the first novel The Concubine, in order to reveal the narrative techniques which Elechi Amadi utilizes to give an African identity to the novel.

II

In The Concubine, Amadi gives expression to the metaphysical background of African experience through the story of Ihuoma. The story is relatively simple in form. Set in the village of Omokachi, the novel's central character, Ihuoma, is a young woman endowed with great beauty, grace, and good manners. In this way, she is very much the centre of attention in her village. Ihuoma's story, and the tragic experiences presented, derive from the hidden fact that although living as a normal human being, she is really the wife of a god, the "sea-king."[1] Apparently dissatisfied with living in the world of the spirits and gods beneath the sea, she had asked to be allowed to live, at least for a short time, as a human being. This request her god-husband grants but on the condition that she does not marry

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[1]. See Anyika's divination - The Concubine p. 253.

any man.[1]

In his peculiar approach, Amadi has transformed this religious motif into a narrative plot-form whose logic derives from the rural people's belief in the close interaction between earthly life and the spiritual world. This motif of "interaction", and with it, the sense of the reality of the spiritual beings and forces, is fleshed out through the fate of Ihuoma and the very unfortunate nature of her love relationships with three successive men - Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme. Through the use of these three men, the novel presents three different experiences. While these experiences pre-suppose a common theme, they are also used to portray three different types of African characters. The first phase of the narrative action deals with Ihuoma's life, as the wife of Emenike. This comprises chapters 1 - 8. The second phase consisting of chapters 9 - 12, deals largely with Ihuoma's brief but harrowing encounter with the "big eyed" bully, Madume. Running through the treatment of the first two characters as "a submerged" story and "maturing" into the main narrative experience of the novel, is the relationship between Ihuoma and her third lover-artist Ekwueme.

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[1]. The Concubine, p. 255.

In telling the story, the novel focusses our attention on the destiny of each of these three men as they relate fatally to Ihuoma. Each dies in the attempt to woo and win her as wife. The circumstances leading to the death of each of them look natural and ordinary enough, and require nothing other than a natural explanation. Emenike, the first and only husband dies as a result of the "lock chest"[1] injury which he receives in his fight with Madume in the bush.[2] He fell and hit a tree stump. During his days of sickness, some diviners are called upon who foresee the involvement of sea spirits whom they proceed to pacify. In spite of sacrifices, however, he dies when he seems all but cured.[3] Madume committed suicide as a result of the blindness[4] inflicted by the spitting cobra. As in the case of Emenike, a dibia is called upon who asks for sacrifice to be made. In spite of this, he too dies. Similarly, Ekwueme dies when it seemed that he had all but bound the malevolent spirit and attained his dearest wish.

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1. The Concubine, p. 255

2. Ibid.,

3. Ibid.,

4. Ibid.,

In terms of narrative span, the first two narrative phases which are dramatically "interlocked" are quickly passed over. By quickly passing over these experiences, the narrative focus falls sharply on the development of Ekwueme's character, and brings into sharp relief his personality and the courtship and flowering of Ihuoma's love.[1] Indeed, the detailed presentation of Ekwueme and his environment is such that the novel can also be read as a novel of character with Ekwueme as protagonist. While Amadi's awareness of the role of the supernatural in the shaping of human experience has determined the plot-structure of the novel, there are also other features which intensify the African quality of the experience presented. In this regard, while the interest in the power and role of the supernatural provides a unifying theme, the handling each of the three men's love of Ihuoma often leads to the evocation of new cultural motifs and episodes. In this way, the social milieu becomes effectively linked with the pattern of narrative events which constitute the plot-movement of the novel.

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[1]. The Concubine, p. 249.

Primal Vision and Modes of Living

Many scholars have conceived the originality and source of the relevance of Elechi Amadi's work to consist largely in the theme of the supernatural which has informed the novel. Although this view is right, it is important to appreciate the fact that the significance of Elechi Amadi's novels is not simply a matter of his basic theme. It is also his creative use of this theme as a framework for the imaginative evocation of the ethos of the rural African world in its primal vision. Specifically, the theme of the supernatural functions as a medium for the creative evocation of the rural African consciousness and the patterns of life which this essentially religio-mythic imagination has evolved. Thus, in suggestively expressing the theme of supernatural elements, he brings into focus the quality of actual rural life - its religious beliefs, people's temperaments, magical and occult powers, and above all, the practices of divination, sacrifices and consultation of medicine men which are the modes of living that have arisen through man's spiritual struggle against the occurrences of personal tragedy and the securing of happiness.

It is these evoked life patterns and defiant quality of the human spirit which are in the foreground of the narrative action. These are the qualities that enable the novel to achieve the quality of being a mirror of the rural African life. In chapter four, Elechi Amadi offers a detailed description of the gods and spirits like Amadioha and Ojukwu in relation to the role they play in the lives of the people of Omokachi and the neighbourhood of Omigwe and Aliji. In this same spirit, the description of Emenike's journey to the shrine of Amadioha, his sacrifice[1] at the shrine, the description of Madume's consultation of Anyika,[2] and the details of his subsequent death; the description of the effects of Ahurole's love potion on Ekwueme,[3] Ekwueme's consultation of dibias, and his gathering materials to bind the sea god...

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1. The Concubine, pp. 20 - 21

2. Ibid., pp. 74 - 75

3. Ibid., pp. 232 - 234

all of which form the key incidents in the narrative action have an important communicative significance. For the Nigerian reader especially, they convey a refreshing truthfulness to the incidents and situations which are the very fabric of rural life. They are also indicative of the religious-mythical mode of thinking which underlies every activity and individual experience in the rural African world.

Throughout the narration, the dibias like Anyika, Agwoturumbe and Nwokekoro play a vital role - the role of doctors and wise elders. They are described in touchingly realistic images. The following is Amadi's presentation of Agwoturumbe in a divining session:

> You have guessed right. Anyika the dibia said, 'it is no ordinary injury ..... Anyika cast his cowries to and fro for some time. Then he chewed some alligatar pepper and spat it out in a fine spray in front of his temple. Madume watched him keenly, wondering what pronouncements he had up his sleeve. He thought himself clever to have come to Anyika to know the true story behind what he thought of as his toe disaster. He had not been mistaken. The gods were behind it. It was certainly a premonition.
>
> "You were lucky, Anyika said slowly, "to have come out alive from Emenike's compound." 'Ojukwu forbid', Madume stammered. 'Several spirits swore to kill you there and then'. 'Emenike's spirit must have been among them'. 'No, you are mistaken. He was not among them. Unknown spirits, some of them from the sea, teamed up to destroy you. Let me see, oh yes, Emenike's father was among them... There will be several sacrifices to appease Emenike's father and his train.' Let me know the various items involved in the sacrifice. Here they are: seven grains of alligator pepper, seven manillas, and old basket, three cowries, a bunch of unripe.....

> palm fruit, two cobs of maize, a small bunch of plantains, some dried fish, two cocks, one of which must be white, seven eggs, some camwood, chalk, a tortoise (or the shell) and a chameleon. 'Hei, this is a costly sacrifice. Can we not omit a few items? I wish we could, but we dare not. Nothing is more precious than life.'[1]

It is the behaviour and proficiency of the diviner that are here being evoked. But it is not only the realistically presented details. There is also the distinct suggestive presentation of the reality of other forces beyond sense perception and in a way that enforce further, the theme of the invisible realm of magic, deities and ancestral powers. The role which these forces and the frequent incidents of sacrifices, divinations and charms play in the novel is not merely to provide cultural information. They are integrated into the vision and narrative action of the novel in the sense that all these items express vividly, the African people's profound attachment to life - to "vitality" - the pursuit of wealth, longevity, the avoidance of disaster, the attainment of physical well being, and the love of children, which constitute the psychology of Nigerians whether urban or rural.

III

Aesthetic form and structure

The narrative structure of The Concubine is such that it can generate the impression that it is repetitious in its organisation, and didactic in its single-minded commitment to the portrayal of the effects of the immanent world of invisible

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1. The Concubine p. 75

forces. This kind of impression arises largely from the deaths of the three men which form the core of the experience, and which seems to constitute independent narrative episodes. Thus, in reviewing the novel, Dipoko notes that the novel "reads like a collection of short stories"[1] loosely tied together. While Dipoko's judgement is basically about the quality of the narrative structure, other critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the presented experience on the grounds of the incredibility of the myth of the sea-king upon which the narrative experience is founded. Along this line, it has been suggested that the theme of the novel should not be taken too literarily; that the novel should be read as "a presentation of the myth-making process,"[2] or as a dramatisation of the consequences of the breach of social mores. This view which seems to ignore Elechi Amadi's realistic portrayal of rural African life seems to imply that Amadi is "more interested in an idea than in plot".[2]

In response to these kinds of criticism of the novel, two types of suggestion have been made. Eustace Palmer[3] has outlined as a guideline the criteria that has to be used in the evaluation of the kind of narrative form and experience being presented. According to him, the success of Elechi Amadi's novel has to be seen as a matter of whether he can "convince us of the reality

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1. M. S. Dipoko, Review in Presence Africaine. 30/58, 1966, p.248

2. For a fuller discussion of these critical views, see D.S. Izeubaye, "The Relevance of modern literary theory in English to the Poetry and Fiction in English speaking West Africa." op.cit. p. 295

3. Eustace Palmer, Introduction to the African Novel. (Heinemann, London, 1972), p. 125.

of the incidents he is describing or the world he is presenting." Towards this end, Palmer suggests that he (Amadi) has to show us that the events he is presenting "cannot be explained by other social factors"[1], and that "he must persuade the reader to suspend his disbelief."

In sharp contrast to Dipoko's observation, Bernth Lindfors' stance is that Amadi's handling of his subject is artistically successful, and culturally in place. As he observes:

> "The social setting of the novel is so completely and convincingly evoked that the supernatural does not seem out of place." [2]

Lindfors' observation here is not only well made, but also, touches another point that is highly relevant in the evaluation of The Concubine. This relates specifically to the idea of the proceedural approach of the novel as a genre. Outlining the method of the general novel form, Dorothy van Ghent[3] has made the

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[1] Ibid.,

[2] Bernth Lindfors, Review in Books Abroad. 41/3, p. 366.

[3] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel Form and Function. (Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1953), p. 3ff.

illuminating point that the novel as an art form has to be viewed as "a logical hypothesis." By this is meant the idea that a novel sets its own moral premises, limits and logical space within which it explores such given data as life-possibilities. Its basis of narrative procedure is the unravelling of such possible experiences in "a cogent pattern of cause and effects".

It is from this perspective that the outsider to Amadi's cultural milieu has to respond to the mode of narration, and the issue of the plausibility of the myth of the sea-king upon which the narrative action hinges. Within the novel, this myth functions as the "given data," a culturally determined reality which has to be assumed for what it is. What this implies is that Elechi Amadi's task in dealing with this possible source of human experience is not necessarily to convince us, or lead us into a state of belief about the reality of the supernatural as Eustace Palmer's criterion seems to suggest. The success of his imaginative response to this order of human experience will emerge from the possibility that within the limits of his created world, he can treat the supernatural theme as a creative issue. This he could do by skillfully unravelling the operation of the world of invisible forces upon human lives through "a cogent pattern of cause and

effects" artistically presented.

Examined against this kind of critical perspective, it is a testimony to Amadi's intuitive mastery of the artistic problems involved that he is able to transform this set of African mythic beliefs into a well articulated narrative form that answers most satisfactorily to our sense of a genuinely African novel. In connection with this, two creative features must be noted as they show the limitation of Ojiako's critical judgment. First, is the dramatic continuity of the novel. In developing the fates of the three characters around Ihuoma, the dramatic interest of the narrative action is never slackened, but sustained in an ever-increasing narrative pitch and realics to the very end. Thus, even after the denouement of the story and the novel is about to close, the narrative suspense already generated through our interest in Ekwueme's pursuit of his fated passion, maintained in the tragic pathos which surrounds Adaku and Ihuoma as they both seek to commit suicide, following Ekwueme's death.[1]

Further, while the pattern of recurrent deaths seems to be an expression of a didactic point of view, these experiences do not read as contrived and isolated episodes. Rather, they are

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[1]. The Concubine, p. 280

effectively interlocked in a number of ways: by being dramatically presented as part of the unusual experiences of Ihuoma the central character.

In 1969, Elechi Amadi wrote his second novel, The Great Ponds We shall discuss this very briefly to establish two points:- Amadi's sustained interest in the use of the theme of the supernatural, and the maturity which he achieves as he developes in his use of this African religious belief in the presentation of imaginative experience. In The Great Ponds, Elechi Amadi continues to explore some of the ideas of the earlier novel in a much more intensified form. What is interesting in his development is that he seems to bring to the treatment of the theme of the supernatural a much higher level of narrative craftmanship as well as a greater sensitivity in character portrayal.

This new sensitivity is displayed most significantly in the novel in the apparent shift of the narrative point of view towards the insistent presentation of the emotional and psychological tensions which his characters undergo in their encounter with the immanent forces of evil.

Chapter twelve[1] dealing with Olumba's sudden collapse

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1. The Great Ponds, pp. 116 - 123

is not only central in the dramatic structure of the novel, but is remarkable for its effects of psychological anxiety which it generates in the reader. The realisation of these effects derive from the initial conception of the novel - the representation of the vision of a universe of occult powers. They arise also from the reader's suspicion of the potency of the oath and the possibility of the evil charms of Aliokoro people acting on Olumba from a distance. While these feelings are sensitively conveyed the passage also registers the pathos of Olumba's condition, the sympathetic participation of the society, and the ease and directness of social relations in the rural world of Omokachi. By imaginatively insisting on the acute pain and suffering of Olumba as a result of the futile struggle for the great ponds, which are very soon to be rendered worthless through a [illegible] mishap[1] and the forces of socio-historical change Amadi's novel succeeds in capturing impressively the tragi-comedy of real life everywhere.[2]

Through this new emphasis upon the quality of experience presented, and through the development of the character of Olumba throughout the novel the total experience which the novel effectively conveys is not simply the underlying theme of the super-natural cause of the hero's suffering as much as his passion

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[1]. At the end of the novel, Wago the leopard killer drowns himself in the Great Pond making it for ever worthless for the people by his act of suicide.

[2]. By this is meant the comedy of endless human struggle and the tragedy of the waste of human lives both of which are the inevitable consequencies of man's futile and egoistical striving.

as a human being and the moving traumatic effects which his suffering has first, for his immediate family and for his society as a whole. The evocation of the reality of his physical and psychological pain enables us to read between the lines by suggesting to our consciousness the possibility of the influence of the oath made in the name of the god. The description also serves to enlist the reader's sympathetic response to him and his family as living people.

Although the later novel is in many respects much more artistically handled, the earlier novel The Concubine has many touches of excellence. It highlights even more than the later novels, the techniques which Elechi Amadi uses to give an African identity to the novel form he has elected to use. One of the major aspect of the novel which demonstrates this originality in his method of characterisation. In the presentation of his characters, Elechi Amadi does not resort to the initative use of such modernist techniques of character presentation as the stream of consciousness, detailed emotional and or psychological analysis. Instead his method is simple, subtle in effects, and based upon local condition of life and beliefs.

Ekwueme and Ezeniko's personalities are in terms of specifically local occupation with emphasis upon their trapping and wrestling skills, their deportment, gentleness, and good

behaviour to elders. Ihuoma is presented and identified with the local earth. She is a woman of "ant-hill" colour. Anyika and Agwoturumbe and Anwunanwu are all presented in terms of the familiar and highly recognizable traits of the traditional dibias. Basically, to present characters in The Concubine, a culturally bound notion is often creatively used as the effective source of experience, mood, and behaviour. In the case of Ihuoma it is the myth of her strange identity as a goddess temporarily incarnated. In the character of Ekwueme it is the position of being "a mother's boy,"[2] and in the case of Ahurola it is the myth of being possessed by, and regularly troubled by agwu - the spirit of madness.

But Elechi Amadi's success does not consist exclusively in the use or presentation of characters in this form. It is also his portrayal of characters in terms of specific imaginative actions, individualities, and in relation to the achievement of a sense of place in the novels. Basically, what Elechi Amadi seems to recreate quite impressively is the fact that a given socio-cultural continuum is not only a factor in the lives of the characters, but more vitally of the uniqueness of their personalities. Thus, in

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1. The Concubine, p. 14

2. For the use of this term as description of the peculiar relationship of Ekwueme to his mother we are indebted to Eustace Palmer's suggestion in Introduction to the African novel. op.cit. p. 120.

various dramatic scenes and narrative descriptions, he presents individual behaviour and personalities as an expression of the cultural norms and conceptual assumptions of the rural society of which the individual is a part. Chapter 19 recreating Ihuoma's feelings [illegible] for life and love after her long period of mourning may serve to illustrate the level of realism which Anadi can achieve in the delineation of the nuances of African character and personality.

The success of this passage is the vivid illumination of Ihuoma's unique individuality. Her intelligence, femininity, and grace of character as well as the pathos of her widowed situation - all of which endeared her to her prospective lovers and women folk - are vividly present. But, secondly, and blended with this, is also the deftly controlled use of her bereaved condition as a basis for presenting the realities of her social environment - its cultural assumptions and the subtle but real impact of these upon her own reactions in the given situation. Thus, while the passage gradually seeks to present her image as a quiet restrained woman of great charm, it uses this picture as a literary vehicle for the portrayal of the people in her world at the moment, and the new avenues of life which may open once again for her in the course of time. Her own self restraint - her characteristic sensibility that enables her to come

to a state of being in which "whatever she felt were locked up safely in her mind"[1] are all but reflections of the local culture of Omokachi which:

> was noted for its tradition and propriety and decorum. Excessive or fanatical feelings were frowned upon, and even described as crazy. Any one who could not control his feelings was regarded as being unduly influenced by his agwu.....Even love and sex were put in their proper place. 2

Her resolve to take up life and forget the past tragedy clinches the idea of her own good sense, and intelligence. This resolution brings into focus the values of Omokachi world which determines the world-view, deportment and horisons of the individual. In a style that is at once simple and sophisticated, Amadi's prose conveys the uniqueness of individual identity with an awareness of the realities of the surrounding circumstances of African life.

> She had had her chance, and if the gods had been rather cruel there was nothing she could do about it. She threw herself into the business of switching her mind from whatever had gone before. She worked with renewed energy on her farm, gave her children extra care and attention, and danced on moon-light nights as happily as anybody else. 3

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1. The Concubine p. 165.
2. Ibid., p. 165.
3. The Concubine, p. 166.

For herself the struggle is against the 'decorum' that limits the freedom of individual action and the upsurge of personal feelings. With respect to Omokachi the descriptive focus is upon the network of constraints imposed upon the individual.

If the passage is a deftly controlled analysis of the relation between individual and social assumptions as these are reflected in Ihuoma's life at a particular moment, the passage also underscores Amadi's habit of easy transition from the sharp focus on the individual character to the "wider circle" of socio-cultural relations. Through the portrayal of her waking love-feelings for Ekwueme, the passage introduces in a relistic rather than satiric manner, a range of other characters in the world of Omokachi, and in their social relations to Ihuoma's situation. First is Ekwueme and his singing friend Wakiri who fell off the palmtree, and their social activities of composing songs. The progressive narration widens, gradually leaving the initial analysis of her inner life for the portrayal of the life patterns of the community. Specifically evoked are the dancing at night, the gossips, the composition and learning of songs, and trading and farming activities.

This link up of the narrative movement with particularities of African life may be seen in the presentation of most of the major characters - Emenike, Madume, Agwotorumbe, and Ahurole. This is especially so in the case of the portrayal of Ekwueme's behaviour through which the novelist evokes the texture and feel of the world of Omokachi and its neighbourhood.[1]

While theme and character presentation constitute the major elements which Elechi Amadi uses to give cultural identity to his narrative form, he quite often exploits other aspects such as speech and dialogue to achieve certain desired effects.
In The Concubine for instance, he uses these modes to express the nuances of personality in a way that gives subtle realistic touches to his characters. The style of the presentation of the following passage brings this quality into focus:

> 'For some time mother and son sat motionless in the small room. The sun sent two straight red shafts through holes in the roof. Outside a black and white goat heavy with child sauntered across. It stopped by the doorway, looked intently at the pair of unhappy human beings inside and

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1. See The Concubine, pp. 229ff.

> moved on to forage for food. Adaku blew her nose, wiped her red eyes and studied the floor. Her toes twitched as her thoughts darted this way and that. Here was a real mystery. Most young men would be impatient over a girl like Ahurole. What had come over Ekwe? Someone must be involved. He must have been bewitched. If so Anyika would soon set that right. But if Ekwueme had not been bewitched, what then? Maybe Ekwe was interested in another girl, but who? Ah! What a fool she was, Ihuoma, of course. It was just as she feared.
>
> Having arrived at this conclusion she felt calmer. Ihuoma should not be too difficult to deal with. She cleared her throat and as casually as it was possible she tried another line.
>
> 'Ekwe, by the breasts that fed you, and by the laps that carried you, I command you to answer this question truthfully. Have you any other girl in mind?' [1]

The passage is a recreation of a little family crisis, - a quarrel between mother and son. The success of the passage is not only a matter of the realistic depiction of the scene, but the use of tone, construction, and diction to illuminate several realities - the mood of both mother and son, the love and kinship feelings between mother and son, and the anxieties which both feel about the reaction of each other. The sense of real "mystery" is not only the fact of Ekwueme's unwilling-

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[1] The Concubine, p. 135

ness to marry Ahurole. It derives from the fact that as fully realised individuals, these characters exude mental perspectives and a sensibility that also remain a mystery to us. This is so in the specific sense that their behaviour in the scene reveals shades of responses which we as African readers, can recognise as African without at the same time being able to predict. As Adaku, Ekwueme's mother quietly reasons within herself, the categories of thought registered in her musing over the possibility of bewitchment reveal a mind shaped by local beliefs. Whatever demerit it may have, her language "by the breast that fed you, and by the lap that carried you..." establish successfully the familiar voice of an African mother addressing an obstinate child in a recognized local idiom.

Although the kind of realism which Elechi Amadi achieves in the delineation of characters in The Concubine constitutes a vital part of the authenticity of his narrative art, this approach can also be said to have a built in criticism of the novels.[1] The grounds of the criticism involved here can be

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[1]. Cf C. Larson's general critique of character presentation by African novelists C. Larson (1971), The Emergence of African Fiction. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1970), pp. 146 - 147.

stated in such terms as follows:- That his keen consciousness of the link between African personality and the background of African social and cultural realities seems to lead him into a rather dogmatic manipulation of characters and events in order to make a point that is more cultural than humanistic. This emphasis seems to result in an unrealistic delimitation of the minds, feelings and imaginative responses of his characters, making them psychologically insensitive to the non-religious possibilities and wider socio-historical issues of their world.[1] By insistently representing the mental consciousness of his characters in a stasis of metaphysical assumptions he seems to fail to handle the novel as genre in which characters are involved in a process of moral and intellectual development.[2]

These criticisms seem to apply especially if we restrict our consideration to some of the main characters.

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[1]. Amadi's characters seem strangely unaware of the dilemmas posed by forces of socio-historical change, and the crippling problems of materialism and poverty all of which are real enough in the Af rican rural world.

[2]. A penetratively realistic presentation of the moral and psychological development of the characters is one that would also involve the questioning of the traditional beliefs about the nature of reality and the basis of human experience at certain moments of their suffering.

For instance, Ihuoma hardly develops.[1] Our awareness of her humanity seems overshadowed by the initial conception of her identity as a goddess temporarily incarnated in a human mould.

Beyond these kinds of minor limitations, the validity of the above type of criticisms cannot be pushed too far because of one important reason. This consists in the fact that it is only by virtue of the extent to which Elechi Amadi has been able to present his characters to be so possessed by the consciousness of the supernatural forces of their world that his novels

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[1]. In Culture, tradition and society in the West African novel (1975), pp. 97-98 E.N. Obiechina takes the view that there is an element of development in the character of Ihuoma. This development he analyses in terms of her growth from her divine qualities towards the increased expression of her human aspects. Although there is a justification for this view, Ihuoma still fails to engage our attention as an active human being. Two factors are responsible for this. First is the novelist unwarranted assumption that his largely apriori statements about Ihuoma's many sterling qualities are an adequate basis for a sympathetic response to her as a living person. Second is a factor which Larson (loc. cit) has rightly identified, namely, the relative lack of positive interaction of the heroine with the other characters in her world. Although this is bound up with the condition of womanhood in the traditional African society, it has undermined her effectiveness and humanity as a fictional charadter.

have been able to illuminate more than any other Nigerian novel how deeply rooted this belief in the supernatural is in the mind of the typical traditional African character. It is this fact which Amadi recognised and stated clearly in his discussion of the African approach to life when he noted with telling frankness that:

> As a matter of fact foreign religion forms only a very thin veneer on the minds of most Nigerians. When the worst comes to the worst, most people resort to their ancestral gods for whom they have unbreakable emotional and psychological ties. 1

The general movement of the narrative action, and the presentation of characters in The Concubine and The Great Ponds serve to establish the fact that Elechi Amadi is a novelist who has been seriously alert to the problems of developing a

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1. E. Amadi "The Novel in Nigeria" ODUMA, ed. T. Vincent, Vol.2, No.1, August 1974, p. 30.

fictional form capable of expressing the feel, tone and substance of real African life.

In the imaginative representation of the relation between character and environment he seems to give a vivid and psychologically satisfying expression to the significance which the background of African cultural values can have for the dynamics of a realistic African novel form. The evocation of the transcendent world of gods, spirits and forces, the recreated impression of the dramatic effects of the oath and charms on the health of Olumba and finally, the mysterious death of the three men in The Concubine all express the limitedness of the scientific (western) realism which often consider the occult as illusory, and presumptuously seeks to explain all phenomena in terms of the limited range of forces in the world of sense-perception. Further, through the myth of Ihuoma's life, the narrative vision also entails the African religious conception of human life as a continuous process in which human identity, life and consciousness are seen to begin not with biological birth in the world of sense, but transcendently before, and surrounded all along the way by terrible powers and beings.

Elechi Amadi's imaginative recreation of the African primal vision not only underscores his originality as an African novelist, it also constitutes a further development of Chinua Achebe's concern with the projection of African realism. In spite of its many positive qualities, Achebe's treatment of Ezeulu's fate tends towards being "historical", and involving a dialectical explanation of the process of Ezeulu's fall. In contrast, Amadi's novel seems to touch and invoke more than Achebe's the dimension of the mysterious, creating in the reader the mixed feelings of belief and unbelief about what lies behind the world of appearances.

But the artistic significance of the novel is not simply a matter of its achieved local flavour. The details of Elechi Amadi's social presentation of personality and the type of experience with which he chose to explore the African reality enables The Concubine to achieve a quality that transcends the general merit of the local colour novel form in which sociological details often overwhelm artistic vision. By choosing bad-luck, pain and personal misfortune as signals of the background of metaphysical forces, the novel becomes a localised expression of the universal theme of human suffering. By the revelation of the reactions of individuals to their instinctive

meticulously handled. It shows in a positive manner, a great concern with the realist novelist criteria of appropriateness - the appropriateness of language to character type, and the appropriateness of the basis of fictional action to local social-cultural assumptions. Indeed, although the thematic focus of his novels differs significantly from those of George Eliot and Jane Austen, and further, while the achieved imaginative scope of his novels is more limited, the artistic skill with which he etches the picture of the societal life of the novels bears a comparison with the rich social realism and narrative skill implicit in George Eliot's depiction of Middlemarch in Middlemarch and in Jane Austen's picture of Highbury in Emma. What we mean by this comparison is not the achieved imaginative scope or subtlety in realistic portrayal in the given novels. It is Elechi Amadi's intuitive understanding of the basic logic of the western social realistic novel form he had inherited.

But in addition to this quality there is also the even greater creative intelligence which he has brought into the infusion of this narrative form with the cultural ethos and rhythm of his African world. The infusion of this local experience and world-view into the novel, and the creative

use of this in the modulation of the identity and experiences of his characters on the one hand, and on the other, the way in which Amadi has consistently explored these realities in his two novels constitute the specific areas in which he has made a positive contribution to the growth of the novel in Nigeria. While stylistically, his innovative spirit is not so spectacular, the theme he introduces is one of the most basic and relevant to the process of giving an African identity to the novel which is new to the African literary scene.

TOWARDS ALLEGORIC AND SATIRIC FORMS

CHAPTER VI

GABRIEL OKARA: THE VOICE

Of the various Nigerian novelist's creative response to the western novel form, by far the most idiosyncratic in its experimental approach is Gabriel Okara's. In The Voice,[1] his only novel to date, Okara has not only presented a typically modern African socio-political experience, but has also evolved a range of highly personal modes of narrative representation. The combined effects of the presented experience and style have resulted in a strikingly original novel form that could be said to represent a significant achievement in the African writer's adaptation of the western novel to the realities of his environment.

As in the case of Amos Tutuola, Okara's "personal" style and level of deviation from the conventions of "the well made novel" has produced a mixed critical response

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[1]. G. Okara, The Voice (Andre Deutsch, 1964), References to Heinemann, AWS, 1970.

to the novel, and the kind of originality which it represents. In his evaluation, G.D. Killam[1] who had warmed greatly to Achebe's more conventional basis of narration considers The Voice a disaster, and Okara's experiment a failure which he feels "must give a genuine cause for alarm." From their own independent studies of the different aspects of the novel, Edgar Wright[2], and Peter Young[3] have similarly expressed the view that inspite of its genuine innovative spirit, Okara's work is unsuccessful. Expressing his views Wright notes:-

> The case with Okara in The Voice is one of a writer who has failed to create any unified style...the novel throughout mixes formal and informal; the prosaic and the poetic. Okara has failed to handle the registers and their implications of mood and social context that are inextricably involved in the use of language, nor has he like Tutuola been able to skip the difficulty of creating a consistent style easily comprehensible but clear of language-tied social or emotional overtones that creates its own level of registers.[4]

In effect the attitude of Okara's critics seems to be that he reveals a fundamental misconception about the nature of language and the logic of the

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1. G.D. Killam, "Recent African Fiction". In BAAL, (1965), Vol.2, p. 3.

2. E. Wright, "The Critical Procedures and the Evaluation of African Literature" in The Critical Evaluation of African Literature, ed. E. Wright (Heinemann, London, 1973), pp. 15, 16.

3. P. Young, "Tradition, Language and the Re-integration of identity in West African Literature in English", E. Wright (1973), op.cit. p. 42.

4. E. Wright, The Critical Evaluation of African Literature, op. cit. p. 16.

novel form.[1]

While a number of people have passed adverse critical comments, others who disagree with such verdicts, have seen in Okara, a major novelist perhaps the only novelist who has extended the possibilities of the novel form into a new, and authentically African form. In his review, Bernth Lindfors[2] sees this quality in Okara as he had similarly observed in the case of Tutuola. Writing in Books abroad, he argues:- "

> The Voice is the most successful novel to come out of Nigeria so far.....(it) is Nigeria's greatest contribution to fiction in English.[3]

In a similar commendatory spirit Wilfred Cartey sees in it the successful expression of the African sensibility and identity. For him "The Voice ranks among the

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1. Ibid.

2. B. Lindfors, "Five Nigerian novels." in Books Abroad 39/4 1965, p. 441.

3. Ibid.

best of the new African novels. It is uniquely African, but it has universal overtones."[1]

It is not our aim here to show the success or failure of Okara's linguistic experiment;[2] rather we shall be concerned with the analysis and description of the structural organisation of The Voice as a novel. This we shall do to illustrate the way in which its narrative form has been shaped by the contemporary Nigerian sociohistorical experience. As a background to this analysis, we shall examine briefly, some of the reasons that have led Gabriel Okara to have an interest in the writing of fiction.

Although completed and published in 1964, Okara started work on The Voice before Nigeria achieved Independence in 1960. Around this time too Okara was also writing poetry, producing a number of important poems. As evident in these poems and as explicated in other contexts[3], Okara had been concerned with

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1. W. Cartey, "Gabriel Okara's Search" in African forum. Vol. 1, No. 2, (1965), p. 112.

2. For this discussion see chapter IX, p. 430 of this study.

3. B. Lindfors, Ed. Dem-Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian writers. Publication of the African and Afro - American Studies and Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. 1974. pp. 41-47

two major problems, the one purely literary and related to the awareness of national and cultural identity and, the other related to his own perception of the moral mood of the period. With regards to the first, Okara had been concerned like some of his contemporaries with the urgent need for the development of a more relevant and experientially immediate literature. This was the concern with "how best to bring out our own thinking, our own imagery, our own ideas and philosophy... reflected in what we write."[1] But this artistic awareness was also conditioned and modified by a profounder mood of pessimism brought about by his own perception of the breakdown of moral order and human values in the wake of an overpowering materialism in the country.

As it was for many people, Okara's mood was one of deep anxiety about the prospects of independence as well as about our capacity as a nation to lead clean lives, and develop a society based upon positive human values. In effect, the informing social reality of The Voice is the wide range of experiences and moral perceptions which have been persistently expressed by various Nigerian writers, particularly Chinua Achebe in A man of the People, Christopher Okigbo in Path of

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[1]. G. Okara, "African Speech, English Words" in African writers on African Writing. Ed. G. D. Killam, p. 137.

Thunder, and Wole Soyinka in The Interpreters. The social relevance of the themes which have determined the form and style of these works is the obnoxious nature of the contemporary Nigerian value system which continuously presents the individual with the enormous problems of how one could actualise one's personal morality, one's concern for the spiritual and yet survive without either being regarded as a fool or swept aside in the growing pressures of progressive materialism.

In one[1] of the interviews recorded in 1973, Gabriel Okara has given an indication of his deep concern with the achievement of authenticity and relevance at the level of style and vision. Concluding his discussion he says:

> So I arrived at the conclusion that probably, if one wrote as closely as possible, not in the way that Tutuola has done in his books but in some conscious way, one might be able to bring our ideas, our thinking, in fact our whole mode of speech, into whatever we wrote.

Okara's view here is a clear recognition of the need for the artistic indigenisation of the alien novel form in terms of culturally relevant communicative modes and vision. In the writing of The Voice, the concern with these values functioned as a source of stimulus. It forced him not only

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1. B. Lindfors, Dem-say. Interview with eight Nigerian writers. (Austin, Texas, 1974), pp. 41ff.

away from the use of English in a manner imitative of typical English usage; more positively it seems to have led him towards his own conception of the appropriate form and structure of the novel, as well as the fashioning of a prose style that is at once relevant and uniquely personal. These creative interests are imaginatively realised at the level of the quality of experience delineated, and more strikingly, in the formal and stylistic orchestration of the novel.

II

Vision and Linear Structure

For the creative realisation of his many-sided literary aspirations, Okara has set up an intensely concentrated story of a political-moral confrontation between two characters, Okolo and Chief Izongo. This story he has also developed into a concise poetic image for the imaginative representation of certain aspects of contemporary Nigerian consciousness, and attitude to life. In its basic thematic form, the story is an exploration of the problematic choices inherent in the current phase of Nigerian life, - the choice between the

conflicting pressures of adaptation to the ethos of corrupt social values[1] and a personal morality; and between material success and the stigma of failure that follows the honest, but materially poor worker. Okolo, the protagonist, is a visionary with an intense social reformers's instinct. He is a man with a temperamental concern with social-religious values which give order and meaning to human existence. The essence of his activities throughout the novel consists in a sustained ideslistic search for the human values of integrity, truth and beauty in both personal and public life. These values he cannot, however, find in an increasingly decadent world already eaten up with gross materialism, power struggle, and opportunism.

The narrative action in terms of which the moral vision has been recreated in the novel is relatively slight in scope. This is so at least when compared with the ampler scope of narrative experience in say Arrow of God and The Interpreters. For various reasons, the narrative action is limited to a small range of specially selected sequence of

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[1] See Interview with Lindfors op. cit. p. 43.

narrative events presented in a dramatized and highly poetic form.

If in terms of the formalistic approach of E. M. Forster[1] we consider "plot" to consist in a sequence of narrative events, causal-temporally ordered, The Voice can be seen as a carefully "plotted" novel. This is so in the sense that what events it presents, are causal-chronologically ordered, and directed with calculated relevance, towards the communication of the moral basis of the narrative action and conflict.

The development of the story can be seen in terms of two main social settings, Amatu and Soluga, with the journey from Amatu to the city of Soluga functioning as an interlocking episode for the two situations. In this limited sense, the plot - structure falls basically into four[2] major episodes, which represent successive stages in the moral and emotional development of Okolo. Amatu forms the main locus of dramatic action and experience. The first section chapters (1-2) deal with Okolo's initial moral predicament in

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1. E. M. Forster, Aspects of the novel. London, 1927, Chapter V.

2. This suggested way of reading the story is not intended to rule out other possible approaches.

the town of Amatu, focusing our attention on his conflict with the moral values and politicians of the town. The second episode, (Chapter 3) deals with Okolo's journey by river to Soluga, as a result of being forbidden on pain of death from ever living in Amatu. The third set of episodes (Chapters 6, 8, 9) deals with Okolo's traumatic experience in Soluga and the last section (chapters 10 - 12) take the narrative action back to Amatu where Okolo meets his tragic end.

In chapter 1, when the novel opens, Okolo whose education had "opened" him up to the painful awareness of the corruption of his society of Amatu, is already pricking and challenging the general social consciousness by seeking to examine everybody's "inside" to see if they have'got "It"', the unidentified moral essence which constitutes the object of his search. As the novel establishes in chapter 1, the background of his search is the atmosphere of optimism about the "coming thing".[1]

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[1]From Okara's interview with Lindfors in Dem Say loc. cit. it becomes clear that "the coming thing" refers to the approaching Nigerian political independence of 1960.

> Okolo started his search when he came out of his school and returned to his people. When he returned home to his people, words of the coming thing, rumours of the coming thing were in the air.

In a world in which each man is for himself, caring for no one else's interest, Okolo's belief in "I" and concern for human values lead him into doing good for others. In a boat crowded with travellers being drenched in a rainstorm, he innocently uses his overcoat to protect a young girl from the rain.[1] Ironically, however, his good intentions become the reasons for his accusation and open disgrace. He is accused of sexually assaulting a bethrothed girl, Ebiere. The protective mother in-law who had been praying to the local gods for mercy only a few seconds earlier scandalizes him. She raves and creates a stir in the engine-boat by her ululation and shouts of Apoi, Apoi, Apoi. In his sensitivity to the situation, Okara's narrative action in this section blends the trivial with the serious and the comic with a subtle satiric touch.

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[1]. The Voice, p. 59

satiric touch.

The innocent girl looks on in wonder, and unbelief, as Okolo, in spite of his innocence, is gradually incriminated and herself disgraced, by the dangerously suggestive inruendoes of the fellow travellers.

Although superficially isolated, structurally, this river-boat episode does in fact, knit both parts of the novel together into one single coherent story. Specifically, it reinforces the atmosphere of hostility which infects the novel's world. Thus even though the claim is false, not only does no one actually come to exonerate Okolo, but later in Soluga, the accusation is blown up into a big "palaver" with trouble for both Okolo and Ebiere as a result of the lack of communication between Okolo, the girl, and the mother-in-law.

The third set of experiences presented begin with his arrival at Soluga where he also continues his search for "IT". In this section of Soluga (chapter 6-9) the novel assumes a much more harsher, tougher and grimmer tone of a political satire. Strident decadence and terrorism, express an imaginative vision that is also more penetrating than political satire per se. Here, too, Okolo, now disoriented and transplanted from familiar grounds into strange and hostile

world finds himself face to face with more negative forces of "darkness" which confirm Tebeowei's warning that:- "things are not only worse there, but it is dog eat dog there."[1] Confronted with the crushing political realities of Soluga() with its brutality, and the corruption of a police state, Okolo comes face to face with the harsh reality and the doomed nature of his quest for values in a morally unregenerate world.

By slow but steady degrees, the truth of the ultimate reality - the moral nature of things, begins to break in upon him as we shall show later. Faced with these ultimate realities, he reappraises his next course of action, - what he must do now and there he must go.

The last set of episodes marks his return to Amatu to face his enemy Izongo. But he returns a changed man keeping himself to himself: The finalé of the novel (chapter 11) presents not a search but the continuation of societal negative reaction to what Okolo stands for. With the seed of the light he has sown already taking roots, the citizens of Amatu led by Izongo are only too glad to destroy him forever.

Mode and Style

Okara's stylistic organisation of this story represents effectively an innovative spirit that is quite unequalled in the current Nigerian fictional output. While the thematic basis of his novel continues an area of moral awareness common to a majority of the practising Nigerian novelists, the narration of this awareness is significant more for the "independence" of techniques than for his indebtedness to the more general and established conventions of the typical novel of social realism. Significantly, however, the sense of independence of style is not only a matter of his deviation from the conventional approach of this novel type. Okara's style and narrative form are peculiarly interesting in the sense that while drawing its creative strength from the traditional rhetoric and linguistic features of his African locality, the aesthetics of the narrative frame into which these traditional elements have been integrated transcends also the organisational mode, and content of such African narrative models as myth and the folktale.

The novel becomes in effect a peculiar narrative whose form lies between myth and the novel genre. Indeed, in its development, The Voice is a novel in which the method of traditional African mythical narrative and those of the modern short novel are effectively

brought into play. In the first instance Okara's main criteria for the choice of narrative incidents is not strictly that of verisimilitude but of what is symbolic, especially of what is vividly expressive of the archetypal impulses of man. In this aspect the novelist not only exploits our sense of suspense but very often presents incidents that bear upon the fantastical even when narrating familiar political experiences.

But in a manner that brings The Voice within the scope of the modern short novel, there is nothing that is strikingly bizzare in its stylistic deployment of these incidents. Nothing is presented in the unrestrained prolixity and surrealistic exaggerations of Amos Tutuola's mythopoetic approach. Further, like the contemporary Nigerian novel, and, as an expression of Okara's own aims, the overall experience which the novel presents has a topical significance - being something immediately reflective of the political and moral issues of its day. For example, the motives of those who decide Okolo's fate (especially when we think of their ruthlessness and singlemindedness) are based upon actual social and psychological tendencies of contemporary African political leaders.

As a novelist Gabriel Okara also shows his own uniqueness in the way he evolves his peculiar modes to demonstrate his vision

without caring for the conventional aesthetics of the novel. A manifestation of this is the way in which the focus of the novel is deliberately restricted to the depiction of the society's negative reaction to Okolo almost to the exclusion of other imaginative aspects of social life. As a result of this the novel is not a novel of action, when by this we mean what Edwin Muir means when he says:

> "In the novel of action, a trifling event will have unexpected consequences; these will spread, and soon they will be numberless, and apparently inextricably an inextricable web will be woven, which will later be miraculously unravelled. In the action, its complication and its resolution, our interest is taken up, and being interested we are pleased."[1]

On account of its restrictive scope of narrative action and point of view, what the novel succeeds in recreating is not a realistically complex experience realised in terms of a wide range of activities involving many characters sharply delineated. It is the sense of Okolo's sufferings and the brutality of his society that hits the reader.

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1. E. Muir, The Structure of the Novel. The Hogarth Press London, 1928. 2nd edn. 1967, p. 20

IV

For all its tight structure and limited scope of narrative action and felt life, The Voice is a complex and highly sophisticated novel by any standards. It is a novel that is exceptionally rich in its symbolic suggestiveness. The achievement of this rich imaginative life from so limited infrastructural materials is due, essentially, to Okara's peculiar mode of novelistic representation, especially, the organized pattern of significant events presented in the linear chronology of the novel.

Predominant in its process of communication is its poetic mode, the insistence on the primacy of the poetic over the realistic. Thus, instead of being based on the aesthetic conventions of the more popular social realistic novel, with its emphasis on the mimetic presentation of situations and actions, Okara's novel draws its strength and significance from the suggestive power and interplay of a number of creative devices, especially, the modes of metaphor, synecdoche, symbolism, and allegory. Significantly, Okara's basic approach to narrative representation is "synecdochical".

In order to elucidate Okara's use of this mode, we shall examine two related aspects: (a) his narrative descriptions and pattern of images and (b) his basis of character presentation.

First, through his instinctive emphasis on the poetic rather than the realistic, Okara presents a pattern of fictive realities that seem to lie between the real and the fantastical, and tending often towards the level of the symbolic. The focus of narrative movement is rarely, if ever, directed either towards full human qualities of his characters or to the details of local colour, sound, or ritual in the manner characteristic of most of his contemporaries. What he invokes as texturing narrative units, are the bare "aspects" - the isolated parts or features of phenomenon. The presentation of the crowd of Soluga is an extreme example of this poetic mode of novelistic pr sentation.

> So to the inside of Soluga of the Big One he walked with each step begging the ground. So Okolo walked in Soluga of the Big One passing frustrated eyes, groundlooking eyes, hot eyes, cold eyes, bruised eyes, despairing eyes, nothing-caring eyes, grabbing eyes, dust-filled eyes, aping eyes... Okolo walked passing eyes, walked passing eyes, walked passing eyes until hunger held him.[1]

The repetition here is not the result of the kind of narrative verve we have observed in Amos Tutuola.[2] The

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[1]. The Voice, p. 80

[2]. Gabriel Okara seems conscious of meeting the demand of establishing continuity b tween the modern and the traditional in a radically different manner from Amos Tutuola, see Dem Say, op.cit. p.43

striking descriptive quality here is 'disembodiment' the narrowing of the narrative focus upon the "eyes" and the repetition of this to an extent that transforms the description to the level of the "surreal". Generally, enveloped in the darkness of moral evil, the people are revealed aspectually, that is in terms of either their "voices", "eyes" "hands" or sharply discriminated moral personalities. It is in this poetic use of aspect or part for whole that we describe Okara's The Voice as synecdochic in form. Taking a limited aspect of human behaviour he makes this an effective symbol of contemporary Nigerian socio-political behaviour. Through this poetic mode, Okara's novel achieves significant aesthetic effects that are quite peculiar to his novel form. One of these consists in the "blurring" of our sense of the actual or the possible, in a special way that contrasts with the intense and comprehensive "African realism" of Achebe or Amadi.

The imaginative presentation of Okolo's first dramatic experience in Soluga[1] is another example of Okara's habit of the evocation of "aspect" as an intensive image of behaviour and experience. In this passage the recreated impression is the

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[1]. The Voice, pp. 15 - 16.

stark darkness, and its mythic conflict with light. The concrete reality, the specifics such as what kind of people have come to arraign him, just why, and what kind of place he has been thrown into are not within the focus of the narrative description. The entire emphasis is the darkness intensified to a pitch of symbolic significance. The grim face, the eyes, the voices, and the intensity of the darkness functions to interpret the moral and political nature of the situation being described. As a motif in the narrative it can be seen at many levels of the novel: especially in the conception of characters.

The presentation of the major characters - the young girl Tuere, Chief Isongo, the "Big One" - the white man and the policemen of Soluga are examples of this singularly poetic approach to the representation of characters. There is also no descriptive presentation of any one of these characters even though they are of cardinal importance in the moral atmosphere of the novel. Tuere for instance, is introduced into our consciousness as follows:-

> Faces, a mass of faces glistening with sweat in the moonlight stood, talking, arguing. Grim faces like the dark mysterious forest afire with flies. Then a shadow blocked his view, then silence.

> And the voice clear and cool like a glass of water, from the standing shadow sallied forth.
> 'What is it? What again do you want of me? What do you want of a witch?
> 'We want nothing of you', a voice came from the crowd. 'We want nothing of you. We want only the man you keep in your house.
> 'I keep no one. Why should I any of you keep who called me a witch and have kept me away from the town?

As the narration continues,[1] she is seen as part of the symbolic language of the novel - especially the symbolism of light and darkness. In the presentation of the characters it is only just a suggested moral quality or pattern of behaviour that is used to "fix" and sharpen the personal identity of the character. For Tuere it is the accusation of being "a witch", in the case of the "Big One" it is his unexpected moral cynicism,[2] his loss of faith in the possibility of moral goodness. For Chief Ezonge it is his greed and political ruthlessness. Thus, in the presentation of character, Okara's work suggests a form of literary reductionism, something of a movement away from realism towards the use of sharply differentiated moral or psychological states as narrative personae, and source of conflict. Through this insistently poetic mode, the characters achieve symbolic associations that enhance the underlying allegorical frame. Okolo's life spent in searching for "IT" is a symbol of

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1. The Voice pp. 30 - 31

2. Ibid. p. 86ff

the yearning for moral truth and ideal goodness. His suffering which form the focus of the narrative action is an image of a wider range of decadent behaviour in a highly stavistic society. Tuere, who is kind, sympathetic, and unjustly accused of being a witch is at once a symbol of the oppressed and of the christian virtues of charity and patient endurance.

Chief Isongo is the incarnation of the misuse of power. He is the oppressor and an enemy of light. He and the elders of Amatu symbolise the over-consciousness of materialistic success. The "Listeners" of Soluga are the agents of tyranny and oppression, Tebeowei and the messengers are "moral pawns" who have no fixed stand but are ready to be swayed. Indeed, the active beings, the protagonist in this novel: - Isongo, Abadi, Okolo and Tuere are significant more for the kind of moral forces that they represent in the conflict than in the fullness, subtlety and complexity of their inner life and psychology.

Whatever short-comings Okara's stylistic "deformation" of the real may have, it does very often result in a prose style of great lyric beauty and deep symbolic significance. In a number of passages, the prose in its pure evocative interest creates complex suggestive effects that have certain religious overtones. For instance is the following:

> Outside, the dog barked, the pursuing feet of the world stopped and the shout of triumph from the ground reached the eye of the sky and all the town shook. As the shout shook the town like a cannon blast, fear entered Okolo and he thought of escape through the hole, the sole window at the back. But a hand reached him from the dark void. 'Stay quiet,' the darkness whispered. 'Nothing they will do to you'. Next, Okolo saw the mat covering the door move aside.
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> Faces, a mass of faces glistening with sweat in the moonlight stood, talking, arguing. Grim faces like the dark mysterious forest a fire with flies. Then a shadow blocked his view, then silence. And a voice clear and cool like a glass of water, from the standing shadow sallied forth.
>
> 'What is it? What again do you want of me?' [1]

Considered in its dynamic structure and in its formal approach to the presentation of characters and human behaviour, The Voice is insistently intensive, presenting character and life not in terms of the inclusive possibilities of good and evil. No character is seen to possess at once both qualities. Social and political reality is also presented in this distinctive form. In these respects The Voice is a diametric opposite of both the "extensive form"[2]

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1. The Voice, p. 80

2. See chapter IV, p. 142 of the thesis.

and intense social realism achieved in Arrow of God.

V

Image Pattern and Texture

Okara's instinctive emphasis on the poetic has brought into play a pattern of highly evocative symbols which act as leitmotifs in the novel. Each of these aspects of Gabriel Okara's narrative vision are intensified and more or less given special emphasis in each of the different sections of the novel.[1] In the first section of the story, Amatu (Chapters 1-2, p. 1-57) the two dominant motif-images are "darkness" and "fear" with the emphasis falling upon "fear".

In the last section of the novel, the fear and darkness image still persists. But while in the first section, the greed and "obscurantism" of Izongo had been the major focus of imagery and action, in the later section, in which a more or less satirical treatment of modern political activities

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[1]. This variation of the emphasis upon these is bound up with the shift in the locus of the action (from Amatu to Soluga) and the new realities which confront Okolo.

of the Big One are dealt with, the butt of the imagery is political fascism, terrorism and moral hopelessness. In this section of the novel the image of darkness and conflict between light and darkness comes into the foreground as the darkness seem to be imaginatively intensified in proportion to the surrounding moral nullity. Of these various forms of experiences, the leitmotif of fear has a pronounced dramatic role. It is concieved as a mixture of emotional and psychological fear of facing the truth, of being exposed, and through this, losing a social standing not legitimately achieved. Chief Izongo and his cronies are those who most exhibit this fear. They will do anything to preserve their smug complacency and the political limelight which they are enjoying. The effects of their "fear" is strikingly revealed in the course of the main narrative action of the novel, and in a minute set of symbolic incidents, statements and emotional reactions of the characters. The hounding of Okolo into the forest, the way he is tortured, Tuere's banishment into the evil forest for no just cause, the extremely brutal and cold-blooded manner in which she and Okolo are set afloat to drown in the river are examples of the operation of this fear.

Concurrent with Fear is the motif of Darkness. In his narration Okara presents this motif in its moral implications

through the traditional Christian symbolism of the opposition between light and darkness.

Chapters 1 (p. 32 - 33) and chapter 5 (p. 76 - 77) are recreations of this allegorical combat in which darkness encapsulates light. This negative encapsulation of light by darkness has special symbolic significance in Soluga, where its reality and social effects seem to be more pronounced. Here man's self alienation from light, his brutality and hostility are more oppressive, more potent, and crushing than even in the town of Amatu. The world of Soluga had symbolized hope for Okolo. But ironically through the fascist activities of the Big One, through his thugs and listeners, Soluga represents the nadir of anarchy, despair and cynicism. The parallel development of the darkness image with that of "fear" function throughout the novel as two related central leitmotifs that are sustained, amplified, and repeated as poetic images expressive of the opposite of all that is good, humane and godly.

VI

Amongst the resources which Gabriel Okara draws upon to give concentration to his fictional experience, language

plays a major role. Generally the Izon linguistic structures utilised intensify the form, force, and atmosphere of the novel. The varieties of linguistic structures utilised in the novel include direct translation of Izon syntactic forms into English, the imposition of specifically local meanings and ideas upon ordinary words,[1] and the use of repetitions, especially of images, motifs and symbols. The way in which some of these stylistic forms are creatively used will be examined closely in the course of our discussion. What we observe here briefly is that the use of language highlights the different leitmotifs of the novel. In this respect an effect which must be noted is the suggestiveness of the verbal transliterations used in the novel. Generally, through the imaginative power of these transliterations, and the concretely evoked local images, the realities which

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[1]. See p. 184 of the thesis

constitute the focus of the narrative action are vividly imaged, revealed, and rendered as active forces of evil. By this mode, greed and fear are rendered as negative forces that reduce man to the level of an animal. This quality is imaginatively conveyed by Okara's poetic language which brings out most strikingly the atavistic impulses of those alienated from the knowledge of "IT":

> On and on they pushed and dragged him.
> Round and round they went with their blind
> feet. This way they turned and that way they
> turned like a dog with a piece of bone looking
> for a corner. Nobody talked, nobody whispered.
> They pushed and dragged him in tramping silence
> with buzzing mosquitoes... 1

The experience which emerges from the different aspects of Gabriel Okara's narrative presentation - from the plot-movement, from the poetic symbolism, and from the original language use, is a very intense feeling of despair, - a terrifying awareness of a socio-political world polluted by moral evil, fear, self-interest and barbarism which underlie Okolo's cry:

> I am moving round and round caught in
> a whirlpool of hate and greed and I smell...

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1. The Voice, p. 39

> the smell of hate in their sweat
> glistening on their backs...[1]

VII

Vision and Allegory

The sustained evocation of the themes of "fear", "evil" and symbols of violence and the pattern of narrative action define the formal quality and thematic interest of The Voice. These evoked themes are expressions of the decadence of the society which contemporary man is evolving. While this theme of social decadence is directly derived from the realities of the period immediately proceeding National Independence of 1960, the range of the quality of experience delineated in the novel transcends the immediate Nigerian socio-political ethos to the level of the universal state of man. The nature of Okolo's own moral experiences, his "discoveries" in the course of the novel, make this clear. Much against his earlier moral naivete and idealism, in the

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[1]. Ibid., p. 39

end, he is brought in a moment of anagnorisis,[1] to a new state of awareness that is religious in nature.

The river-boat journey to Soluga marks the beginning of this process of new and crushing discoveries. First, while he had hoped that what the world requires for its regeneration is a good heart (a good "inside"), it was a harrowing discovery that his good intentions could even become a reason for his further victimisation, and trouble with the law. Soluga thus presents an even bigger shock as he learns that it is no haven. Through his personal experience of its infrastructure - its corrupt and non-caring police, "listners", the Big One, and the surrounding crowd of indifferent and broken eyes of disillusionment and despair, the reality of the moral nullity and hopelessness of the world begins to break irresistably upon him. The knowledge of this "dark" reality is brought home to him

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[1]. This concept of tragic experience is advisedly used to suggest at least in a limited respect, a parallel between Okolo's experiences and that of the real tragic protagonist. Okolo's discoveries and reflections in Chapter 5 not only involve an awareness of the unredeemable nature of the world and man, but also the hard fact that given this knowledge his own stance might conceivably be mistaken in its thoroughgoing idealism.

not only through these street experiences, but explicity by the more experienced people, by the kind hotel keeper, by the white secretary of the Big One. The cynical policemen at Soluga "hammer" the knowledge literally into him. Having arrested him, and forbidden his sojourn in Soluga, they advise him:-

> Look, my man, stay here with us, This thing you are searching you cannot find here. You can only this thing find in rubbish heaps or in night soil dumps, and those who go there do not come back. If they do, every body will run away from them - the high and even the low - because of the stench ——— we here too, we have our best tried, but it is like trying to see if the body of a person who is in the water with you is dry. 1

Next, completely broken, exhausted and denied even the right to see the Big One from whom he might discover the "bottom of things", he learns through the whiteman, and secretary to the Big One, of the utter impossibility of ever finding IT, and the pointlessness of trying at all. Even

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1. The Voice, p. 83.

faith, the faith of the christians, faith in the traditional spirits, and even high education, the possession of Ph. Ds do not mean moral attunement to religious ideals and sense of values. For in the general ethos, in the wild enveloping chaos of Soluga, and Amatu, in their growing moral myopia, education and ignorance, law abidingness and lawlessness, faith and faithlessness add up to nothing and mean nothing. Education, traditional religion, and even Christ have all failed. What matters is cash, - the new intoxicating "trinity of gold, iron and concrete".[1]

Abandoned by the whiteman whom he had hoped would listen to him, Okolo

> Sat on the bench along one forbidding wall of the room and waited, speaking with his inside and thinking of the proverb of his people the Ijaws, which says "If you roast a bird of the air before a fowl, the fowl's head aches". So his mind inside many questions asked, Faith and faithlessness adding up to nothing. Belief and unbelief adding up to nothing. Man has no more shadow, trees have no more shadow. Nothing has any more meaning, but the shadow - devouring trinity of gold, iron and concrete. Then he asked himself what road to take, in the immediate problem, - to go back home if that is possible, or to go to the asylum.[2]

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[1]. The Voice, p. 89

[2]. Ibid.

This moment represents the culmination of Okolo's moral experience and spiritual growth. It is the dramatic point towards which the narrative action has also been leading and directing our consciousness. Okolo, stripped now of the buffer which youthful idealism had provided discovers an ultimate reality about the nature of man, society, and why conflicts and hostility, bitterness and evil must be part of the continuing state of man's existence. Against this background of the overwhelming spiritual decadence, and brutality of his surrounding world, he opts out for a return to his home town in spite of his knowledge of what his end might be.

The two choices which he was confronted with are ultimately, choices between death and through this, the affirmation of his faith in his mission on the one hand, and on the other, survival and failure. To go to the asylum is to 'silence' his moralistic voice and admit that he had been crazy according to popular opinion. To go home to Amatu is to face the music of death from his enemy Izongo and the people of Amatu. In choosing the latter he chose the path of matyrdom and the vindication of the sincerity of his belief. In his spiritual quest, progress, and discoveries,

Okolo represents not so much the mystic but the tragic messianic figure, who sees only the impossibility of a moral compromise with the pressure of his world, and hence for whom the only way out is ostracisation or death.

Through the imaginative link-up of Okolo's exile with spiritual and moral "discoveries", Okara makes Okolo's journey assume an allegorical form in which there is a symbolic suggestion that the irrationalities found in Amatu are based upon universal impulses externalized in man everywhere. For Chief Isongo the banishment has been merely a punishment. But from Okolo's experience it is journey of initiation, a personal movement towards a maturer understanding of the world. Okolo's subsequent recognition of society's apathy to his quest for moral goodness symbolized by "IT" is not only pertinent to contemporary Nigerian moral life. Transcendentally, it is a discovery of the state of human societies everywhere.

Okara's Narrative form and Critical Attitudes

Whereas for most critics, the source of the failure of The Voice as an experimental novel seems to lie in Okara's

use of language, there are a few who have castigated Okara for the nature of his response to the form and structure of the novel. Anozie's view of the "poverty"[1] of Okara's adaptive vision, represents one of the most serious and thoroughgoing deprecation of the formal quality of the novel. In his view Okara's failure stems not only from the mistiness of his artistic vision, but essentially from his being inadequately equipped to handle the structural requirements of the novel. Where we have maintained in agreement with Lindfors that the significance of the novel derives largely from Okara's insistent poetic approach, Anozie identifies this approach as the basis of the unsatisfactory quality of the work as a real novel. As he argues:

> Mr. Okara is first and foremost a poet, a gifted lyrical poet. In lyrical poetry his art and vision find a ready-made spontaneity of expression. But when he trespasses into the extended and epic domain of the novel he is automatically challenged by life with a more than lyrical confrontation... To meet this challenge, would require a new dynamic art and an adaptive vision to life - realities in an African context - But Mr. Okara betrayed poverty in both except in his language of folktales with its annoying literary squint. The failure of the work is in its handling. Never before has so large a vision been imposed upon so small and limited a craft. 2

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1. Sunday Anozie, "Theme of Alienation and Commitment in Okara's "The Voice" BAAL, Vol. 3, (Nov. 1965), p. 63.

2. Ibid., pp. 61 - 62.

As his argument further suggests, the "failure" of The Voice as an African novel derives from its form - the absence of the "right type of action"[1], its lack of "concrete African sense"[2] and the extremely ambiguous nature of its vision as expressed through the vaguaries of the notion of "IT". As he observes:-

> .....Mr. Okara begs the question and hopes that his readers will understand by disguising the central conflict under the search for "It" - a universal ideal "it" - a nameless abstraction which traces the course of morbid eccentricity. 3

that is effectively suggested by the scathing tone and dogmatism of these judgements is ironically, not the "morbid eccentricity" of Okara, but the rather stunted response of Sunday Anozie to Okara's novel approach. More significantly, the judgement reveals Anozie's insensitivity to the varieties of narrative structures and styles within fictional form and a lack of awareness of the possibility that a novel need not conform to the social-realistic model to be artistically

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1. Ibid.,

2. Ibid., p. 62.

3. Ibid.

significant and viable. In effect, Anozie's kind of critical stance, and indeed a great deal of the deprecatory criticism of Okara's novel which it represents, are only expressions of a myopic response to the form of the novel, and the seriousness of Okara's novel and the various meanings which the novel manages to convey through its essentially poetic approach to the presentation of characters and narrative action. The general allegoric-poetic structure of the story makes the novel achieve a mythic quality that allows, as earlier suggested, a multi-levelled reading of the story. Thus, further to the central socio-political theme, there is also added the undefined quality of "IT" the object of the search. This functions in the novel as a dynamic concept. Its reference is not singly discriminated moral value, but a variety of values defined by the narrative context of its use. Out of this elastic use of the expression, "IT" achieves the referential quality of an open concept, designating at once the following set of ideas:

(a) The African traditional values of moral goodness, honesty and intergrity.....

(b) The African traditional values of communal spirit and sympathy.

(c) The Christian virtues of love, charitableness and tolerance...

(d) A practically concomitant faith and belief in a higher Power

(e) The Power of the Creative word.

In accordance with each or combinations of these suggested meanings, and the persistent allegorical structure of the narrative action, the novel works effectively as an allegory of:-

(a) Man's quest for moral goodness and truth,

(b) The animal instincts of man...

(c) Man's unregenerate nature and of the continuing state of sin,

(d) Man's self-alienation from the spiritual basis of life,

(e) The conflict between good and evil, and

(f) The victory of the Power of darkness over the creative power of the word.

Through the achievement of this form, Okara's The Voice is unique in many respects. It represents a work of major creative initiative and originality, and an important contribution to the development of the Nigerian novel. This conclusion is based upon two major achieved aspects of the novel. First is the social relevance of the moral vision of the novel. This is realized through the relationship of verisimilitude established between the social and political behaviour of his

fictional characters and the actual patterns of the behaviour of political leaders not only in Nigeria but in many African countries of today. But the merit and significance of Okara's novel do not derive only from its thematic vision and relevance. Stylistically, the allegorical form achieved through the use of the synecdochic mode, coupled with the original use of rhetorical and linguistic devices are of literary value for two reasons: Firstly, for being a successful experiment in narrative form and style, and secondly for the effectiveness of these modes in adequately conveying some of the harsh realities of modern African socio-political experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOHN MUNONYE: A DANCER OF FORTUNE

I

Although John Munonye has not attracted much critical attention, he is in some respects a major Nigerian novelist. By using some of the conventional modes of the realistic novel-form, he has written a number of novels which though not so remarkable for their skill in technical execution, are nonetheless important, especially, in respect of the kind of human experiences which he often seeks to express. From the point of view of our interest in this study, John Munonye's novels provide a particularly interesting perspective for two reasons: First, for what he did and did not try to achieve in his use of the structural format of the realistic novel, and in the presentation of contemporary Nigerian social experience within this form. Second, given the particular quality of his adaptive skill and vision, his novels do illustrate for us an aspect of the variety of stylistic approaches implicit in the Nigerian novel as it has so far evolved. Against this background, we shall examine in detail A Dancer of

Fortune,[1] one of Munonye's later and maturer novels in order to indicate an aspect of his contribution to the growth in form and style of the Novel in Nigeria. Where possible we shall focus these qualities as they relate to his first two novels The Only Son,[2] and Obi.[3]

Born in 1929 at Akokwa a few miles from Ogidi in Anambra state, Munonye studied English at the University of Ibadan, worked in the civil service, and as the Principal of the Advanced Teachers Training College in Owerri, Imo state, John Munonye started his writing of novels as a result of a longing for the full realization of his potentialities.[4] Frustrated by the stifling bureaucracy of the civil service, and longing for another area of self-fulfilment, he was stimulated into creative fiction by the example and success of Achebe's Things Fall Apart. Since the awakening of this

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1. A Dancer of fortune. References throughout this chapter are to Heinemann African writers series (AWS) paper back Edn. 1975.

2. John Munonye, The Only Son (Heinemann, London, 1966).

3. John Munonye, Obi (Heinemann, London, 1969).

4. Bernth Lindfors, Dem-Say: Interview with eight Nigerian writers, op. cit. p. 37.

interest, he has been comparatively very productive, certainly no less than Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi in terms of novel writing even though the importance of his contribution to the growth of the novel in Nigeria has not been fully realised.

His first novel, The Only Son, came out in 1966, followed later by four other novels Obi, Oil, Man of Obange[1] A Wreath for the Maidens,[2] and A Dancer of Fortune.[3] There is now a sixth novel - Bridge over a Wedding. From Obi to A Dancer of Fortune there is a noticeable development, especially in the conception of the themes treated and the experiences presented. In his first two novels, Obi and The Only Son, Munonye, following the example of Chinua Achebe, deals with the general theme of culture conflict. In the later novels, A Wreath for the Maidens, and A Dancer of Fortune, the focus is on contemporary issues, - the casualties of the last civil war, and the ruthless commercialism of today. While the novels explore these general themes as the bases for narrative movement, the literary interest which John

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1. The Oil Man of Obange (Heinemann, AWS, London, 1971).

2. A Wreath for the Maidens (Heinemann, AWS, London, 1973).

3. A Dancer of Fortune (Heinemann, AWS, London, 1974).

Munonye offers derives partly from the kind of satiric realism which he brings into the analysis and presentation of some of these realities of contemporary Nigerian social condition. Linked to these is also the presentation of the harrowing experiences of the individual as he responds to the constraints posed by the complex ethos of old and modern values. Within this basically humanistic focus, his work shows what we may describe as a persistent interest in certain forms of African human relationships, such as the relationship between the African mother and her child, between husband and wife, and between father and son, as these relations are affected by the conflicting values of the new social milieu. These forms of personal relationships constitute the thematic focus of his first three novels - The Only Son, Obi and The Oil Man of Obange. The novel A Dancer of Fortune shows a development a way from these types of family relationships to the theme of modern commercialism, and the way in which this determines the moral relationships between individuals.

As suggested by its title, A Dancer of Fortune, what the novel presents is the story of a popular dancer, "Ayasco". His profession is the dancing of highlife as a means of

attracting public attention to the sale of drugs of the company to which he is attached. Through his dexterity, and consequent popularity with the public, he is an invaluable asset to whichever drug-store he is attached. By the end however, through the assimilation of the dishonest logic of the surrounding business world, he outmanoeuvres his employers and places himself in position of envy as a prospective owner of a drugstore, while ironically, his successive masters whom he had deserted, end up ruined and bankrupt. By treating this story from a human point of view, John Munonye achieves one of the creative intentions of the novel - "to tell a new[1] kind of story that have some deep meaning for society."[2]

In order to establish a framework for the discussion of Munonye's adaptive vision and skill, we shall examine in greater detail the form and development of the experience presented in the novel.

II

Throughout the novel, the dynamic principle which

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1. "New" in contrast to the mood and point of view of the earlier novels.

2. "Interview with Bernth Lindfors, Dem-Say. op.cit. p. 38

Munonye uses for the development of his theme and narrative experience is the conflict which arises from different people's materialistic interests. This form or conflict also functions as a basis for the analysis and presentation of characters. It is also the butt of the satirical point of view of the novel. It establishes for the novel the essentially moral nature of its realism, and the ground of its relevance and contemporariness. Dramatically, the conflict involves the turning of money, an innocent object of a certain amount of positive good into a matter of life and death. Ayasco, an essentially comic hero functions as the passive centre of the comic-satiric plot form. He is the figure around whom the action develops and whose surprising financial triumph at the end acts as a wry ironic comment on society, and the over-response to money and the consequent futile rancour of the various characters.

Structurally, the pervasiveness of this conflict is conceived and dramatically portrayed at two related levels. First, at the level of what we can describe as the "intercompany rivalry," and second, at the level of inter-personal clashes amongst the employers in the Avarido drug store.

The successive inter-company struggle provides the outer and larger frame within which the petty and selfish personal conflicts are dramatized.

Towards the dramatic rendering of his comic-satiric vision, the novel presents three perspectives through which the thematic realities are explicitly imaged. First, and central to the narrative structure is Avarido, and his team of workers:- Ayasco, Marianna, Ogoroba and Sopolu. The activities of this group represent the focal centre of the narrative action and the major vehicle for satirical expression. Second is the presentation of the background to Avarido's present success (chapter 7); and thirdly, is the recreation of the continuing state of struggle; firstly between Avarido and the young "new" comer Eddy Chindi, (chapt. 10ff), and secondly, between Eddy Chindi and Ayasco his unexpected but determined suppliant. Through these different segments of the narrative the moralistic theme of greed is sustained, amplified and projected along with a rather ambivalent focus upon the material development of the central figure Ayasco. Through Ayasco's central position in each of these sections of the narrative development a basis of unity and continuous development is achieved for the novel.

When the novel opens in chapter one, the Avarido drugstore has already secured the position of monopoly, having destroyed and ruined his one time bitter rival Marabu

In the opening chapters (chapters 1 - 3) Avarido and his team of workers are enjoying the trade monopoly, and exploiting with ruthlessness, the ignorance of the illiterate rural people. The only possible source of anxiety is the possibility of danger from the defeated, ruined, and disgruntled Marabu who it is feared might send an occult thunder[1] as a reprisal measure to destroy his enemy Avarido. In his growing affluence, and intoxication with the charms of business and monetary success, Avarido does not however realize that in precisely the same way by which he had displaced Marabu from the trade, he too, can be undermined, and reduced to such a bitter end by others who are more subtle and more ruthless than himself. For a time he enjoys the monopoly and success until Eddy Chindi emerges to displace him only to be out-manouevred by Ayasco, whose exposure to the mad ethics of grabbing and self-interest has already had its

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1. A Dancer of Fortune, p. 37

effects upon his moral consciousness and aspirations. In terms of this insistent drive for monetary gains, and social success, the line of the novel's plot movement evokes into the reader's consciousness a state of affairs in which each man lives in a terrifying negative manner for himself - aware of his own ambitions and desires without caring for the basic values of human life or what is conductive for the good of all.

Thus, as presented in the many scenes of sales promotion drives,[1] the business of making money thrives on the merciless swindle of the illiterate rural people through the sale of impotent, dangerous, and irrelevant drugs[2] to unsuspecting people. As Ogoroba was led to feel in a rare moment of sober reflection what obtains in the business is "bad blood".

> That was the nature of the trade. The small tablets had become the source of so much hate, intrigue, and bad blood. Yet, those who had made them intended that they should help people to live well.[3]

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1. A Dancer of Fortune, p. 7, p. 9, p. 54

2. Ibid., p. 7.

3. Ibid., p. 48

From this initially established atmosphere of commercialism, the novel shifts its focus in Chapter four from the present into the past, to give a dramatically recreated account of the rivalry between the now affluent and self-intoxicated Avarido on the one hand, and on the otherhand, the once successful but now ruined Marabu; and of Marabu's earlier triumph over Sebanco. Central to the narrative history is Munonye's sharp satirical presentation of the intense hostility of the rivals, and the crudeness of the means which they adopt to outdo one another. In his own struggle to preserve his hard won success over Sebanco and not merely his own success, but also the ruin of Avarido his new rival, Marabu does not stop at anything, however mean. He resorts to blackmail and bribery, using his influence to persuade wholesalers not to sell drugs to Avarido.[1] Avarido in turn bribes the police to arrest Marabu just to harm him and undo his (Marabu's) success.[2] In his growing bitterness and desperation, Marabu resorts to crude tactics calculated merely to soil Avarido's reputation and social standing in

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1. A Dancer of Fortune, p. 27, p. 29
2. Ibid., p. 30

Dokko. The campaign he forces his employers to launch against Avarido, to have his name and popularity smeared with rumours and slanderous songs[1] are all indicative of the bad blood and the unscrupulous spirit of this new class of businessmen and the hostility they represent.

Eddy Chindi's relationship with Avarido and the final overthrow of the latter by him (Chapters 11 - 12) is significant not only for the temporary nature of Avarido's hard won victory over Marabu, but for the light it throws upon social values, especially upon spiritual values. Eddy Chindi had been sent to the seminary to train for priesthood.[2] It is however, the life of business - the new craze for business and money that he finally succumbs to. In his dealings with Avarido, the years of the seminary appear to have left him untouched. He too brings down Avarido with means that are more crushing than what Avarido had employed against Marabu.[3] The imaginative development of Avarido's fall is significant in the narrative structure of the novel

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1. A Dancer of Fortune p. 28
2. Ibid., p. 89
3. Ibid., pp. 118ff.

not only as it relates to the anti-social behaviour of the drugstores, but it enhances the satirical interest of the novelist in the way in which through it, Munonye presents the craving for materialistic success and the attendant lack of scruples which has infected contemporary man in his alienation from the spiritual checks and balances of traditional life. Thus, from the internal logic of the narrative events, Avarido falls largely out of the bitter rivalry between his workers. Ogoroba hates Ajasco. Marianna hates Ayasco, Ogoroba hates Marianna and Ayasco in turn hates Marianna. Marianna is sick with envy. While she prostitutes herself to Avarido the Director, she does not allow any other girl to come to the company office for fear of the relationship which Avarido might establish with such a girl.

Acting as the spark of the interpersonal hostilities, is the conduct of Ogoroba who has his eyes on possessing the business should Avarido die suddenly.[2] Jealous of Ayasco, and feeling his familiarity with Avarido threatened by Ayasco's

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[1]. Ibid., p. 76.

[2]. Ibid., p. 48.

growing popularity and his rapport with the boss, he schemes to poison the mind of Avarido and his mistress to have Ayasco dismissed. In the end however, and by the rebounds of his own ill-advised action, Avarido loses his hold on Ayasco and finally finds his company collapsing. The imaginatively recreated world is a world whose law is the law of the jungle, that of the survival of the strongest in whom the finer scruples of morality and conscience have been etiolated in the wake of the passions of greed and the new drive for material wealth and social success.

III

In the formal expression of this vision, Munonye has created an imaginative experience whose quality and nature contrasts significantly with those of Achebe and Amadi in a number of important respects. First, in the literary projection of the dramatic scope of the action, Munonye's imagination rarely extends to the wider level of the entire societal frame - to the social background of the dramatic action, the metaphysical basis of the African social life, and the idea of the possibili-

ties which all of these realities have on the movement of narrative action. Thus in contrast to the "extensive" form of Achebe's novels, Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart, Munonye's novel is 'intensive' in form, and personal in its orientation. The notion of "intensive" here designates the characteristic focus upon a limited area of personal experience. Unlike the complex and sophisticated focus of the extensive form, the level of penetration in this is limited, being more moral than social or historical. Within this specifically moral perspective, Munonye has forged a narrative form that is farcical in its effects.

Thus, the crudeness and opportunism displayed by these men are used to depict from a humorous point of view, the behaviour and motives of the major characters especially Marabu, Avarido and Ogoroba. With a humorous touch, greed is shown to underlie also the progress of Ayasco through the novel. First, he had been a school drop out, rejected, and estranged by his step mother. But finally, by his determination to succeed materially and by the experience of the ethics of the new commercial practices, he successively out-flanks his employers to become a company owner.

In its moral form, the pattern of his progress from poverty towards prosperity in the end, is also a growth from innocence to the state of the corrupt. He is now no longer the dancer but grabber and opportunist. Parading himself as the simple honest worker, he is the typical example of that kind of Nigerian who trusted by the master will outflank and dupe him for his own gain.

Ayasco's monologue gives an insight into the real personality that hides beneath the cloak of his jovial and almost vague personality. Unknown to his masters, he too like everyone else has his eyes on the wealth and the prospects of one day being the boss. Telling the rising Eddy Chindi he says:

> You, Eddy Chindi, are a young man. Ayasco too is a young man, and the young should understand the young. Alleluyah! Just a few points. First, don't behave like Avarido or Marabu or even (in your own interest) like Sabanco. The second point is that Ayasco has been dancing for years and his legs are beginning to ache. Third point: Ayasco now knows a great deal about patent medicines. And this is the last point: I, Aya, better known as Ayasco, desire to live in comfort, like anybody else,

> in proof of which I shall change house in a few days' time; I shall move into a two room apartment. This is my voice and it sounds like a song. 1

Although, what Judge Lanson said is not totally right, it touches the essence of Ayasco's comic exterior, when he observed:

> He is a clever fellow. Don't be misled by his jokes and his dances. See how he has used each of you in turn to destroy the other. And now he has the market to himself! 2

What the judge did not observe is that Ayasco did not start by using people but <u>learnt to use</u> Chindi by being <u>continuously used</u> by these men; and that his success in the end is in a sense, an act of justice. Just as they had exploited the innocence of the rural illiterates with their lies they too come almost to the same end. Thus at the end, broken, tired and cheated by time, they appear bruised, helpless and outdone by an inscrutable ironic force.

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1. <u>A Dancer of Fortune</u>, p. 132.

2. Ibid., p. 186.

> They kept gazing, gazing into the air, with eyes dilated, like beings bereft of reason, indeed mere husks of human beings impressive in attire. 1

Formally, the pattern of plot-movement and the point of view utilised have an affinity with the moral fable. While the story is simple and entertaining, the concern with human values is insistent.

IV

Stylistically, John Munonye's approach unlike that of Chinua Achebe, does not show striking flashes of inventiveness either in the use of language or in the narrative strategies drawn upon. An aspect of this which immediately strikes the reader familiar with the works of other African novelists like Gabriel Okara and Chinua Achebe or Camara Laye is the limited sensitivity of John Munonye's prose style to the distinctive aspects of his cultural environment. This may be readily seen in the use of diction and the development of dialogue in his novels. The presentation of the dialogue between Ayasco and his wife in chapter seven may be considered :

> She clucked. She was pursuing and he was running, round in a circle. 'You will never tell me how much he pays you lest I ask you what you do with it,' she came out plainly. 'Amen.' 'He dodges again. And she added: The next one will be "Alleluyah!". He yawned. Did you say there were two others who work with Avarido?... After a pause she exploded: 'I have asked you to find a better house for us to live in, but you won't do that - you complain about lack of money. You hardly give me.....

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1. Ibid.

enough to buy any dresses for the children these days - not to talk of Bessie! It would have been all right if I knew you were saving the money to start life with, but there is no sign of that. You go on flinging your legs for the public to watch! Is that what will feed your wife and children?

'Never you mind,' he said coolly, almost callously.

'Never you mind!' she mimicked with scorn.

'We may soon find another house.'

'When the earth has met the sky! Do you forget you said the same thing months ago?' Her voice sounded broken, she was clearly agitated. 'It's time to talk to you seriously, to tell you that this thing you do will not carry us through life. He swallowed, thereby nearly betraying his true feeling. And then he began to hum, tapping on the ground with both feet. There was knocking on the door. It was followed by a female voice.

'Come in!' he cried with considerable relief.

She was the wife of one of the neighbours. There was agitation written on every square inch of her face.

'Chinwe, what's wrong?' Bessie asked.

'Do you know, my sister,' she panted

Her husband had left home for the office an hour before office time. He still had not returned. Could she borrow a torchlight to go out and look for him? She knew where to go to; she would search at a particular location in Dekko. And she knew too who the woman was. That at least was not her husband's weak point, Bessie thought. No, he was not in any way like Ekeledi, Chinwe's husband. Ekeledi was a Chief Clerk, or something like that, in the United Africa Company. They said he was paid around five hundred pounds each year. Yet Ekeledi was a great disgrace to Chinwe, his wife. He spent most of his salary on drink and what went with drink - roast chicken with tomato sauce, and giggling young females sitting round the table at his expense. Who did not know that there were foolish men in Dekko who lavished their earnings in that way? Ekeledi was certainly one of those.

Aya? No, you could never associate him with reckless living, although she had still to find out what happened to his money. In spite of the dancing and jesting, he also had some dignity about him; indeed, he managed to give her status in the community. In an unguarded moment one day

> she had commended him from her heart of hearts for the manner in which he conducted himself whenever, as she put it, he managed to step out of character, which was not rare. However, she had to retract what she had said almost immediately when he started crying 'Amen' one finger pointing upward in triumph, which he followed by flinging up his legs.- 1

This passage portrays a mild confrontation between two young married people. Its tendency is to be humorous and the achieved effect is a subtle and rather genial kind of humour that depends upon the reader's knowledge of the type of character and situation being presented. What is striking about the narrative style is the almost total lack of interest in the presentation of sociological information. The various images which define the background and presence of this dramatic situation are completely winnowed out while creative effort is directed towards the description of the tone, manner and behaviour of the characters.

Generally, through this affected mode, combined with the light breezy rhythm of narration, the simple language, and short sentence structures, Munonye's prose, like that of the general popular novel form seems to be aimed at being readily intelligible to the general reading public of limited literary education.

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1. A Dancer of Fortune, pp. 62 - 64

These general stylistic approach do not only make for intelligibility of the experience being presented. It enhance the farcical-satiric quality of the experience being presented.

At the level of creative strategies the major technique which Mononye persistently exploits in his novel is the ironic mode. Just as uniqueness of narrative form in The Voice is realised largely through a network of symbolic incidents and linguistic modes; in Munonye's novels vision and moral point of view are presented largely in terms of a network of ironic reversals. In fact, in the novels, the ironic mode is what John Munonye uses most of the times to solve the problem of how imaginative experience, narrative suspense and humour can be effectively presented.

The role of this narrative mode in John Munonye's novels is in the first instance bound up with the nature of the communicative structure of the novel as a genre. As Jonathan Culler rightly affirms, "the novel is a form most propitious to irony,"[1] in the sense that irony forms an integral aspect of its communicative process. "Referring us constantly to a

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[1]. Jonathan Culler. Structuralist poetics: op.cit. p. 156.

world whose reality it asserts it makes relevant our models of human behaviour and enables us to detect the foolishness of apparent meanings.[1] In Munonye's case, the use of ironic patterning has another basis of reference. As evident in his novels it seems that Munonye sees irony as one of the basic forms of human experience-tragic or comedic.

The type of ironic pattern exploited in the organisation of the novels is the form commonly referred to as 'the irony of direction.' The characters in striving to get somewhere, - to achieve an end considered important - say, to get rich quickly or to satisfy some desire, end up, however, in being placed in the reverse situation. In A Dancer of Fortune, the denoeuement of the novel is executed in terms of this opposition. Sebanco, Marabu, Avarido, and Eddy Chindi, who had sought to monopolize the medical trade in Dekko and get rich over night end up destroying themselves. Similarly, Ogoroba who had sought to ruin Ayasco in order to advance his own promotion ends up by being pathetically beaten physically and morally as Eddy

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[1] Ibid.

Chindi's thugs set upon him and the driver, destroying the reputation and property of Avarido.

In the other novels of Munonye the presentation of the experiences of the major characters is also in terms of this dramatic reversal of expectations. In Obi for example, Joe and Anna turn away from traditional beliefs and practices because being Christian converts, these have become sins. But not only does the new God seem to fail them in their longing for a child, but faced with psychological anxieties of a barren marriage, it is to a traditional medicine man Emeniko[1] that they turn for help. Ironically, they also discover in the process that other christians including even the headmaster[2] have all been turning back from the new God to their cultural roots in times of difficulties.

Generally, the unexpected experiences in the lives of the characters are used to prefigure the dilemmas which result from accepting too readily new social and cultural values that are alien to the traditional African spirit. Thus in A Dancer of

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[1]. Obi. p. 111.

[2]. Ibid., p. 117.

Fortune, the moments of ironic reversal function as the goal and direction towards which the narrative section moves. They become climax of the action in that they confront the characters with the unexpected and unanticipated experiences that bring out dramatically, the moral limitations of their desires, decisions and actions.

In the particular context of A Dancer of Fortune, John Munonye's insistent use of ironic experiences coupled with the typically Nigerian experiences presented serve to underscore the relative seriousness of the moral point of view which underlies his surface humour. In particular, the ironic mode of structuring the fictional experience serves to transform the story from a mere purposeless comic narrative to something of a social satire, expressing a moral vision that is altogether not too lighthearted. In this particular respect, the "war" being waged through excessive self-interest, and directed towards the destruction of the other, images the crudeness and greed inherent in the activities of the men of the business world. In the manner of a moral fable the novel seems to present in a veiled form, the realities of contemporary African socio-political life by suggesting obliquely the successive rise and fall of the new self-centred and materialistic possible leaders. Thus, as in T. U. Nwala's Justice on Trial, Ayasco's own rise and success at the end of

the novel shows how with the complicity of chance along with his adroitness in the manouevering of people, even the man without credentials or training or innate intelligence can rise into a position of worldly success, and at times of power which he does not know how to wield. As in contemporary African political reality itself, the tragedy of the various characters involved in the novel's narrative action is that they could neither outgrow nor transcend their over-response to materialistic gains.

This implicit commentary on contemporary African socio-political life is indicative of the way in which some of John Munonye's novels achieve significance as imaginative compositions. Without being intensely pre-occupied with the depiction of psychological states of being, man's emotional and or intellectual life, the novels are still insistently about the contemporary African, about his modes of responses, his priorities and social problems.

V

One of the guiding interests in the development of A Dancer of Fortune is the achievement of a comic rather

than a tragic form of fictional experience. In this particular respect, in his characterisation and in the organisation of the narrative experience through the ironic mode, there is a constant effort to be humorous. The opening paragraph of the novel, the description of the physical looks of Ogoroba,[1] Ayasco, the other dancers, and the portrayal of the comic intrigues of the businessmen are all handled not only to convey theme, but also as means towards the achievement of comic effects.

The question of how far the achieved humour in the African novel is specifically African has been raised and discussed generally in the criticism of the African novel. Ordinarily, the idea of a socio-ethnically determined experience generally, and humour in particular depend upon effects which reveal aspects of group consciousness. As Walter Blair has observed:

> Humour is national when it is impregnated with the convictions, customs and associations of a nation. 2

While this representation cannot be taken literally, it does

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1. A Dancer of Fortune, p. 45.

2. Walter Blair, Native American Humour, (1800-1900), (American book Company publication, New York, 1958), p. 3.

express the fundamental principle upon which a given social comedy or farce or satire depends. W. E. Abraham writing in The Mind of Africa[1] has isolated two qualities intrinsic to the realisation of the African farce and/or comic experience particularly in its continuity with authentically African sensibility:

> It is evident that a novel which is about traditional Africans has to show finesse in the construction of and building up of situations. It is a feature like this which will make modern African Literature in European languages, African and not the fact that they are written by Africans. The type of humour which can be ascribed to the African is another element which is firmly rooted in the vernacular, and is nourished by the bizzare and the fantastic.[2]

The issue here is not the correctness of Professor Abraham's formulation. It is that there is a quality of humour whose affectivity depends upon local assumptions and sensibility.

If by trying to project the humorous John Munonye is striving to create a novel that is especially entertaining to the African reader, it is easy to see that he has succeeded

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[1] W.E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa. (University of Chicago press, 1962), p. 40

[2] Ibid.

even though not in a dazzlingly brilliant fashion. Throughout his narration, especially in the portrayal of the experience of his characters, Munonye organises his materials as if consciously aware of the comic possibilities of local behaviour and ways of thinking. But although often effective in this particular respect, the reader often feels a certain amount of limitation in the achieved quality, range, and directness of these effects. There are many factors responsible for the limited aesthtic affectivity of Munonye's treatment of humour. One of these is the problem which Vincent[1] has rightly outlined in his discussion of the African novelists's response to the use of humour as a technique. This is the difficulty of recreating the humorous without lapsing into farce and banalities. In addition there is the general lack of presentation of his situations in a way that resonates with a mixture of humour and moral suggestiveness.

VI

In our examination of John Munonye's creative response to the western novel form in A Dancer of Fortune the aim has not been to show its success and limitation. Considered

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1. T. Vincent, "Humour in the African Novel". An unpublished paper.

as a novel, A Dancer of Fortune is a competently written and engaging story, whose technical quality is of the order of the "popular"[1] and moderately good novelette which come out in large numbers yearly in most western countries, and dealing largely with urban experiences.

Our interest in its form and style derives from two considerqtions: first for the particular kind of contribution which it makes to the growth of the novel in Nigeria. This has to do with its intense satirical vision of contemporary Nigerian economic aspirations. Second is the way in which this satirical vision has been conveyed briskly and effectively in terms of a popular form conceived specifically in relation to the re-establishment of a moral communicative link between himself as writer and the Nigerian masses with limited literary education. In the first instance, Munonye's satiric vision of contemporary Nigerians' crave for wealth is not merely

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[1]*The notion of "popular" as used here does not necessarily imply the scope of the reading public's positive response to the novel as much as the idea of Mononye's resort to conventional narrative form rather than any literarily significant experimentation with radically new narrative strategies.

entertaining. In a way that transcends the humorous surface it is a serious reminder of the same collapse of values and the growth of greed and individualism which is the bane of many African societies.[1]

By the depiction of this moral vision, and in terms of the simplicity and effectiveness of the literary modes he had utilized, coupled with the range of the experiences he vividly presented in his novels, John Munonye has clearly established himself as a major Nigerian novelist. By the achieved simplicity of his narrative style in A Dancer of Fortune and the consequent accessibility of the experiences presented, the novel functions as a powerful and relevant mode for effective communication of the social criticism which Nigerian novelists strive to impart to their readers for the purpose of the regeneration of society. Through these qualities of form and function the novel also continues in a sense, the role of the traditional African narrative artist.

This is very much the same theme which many African writers articulate in terms of narrative form and stylistic modes that vary in their achieved complexity and sophistication.

In a way, this achieved simplicity of narrative form is quite an important consideration in the development of the novel into an indigenouss art form. For where Wole Soyinka's "elitist" style seems to find very little audience outside the University departments of English, this class of novels often provide a highly readable form to which the larger proportion of the Nigerian reading public can easily respond. In this respect, the novel is not only an imaginative expression, but also a realization of the need to create through the appropriate form, style, and experience, a reading habit in a society where literary education is low, and books of appropriate content and style are few and far between.

It must be noted that Munonye's A Dancer of Fortune is neither the first nor the only successful attempt in the development of a popular novel type geared towards the catering for the interest of people of limited literary education. As E.N. Obiechina has demonstrated,[1] the beginning of this type of less sophisticated reading materials goes back to the Onitsha market chapman books, and to Cyprian Ekwensi's novels like Jaqua Nana (1961),

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1. E.N. Obiechina, Onitsha Market Literature (Heninemann, London, 1973.

People of the City and Beautiful Feathers. Where A Dancer of Fortune is historically important is that of the new breed of novels especially those which started with a concern for the depiction of African cultural realities, it is the one striking novel in which there is a wider and realistically conceived range of social experiences. It is also the novel in which the popular mode is reconciled with a moral earnestness and subtle satiric humour that cuts across various levels of the Nigerian society.

VII

A Dancer of Fortune and the "Popular" novel genre

The stylistic organisation of A Dancer of Fortune serves to bring into the foreground an important group of Nigerian novels and novelettes of which it is representative. These are novels of restricted complexity in style and form. Statistically, they out-number the novels of much complex form and style like The Interpreters, Arrow of God and Season of Anomy. But in spite of the reservations of high-brow literary critics, these novels are more popular with the general reading public. Included in this stream of novels are Cyprian Ekwensi's Jagua Nana

People of the City, Iska, Flora Nwapa, Idu, John Munonye Obi, and The Only Son, Kole Omotosho Combat and Fela's Choice, Nkem Nwankwo My Mercedees is Bigger than Yours, Festus Iyayi,[1] Violence, Vincent Ike,[2] Sunset at Dawn, and Toads for Supper, Obotunde Ijimere,[3] The Fall, and T.M. Aluko[4] His Worshipful Majesty

Although the generality of these moderately good novels may not be noted for their narrative or stylistic innovations, some do succeed in treating certain aspects of local experience in a peculiarly insightful manner that enables them to achieve a more than average literary merit. In Nkem Nwankwo's My Mercedes is bigger than yours, there is a striking original representation of certain forms of Nigerian contemporary social attitudes in a way that is new and delightful in its achieved realism and details. Where the majority of Nigerian novelists'

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1. Festus Iyayi, Violence (Longman, Drumbeat), 1979.

2. Vincent Ike, Sunset at Dawn, (London), 1976. Toads for Supper, (London), 1965.

3. Obotunde Ijimere, The Fall (Oshogbo), 1966.

4. T. M. Aluko, His Worshipful Majesty, (London), 1973.

portrayal of social attitudes is largely in terms of the more antisocial and criminal behaviour such as corruption, greed, political irresponsibility, Nwankwo's focus is upon the more venial but more general kinds of short-coming. These include the love for ostentatious living, the crave to ride fast and expensive cars, the inordinate respect for those who are rich or who appear to be rich, and the lack of sympathy for those who do not appear to be prosperous. Further to these is the frank representation of the promiscuity of city dwellers - promiscuity of car owners, the "girl carriers" on the one hand, and on the other, the promiscuity of girls who without qualification and job prospects, have to approach the problem of survival by allowing themselves to be "fucked out". While these attitudes pertain more to the city, the novel also realistically brings into play, the pride and joy of rural people in having a son who manages to bring a car home. As in A Dancer of Fortune, these attitudes are treated with satiric humour.

By imaginatively exploiting these types of prevalent social attitudes which are part of the daily experiences of most Nigerians, the novel's appeal is not only strikingly

immediate but is in many respects more typical of contemporary Nigerian life than even the experience of culture conflict which many of the early African novels offer. Nwankwo's sensitivity to these prevalent patterns of social attitudes which shape the lives of many individuals, his presentation of Lagos city life, its traffic jams, slums, and workers attitudes give the novel a peculiar basis of authenticity, and relevance that goes a little way beyond the general popular novel forms.

As may be seen from our analysis of the stylistic construction of A Dancer of Fortune and Nkem Nwankwo's My Mercedees is bigger than yours the issue of the naturalisation of these novel to the local environment is realised largely in terms of their themes and general African setting. Further in their commitment to moral and or political ideas there often lurks an imbalance between art and message that often raise the kind of problem which Elechi Amadi[1] has rightly pointed out, that is, how one can distinguish between what is art and what is merely journalism. The point which

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[1]. Elechi Amadi: "The Novel in Nigeria" in ODUMA, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1974 ed., T. Vincent, p. 37.

Amadi seems to raise is not an objection to commitment as such. It is the tendency towards the use of simplisitic narrative form and the lack of serious engagement with the treatment of their subject-matter as a creative issue in which the stylistic demands of using the genre in a new cultural context are perceptively grasped and resolved without sentimentality.

It is not that these novelists are basically incapable of complexity. Two factors seem responsible for the development of this category of novels. For some of the novelists the ordinariness of their work result from the fact that they have not reflected deeply enough about the problems of creating a national literature, especially, about the kind of stylistic innovations which need to be made in order to achieve as in Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi, an appropriate narrative form and language capable of capturing the total feel and substance of life in the new African environment. For many of the novelists however, the reason is not a matter of incompetence. It is the same considerations that have led to the conception of the theme and style of A Dancer of Fortune, - the need for the composition of less sophisticated and more popular novel capable of presenting entertaining qualities that can encourage

stable basis and an important literary growth against which stylistic innovations and new forms from more talented and inspired novelists come into and out of fashion.

The importance of these popular novel forms in the growth of the Nigerian novels cannot be determined as of now. What can be said now is that many novelists are resorting to the use of various types of simple narrative structures capable of reaching a wider reading public. The reasons for this may be due to the fact that these forms present less technical difficulties, make less demand on the writers time, have a wider audience, and often offer more economic rewards. Whatever may be the case, the development of the Nigerian novel during the period has shown a marked tendency towards this popular narrative form as expressed in A Dancer of Fortune, Fela's Choice and The Gods are Silent. Indeed, of the large number of novels which have been published between 1975 and 1978, only two, Wole Soyinka's Season of Anomy and Okpewho The Last Duty belong to a rather "elitist" class of novels whose form and style looks towards the complexity and narrative techniques of modern European novel forms.

The kind of relationship which exists between narrative form and audience which Munonye and other

novelists seem to bear in mind in the composition of their novels indicates insistently the Nigerian novelists' consciousness of his audience[1] and the kind of role which he wants his art to perform in the moral development of his society.

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[1]. The question of the relationship between Nigerian audience and the development of form in Nigerian fiction is an issue which has not been carefully discussed or recognised. It is however important to note that many of the writers have been, and are growing more conscious of how to interest the majority of their countrymen. As Bernth Lindfors has rightly noted this when he writes "Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe wrote a number of locally published chapbooks and school readers in the hope of being read by a wider cross section of the Nigerian reading public. In 1967, Chinua Achebe and Christopher Okigbo were planning to set up a publishing house in Eastern Nigeria to produce more books for Nigerian school children." See Bernth Lindfors "Nigerian Fiction in English 1952-1967." op. cit., p. 8. Also see Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher." New Statesman, January 29, 1965, p. 161.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CIVIL WAR AND THE NIGERIAN NOVEL

WOLE SOYINKA, SEASON OF ANOMY
ISIDORE OKPEWHO, THE LAST DUTY.

Like any war, the Nigerian civil war of July 1967-January 1970 had terrible consequences on the social and political life of the Nation. Not only did it bring untold suffering and loss of human lives, but it also resulted in the wastage of many creative talents. From the literary point of view the greatest loss was the death of Christopher Okigbo, a man who had the qualities of a gifted poet and a deep thinker who was killed prematurely in the war front. One of the few positive effects of the war however is the way in which it seems to have injected a fresh blood into the growth of Nigerian literature by providing a fund of new experiences and a new thematic basis for the development of fictional form and style. Thus, where most of the novels of the pre-civil war period had been pre-occupied with cultural realities and economic problems, the traumatic experiences of the political and social chaos of the period seem to have led a number of Nigerian novelists towards the use of new kinds of narrative techniques capable of conveying the gravity of the social tragedy and the writers' personal responses to the non-human behaviour of their fellow countrymen. In this respect, it is not only the presented aspects of "African

realism" that are different from those of the pre-war period. In the area of structuration, narrative tone, and the texture of images, some of these latter novels reveal new stylistic features through which the dynamic relationship between social psychology and the collapse of moral order are imaginatively portrayed.

Naturally, it is not all the practising Nigerian novelists who have shown a conscious interest in the development of an appropriate novel form and language for the communication of the brutalities of the civil war. Of the novels and stories written since the war, those which deal with the war experiences in one imaginative form or other include:- Cyprian Ekwensi, Survive the Peace,[1] A. B. Aleke The Broken Bridge,[2] Flora Nwapa, Never Again, John Munonye, A Wreath for the Maidens,[3] Chinua Achebe, Girls at War,[4] Kole Omotoso, Combat,[5] and Sacrifice,[6] T.U. Nwole, Justice on Trial,[7] Wole Soyinka Season of Anomy,[8] Isidore Okpewho, The Last Duty,[9] and the precursor of these novels, Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People.

Published by:

1. Heinemann Aro, 1976,
2. Ethiope Press, 1976,
3. Heinemann, Aro 1976,
4. Heinemann, Aro 1975,
5. Heinemann, London, 1972.
6. Ibadan, Onibonoje, 1974,
7. Onibonoje Press, Ibadan, 1973,
8. Rex Collins, London, 1973,
9. Longman, Aero, 1976.

Of this crop of novels, three stand out distinctively in terms of their stylistic approach to the representation of the experiences of the war period. These are: Wole Soyinka's Season of Anomy, Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty; and Achebe's A Man of the People, which anticipated the tragic events dealt with in these novels. Although each of these novels achieves its distinctive formal structure, atmosphere and point of view, all of them have one feature in common, namely, that they focus not so much upon the analysis of individual characters and destiny, but on the entire degenerate national ethos in which the possibility of the survival of the individual, and social values are shown to be seriously endangered. While each of the novels seek to offer a realistic presentation of the national tragedy, what emerges from each is a kind of satiric realism that develops the pre-civil war satiric themes into new dimensions characterised at times by a deeper sense of shock, horror and despair. Through the sensitivity of the novels to the historical basis of the incidents and experiences presented, the novels achieve a form in which there is an imaginative fusion of literariness with documentary interest. In this chapter, we shall examine in turn, Wole Soyinka's Season of Anomy and Isidore Okpewho's The last duty from point of view of the relationship established between national experience and the form and stylistic techniques of the novels.

II

Season of Anomy is basically an imaginative representation of a nation in a process of self destruction. It is also a vivid recreation of the theme of tragic personal loss in a period of rampant violence and social disorder. The narrative action develops in terms of the experiences of a young man, Ofeyi and his girlfriend Iriyise. In terms of imaginative presentation, not much is given to the reader about the emotional life of Ofeyi. His significance as a character in the novel, and the motif upon which the narrative action is built consist in his rebellion against the Cocoa Corporation, its values and his subsequent growth towards the Promethean cause of saving mankind. Employed by a monopolistic Cocoa Corporation, bent on exploiting simple farmers and labourers for their private gains, he is moved by a desire to break this monopoly by seeking to work towards the establishment of a new moral order and a better society.

> His goals were clear enough, the dream a new concept of labouring hands across artificial frontiers, the concrete affective presence of Aiyero throughout the land, under ...

> mining the Cartel's superstructure of robbery, indignities and murders ending the new phase of slavery. 1

With this kind of egalitarian interest, he is branded an agitator, and a dangerous Marxist by the establishment - the Capitalistic Cartel, which is in alliance with government's agents. In a terrible reprisal swoop, intended to terrorise the Aiyero community, and to distract Ofeyi and establish their own firm hold on the land, Iriyise together with Zaccheus and his band are seized, beaten and abducted. Iriyise is locked in the midst of mad men and lepers in an unknown destination. Ofeyi's search for her provides the basis of the plot movement of the novel. The development of narrative form and point of view in this story is insistently modulated by two central concerns, viz the representation of the shocking realities of the last civil war, and secondly, Wole Soyinka's desire to explode with a satiric touch the mythical aspects of negritude and other much more recent

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1. Season of Anomy, p. 27. All references to Rex Collins, London, 1973, hard back edn.

ideologies of modern African writers and politicians. Through out the narration, blood-curdling[1] violence is evoked and used as a recurrent motif through which these two aspects of the novel are projected.

In the transformation of the story into novelistic form, Soyinka has organised the experience into five narrative phases: "Seminal,"Buds", "Tentacles","Harvest", and "Spores". These concepts from the vegetable world seem to be used to analyse and depict the growth of the Aiyero ideal,-its sowing and possible fruition. But ironnically, the "harvest" is not the harvest of its growth and desired fruits. It is the inhuman harvest of the Cartel to which Aiyero and the entire country have fallen helpless prey. In effect, these concepts seem to be used to suggest and evoke the growth of the Cartel's hold on Aiyero and the entire country, and the culmination of this hold in the total devastation of the land and its hopes.

Basically, the development of this story is in terms of the traditional novelistic form, in the sense that it presents the action progressively within a causal chronological framework

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1. See Season of Anomy, pp.110, 141, 157, 270, 277.

provided by these five narrative phases. In the first section, "Seminal" comprising pages 1 - 29, the novel establishes an aspect of its thematic structure through the presentation of the Aiyero community, "a quaint and singly knit"[1] religious commune which had governed itself in terms of traditional African spiritual values. Although not militantly engaged in the spread of its life promoting socio-religious beliefs, the community represents in the world of Season of Anomy, a positive creative force. It is the only place in which life itself has sanctity, and the observation of humane religious values are effectively used as the basis of the life continuity of the society. In the thematic development of the novel, this opening section serves two functions, first, it provides a code of conduct which is in sharp contrast to the anticocial and hell-bent aggressive individualism of the Cocoa Corporation and its Cartel operating from the mainland of Ilosa. Secondly, the style of life which it thus represents is an affirmation of the spirituality of traditional African life before this became obliterated by the superstructure of western values.

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[1] Season of Anomy, p. 2.

The focus upon Aiyero community and the development of Ofeyi's social consciousness provide the regenerative forces in the world of the novel. With the growth of his feelings of disillusionment with the materialistic self interest of the Cocoa Corporation, his official visit to the Aiyero community "opened" his eyes to the spiritual and more positive possibilities of the traditional African life. Impressed by the way of life of the Aiyeros, he is soon converted. Iriyise his girlfriend and a highly impressionistic young lady with an instinctive spirituality is naturally drawn to this new way of life. Their "conversion" fills them with dreams of how to create a new social order based upon the moral and spiritual possibilities represented by the Aiyero.

In "Buds", Soyinka presents another reality which is in sharp contrast to the focus in "Seminal". Thus, in terms of a point of view explicitly fertilized by the actual historical realities, he presents through dislogue and mock action, the various groups and characters whose conflicting pursuit of self interest form, as we shall show later, the dialectical conflict of values which constitutes the source of the social tragedy. The chairman of the monopolistic Cocoa Corporation, Chief Batoki, the Cartel Superstructure,

the army, the corrupt police, the government trouble shooters, who take the law into their hands, are all comically brought together in the presentation of the gigantically wasteful[1] party given by Chief Batoki himself. Using an explicit satiric approach, the scene is presented to express a vision of a kind of self interest typical of Chief Nanga in A man of the People, and which goes hand in hand with tragic irresponsibility.

Dramatically, the central piece of the narrative action of this section is Ofeyi and Iriyise's masque of the Cocoa Pod.[2] This had been designed as a means for the advertisement and promotion of the Cocoa Industry. But in the structure of the novel the incident serves two functions. First it reveals to the reader Ofeyi and Iriyise's rebellious activities to undermine the policies of the Cocoa Corporation. Second, the context of the display performance also shows the extent to which the entire social ferment has become permeated with authoritarian agents and oppressive instruments of the Cartel and the military regime. Ofeyi's show results in his arrest[3]

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1. Season of Anomy, pp. 42ff.

2. Season of Anomy, pp. 50-52.

3. Season of Anomy, p. 53.

and bogus trial and the eventual abduction of Iriyico.[1]

While the main focus of "Buds" is the imaginative representation of the beginning and causes of rampant violence in a society on a road to self destruction, "Tentacles" deals mainly with the outbreak of anarchy precipitated by militant group interest. In this section, the decay of man's moral sensibility and of the breakdown of the entire social order are revealed in an explicitly shocking manner that enacts the satirical dimension of the story. The Aiyero community and all that it stands for are senselessly made the victim of the terrorism of the Cartel.

"Harvest" and "Forces" are dramatic presentations of the intensifying spread of murders and holocaust which result from man's rejection of his humanity. Treated in the form of Ofeyi's search for the abducted Iriyico, it evokes scenes of "Anomy" large scale killings, bloated bodies, and terrorised victims in camps and hiding places in which their treatment are fearfully reminiscent of the brutal conduct of Natsi guards of the concentration camps. Through the

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[1]*Ibid., p. 61

orchestration of the action, the presentation of the behaviour of the Cartel and its underground agents, the section recreates dramatically, a reign of anarchy in which the "victim" is not only the individual, but the very survival of civilisation itself. Not only was Iriyise - artist and symbol of beauty and creativity in the world of the novel seized[1] for lustful motives, but even the Aiyero community, the only positive force in this fallen world is made the target of the terrorism and wasteful victimisation. As Pa Ahimo sorrowfully asserts

> (Iri was just a personal bomb...They were after the men of Aiyero everywhere...But they had to hide it by unleashing death far and wide.) [2]

The presentation of narrative action and imagery in Season of Anomy in the form we have indicated is not merely for sensational effects. These have been determined by two insistent interests - the presentation of "a historical vision"[3] and the

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[1]. Seized by Zaki Acuri for his lustful purposes.

[2]. Season of Anomy, p. 159.

[3]. See Wole Soyinka's "The Writer in a modern African State." A speech delivered at the 1967 Writer's Conference in Stockholm. Published in When the Man Died views, reviews, interviews on Wole Soyinka ed. John Agetua (Bendel Newspaper Corporation, Benin City)., p. 29.

recreation of a mythopoetic framework[1] that intensifies and universalises the local experience.

III

Towards "A Historic Vision"

In a speech[2] he delivered in Stockholm in 1967 (the period of the beginning of the Nigerian civil war treated in Season of Anomy) Wole Soyinka speaks of the need for the African writer to maintain what he calls a "historic vision." By this he means a literary approach that deals specifically with the objective re-assessment of the moral and cultural achievement of the African in his socio-historical past. It implies not only the re-examination of the whole phenomenon of humanity, but also the total acceptance of the human heritage.

In his essay "Ideology and social vision"[3] Wole Soyinka raises the issues underlying this "historic vision" in a question which he puts thus: 'What is the authentic vision of the African

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1. See p. 291 of this thesis.

2. "The writer in a modern African State" op. cit. As may be seen from our study, Wole Soyinka's ideas in this speech (which clearly reflect the anger and shock he must have felt during his detention in the prison) have naturally been given imaginative expression in Season of Anomy.

3. Wole Soyinka, "Ideology and Social Vision in Myth, Literature, and the African World (London, Cambridge University Press 1976), p. 105.

world before the impact of the destructive culture?'
According to Wole Soyinka, this question is posed in a creative context not merely to provide an opportunity for "a studied repudiation" of any idealised reconstruction of the African past and culture, it is to lead towards "a reassessment of contemporary Africa and its cultural equipment" as an indirect means towards "racial progress".[1] Further, it is also an expression of Wole Soyinka's concern with the depiction of a universal vision of man's humanistic achievement, taking into account his ashes and glory. As he tries to argue:

> The situation in Africa today is the same as in the rest of the world: it is not one of the tragedies which come of isolated human tragedies, but the very collapse of humanity.[2]

Wole Soyinka's animus in the presentation of African general social-cultural performance in Season of Anomy seems to stem

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[1]. Speaking about the writer in a modern African State, Wole Soyinka observes: "The test of the narrowness or breath of his vision however, is whether it is his accidental situations which he tries to stretch to embrace his society and race or the fundamental truths of his community which inform his vision and enable him to acquire even a prophetic insight into the evolution of that society."

[2]. Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State", loc. cit

from two perceptions. First is his belief that generally, the contemporary African writer has failed to justify his true role as a writer. He has done nothing to show that he is even aware of the awful collapse of human values in his glorification of the past. Secondly, as a result of what he experienced during the civil war, Wole Soyinka seems to believe that in actual fact, the blackman is not a better human being than the whiteman in the capacity for savegery, greed and bestiality. This he believes is what any black South-African would immediately understand if he manages to escape into any other black African territory. As he puts it:

> And he sees and understands for the first time that given equal opportunity, the black tin god a few thousand miles north of him would degrade and dehumanise his victims as capably as Vorster and Governor Wallace. This fact has been ever present, this knowledge is not new, and the only wonder is that the romancer, the intellectual mythmaker has successfully deleted this 'black portion of a common human equation and the intermittent European exercise in genecode has been duplicated in the African continent admittedly on lower scale but only because of the temporary lack of scientific organisation. [1]

Throughout the course of the novel, Wole Soyinka projects

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[1]. Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State" op. cit.

and treats this "historical" vision as a leit-motif which is amplified through direct statements reinforced by the form and texture of his narrative images. The behaviour of the contemporary African political leaders and regimes is seen as a repetition of the pattern of selfishness and inhumanity of the past:

> Ofeyi was somewhat surprised at the passion of his resentment. The pattern was wearisomely clear, familiar. A violent change of government the new leaders courted recognition from neighbouring power, offered dowry in the form of wanted fugitives from that area of repression. Sometimes trussed and wrapped like mailbags. And dossiers complete with aliases, photos, activities and lists of connections. Dirty deals, the old bargaining in human flesh, a slave market among the middle men of the black continent; perpetuating their historic role in a lucrative betrayal of their own skin and flesh. It boiled down to this, neither more, nor less, sustaining the putrid form of power with a market in flesh and internal slave route lined in shameless sophistries. [1]

The element of social criticism in the reconstruction of the past has been the preoccupation of a small but very significant number of African novelists and dramatists notably, Yambo Ouologuem in Bound to Violence,[2] Ayi Kwei Armah in Two Thousand

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[1]. Season of Anomy, p. 103.

[2]. Yambo Ouologuem Bound to Violence (Paris Seuil, 1968).

Seasons and The Beautiful ones are not yet born.[1] In these novels, a major concern of the narrative form is the critical and generally unflattering examination of the African creative and moral performance in both past and present and in connection with what may happen in the future. For instance, in his novel Bound to Violence, Yambo Ouologuem has repudiated in an uncomfortably uncompromising manner, the myth of the nobility of the African historical past in terms of an extremely chilling exposure of the crushing brutalities perpetrated not only by European and Arab slave dealers on Africans but also by African Chiefs and Sheiks on fellow Africans. In their form and point of view, Yambo Ouologuem and Ayi Kwei Armah's novels seem to lack the element of ambivalence in their almost too explicit and thoroughgoing devaluation of the African historical past and social psychology.

Wole Soyinka seems to have felt[2] this limitation and in the composition of Season of Anomy, he seems to have borne in mind the need for an artistic ambivalence in which the negative and positive realities of African cultural history are

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1. Yambo Ouologuem Bound to Violence (Paris, Seuil, 1968).

2. Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World, op. cit., p. 106.

imaginatively conveyed in an appropriate narrative form. The novel realises this perspective through the dramatic presentation of two kinds of societal forces - the creative, symbolised in the humanism and spirituality of the Aiyero community, and the destructive, represented by the anarchic activities of Chief Biga, Chief Batoki and Zaki Amuri the patron of the Cartel. The narrative focus upon these two conflicting forces of order and disorder, of the creative and the destructive, represents a cyclic or "periodic"[1] phenomenon which Wole Soyinka sees as constituting the pattern of human history which he believes is expressed in the Yoruba myth of Ogun.[2] Although the stylistic organisation of Season of Anomy is such that there is a focus upon the possibilities of moral goodness in the African world, it is the power of darkness, the total destruction of moral values that the denouement of the novel celebrates. Indeed, Season of Anomy surpasses its precursor, Yambo Ouologuem's Bound to Violence in its unrelieved pessimism and chilling images of social decadence

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[1]. See Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World op. cit. p. 37-38.

[2]. Ibid., pp. 40ff.

IV

Vision and Narrative Style

Wole Soyinka's interest in the presentation of his "historical vision" on a panoramic scale seem to have led him not only towards the conception of the theme of the novel, but also to a rather cavalier use of a number of stylistic modes capable of conveying the gravity and feel of the subject matter. Some of the most striking of these stylistic forms include (a) characterisation, (b) the distortion of the immediate narrative experience through the use of flashback, (c) the mythopoetic presentation of the geographical locus of the action and the sustained use of evocative imagary. Each of these stylistic forms gives the novel its distinctive aesthetic form. They also indicate the nature and quality of Soyinka's craftmanship as a novelists as well as the source of the strength and limitation of Season of Anomy as a novel.

Unlike James Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat, Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty and Achebe's A Man of the People in which the presentation of characters and personality is distinctively in terms of the examination of personal motives in relation to

the satiric interest and verisimilitude, Soyinka's representation of his characters is "externalistic", rather than being "interiorized", and dealing with the personal emotions of the characters in their response to the overwhelming ethos of violence in which the characters finds themselves.

While this has enhanced the readers perception of the vision of the novel it has also driven Soyinka towards making his characters more abstract than sensuous and sharply individuated. The rather overwhelming ethos of social anarchy in which they live, the impossibility of any chance of living full and purposeful personal life in which they could manifest themselves in appropriate action seem to deprive the characters of the necessary element of vitality and typicality which the characters of Achebe, Amadi, and Okpewo achieve. For instance, the novel presents nine major characters: Ofeyi, Iriyise, Chief Batoki, Pa Ahime, Zaccheus the Dentist, the Indian mystic-girl Taila, her brother the doctor, and Mr. Nnodi. But the major interest in the presentation of these characters is that each of them functions essentially as a consciousness for "mirroring" the elemental forces of

destruction in their world. Thus, although Ofeyi has some personal relationships with each of these characters, this relationship is not developed beyond the rather vague level of socio-political discussions. Soyinka's presentation of Mr. Nnodi[1] the engineer and non-native of Cross River working as employer of the mining trust located in Cross River area is the most personal approach to characterisation in the novel. The presentation of his personal ambitions in the novel, his obsequious character and the final brutal annihilation of his family, - an incident that mocks his ambitious nature, are details that express with universality the sufferings of individuals in a period of war.

For most of the other characters, however, there is not the same level of specificity and subtle touches of details. One of the negative effects of this approach to characterisation is that the characters remain "distanced" from the reader. They have not sufficient personal identity and redognisable traits that provide enough basis for the reader's sympathetic response to them as human beings. Thus, although Iriyise is a major character of central thematic significance in the novel, she remains like most of the characters a shadowy symbolic figure.

When we are finally told at the end that she was tortured and hidden away in the midst of the lepers and lunatics of Tomato prison our reaction is not as poignant as it could be.

Whatever may be the limitation of the artistic presentation of Ofeyi, Iriyise and most of the characters of the novel, the style of presentation adopted serve to bring into the foreground two aspects of Wole Soyinka's historical vision, namely, the emasculation of the individual and his aspirations by the outward pressures of social disorder. Second is the sense of inter-group conflict which is treated as an important dimension of the African socio-political world. Thus in a manner reflective of the historical facts of the Nigerian civil war, the characterisation highlights the realities of group conflict - the tensions between various tribal groups and between various social classes as these worked as root-causes of the extraordinary hatred and brutality displayed in the civil war. The role of these groups as dramatis personae in the war are cleverly conveyed through allusions to geographical areas, social groups and particular behaviour of characters. The Cross Rivers people's rationale for their horrifying massacres derives from rather tribalistic

sentiments expressed in their hatred of foreigners in their midst. There is also a suggestion of the feet of corruption and graft by particular social class or group referred to in the novel as the "Cocoa Corporation." Thus, characterised by its militant greediness they constitute themselves into a group of bourgeois exploiters who connive with the army, the police and other government agents to enrich themselves and protect their own interests. In the presentation of the conduct of these interacting groups, Wole Soyinka recreates a vivid picture of the shockingly callous attitude of one social or ethnic group to another. The tense atmosphere of political tensions, hatred, uncertainty, and cynicism which becomes the consciousness of the characters is evoked persistently in the readers imagination through various images, action or statements such as :-

> "Whoever first invites the other to death' said the Dentist, 'literally has his cake and eats it. For the recipient to pretend non-recognition of the invitation is to accept his own demise. To accept it is to meet the first man on his own terms. To misinterpret it is to deny one's intelligence, in which case to lose our sense of wholeness after, which is a form of death. In exchange for the surrender.....

we receive a permit to remain alive, but
it is really a certificate of death." [1]

The merciless massacres of various individuals, the persecution of Aiyero community and the brutal massacre of Mr. Bhodi's family, the burning down of non-natives by the Cross River people are insistently conveyed by Wole Soyinka as reflective of the tragic loss of moral sensibility and the loss of the traditional humanism which is often romantically considered as expression of the Blackman's instinctive spirituality, and his contribution to the spiritual regeneration of man and the orderly development of a humane civilisation.[2]

V

(b) Wole Soyinka and the "Stream of Consciousness" Novel: Flashbacks

The approach to character presentation in this novel is reminiscent of the way in which Wole Soyinka's satiric interest

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1. Season of Anomy, p. 133 - 134.

2. Wole Soyinka "The writer in a Modern African State" op. cit.

affect the presentation of characters in his first novel The Interpreters. Indeed in many respects, Season of Anomy reveals the same problems of narrative form and style of the earlier novel. One particular respect in which this continuity of style and form can be felt by the reader is the inability of the novelist to resolve the difficulties of welding the aesthetics of narrative covenant to the complexity of the issues being treated. In The Interpreters, for example, Wole Soyinka had shown a definite leaning towards the narrative structure of the typical stream of consciousness novel, especially in his recourse to the use of space and time montage. Through the distortion of the plot-line of the story, and the evocation of the past of the characters, he seeks to make the past of the characters a continuing reality in their consciousness and present actions. This insistent interest coupled with the continuous shift of the narrative focus from character to character and from one spatial-temporal framework to another, has led a number of critics to suggest that the narrative logic of the novel is in the tradition of the stream of consciousness novel.

Considered in its finer details however, Soyinka's novel is not strictly in line with the stream of consciousness novel.

Writing of the "stream of consciousness" novel, David Daiches observes:

> Looked at from one point of view, the "stream of consciousness technique is a means of escape from the tyranny of the time dimension. It is not only in distinct memories that the past impinges upon on the present, but also in much vaguer and more subtle ways, our mind floating off down some channel superficially irrelevant but really having a definite starting-off place from the initial situation; so that in presenting the characters' reactions to events, the author will show us states of mind being modified by associations and recollections derived from the present situation (in a sense creating the present situation, but referring us to a constantly shifting series of event in the past... [1]

Soyinka's primary interest in The Interpreters is a principle not of this type. The affinity which the Interpreters has with the modernist techniques of narration results from Soyinka's interest to reflect the sense of the continuing influence of the cultural past of the characters on their present choices and behaviour. Further, the shifting focus of the novel is also a direct result of the novelist's attempt to present a

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[1] David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960, Revised Edition, chapter 2, pp.16-17.

broad view of the society, bringing successively into the foreground, the activities of the new 'elites' of the university campus, the traditional rulers, the politicians, and the young generation groping towards their true place in life and society.

As in The Interpreters, the techniques of narration employed in Season of Anomy reflects the influence of modernist narrative methods, while in actual fact the novel is largely traditional in its basically linear chronological structure. In this respect, there is a continuation of some of the narrative methods and problems of The Interpreters, even though there is a sense of development towards the achievement of much more integrated experience, and the sustained and patterned use of evocative images.

In his narration, Soyinka has introduced a number of narrative techniques which disturb the narrative continuity of the story. These distortions are in the form of imaginings of the past or sort of flashbacks. The first occurs in pp. 89 - 92. After hearing the shocking news of Iriyise's abduction by

the Cartel, Ofeyi now naturally grieved and despendent of her life is taken by Pa Ahime into a secluded pool used by the Aiyero community as a sanctuary 'to recover himself'.[1] In his seclusion, Ofeyi's mind goes into past history and brings into the reader's consciousness, his own view of the quality of the African past. From page 92 starting with "magic mirrors"[2] the narrative takes us into another kind of past - the experience of Ofeyi by recreating nostalgic memories of his encounter with the Indian girl Taiila. Thus through 93 - 104, the narrative presents in a rather inchoate manner Ofeyi's encounter with her at an unspecified airport during his trip abroad, and the gradual growth of a relationship between them.

Formally each of these dislocations of the chronological sequence of the action are not presented as reflective of the movement of the consciousness of the characters in the manner typical of the methods of either James Joyce or Virginia Woolf in which these modes are deployed to depict pre-speech consciousness and its myriad of impressions which blend both

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1. Season of Anomy, 90ff.

2. Ibid., p. 89

past and present in a unified consciousness. In the novel, Soyinka uses these incidents and the occasional manipulation of cinematic techniques largely to project and enhance our understanding of the central social historical vision of the novel. The first flashback presents in an articulated manner Soyinka's extremely non-idealized view of the African past - a past that stinks of slaves, gold, oil, the old wars, sightless skulls, blood and sweat"[1]... "their rooted deeds, thoughts, values, tears, bile and putrescent memories[2], and despair and the impossibility of change.

The second flashback of the encounter with the religious girl Tailla fits into the thematic structure of the novel in the particular respect that through it Wole Soyinka examines a number of possible routes out of the vicious cycle of brutality. Three solutions are presented. First is the way of Aiyero community - the way of passive goodness - non-violence and spirituality. Second is the way of the anarchic dentist". His philosophy of revolutionary violence as expressed in an organised counter-active killings of members of the Cartel is

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1. Ibid., p. 90.

2. Ibid., p. 91.

insistently reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's ideology of violence as a mode of liberation of Africa from the trappings of neo-colonialism. Between the way of the Aiyero and the dentist is the approach of the Indian mystical girl Tailla. For her, the way of peace and man's self-fulfilment lies in his search for the infinite and his acceptance of his "metaphysical fate." The narration in the novel is, however, not of the kind that suggests that it is really Wole Soyinka's interest to offer a solution to the problems of contemporary society in such terms as these. The novel is neither a celebration of the dentist's anarchist belief in the use of violence for controlling violence nor of Aiyero or Tailla's acceptance of suffering. Instead, these are treated merely as suppressed motifs in the novel. The final denouement of the novel shows, as we point out later, an extremely pessimistic affirmation of not only the collapse of humanity, but the impossibility of the survival of the basis of civilisation. The presentation of these ideas in terms of flashbacks and dialogues provide additional perspective for viewing the moral dilemmas which the narrative action develops.

The links creatively established between the use of memory and flashback and the theme of the novel is a measure of how

far Wole Soyinka like other major Nigerian novelists can use pre-established narrative techniques for specific and locally based creative interests. Thus, although he occasionally resorts to the use of memory and flashbacks, in a style that has some semblance with the post Proustian novel, the use to which he puts this type of technique is uniquely his own - the expression of contemporary African socio-historical performance.

Generally, Soyinka's method of narration does not seem to permit a realistic depiction of scenes and situations which provide the background of his narrative action. This aspect is so evident in the presentation of the situation of Aiyero community, Ilosa, Cross River country, and Temoke prison.

The major reason for this is that in his narration Soyinka puts almost too much emphasis upon the use of dialogue as a context for the evocation of experiences which advance the theme of his novel. The imaginative use of dialogue which insistently reflects Soyinka's experience in the theatre adds dramaturgic significance to the narration. But it also leads inevitably towards the minimisation of the element of narration. It also involves the delimitation of the realistic emphasis on

scenic description which in a novel works to recreate our sense of the location of action and hence facilitates our emotional and intellectual response to the experience. The imaginative presentation of Temoke prison illustrates the strength and limitation of Soyinka's style of novelistic presentation.

> "Ofeyi's eyes roamed across the yard to a distant barbed-wire topped wall. Was that the legendary wall? There was an unbroken roll of barbed wire held in position by evenly spaced bars, V-shaped on the top of that wall. The wires thus formed a V-tunnel. Perhaps it was the wall, it fitted the description he had heard that day when the pattern of unsanctioned traffic had been reversed and the world was trying to break into a citadel of astricism. They beat on Temoke's gates as soon as other flood-gates were opened to terror and death. The animal noise of fear, the crowd whimper when the last exit is tried and that also is sealed...a sound so tangible he felt he could touch it.
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> A new sound appeared to come from the ceiling fan, a mixture of asthmatic wheeze and a panting dog... Ofe turned round. It was only Suberu's unique way of breathing. Ofeyi stirred his cocoa aimlessly and sipped the tepid mixture." [1]

The characteristic process of narration is one in which narrative action and background mutually highlights the symbolic

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1. Season of Anomy, p. 209ff.

nature of each other. Our bearing is ill-defined. In terms of this poetic approach the narrative renders the country in which the conflict takes place poetic, and hence situating the reader's consciousness in a mythical landscape of destruction. While this narrative style invests the novel with a highly suggestive power, the novel by the same token takes the reader's capacity to understand the course of the action. In particular, it raises the critical issue of the extent to which a novelist can be indifferent to the realistic presentation of the background of his narrative action without impairing, seriously, the intelligibility of his story.

In spite of the kind of stylistic limitations which we have indicated, Season of Anomy is very much a classic. It is easily the most powerful African novel to date. A major source of its achieved narrative power and significance is what has been described above as Soyinka's effective use of highly graphic narrative incidents and images. In a form that is quite peculiar to Soyinka's vision and method, the use of imagery and incidents do not seem determined only by the desire to capture actual historical events and the character of the war. Throughout the novel, images are specially conceived and set up to convey in a very striking manner, the savagery and mind-

lessness of man. In particular, the images show a deliberate focus upon putrescence, death and terror. The description of the burning of the church[1] with innocent victims including pregnant women, the shooting of foreigners with barbed arrows, and the images of wells and rivers littered with bursting dead bodies hauled into them to save the labour of burial are typical of the texture of imagery which express in a single instant the novelist's intense satiric approach and his interest in historical documentation. As the novel moves towards its dramatic close in "Spores", the prose becomes increasingly littered with these kinds of images that electrify the reader's sensibility as in the following description of the burning of the church at Kuntua:

> The screams appeared to come from a long long way below earth. Loud crackles as if of sudden downpour on overheated metal sheets accompanied, then drowned them. Fumes from the petrol set up an unearthly haze high above the roof. Two kites were conjured up from an empty sky and hovered above the human kiln. Ludicrously the folk-tale to explain this homing of kites of fires passed through Ofeyi's mind.
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> An iron sheet burst its moorings, flapped grotesquely in the flames. As if this had been perceived by the trapped people and was accepted for a signal, some half-dozen windows flew open, smashed through as before by wielded pews. A general assault on other windows and doors began and the sound of battering-rams now mingled with the general roar of the flames ....

> It was a moment the attackers had awaited. As the first man leapt out an arrow flew towards the flames, transfixed him briefly. The figure staggered, recovered balance and fled towards imagined safely. More followed him, and so did the steady procession of arrows, thudding into their targets and wringing execrations from their lips. The last man turned, pulling at the shaft embedded in his throat and, crazed by the pain tried to clamber back into the inferno. Another arrow struck him in the spine and he shuddered, fell over the sill and hung there as flames licked his clothes and soon engulfed him completely.1

The evocation of sheer barbaric behaviour is obvious. The use of arrows as weapons, the manner of shooting them at the human targets are shocking. These narrative images are startling recreations of the de-humanisation of both killers and victims alike. In the context of the Nigerian novel, these images are also new in the sense that no other novel, including the war novels evokes the horror, shock and brutality characteristic of them. Soyinka's method is exaggeration and intensification that tend towards the macabre. What is quite striking in the passage is that through the use of these forms of images, Season of Anomy reads impressively and realistically like "a war novel". Further, it not only affects one as a war novel, but also as a tale of terror and genocide. Decomposition and the loss of the sense of the sanctity of life are presented

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1. Season of Anomy, pp. 199-200

in a way that suggests that quality of terror which Joyce defines in The portrait of the Artist as a Young-man:

> Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with its secret cause. 1

Through Soyinka's style, it is not so much the spectacle that shocks and perplexes the reader. It is the depravity of the soldiers and agents of the Cartel who are responsible for the assaults on life. In his strikingly suggestive use of language, the towering prison of Temoke, its unfolding labyrinthine interiors, the lepers, the lunatics, and the defilement of Iriyise in this environment function as highly symbolic references charged with satiric meaning.

VI

Soyinka: Myth and Social Vision

Soyinka's use of a network of narrative symbols of

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1. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man, Penguin Books 1966, Section 5, p. 204.

striking suggestive power serve to transform the novel from the level of satire and documentary into a novelistic form in which myth and allegory are used to interpret national experience. Ofeyi's journey through the bizarre landscape of the novel is not simply the literal search for Iriyise. It represents an entry into the soul of man, revealing as in Conrad's Heart of Darkness an unutterable savagery and bestiality. What the novel thus recreates is a mythical experience - a mythical journey through a wasteland.

The form of the mythical mode which Wole Soyinka has drawn upon to convey the totality of his vision is difficult to define in simple terms. This is because what he has utilized is not only a single myth but a fusion of several mythical motifs derived from both the African as well as the classical literary background. In his discussion of the novel Eustace Palmer[1] has posited the Orpheus-Euridice

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[1]. Eustace Palmer's argument is that "Ofeyi and Iriyise are intended to be Nigerian variants of the legend of Orpheus and Euridice". See E. Palmer The Growth of the African Novel. (Heinemann, London, 1979), p. 281.

myth as the integrative element in the novels. In his own independent study, Izevbaye has similarly advanced the notion of Wole Soyinka imaginative use of this myth. Expressing his views he observes:

> It will be observed from this summary of plot that the outlines of the Orpheus myth are strongly pronounced in Season of Anomy, and that Soyinka abandoned the veiled allusiveness of The Interpreters for an explicitness which ensures that no reader will miss the deliberate focus on the social significance of the myth. 1

Ofeyi's role as presented in the plot-movement of the novel, Soyinka's own educational background, the allusions to Greek myth in The Man Died, along with other correspondences clearly establish the relevance of the Orpheus myth in the interpretation of the experience presented in the novel. However, to take this as the basic mythical concept that animates the novel is to ignore the insistently domestic origins of the mythical vision that fertilizes the novel, enhancing its social relevance, vision and the evolution of its symbolical language. This is the myth of Ogun as formulated and celebrated in Yorubaland. Essential to this myth is the

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1. D. Izevbaye "Soyinka's Black Orpheus" in Neo-African Literature and Culture: Essays in memory of Jahnheinz Jahn, eds. B. Lindfors and Ulla Schilds. (B. Heymann, Mainz, 1976), p. 153.

character of Ogun[1] in whom a number conflicting principles of being are maintained in a tension that demands resolution as a condition of its continuing being. Ogun is the god of creativity, an artist who taught man the art of metallurgy and smithing. But he is also the god of war, an irascible destroyer. One of the qualities and source of the dignity of Ogun as a god in the Yoruba pantheon is his control of the negative aspects of his personality to achieve a state of fitness for living in the society of men and other gods.[2]

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[1]. Soyinka's early fascination with this indigenous myth of Ogun and his many contradictory qualities is first made manifest in several contexts: in his essay "The Fourth Stage" and "Ideology and social vision I", now published in Myth Literature and the African world, op.cit, and in his interview with John Agetua in Interviews with six Nigerian writers, op. cit. In these contexts, Wole Soyinka discusses the complex mode of being of this divinity and the relationship of his nature to the Cosmic order and the conditions of tragic experience. Two aspects of his personality provide the source of the fascination which this divinity has for the novelist. First in his Promithean role as benefactor of man - the artist, and creator, - which express the positive and creative will in Nature. Second, is the violent, - the destructive, which express the negative aspect of his nature. In addition, there is also the novelist's keen awareness of the existence of these contradictory moral qualities in man as an individual, and in the society of which he is a member.

[2]. Rev. B. Idowu: Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief (Longmans, London, 1962), pp. 85ff.

The most significant aspect of Wole Soyinka's creative adaptation of this myth to modern experience, and what relates his use of it to his historical vision is the introduction of the central motif of man's inability to resolve and balance the two opposing halves of his sensibility through the transcendence of his antisocial nature. Wole Soyinka had described this reality as the "collapse of humanity."[1] The tragedy which his myth of Ogun expresses is man's continuous reification of the negative polarity of his being through his self surrender to the destructive impulses inherent in his nature. The use of imagery and incidents in Season of Anomy, and Madmen and Specialists is not only a chilling expression of man's self dehumanisation; the images are suggestive of how through his instinctive self dehumanisation, man

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1. Wole Soyinka "The Writer in A Modern African State". op. cit.

has created a diseased and irredeemably sick world, - a world of lepers, lunatics, prisoners,[1] cannibalistic wall geckos and lizards,[2] in which the socialising institutions, the law courts, justice, government, life, and culture have become nothing but a mockery of their true nature and values.

The perception of the elemental instincts of destruction and selfishness inherent in man has introduced into Wole Soyinka's vision the quest motif - the search for a restorative energy capable of taming the negative forces of society, and providing a remedy for social ills. It is at this level of awareness that the mythical motif of Orpheus and Eurydice expressed in terms of Ofoyi and Iriyise enters into the narrative structure of Season of Anomy. It is also in this respect that it enters into Soyinka's other works.[3] Iriyise and Ofoyi, Euridice and

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[1]. Season of Anomy, pp. 300ff.

[2]. The man died, pp. 263ff.

[3]. In Wole Soyinka's other novels and plays, notably, A Dance of the Forest, Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialists and The Interpreters, certain characters are consciously created whose role is to symbolise moral positives against the oppressing background of social decadence. It is they who by their resilience, by their determination against oppressive forces can bring order and life to society. The fact that these Promethean spirits like Sekoni, Ofoyi, and Iriyise are overcome provides the tragic pathos in the works.

Orpheus and the god Ogun as variants of the same motif, are symbols of the creative spirit and of moral consciousness. They are the saving energy of society and who society ironically oppresses and rejects in spite of the fact that it is they who constitute the source of society's sanity and continued existence. The ideal which these artists represent is that of resilience, the synthesis of the opposing qualities of strife and creativity - "the chanelling of anguish into creative purpose which releases man from destructive despair."[1]

The kind of narrative form which emerges from Soyinka's style of narration is one that inseparably welds a humanistic vision with the historical experience of the Nigerian civil war. This achieved novel form can be described analogically in terms of the narrative form which Marvin Mudrick has referred to as "double plot" in his analysis of Joseph Conrad's originality in Heart of Darkness. By this notion, Mudrick suggests the idea of a kind of narrative form which is

> neither allegory (where surface meaning is something teasing to be got through) nor a catch...

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[1] Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage" in Wole Soyinka, Myth Literature and the African World. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, p. 146.

> all symbolism (where every particle signifies some universal or other) but a developing order of actions so lucidly symbolic of a developing state of spirit...from moment to moment, so morally identifiable...as to suggest the condition of allegory without forefeiting the realistic claims of the actions and their actors.1

To describe the narrative form of Season of Anomy in terms of this specific notion of "double plot" could be misleading. As our analysis shows, we do not have in the narration, a main plot and a sub-plot as in Middlemarch, but only one linear set of plotted action with Ofeyi's experiences as its focus. However, the texturing of this narrative form insistently invites two ways of reading this experience. First there is what we can refer to as an "extrinsic" reading in which we can locate the meaning of the novel in terms of the immediate historical and political background of the Nigerian civil war. But parallel with this, the novel also solicits an "intrinsic" reading in which Ofeyi's frustrated humanistic dreams function as a powerful poetic symbol of the destruction of spiritual values in an à-moral world.

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1. Marvin Mudrick "The originality of Conrad" in The Hudson Review XI, No. 4, (Winter 1958-59). rpt. in Marvin Mudrick ed. Conrad A Collection of critical essays. Twentieth century views (Eaglewood, Cliffs N.J.), Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 38.

The vision Wole Soyinka presents, the mythical mode adopted and the relationship of these to contemporary Nigerian moral predicament indicate the essentially humanistic nature of Wole Soyinka's contribution to the growth of the Nigerian novel. Characteristic of the kind of interest which he offers are the two qualities already highlighted. First and most striking is the insistent imaginative use of contemporary socio-historical experience as a mode for giving local interest and social relevance to the novel. Second is the high order of creative power and moral fervour which he displays in the formal and stylistic orchestration of the novel.

Although Wole Soyinka's handling of novelistic form is in itself significant on account of its overall aesthetic effects, Soyinka's real importance in the development of Nigerian fiction lies ultimately in the nature of the profoundly serious human awareness which he brings into his narrative art. His acute awareness of the lack of moral integrity in the modern African world generally, and particularly in Nigeria, has led him not only towards the evolution of his own narrative style in <u>The Man Died</u>, The

Interpreters, and Season of Anomy, but also to the conception of the role of the African writer today.

As he has always maintained:

> The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and the voice of vision in his own time. 1

As he has further stated in his essay, "The choice and use of Language":

> The writer is the visionary of the people. He recognises past and present not for the purpose of enshrinement but for the logical creative glimpse and restatement of the ideal future. He anticipates and he warns. 2

For the effective realisation of this kind of goal he maintains, and indeed, has also realised in Season of Anomy that a book if possible must be such that it can hit the reader like "a hammer", shaking him from his state of moral neutrality.

What the foregoing analysis of Wole Soyinka's

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1. "The Writer in a Modern African State" op. cit.

2. "The Choice and use of Language" Cultural Events in Africa (London LXXV 1966), pp. 3-5.

vision in Season of Anomy shows, is that in spite of the highly sophisticated use which he makes of the English language and the complexity of his narrative form, the content of his works are often purposely utilised as a medium for the enlargement of contemporary Nigerian's moral consciousness. Through the fusion of the two aspects of his creative art, the artistic and the moral, and by the suitable choice of themes that are part of the fabric of Nigerian contemporary experience, Wole Soyinka can be described not merely as "an esoteric" writer, concerned only with the expression of his personal myths and experiences. Rather, he has been able to write with a clear consciousness and deep understanding of the socio-political issues of contemporary African life, and with an acceptance of the responsibility of the artist to his society. By actively exploiting a narrative form that expresses these ideals, he has been able to bring both himself and his art in line with the traditional African view of the role of art and the artist in the society.

VII

Isidore Okpewho: The Last Duty

Like Wole Soyinka, many other Nigerian novelists have

been moved to write novels about the Nigerian civil war. The most important of these so far, are those which we have already outlined in the introductory section of this chapter. The significance which a majority of these novels achieve derives largely from the type of experiences of the war proffered by the novelists rather than in a significant addition of new stylistic elements to the communicative modes and general vision of the Nigerian novel as this has evolved so far. A major novel that deserves special consideration is Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty. As a novel it does not have the complexity of depth of vision characteristic of Season of Anomy or Arrow of God. Its value derives from two peculiar and quite significant literary qualities: First and most striking is the novelist's humanistic outlook, that is, his intense concern with social values which he dramatizes and conveys in a way that no other Nigerian novel has done. Secondly, there is also the sheer technical excellence of the novel. Okpewho achieves this through the supreme mastery of the novelistic form which he has adopted

to explore the social issues he is presenting. In our discussion, we shall be mostly concerned with the first of these two aspects. The purpose of this is to suggest that the commitment to the regeneration of social morality which Okpewho skilfully weaves into his treatment of the war experiences is not only a re-affirmation of the humanistic outlook which has been a characteristic feature of the form of the Nigerian novel; it is also an inspiring climax in the expression of this outlook.

What the novel presents effectively is the experience of a number of people during the civil war of July 1966-January 1970. The fictional framework for this experience is the war between the Federal and the Simbian troops.[1] The specific human situation which is presented within this framework is that of the woman Aku, a Simbian lady married to Oshevire, a man in the Federal section. Aku's presence in the federal sector away from her own people provokes naturally

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1. The conflict between the Simbian and Federal troops (The Last Duty p. 4), can easily be read in terms of the confrontation between the Biafran and Federal Army of Nigeria.

hostile reactions from the local Urukpe people who would like to see her lynched or sent to her own people. Aku's position is further complicated by the fact that Chief Toje, the local political leader is jealous of her husband, Oshevire, and arranges to have him jailed in order to secure the opportunity to exploit her.[1] The situation created by these issues generates a pattern of human dilemmas which Ali, the military commandant of the area is called upon to deal with in a way that tests his own conscience and moral calibre.

The narrative organisation of the story makes the novel achieve a dual character. Thus, while basically the story presented is the story of people caught up in the civil war, it is also a recreation of how individuals can struggle to overcome the forces of evil even against a background of very difficult personal circumstances.

VIII

Structure and Technique

A vital aspect of the new interest and level of

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1. The Last Duty, p. 5.

complexity which The Last Duty adds to the growth of the Nigerian novel can be seen in the novelist's recourse to some of the stylistic innovations of the stream of consciousness novel, and the refinement which he brings into his use of these modernist narrative methods. Perhaps the most striking of these is the technique of narration - the use of the multiple point of view. Instead of using the omniscient author point of view deployed in such novels as Arrow of God, The Concubine, or through the eyes of only one of the characters, The Last Duty presents some 48 sections which are purposefully apportioned amongst the characters of the novel. The presentation of experience in the opening section of the novel is firstly in terms of Ali (p3-4) and then Chief Toje (pp.4-6) followed successively by Odibo (pp.6-10), Aku (pp.10-14), Ogbenevo (pp.14-15) and Oshevire (pp.32-42), Ali (15-23) Oshevire (pp.23-32). Through this mode, each of the characters become in turn the personal point of view and consciousness through which both the private as well as the general societal experiences of the period are portrayed. By successively using each of these characters as

the narrative point of view, the novelist tries to recreate the realities of the social political crisis of the period while also illuminating in detail the harrowing personal problems which this traumatic experience brought about.

Coupled with the shifting of the narrative focus from character to character, is the variation of the representational time and space devoted to the analysis of the dramatic experience of the novel. Of the total narrative 243 pages of the novel 53 are devoted to the experiences and motifs associated with Colonel Ali, 32 to Chief Toje 27 to Aku, 46 to Oshevire, and 14 to Oghenevo. The proportioning of these narrative time ratios constitute what may be described as quantitative indicators which throw into relief for the reader, the centrality of the main theme and the relative significance of the various motifs of the novel. The domination of the narrative space and time by the three characters, Ali, Toje and Oshevire, serve to enhance the central theme of justice and the affirmation of social values which provide the controlling basis of

the narrative movement.

This pattern of narration which is effectively used throughout the novel does not of course originate with Isidore Okpewho. In fact, the use of this formal mode is indicative of the influence which the narrative techniques and forms of major European masters of fiction can exert on highly educated African novelists. In particular, Isidore Okpewho's method of shifting the focus of his narrative insistently recalls the narrative procedure of William Faulkner. In his novels especially As I lay Dying[1] and The Sound and the Fury,[2] William Faulkner makes a sophisticated and highly original use of narrative time and the structural format of the traditional novel. He does this by distributing the narrative focus and point of view among several characters each of whom shares in, and responds to a common experience in terms peculiar to their unique individualities and special personal circumstances and sensibility. The aesthetic result of this style of narration is that the reader is given a complete picture of the incidents as experienced through the sensibility of the characters. But while Okpewho's narrative methods insistently looks back to the narrative approach of

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1. W Faulkner, As I Lay Dying. (New York, Cape and Smith.) 1930

2. W Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury. (New York, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith.) 1929

William Faulkner, the specific use to which the form and style of his novel are put is peculiarly his own. Okpewho demonstrates this adaptive vision by conveying insistently through the story his deep concern with human values, and by doing so in a way that is sophisticated, morally inspiring and aesthetically entertaining.

IX

Indeed, central to an appreciation of the aesthetic significance of the novel is his social consciousness, his insistent interest in the themes of duty, honour, and justice which in the novel represent supreme human values and paradigms for individual conduct. In the imaginative development of these themes the presentation of characters and narrative experience are in terms of specific patterns and codes of human behaviour which awaken in the reader, a consciousness of the opposed attitude of people towards honour and justice.

Exemplifying the negative aspects is Chief Toje. His

inflated egoism and indifference to moral scruples are persistently articulated in various incidents of the novel. Expressing the positive is Ali who executes his duties as military commandant of Urukpe with the highest ideal of moral uprightness imaginable in a soldier. Morally and psychologically, he and Chief Toje live in an entirely different world. Presented as other human contexts for the exploration of individual responses to duty are the two characters, Odibo and Okumagba, both of whom are persistently ordered to carry out rather disagreeable duties.[1] Situated in the opposed world of Chief Toje and Colonel Ali is Aku. She is a typical victim of the extenuating circumstances of the war. In a manner that adds considerable complexity to her moral choices is the fact that she is thoroughly destitute materially, and the business of having to provide food for her child is a difficult task made worse by the hostility of the people around her.[2] In this condition, Chief Toje who desires to use her tries

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1. The Last Duty, p. 61.

2. Ibid., p. 6.

strategically to provide for all her needs. Her social and material circumstances create for her the hard and difficult moral dilemma in which the motif of honour is presented not abstractly, but in terms of an exceedingly challenging and realistically conceived situation. Specifically, she becomes confronted with two unpleasant option:- either to preserve her feminine honour and reject Chief Toje's advances and consequently become hungry and defenceless in the midst of her enemies. Else she could compromise herself by yielding as she did to Chief Toje in order to survive.

The formal organisation of the novel is such that it brings into a unified form, the various motifs through which Okpewho dramatizes the intense humanism of the novel. At the centre of these is the theme of moral intergrity, and dedication to duty in the midst of a corrupt and corrupting world. This theme is conveyed through the presentation of Colonel Ali in his uncompromising moral stand against the corrupting forces of egoism and self interest of the world in which he has to operate. Concurrent with the theme associated with Ali, is the motif of Chief Toje. Through this the novel satirises the negative pursuit of corrupt

private interests of many callous individuals who exploit the situation of war for their own sick desires. These two basic motifs are conveyed and gradually developed in the course of the narrative action towards the catastrophic fight between Chief Toje and his servant and go between Odibo.

The fierce and brutal fight between Odibo[1] and Chief Toje express two ironic patterns that develop and interpret the theme of the novel. First, and presented as the dramatic source of the incident, is the fact that, Odibo in spite of his physical deformity, and low social status, has virility - an intense manhood which the boastful Chief Toje has not. Thus, where Chief Toje had tried unsuccessfully to make love to Ake, Odibo successfully spends a night of ecstatic love making with Aku.[2] Although this knowledge is not fully disclosed to Toje, who merely suspects the incident, the reader knows the facts and makes this ironic reversal a vital aspect of his imaginative response to the story. The inciting circumstances in which Toje meets Aku and Odibo prove too provocative for Toje who had sought to

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[1]. See Section "Ali" pp. 215ff.

[2]. <u>The Last Duty</u> "Odibo" p. 179.

use Aku as his property. Brute force rather than a cool and morally fitting action becomes his response. Not only does his feverish and violent performances in the fight show how ironically unmanly physically he is, but also, he is actually beaten and humiliated in the hands of a servant he had treated like a slave.

Further, the treatment of the fight which resolves the relationship between the two men indicates through the evocation of pain, how the two men become in the long run victims of their passions, suspicions, and selfish designs. Chief Toje's eventual death in the hands of his much despised servant is part of the pattern of complex ironies which express the moral vision of the novel. What is most immediately obvious is not merely the ironic reversal, but the pain and suffering which they inflict upon themselves and how they become victims of their own inordinate selfish schemings.

Aku herself is caught in the ironic fate which befall her lovers for she too is exposed, and not only exposed but she soon finds herself the cause of this unnecessary suffering. But her punishment as the narrative action further unfolds, is not a question of the exposure and the suffering which results from her unfaithfulness. It is the torment of her

psychological[1] anxieties at knowing that even though no one else knows, she is still the cause of whatever hardship befalls everybody. Although faced with a difficult situation which she has to cope with, tradition has it that she could not receive such favours from Toje let alone allow Odibo to have his way. Even when the novel ends, it is not clear whether she regains her happiness.[2]

X

While for a less gifted novelist, the explicit humanism of the novel could easily have limited its literary quality and significance, this danger is skillfully avoided. This is achieved through a number of stylistic features.

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1. The Last Duty, p. 238.

2. What we see is her repentance and attempts to regain her husband's love.

Prominent amongst these is Okpewho's emphasis upon a number of personal experiences which he presents as the focal issues in the life of the characters. With this type of literary emphasis, Okpewho seems to present his characters persistently in terms of peculiarly painful experiences or perplexing moral choices.

In Chief Toje's case the pain is his waning virility - his inability to have an erection. This constitutes the centre of his consciousness. The knowledge of this debility is what he secretly carries with him any where he goes, and which motivates his actions in the novel.[1] For Aku the source of sorrow is a range of problems - the struggle for survival, and the psychological fear of living in the midst of the enemies of her people,[2] and above all the unhappy state of living without her husband who has been forcibly taken away and imprisoned. Expressing her troubled state of mind, she affirms:

> However hard I try, I can never keep my mind from dwelling on these sorrows. For what else can it feed on, imprisoned as I am for so long in a solitude that seems to have no end? When ...

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1. The Last Duty, pp. 5, 23ff.

2. Ibid., p. 11.

> the federal troops liberated this town over three years ago, and all the members of my tribe ran away because it seemed the only sensible thing to do at the time, I was sure that I was doing the right thing by staying behind. Oh how I trembled in the bush clutching my year-old son in my arms: I was sticking with my man because I couldn't conceive of any kind of existence other than with him. Of course, after a short while the glamour of my decision dulled in my eyes, when I discovered that I was going to have to face the harsh realities of that decision. But then it was enough that my man was around, and I thought that if anything happened to me at the time it was all right for me so long as he was by my side. Now three years after they took him away into detention I do not feel so secure any more and, sad as I am to admit it, I am beginning to question the wisdom of that original decision to stay. But do I have any choice? [1]

For Oshevire her husband, the source of constant grief is the experience of being unjustly detained for so long a period of time. For Odibo, the burden of existence originates from his consciousness of his physical deformity. This consciousness renders him a social misfit. His knowledge of this is rendered even more unbearable by his consciousness of the society's attitude to him, especially the attitude of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 10 - 11

experiences presented. Aku's experiences in particular create this effect. After the pain and bitterness which follow her "throwing the door of womanhood" open to Odibo and Toje, her consciousness of her dishonoured self grows and intensifies to a point of painful remorse. Through this painful experience, she is ready to set her home in order once again as she prays for God's forgiveness, and the return of the love of her husband. She longs once again for the good wife she had been. Her adultery and consequent psychological pain become for her an experience which not only provides a means for self regeneration, but which also re-establishes the reality and importance of honour in spite of circumstances.

XI

Although treated specifically as a novel dealing with the personal dilemmas of individuals in a period of war, the style and characterisation in The Last Duty have a bearing upon the quality of societal life generally, and in particular upon the conduct of individuals in position of responsibility. Toje is portrayed in relation to his position as Chief in

the town of Urukpe and Ali as Military commandant charged with the maintenance of public order and peace in the area. For Chief Toje, official position means the use of it in the achievement of personal desires, no matter what. This attitude is pursued regardless of how this attitude may be a contradiction of the public's conception of the role of the individual in the promotion of the well-being of the people he is intended to serve. As evident in the section "Toje"[1], his basic concern in the course of the narrative action is to use his wealth and position to exploit Aku, to establish links with those in power and hence be able to bribe them by various means in order to get them do what would gratify his personal interests. Thus when we see him courting the friendship of Ali, it is only to ask him to make sure that Oshevire his enemy is kept in detention.[2] In a similar manner he uses his ~~name~~ and friendship to get Ali to order the pay-master[3] to clear his false bill as others have done for him before.

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1. The Last Duty pp. 23ff.
2. Ibid., p. 53ff.
3. Ibid., pP.47.

In contrast to Chief Toje's phychological attitude to position, for Ali duty, right, and justice come before personal considerations. Position means fearless service to the people irrespective of their class. When he hears of Toje's accusations and plea to keep Oshevire in detention he carefully investigates to find out the obscure reasons behind Toje's pleas. He receives no favours from anyone. Generally, when he follows this course of action, he chooses to follow his feelings and sense of duty and right even though this may harm a few individuals.

The formal presentation of the characters of these men, and indeed, of most of the characters in the novel, suggest the extent to which the novel may be read as a study in contrasting moral types present in all societies. By the revealed attitudes of these men, the novel explores creatively the larger theme of responsibility and irresponsibility, and by implication, the theme of good and evil. Ali and Chief Toje constitute the narrative foci in terms of which the reader makes value judgement. In particular, Ali forms a central intelligence through whom the reader perceives the central dramatic action and judges the characters especially Chief Toje. As in <u>A man of the People</u>

moral judgment is a vital aspect of the solicited aesthetic response of the novel as its characters are not presented for their own sakes as such, but in terms of the moral and psychological attitudes which they represent. For Ali the emphasis is upon the choice of the right moral values in opposition to the false values of society. The tragedy of Toje's psychological type is that he could not see the possibility of being misled by his arrogant and corrupt egoistic feelings. Through the imaginative articulation of these opposing moral sensibilities, the novel makes as an issue central to its dramatic structure, the theme of the ability of the individual to choose between right and wrong and between justice and injustice. This pattern marks a significant aspect of the development away from the form and style of the social realistic novel types exemplified for instance in Arrow of God and The Concubine. In these novels, the presented opposition between good and evil is relatively ambiguous if at all significant. This is largely because, for these novelists the dominant focus in the development of personalities is essentially the relationship between African culture and personality rather than upon the difficulties of choosing between good and evil.

The consciousness of social and moral values which underlies the development of characters and the orchestration of fictional experience in the novel is in a sense a continuation of the general awareness of the manifold shortcomings of modern man life which many of the Nigerian novels and especially Season of Anomy and The Voice and A man of the People have been preoccupied with. The point of view and emphasis of The Last Duty do however differ to an extent that under score its importance in the Nigerian fictional oeuvre. The basis of the major satirical novels is the intense awareness of the moral instability of contemporary society and the pessimistic realisation of the impossibility of change in the social condition generally and in the life of the individual.[1] Soyinka's Interpreters, Okara's The Voice and Achebe's A man of the people express this pessimism in terms of the final denouements

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[1]. Although not specifically presented as the subject of any one novel, pessimism seems to be a dominant aspect of the Nigerian novelists'vision of the moral life of his society and its leaders. "Interview with Chinua Achebe" August, 16, 1976 in Critics on Chinua Achebe (1970-1976), ed. John Agetua (Bendel Newspaper Corporation, Benin City, 1977, pp. 35ff.

and characterisation in their novels. In contrast, through its central point of view, and the insistent moral strenght of Ali and Oshevire, The Last Duty negates the pessimism registered in these novels by actively recreating the strength and influence of moral goodness in the life and conduct of individuals, and hence suggesting a basis of hope. In particular, Colonel Ali's resolve to do right at all times, and Oshevire's simple but firm faith in honesty and intergrity in personal life express a refreshing, and unexpected heroic attachment to goodness that inspires the reader in the same way that Okolo in The Voice, Ofeyi in Season of Anomy, Mack in A man of the people, and Sekoni and Bandele in The Interpreters do against the background of rampant corruption in their world. Ali and Oshevire's struggles against injustice provide shining examples of man's spiritual efforts to achieve goodness in a world dominated by self interest, greed and injustice. Through its moral emphasis, the conception of characters, and the affirmation of the possibilities of moral goodness, the novel seems to suggest not only a route to individual spiritual growth, but also a way towards the moral re-awakening of the entire society.

XII

The relationship established between the narrative form and the novelist's moral point of view is the basis of Isidore's Okpewho's significant contribution to the development of the Nigerian novel. In addition to his already demonstrated and well realised interest in the aesthetic excellence of his narrative form, there is also the refreshing optimism which he brings to the depiction of the war experience, and the moral behaviour of his fellow country men. Indeed, a vital part of the uniqueness of the novel in Nigerian fiction is that it is the only novel which, in spite of the present state of general moral gloom and despair, still tries to instill into the Nigerian reader's heart a belief in the individual's ability to shape the future, to achieve peace, order, and justice through his personal effort. Through the skilful presentation of the selfless struggles of Ali and the patient endurance of Oshevire and through the ultimate vindication of the principle of justice in the course of the narrative action, the novelist succeeds most effectively in building his narrative experience upon the firm faith that the human heart and mind can be influenced towards a noble desire for moral progress, and ultimately for a general improvement in the quality of social life.

PART III: THE EVOLUTION OF A TRADITION

CHAPTER IX

LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND MODES OF NATURALISATION

In chapter II it was argued[1] that the appraisal of the African writer's achievement in the adaptation of the western novel form also demands an assessment of the quality of his originality in the use of the English language. To be of an artistically significant order, the African novelist's use of the received English has to entail the extension of the aesthetic relationship between the English verbal expression and its meaning, to the more complex relationship between the language, African culture, and meaning. This kind of creative extension of language use is by its nature a process of "authentification," which entails at least two types of stylistic control of language. One of these, we can describe as "deconstructive and dissociative," while the other is "reconstructive and associative." In the first instance, the writer's authentic use of the English

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[1]See p. 69 of this thesis.

language is one which entails the dissociation of English words from their alien cultural associations. In the second instance, the locally relevant use of the English language is one which must also involve the modulation of English words and syntax into linguistic forms that are specifically textured to express effectively, the African characteristic speech pattern, tone and sensibility.

Understood in this respect, a significant fact which emerges from our study of the representative novelists is that the response of many of the major novelists to the use of the received English language is very often highly original, culturally relevant, and at times even quite inspired. Further, not only has the approach of the major novelists been highly imaginative, bold and fresh, but also, generally, the awareness of the need to refashion the English language into forms reflective of local cultural norms seems much more pronounced than what had been the case in their treatment of the structural format of the inherited novel. Two factors seem particularly responsible for this. First is the nature of the second language

situation in which the writers operate, and the consequent creative interaction between the first and second languages. Second to this is the greater malleability of the English language in contrast to the more limited possibilities which the structural format of the novel can readily offer.

As may be expected, it is not all the novelists who have been sensitive to the adaptation of the received English language to local realities. Broadly speaking, out of the various kinds of creative responses displayed, three representative types may be noted. These are:-

(a) those whose stylistic techniques are manifestly individualistic and at times idiosyncratic,

(b) those in whose style there is subtle reconciliation of a culturally reflective language with the demands of standard English usage, and

(c) those in whose work there is a general insensitivity to the indegenisation of the novel through its language perspective.

These types of stylistic responses illustrate the relative diversity in the creative approaches which the Nigerian novelists are bringing to bear upon the English language in their novels. To further develop our argument, we shall discuss and evaluate briefly, the significant aspects of the style of the novelists

whose work best provides some insight into each of these different forms of language use.

II

(a) Idiosyncratic English and Narrative Experience

Amos Tutuola's interest in the use of traditional African oral narrative modes in The Palm-Wine Drinkard can be seen to represent not only a beginning in the development of an African novel form. It is also an engagement with the problems of the creation of a language form in which local speech forms and imagery are also freely used to achieve distinctive aesthetic effects. As we have earlier observed,[1] Amos Tutuola's use of these modes does not derive like Okara from a conscious drive for literary originality. Rather, in his peculiar case it is a direct outcome of his limited knowledge of the English language.[2]

But in an interestingly fortuitous manner, the effects

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[1]. See p. 75 of this thesis.

and forms of his style achieve almost the same literary value and significance which the more educated writers anywhere have used to convey their sense of place and national identity. The repertoire of innovative features characteristic of Amos Tutuola's novels cover a wide range of verbal forms. These include the use of idiosyncratic diction, syntactic forms, word-coinage and the recourse to local ontology and mythical thought as source of imagery. Further to these is the frequent transliteration of local (Yoruba) linguistic structures, and modes of thinking into English.[1] To understand Tutuola's singular use of these, we shall discuss briefly two of these aspects, namely, the incidence of word-coinage, and secondly, the texture of his prose and in particular, the relationship established between syntax, sense, and meaning.

Word-Coinage.

One of the distinctive aspects of Tutuola's literary response to the English language is his imaginative handling of English words. Although at times erratic, his occasional

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[1]. A. Afolayan: "Language and Sources of Amos Tutuola" in C. Heywood Ed., Perspectives on African Literature (Heinemann Books, London, 1971), p. 49ff.

imaginative use of words express an intuitive grasp of the fact that language is a communicative form that can be adapted to new circumstances. Indeed, in his persistent word - play, what his work does represent is not really what his critics describe as naiveté but the realisation that words have to be "refashioned" and their grammar extended to create a new style in harmony with the singularities of the imaginative experience being expressed. Thus throughout the novels, especially the first two, The Palm-Wine Drinkard[1] and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts[2], the reader comes across a range of words which illustrate Tutuola's bold and instinctive creativity in the use of English words. Table I (items 1-11) and Table II (items 1-8) represent respectively, some of the interesting examples of Tutuola's personal diction and phrases.

Amos Tutuola I: Creative Diction

1.	"a really"	"I said within myself that this was a really human being."	PWD[3] p.80

1. See The Palm-wine Drinkard. (Faber, London, 1952), 1977 Paper back Edn. pp. 41 - 43.

2. My Life in the Bush of Ghosts. (Faber and Faber, London, 1954), Paper back pp.20, 23.

3. For The Palm-Wine Drinkard

2.	"a joke-man"	"But after she left a joke-man was koking funnily"	MLBG p.48
3.	"funnily"	" "	"
4.	"a risible"	"And when a risible man who was among the four men."	MLBG p.48
5.	"burglary wars"	"So there were many kinds of African wars and some of them are as follows; general wars, tribal wars, burglary wars and slave wars."	MLBG p.48
6.	"gravitiness"	"when we were bending down from the sky because of its gravitiness....."	PWD p.75
7.	"complete" "completed"	"He was a complete gentleman and all the parts of his body were <u>completed</u>"	p.18
8.	"jealous"	"I would jealous him.....	p.25
9.	"tighted" "hardly"	"He commanded the strings of the drum to tighten me there, as a matter of fact the strings of the drum tighted me so that I was hardly breathing....."	p.12
10.	"unreturnable"	"when we were quite sure that this was <u>unreturnable-heaven</u> town road, so we did not go further."	p.57
11.	"faithfulness"	"She was taking care of us with her faithfulness....."	p.69
12.	"lofty"	"...And they changed the fearful noises of the enemies guns to <u>lofty</u> ones for us and we were dancing to these lofty noises of the enemies guns." "But as these enemies were approaching the town, the <u>lofty</u> noises of their guns became fearful for us because every place was shaking at that moment."	<u>MLNG</u>[1] p.19

[1] MLBG. For <u>My Life in the Bush of Ghosts</u>. op.cit.

10.	"suspecting"	"...his bad smell was suspecting him that he was coming so they were running away before he could reach them"	p.31
11.	"disallowed"	"So they disallowed me to do as I planned until he reached a place where other kinds of ghosts were in conference....."	p.32

XI

Amos Tutuola: Idiosyncratic Phrases

Idiosyncratic Expression			Standard English Equivalent
1.	"He got up on me and took out the rest meat....."	MLBG p.32	He got up from me and took out the rest of the meat
2.	"I would die for his weight as I would not raise him"	MLBG p.33	I would have died under his weight as I could not raise him.
3.	"None of them talked a single word. as looking at me motionless as dolls"	MLBG p.36	None of them spoke a word. Standing motionless like dolls, they stared at me.
4.	"But as he was chasing me fiercely	MLBG p.41	But as he was pursuing me relentlessly
5.	"She was taking care of me with her faithfulness..."	PWD p.69	She looked after me devotedly.....

6.	"He was soon faint with fear"	PWD p.17	He was highly terrified
7.	"And still as I was a man I would jealous him"	PWD p.37	But because I was a man I could only be jealous of him
8.	"...he was trying his best to kill the animals....."	MLBG p.31	He was trying hard to kill animals.....

While Tutuola's peculiar handling of words constitute one aspect of his creativity, his syntactic forms and narrative rhythm express his literary individualism as well as how far he succeeds in making a literarily effective use of a limited level of competence in the English language. In chapter III[1] we highlighted how through the concatenation of images, Tutuola seems to capture the pressure and spirit of African oral narrative delivery. Another significant stylistic feature which enhances this quality of oral narration is his syntax and general cavalier handling of sentences. The presentation of the capture of "Death" typifies this aspects of his language control.

> As I was carrying him along the road, he was trying all his efforts to escape or to kill me, but I did not...

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1. See page 87 of the thesis.

2. A. Tutuola, The Palm-wine Drinkard, op. cit. p. 15.

> give him a chance to do that. When I had travelled about eight hours, then I reached the town and went straight to the old man's house who told me to go and bring Death from his house. When I reached the old man's house, he was inside his room, then I called him and told him that I had brought Death that he told me to go and bring. But immediately he heard from me that I had brought Death, and when he saw him on my head, he was greatly terrified and raised an alarm that he thought nobody could go and bring death from his house at once, and he (old man) hastily went back to him house and started to close all his doors and windows, but before he could close two or three of his windows, I threw down Death before him door and at the same time that I threw him down, the net cut into pieces and Death found his way out.

The most striking aspect of this passage is its dramatic quality. This is achieved largely through the carefree joining of different clauses, ideas and images. As in many other sentences and contexts,[1] the urgency of Tutuola's narration seems to result in extraordinarily long-winding sentence forms in which the lack of adequate control of syntactic logic often results in odd verbal juxtapositions. These verbal juxtapositions sometimes generate ambiguities in meaning. In the passage quoted above, the use of "him" "he" and "his" (which we underlined) illustrate this occasional source of

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[1]. The Palm-wine Drinkard, pp. 41-43 and
My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, pp. 20, 23.

confusion in meaning.

In their independent studies, Afolayan[1] and Collins[2] have highlighted a number of these types of Tutuola's idiosyncratic constructions which deviate from the normal rules of English Grammar. An interesting example of these which Tutuola uses to enhance the peculiar dramatic quality of his narration is "the progressive action verb-form." Very often, Amos Tutuola presents past action by ignoring the use of the appropriate past very form. This is much in evidence in such sentences as follows:

> ...he was still looking at me as he was running away[3]

> But as he was going hastily along in the bush all the animals were running very far away for his bad smell whenever he met them. 4

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1. A. Afolayan, "Language and sources of Amos Tutuola" op. cit.

2. H. R. Collins, Amos Tutuola (Twyane Press, New York 1968), pp. 109.

3. My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, p. 21.

4. Ibid., p. 33.

> All the ghosts of this town and environs were assembling yearly and having a special exhibition of smells, and the highest prices 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. 1

> Although he was carrying me along in the bush, he was trying his best to kill the animals, his bad smell was suspecting him that he was coming so they were running away before he could reach them. 2

Aesthetically, the response to Tutuola's type of language use has been deprecatory except for the enthusiastic remarks of a few literary connoisseurs. Thus in spite of his recognition of the "terse, and graphic" quality of Tutuola's language, John Murra describes it as kind of "young English."[3] While Paul Bohannan[4] simply sees it as a mixture of African pidgin English, officialese and a school boy English", Martin Banham according to Collins[5] regards it as "junior clerk English,"

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1. Ibid., p. 35.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

3. John V. Murra, "The unconscious of a Race" in Nation (CLXXIX September 25, 1954), p. 251-262.

4. Paul Bohannan, The Listener, May 13, 1954.

5. H. R. Collins, Amos Tutuola (Twyane Press, New York, 1969), p. 113.

and the direct "result of Amos Tutuola straining to write a literate formal English" he could not acquire through a good education. In a manner that sums up the widespread insensitivity to the potentialities of Tutuola's language, Ezekiel Mphahlele evaluates it as "unintentionally ungrammatical"[1] adding that such a language will not be able to "catch on" and grow into a conscious style in the hands of a more educated and sophisticated writer".[2] Tutuola's stylistic forms are not deliberate innovations intended to reflect the speech patterns and type of diction in actual use in the daily life of his people and fellow country-men. Indeed, as Ezekiel Mphahlele rightly points out, Tutuola's style does seem to be full of grammatical mistakes, especially when judged against the background of the received Queen's English grammar. Quite a number of sentences in the novels are syntactically awkward. However, it can also be seen that these "mistakes" are strikingly poetic, graphic, and unaffected. They function very often as if they are modes evolved delibera-

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1. E. Mphahlele, "The Language of African Literature". Harvard Educational Review, Spring 1954, XXXIV, pp. 289-305.

2. Ibid.

tely for a more effective self expression. Thus, as H. R. Collins has rightly observed, Tutuola's "unconventional variations make for wit, word-play, and for delightful surprises".[1] In fact, in spite of the obvious ungrammatical quality of his words, syntax and sentence structures, Tutuola's English is not only effective, graphic, and at times delightful, but also, it is a language that captures the dramatic quality and tone of the traditional African oral narrative art. By his imaginative handling of syntax and diction in harmony with African oral narrative art and sensibility, Tutuola enables his style to achieve a liveliness and fascination that forces us to recognise the otherness of his world. In terms of this effectivity, it can be said that Tutuola's style is one of the more interesting and striking demonstration of originality in the imaginative use of the English language in a new non-English environment. By this quality, it represents also one of the most significant contributions of the Nigerian writers to the development of the English language in relation to the African experience, linguistic heritage and world view.

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[1]. H. R. Collins, Amos Tutuola, op. cit., p. 113ff.

While Amos Tutuola's achieved effects have come about quite unconsciously, with Gabriel Okara, these are deliberate. In chapter VI reference[1] was made to Okara's interest in the direct translation of ideas and images from the local African language (Ijaw) into English. We also referred to the way in which the development of this approach serves to intensify the moral vision of the novel. A further manifestation of Gabriel Okara's attempt to achieve authenticity which must be mentioned is how he uses English words to reflect local usage. While he neither coins new words, nor tries to refashion the morphological form of English words as in the case of Amos Tutuola occasionally, his diction does show a distinctive innovative quality in terms of the imposition of a range of new meaning-possibilities on conventional English words. In this respect, throughout the text of The Voice, the reader comes across such words as "inside" "straight" "crooked" "sweet" "sour" "kill". While these have been used as English words, their sense and reference are not the conventional meaning but realities determined by local usage. Okara's personal employment of these words may be seen in his

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[1] See p. 206 of the thesis.

use of the word "inside" which occurs in a variety of contexts. Whereas in the English language this functions largely as a pre-position that indicates the spatial relationship between two items or internality when used as noun, in Okara's style it is used to designate a wider range of meanings. For instance according to its contexts it refers to "mind" "belly" or an individual's mode of thinking and behaviour. Similarly, the words "straight" and "crooked" which are repeated motifs in the story, function not as geometric concepts but, as in the local Ijaw language, these are used to suggest a range of ethical ideas of what is good, beautiful, and desirable. "Crooked" denotes the negation of these values and the inclination towards evil. In this sense, the opposition between straight and crooked reinforces metaphorically, the opposition between good and evil which the central narrative action of the novel presents.

The extremely personal use of the English language in this way is reflected in Okara's use of syntactical repetition to suggest manner and modes of being. Thus, in a number of contexts in which adverbial forms and normally the standard modes for expression manner and intensity, he deliberately uses syntactic repetition to convey these. Hence, very often,

odd sentence-constructions of varying expressive force and aesthetic elegance are used as in the following:- "Your hair was black black be, now it is black black be more than blackness." "The town people said Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct". "The running feet came nearer the caring nothing feet of the world ... "Yourself hold before this thing a big thing turns". We are know God people be" "You are a witch be" and "The think nothing people making people handsome day."

The repetitive use of metaphors, symbols, and leit-motifs not only intensifies the experiences; it also vividly identifies the behaviour of Okolo's enemies with what is ostensibly non-human. Thus through the power of metaphor, personification and exaggeration inherent in the linguistic structures, a parallel is evoked and recreated between the antisocial passions of the people and hostile animal instincts. The people "walk as if stalking an animal."[1] They "pounce" and "claw."[2] Izongo's eyes are stiff and strong like wood.[3] The people snap "like hungry dog's snapping at bones"[4].

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1. The Voice, p. 23
2. Ibid., p. 27
3. Ibid., p. 120
4. Ibid., p. 38

They push and drag "panting silence like soldier ants with their prisoners."[1] Their gnashing of teeth in hatred is "like the sound of bones breaking under dogs teeth."[2] Their bodies sweat and glisten with hatred. By sharply indicating decadent behaviour, Okara's language like any other imaginatively conceived language functions as a psychopathology of the characters - a means for the analysis and revelation of their psychological and moral sickness.

Okara's peculiar use of English is not intended to reflect a distinct variety of Nigerian English. Generally, besides its achieved links with the Izon local vernacular language, is the very striking poetic quality and sharpness which Okara strives to achieve as in the following passage:

> It was the days 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 ...

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1. Ibid., p. 38

2. Ibid., p. 120

> idol's face, no one knowing what's behind. Okolo at the palm trees looked. They were like women with hair hanging down, dancing, possessed. Egrets like white flower petails 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. A girl with only a cloth tied around her waist and the half ripe mangoes breasts paddled driving her paddle into the river with a sweet inside. 1

While a small number of critics have been able to see the significance of Okara's transliterations, many consider this mode to be gratuitous, and of little use in the development of a national literary language. Thus Geoffrey Walton[2] seems to consider Okara's language to be no language at all, while Ezekiel Mphahlele considers the language to be too strainous a mode of representation that renders English a slave of the native language.[3] Peter Young's position is perhaps the most negative in its dogmatism. Arguing that Okara's linguistic experiment is a failure, he affirms:-

> His failure does not lie in this inconsistency which would not wholly invalidate the method or simply result in an annoying literary squint, but...

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1. Ibid., p. 26.

2. Cited in E.N. Obiechina, "Differentiation in English" in JNESA. Vol. 6, No.1, 1975, p. 78.

3. E. Mphahlele, "The Language of African Literature", Harvard Educational Review, op. cit.

> in the fundamental misconception about the nature of language, - that anything as complex as total meaning can be conveyed by the preservation of very few of its parts. Syntax alone is not the vehicle of meaning, nor are a language's rules of collocation.....The importance of Okara's work depends not on his success or failure but in the clearly conveyed realication that the artistic liberty of the African writer in English lies in the integration of expression with experience. By revealing one route to that end to be a culdesac The Voice remains a positive force in the development of the West African novel in English. 1

Even if it can be said that the extremely radical character of Okara's experimental use of language is obviously too "dogmatic" and strained, this does not mean that the style lacks the necessary requirements of an effective language for literary communication. Peter Young's criticism is a misleading conclusion which illustrates a fundamental misconception about two things:- about the nature of syntax and about the ways in which a literary tradition can be created. In the first instance, Young's viewpoint seems to rest on the false presupposition that

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1. P. Young "Tradition, language and the Reintegration of identity in West African Literature in English" in C. Heywood. Ed. Perspectives on African Literature. op. cit. p. 42.

syntactic forms are stable linguistic codes which cannot be altered in relation to the creation of new meaning-possibilities. Secondly, Peter Young misconceives the ways in which an individual novelist may make his contribution to the development of a literary tradition. As evident in the method of Finnegan Wake, Ulysses and Last Year at Marienbad[1] the necessary condition for such a contribution lies not only in the possibility that the novelist's work may and can be imitated by others, but essentially in the unique and novel quality of the approach introduced by him. In the use of the rhetorical codes of a typical African language, and in the directness and intense moral suggestiveness of this language, Okara's style does represent an effective route which can be explored towards the creation of a national literary language. That the literary style of Amos Tutuola and Gabriel Okara has not found imitators, and consequently developed by others to be part of the main stream of the language of Nigerian fiction, is not because of the intrinsic limitation of the approaches of these two writers. This has to do with the climate of the general preference for standard or "elitist" English in which Okara and Amos Tutuola

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[1] A. Robbe-Grillet, Last Year at Marienbad (Paris, 1961).

have worked. It is also a matter of the complex range of factors which determine individual writers choice of language and by implication the form and texture of the literary language of a given social class, community, or nation. In the case of Gabriel Okara in particular, the reason for the indifference to his innovations is not merely because his method is "too strainous" as Ezekiel Mphahlele suggests. It is an outcome of the fact that the average Nigerian novelist is not acutely conscious of the need for the achievement of authenticity and relevance in his use of language.

(b) Creative Adaptation of Standard English Language

If Gabriel Okara's conception of the appropriate African English appear to be parochial, and at times too idiosyncratic, there has also emerged a select class of writers in whose style there is a fusion of the standard correct English grammar with certain forms of local African idiomatic expressions. Achebe's style in his novel is one of the most accomplished expression of this kind of approach to the naturalisation of British English in the

African context.

Basically, Achebe's originality derive from his skillful exploitation of the conditions of the African reader's aesthetic response to his narration. This he seeks to achieve through his insistence on the "cultural signifier," "-that is, an image or idiom which adequately conveys aspects of the local cultural and linguistic reality. In an essay "The African writer and the English language",[1] Chinua Achebe articulates some of the creative issues which must be borne in mind in the African writer's use of the received English language. Rejecting the idea of the use of the language in a style imitative of the native speaker, he argues that the controlled reflection of the local cultural realities and modes of speech is a vital aspect of the African writer's relevant development of the English language. In fact, the criterion which he adduces is its capacity to convey the peculiarities of African experience while at the same time being universal.

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[1]. Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English language" in "Morning yet on Creation Day". (Anchor books, Doubleday, New York, 1975, pp. 74ff.

The range of techniques which Chinua Achebe brings to bear on the realisation of this ideal "African English" are many. They are also bold and at times sophisticated. In his discussion, Bernth Lindfors represents Chinua Achebe's use of the African proverb as the fulcrum of his method, and by implication the basis of the authenticity of his style. As he argues:

> It is my contention that Achebe, a skilful stylist, achieves an appropriate language for each of his novels largely through the use of proverbs. Indeed, Achebe's proverbs can serve as keys to an understanding of his novels because he uses them not merely to add touches of local colour but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characters, to clarify conflicts, and to focus on the values of the society he is portraying. Proverbs thus provides us, as M. J. Herskovits has said, a "grammar of values" by which the deeds of a hero can be measured and evaluated. By studying Achebe's proverbs, we are better able to interpret his novels. 1

It must be conceded that of all the African novelists, Chinua Achebe is the writer who has been most responsible for introducing the African proverb into imaginative use in the African novel. However, to appreciate the scope of Achebe's originality

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1. Bernth Lindfors "The Palm Oil with which Achebe's words are eaten" in African Literature Today, Ed., E.D. Jones op. cit. No. 1, 1960, p. 6.

in the development of the relevant African literary English is to recognise how he localises the English language through a variety of ways of which the proverb is only a part. In chapter IV p. 301 we highlighted the particular way in which his prose persistently seeks to project the cultural background of action and experience by means of the suggestive cultural image. What we may note further to these types of culturally relevant lexical items, and the proverb mode are two strikingly original aspects, namely; his exploitation of certain forms of Nigerian English, and secondly his original and frequent "refashioning" of sentences and phrases into new forms reflective of local linguistic structures and folk-wisdom.

The high level of subtlety and appropriateness of style which Achebe can achieve is very evident in his own discussion[1] of two possible ways in which a particular scene in Arrow of God could have been presented. As he ppints out in the discussion, "The material is the same. But the form of the one is in character and the other is not." Accordingly, the one which he considered not to be in character is eschewed. The ease, directness and propriety of Achebe's prose is everywhere present in all his novels. The following passage illustrates

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1. Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language" in Morning yet on Creation Day. op. cit. p. 83

the quality of being "in character":

> The wood we were blowing is now crushed. When I spoke two months ago in this very place I used the proverb of the cho-goat. I was then talking to Ogbuefi Egenwanno who was the adult in the house. I told him that he should have spoken up against what we were planning, instead of which he put a piece of live coal into the child's palm and ask him to carry it with care. We all have seen with that care he carried it. I was not then talking to Egenwanno alone but to all the elders here who left what they should have done and did another, who were in the house and yet the cho-goat suffered in her parturition.[1]

Many passages like this give the reader immediate pleasure and surprise at the ease and naturalness of the expressions. The chief tool utilized is the impregnation of his English with the apt local image folk wisdom, and speech habit that are familiar to us. Every word in the passage works and has its roots and relevance in the African experience and world view.

Achebe's criteria for the selection of phrases and words which are felt to be in the right character is their appropriateness. This quality of appropriateness is impressively realized in a large number of contexts - in the formal speeches

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[1] Arrow of God, p. 26

at the elders meetings in which proverbs, rhythm and local allusions are used to marshall argument and reflect personality, in the conversations of Ezeulu's wives, and in such crucial moments as the return of Obika from Okperi on the occasion of Ezeulu's imprisonment. A vital part of the effectiveness of these carefully sculptured dialogues is the artistic texturing of the form of the language of each speaker in harmony with the temperament of the particular speaker, and the nature of the occasion in which he is speaking. Hence, throughout his novels, various stylistic forms - pidgin English, standard English syntactic forms, and transliterations and imagery - constitute a repertoire of expressive modes which he draws on in terms of the criteria of necessity and relevance.

As Vincent's[1] study has effectively demonstrated, Achebe's English, unlike that of all his contemporaries, presents a rich terrain of words and rhetorical forms which are singularly appropriate to their specific situations and nuances of individual temporament. Although actively conscious of the need for forging an appropriate African English, Achebe's

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[1]. T. Vincent "Register in Achebe" JNESA Ed. E. Ubahakwe, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 95.

characteristic style is never idiosyncratic, awkward or unintelligible. Eschewing the overtly too personal, he neither coins new words nor does he translate dogmatically from his local Igbo grammatical structure into English in the manner of Tutuola or Okara. Thus, beyond the occasional use of the local proverbs and apt expressive images, his general characteristic approach is the creative modulation of the standard English by the introduction of apt local rhetorical forms in ways which could cause only the minimal violation to the accepted international English usage.

While Achebe's control of the English language represents a fairly individualistic but successful "reconstruction" of the language in alliance with the traditional African (Igbo) rhetoric, in the works of the novelists who followed his realism, the level of stylisation is not quite as refreshing or sophisticated. In fact, quite often their creative response to language is of no particularly striking originality.[1] Beyond the occasional use of local words for strictly denotative purposes or the use of the odd proverb in places, the style and effects of writers like John Munonye, Flora Nwapa, Omotosho,

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[1]. The novels in which this type of language use is especially noticeable are those which we have referred to as "popular" novels. See pp. 354 and 346 of this study.

and many others represent effectively little or no significant deviation from the more common general kind of official English. But in spite of the lack of a bold or idiosyncratic experimentation in the use of language, their diction and sentence constructions reflect in subtle ways the kind of English either spoken and or written by many Nigerians as a result of being in a second language situation.

In his two novels The Concubine and The Great Ponds Elechi Amadi has achieved a type of English style whose simplicity, tone, and texture is very much in harmony with the rural African milieu. While his achieved level of "dissociation" and "association" of diction and syntax is minimal, his prose is imbued with a distinctive African quality. As may be seen in the descriptions of the battles in The Great Ponds[1] and of the wrestling match in the forest in The Concubine,[2] Amadi's major stylistic concern is the accurate description of experience through rhythm and simple diction.

Sometimes he could make his style receptive to the local idioms through the occasional coining of new expressions as in the description of Ihuoma as being of "ant hill colour",

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[1]. E. Amadi: The Great Ponds, pp. 34-35.

[2]. E. Amadi: The Concubine, pp. 2 - 3.

and or his use of "tomorrow's brother" for the day after tomorrow. In this same spirit, Amadi does sometimes exploit the African habit of using the proverb for the clarification of speech and ideas. While these express his interest in the achievement of an appropriate English, he does not sustain this approach to make it striking. What is remarkable about Amadi's style is its faultless simplicity that accurately catches the rural background of the story. This quality may be seen in the following passage in which both diction, prose rhythm and images seem to convey a distinctive sense of the setting of a local shrine.

> They talked less and less as they approached the Sacred Woods of Amodioha. Rank trees bordered the dark path. Some climbers were so thick they looked like ordinary trees. At the shrine absolute stillness reigned and it was quite cold as the high majestic roof of thick foliage, like a black rain cloud, cut off the sun completely. Even the wind could only play meekly among the undergrowth.
>
> The shrine was at the foot of a massive silk cotton tree. It was fenced off with a ring of tender palm shoots and their yellow colour blazed like a flame against the dark background. Mekkoro went into the temple and placed some kola nuts in front of two carved figures clothed in blood and feathers. The floor of the shrine was ringed with earthenware pots each containing manillas, cowries, alligator pepper and feathers of animals many years old.....

> There were skulls of animals on either side of the two carved figures. Emenike, who had never before been so close to the shrine, peered into the darkness and thought that one or two skulls looked human. 1

(c) "Bookish" (Non-innovative) English

Unlike Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara, a large number of minor Nigerian novelists generally make use of the English language in their novels without any significant awareness of the need to refashion it into new moulds capable of conveying the peculiarities of local linguistic modes. Included in this category are novelists such as John Munonye, Flora Nwapa, Kole Omotoso, Onuora Nzekwu, and T. M. Aluko. Even though they may have the creative capacity to be original, their work shows a basic aloofness to this type of stylistic innovation. Instead, what is generally manifested in their novels is an almost instinctive recourse to "standard" English, the kind of English spoken and written by the small class of educated Nigerians in official contexts. In this respect, to account for their contribution to the development of Nigerian (National literature is to acknowledge their literary use of the varieties of official Nigerian English spoken in the country, and the

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1. The Concubine, pp. 21 - 22.

occasional creative use to which this is put by a few of them. The word "occasional" is intentionally used here to suggest that generally, their adaptive development of the English language is a matter of the occasionally apt expression rather than a sustained stylistic procedure. Onuora Nzekwu's language in Blade Among the Boys and Wand of Noble Wood, Aluko's in One man one matchet and One man one wife, Cyprian Ekwensi in most of his novels, and Kole Omotoshe in The Combat and Fela's Choice are in their different ways representative of this class of English usage. As one of the earliest Nigerian novelists, Onuora Nzekwu's style glaringly displays some of the unsatisfactory stylistic aspects of this approach to the use of the English language in fiction writing. The following is a representative passage which serves to illustrates some aspects of his characteristic style.

> Surprisingly enough, neither the wide gap in the cultural standards of their parents, and consequently of themselves, nor the differences in their religions and the unfair idea of associating the Hausa with kwarkwata was responsible for this. Language, too, was no problem. The distance between the children was the result of the absence of a common platform

> on which they could meet. There were no common games; no uniform education system, since the Hausa did not send their children to mission schools; no common examinations; no sports meetings; and no other activities which could bring them together and possibly often. Parents themselves never took their children with them when visiting their friends among the other tribal groups. Occasionally the cow Fulani-whose women, tall and graceful, were a regular sight as they paraded the streets in large flapping sandals, calabashes of milk and butter delicately balanced on their heads, hawking their wares - came to town. Invariably they came for sharo, a flogging custom which was a facet of traditional marriage among them and which added pep to Kafanchan social life. Their dress, their music, their unflinching determination and the contemptuous smile hovering round their faces as they received stroke after stroke of well-seasoned, sinewy cane from others among them, made their presence in town a sensation and their display a wonder. 1

Onuora Nzekwu's style here has more affinity with the 19th century (Victorian) English prose style than with the subtle rhetorical patterns and voice inflections of local African speech patterns. The extremely formal tone of the language, the range of diction, and the limpid rhythm and balancing of subordinate clauses not only seem to eschew any awareness of a specifically African sensibility and the impact of this on the mode of English usage, but also it shows an

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1. Onuora Nzekwu, Blade Among the Boys, (Heinemann, London, 1962), p. 12.

insistent cultivation of the language characteristic of the classic English novels to which Mbakwu must have been exposed in his Grammar School days. What is characteristic of his information oriented style is the marked absence of the appropriate diction and tone which can be achieved in terms of what Achebe has described as "instinct and judgment" which go to the development of style as art qua art. Indeed, in his indifference to originality and relevance, Mbakwu often resorts to clichés of a common order as may be seen in the following passage:

> He soon made some friends there and through them got to know the lie of the land. When he felt like giving his sexual passion a free rein he 'imported' just the right girl, a 'ripe' baby, one who had the right vital statistics and a practical knowledge of sex technique, to spend a week as his guest. He was very generous with his money and she liberal with the goods. He never invited any girl twice, for he believed strongly that variety was the spice of life. 1

As a result of this lack of the fresh use of language, Mbakwu's prose style is for the most part rigid, rather than being lithe and recognizably African.

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1. O. Mbakwu, Blade among the boys, p. 126.

T. M. Aluko's use of language shows this marked incidence of pedantism and general insensitivity to the stylistic reconstruction of language in relation to the local modes of thinking. However, on certain occasions, the use of this type of style in Aluko functions as a mode of creative communication. This is so in the particular respect that the stilted passages and bombastic rhetoric are used occasionally for either humorous purposes as Taiwo[1] has rightly observed, or for deliberate satirical presentation of the kinds of English used by some educated Nigerians. This, of course, represents quite a significant imaginative and entertaining use of language. However, in spite of this occasional creative use of pedantic language, Aluko's use of language tends to lack the innovative spirit and responsibility to language development which is part of the contribution of a major writer to the language of its community.

It is in respect of the insistence of this class of writers on what is pedantically grammatical that their style can be aptly described as "bookish".[2] But "bookish" here does not merely suggest the writers incapacity to distinguish between the context for formal and informal language use. For us, it indicates the inability to distinguish between the vital

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1. O. Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian novel, (Macmillan, London, 1976) paperback edn. pp. 157-159, 161-163.

2. We are indebted to E. Ubahakwe for the use of this description. See E. Ubahakwe, "Bookish English" in JNESA, Vol.6, No.1, p. 38.

creative use of language and the rigid formal adherence to the official English and its conventional standards of correctness. The principal source of this formalism in language use is the fact that many Nigerians have come to accept, speak, and write the grammar book English without the significant awareness of the dynamic character of language use and growth. The factors responsible for this state of affair are what Ebo Ubahakwe[1] has correctly diagnosed when he mentions amongst other things, the original purpose of language teaching in the Grammar Schools,[2] the limited reading experience of the writers, the type of reading materials, and language use to which the writers had been exposed in their formative years, and the fact of their second language situation.

If the aloofness to striking linguistic innovation which T.M. Aluko, and Onuora Nzekwu's general style illustrates is significant for us, it is partly because

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1. Ibid., p. 47
2. Ibid., p. 44 - 46

of the way in which it indicates the different levels and kinds adaptive consciousness displayed in the development of the language of Nigerian fiction. Further, their work is worth noting in the way in which the style typical of their work is an important aspect of the language of Nigerian fiction which cannot be ignored for any reason. Not only do most of the writers use standard or moderately tempered English forms, but even the major novelists who are most intellectually aware of the need for creative adaptation of language do not, in fact immerse themselves in the process of continuous innovation of new and locally relevant style. While on the whole they are engaged in a process of forging new expressions, their originality grows from and has its basis in the background of the aesthetic modalities of the English language as bequeathed by colonal experience, and the novelists formal education in the Grammar schools and universities. Thus in many of the beautiful passages the basis of communication by even the major and more authentic novelists is the English language as used in its international form and character. While in the appropriate context, Achebe often takes the trouble to modulate syntax and diction to express the sense of the African, many of his passages achieve an appropriate sense of place only in terms of the evoked concrete particulars rather than by striking

writers in which there is a highly skilled orchestration of the social and psychological correlatives of the dominant cultural image. Through this sophisticated portrayal, the narrative vision is not only dramatized, but is also multivalent in its intellectual suggestiveness. In the second category fall a larger group of novels in which the mimetic presentation of the possibilities of the cultural image is minimal. This results in a type of novel that is of value more for its sociological quality than for its aesthetic literary force.

On the basis of our textual analysis in the forgoing chapters, IV-VIII the novels which fall within the first category include: Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God and No Longer at ease: Elechi Amadi's The Concubine. The Great Ponds; Gabriel Okara's The Voice; Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters and Season of Anomy; Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty and the novels of Amos Tutuola.

In most of these novels, the imaginative approach to the realisation of form, and the solution of the problems of the naturalisation of the western novel form are well grasped. This is done in the main, in terms of the imaginative treatment of "a dominant cultural image" which is effectively,

the entire modern African consciousness, particularly, the modern African over-response to western materialism. Also these novels evoke the peculiar ways in which this new consciousness is replacing the basic human values of intergrity, and spirituality, and ushering in a new reality - that of a corrupt society. In his "historic vision" Wole Soyinka has treated this not merely as a new experience, but as persistent aspect of African history. Though different in terms of their specific forms of narrative organisation, this group of novels, and especially, A Dancer of Fortune, A Man of the People and The Interpreters, Season of Anomy and The Voice function as and are also readable as a psychopathology of the contemporary Nigerian in his moral and social predicament.

While the handling of "the cultural image" by the group of novelists itemised above is sophisticated, complex and dramatic, for a number of the Nigerian novelists, this is not quite so. Thus, although in their novels there is always a series of cultural images presented as source of the dramatic conflict, there is usually little or no really literarily significant presentation of these realities in terms of a dramatized, sophisticated, and detailed plot-movement. Hence technically, even though these novels attempt to express

aspects of the African cultural reality and experiences, their achieved forms and levels of complexity are often so superficial that they cannot be meaningfully described as constituting major Nigerian novels, let alone as significant extensions of the aesthetic logic or structure of the western novel. Even though they achieve the effects of local colour, and through this gain a sense of place, the moulds into which their experiences are cast offer little by way of technical or stylistic excellence. In chapter VII, we discussed some of the representative novels of this category in relation to the extent to which they are part of the corpus of popular novel types written by a variety of less gifted novelists in many countries. In the discussion, we observed that the stylistic limitations of these novels is not entirely due to the novelists inability to achieve complexity, but that basically, they have not reflected deeply enough on the process and problems which are involved in the naturalisation of the novel, and in the transformation of local experience into an intense fictional form of great subtlety and depth of vision. Hence it is that these novels often read like extended short stories or popular novelettes whose African identity derives largely from the local experiences which they offer.

Whether satisfactorily handled or not, the insistent use of the typically African experience in the organisation of the Nigerian novel becomes more appreciable in the light of the variety of culture-bound themes which are the basis of experiences which feature in the novels. For instance, in the presentation of the logical, moral, social and psychological consequences of the "cultural image," the novels together treat the variety of themes and motifs which are discussed in chapter II pp. 53ff. Of particular prominence are the themes of traditional societal organisation, religious beliefs, spiritual realities, such as charms, gods, sacrifices and magical powers. Presented along with these beliefs are other peculiarly African social problems such as those of marriage in the modern society, childlessness, and typically African domestic relationships, and the moral conflicts which arise for the individual as a result of being in "two worlds." The totality of these varied realities provide "a grid", an objective cultural framework through which the novel achieves a recognizable African cultural identity and basis of reference.

If the initial interest in the projection of African cultural reality has had a significant hold in the structuration

of the Nigerian novel in the manner we have outlined, the novelists intense concern with the reintegration of positive human values has also affected significantly the formal development of the experiential content of the novels. This can be observed in three major respects viz: the representation of character and personality, the resolution of the dramatic conflicts which the central narrative action of the novels presents, and thirdly, the moral point of view of the novels. In general, the artistic handling of these aspects of the novels is an expression of the novelists consciousness of the social responsibility of the writer to his community. Further each of these aspects constitutes a basis of the social relevance of the novels in the distinctive ways which we discuss below.

XXI

Society, Heroism and the limits of individualism

As in the case of other significant novelists anywhere, the object of the Nigerian writer's creative concern is his society. Thus, while the presentation of character and personality in the Nigerian novel can be quite sophisticated, in all the novels, however, character study is never for its

own sake. Rather as exemplified in the treatment of Ezeulu, Okonkwo, Odili, Olumba, Ihuoma and Okolo, Ofeyi and Ali the presentation of character is an imaginative representation of the moral relationship between the individual and society.

Through their personal experience of the communal ethics of the traditional Nigerian society and of the complexity of the problems of personal identity within that society, the Nigerian novelists have unconsciously introduced into their novels a concept of heroism as well as distinctive character types that contrast significantly with the aestheticism of the western writer. Thus, in a way almost characteristic of the developing tradition of fiction, most of the protagonists of the novels we have examined are men whose life aspirations are expressed not merely narcissistically but in the interest of the life continuity of the society of which they are a part.

In one way or the other, this type of character is particularly conscious of his responsibility to the promotion of the life of his society. In this sense the central characters are men who are conscious of the a-spirituality of modern society and are possessed of a desire for the protection of their beliefs against the system of corrupting values in which they find themselves. The formal resolution of the narrative action of the novels in terms of these experiences is determined

by two factors - the novelists conception of the personality of the protagonist, and secondly, by the degree of the novelists' pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of change in the contemporary man's moral predicament.

In the imaginative presentation of their vision, two main types of characters are insistently presented: the 'non-conformist' who never accepts the changing values of his world, and the 'conformist' who in the end succumbs to the surrounding forces of change and apparent decadence. Presented in terms of the 'non-conformist' type of protagonist, there is in the novels a recurrent type of tragic denouement in which the protagonist is a man who with a rare tenacity, moral courage, intergrity, and total commitment to traditional positive values chooses the way of active opposition to society, and consequently may lose his life or position in the end.

Okolo's activities and tragic denouement in The Voice represent paradigmatically this striking pattern of the dramatic resolution of the conflict between the individual and society. Colonel Ali in Okpewho's The Last Duty, also represents this model in the novels. Okolo perishes because the destructive pressures of the system of negative values to which he was opposed, ironically for the good of society, were just too

strong for him. The defeat of the individual may be in the form of the imprisonment of the individual, or the individual's withdrawal from a concern with human values through cynicism, resignation or frustration that comes out of being the odd man out. Most of the major protagonists like Achebe's Okonkwo, Ezeulu, and Obi, Soyinka's Ofeyi, Iriyise and Sekoni, and Okpewho's Colonel Ali and Oshevire are conceived and presented in terms of this moral opposition between individual aspirations and the decadent norms of the society. Wole Soyinka's Sekoni, the engineer, is like the young Nigerian trained overseas and who comes home with plans for the improvement of society. But he is rendered impotent by society. Disenchanted and cut off from the corridors of power he is professionally and spiritually paralysed. Eventually, he perishes. In Arrow of God Ezeulu fails because of the negative pressures of his society which is on the brink of moral and political decadence. In No Longer at Ease Obi's failure is partly the result of the over-powering pull of the corrupt political world around him. Bandele and Egbo lose their moral idealism because of their world. Unable to cope with the ferment of corruption and decadence, they unwillingly shed their moral idealism, becoming in the end disenchanted members of the establishment they had set out to interpret.

In the presentation of the fate of the non-conformist the likes of Okolo, Colonel Ali, Oshevire, Ofeyi, Iriyise, and Okonkwo,

the narrative action is a dramatised confrontation between the messianism of the hero and the opposition to this by society. In the resolution of these experiences the protagonist is tragically presented not as a man who could change the ethos of negative ideals or as one who could arrest the force of socio-historical change. Instead, there seems to be a pessimistic affirmation of the superior strength of the forces of social change and the power of the societal will over that of the individual. In a number of cases it constitutes the drama of the triumph of old age over youth and moral idealism. In this particular respect, most of the novels express a vision in which the individual who does not conform dies either a spiritual or a physical death, affirming by this death, the novelist's sense of the enormity of the contemporary social-moral problems and the hopelessness of the situation in which the isolated man of integrity finds himself.

For the other characters whose inner strength and moral consciousness is not as strong and deeply recalcitrant as the "non-conformist" protagonist, the fate is one of conformity at the end. Paralysed by the overwhelming obscenity of their world, they do not have the inner strength to rise above the ethos of constraining social pressures. Hence, through the course of the narrative action, they drift gradually towards

a quiet but distinct acceptance of the decadent value system of their world. They become characters who know and desire what is good morally and right, but who have neither the moral courage nor the right social conditions to effect it. Odili Samalu in A man of the People, Professor Nwabusor in The Interpreters and Dr. Onochie in Ifejika's The New Religion are examples of this type of protagonists. For a number of reasons that are instinctively human or purely selfish or socially conditioned they finally accept as unbridgeable the great gulf between dream and reality and between what ought to be and what is. From this state of affairs their progress in the course of the narrative action is usually in the form of a slow but steady drift into the establishment and its antisocial opportunitiem.

Through the defeat of the various protagonists, and through the triumph of the outer socio-historical forces over the will of the individual, and his consciousness of what is good, what the novels recreate is the paralysing encapsulation of the individual's moral will and aspirations. The presentation of the protagonists in terms of these patterns of the relationship between the individual and his society is indicative of one interesting and, indeed significant area in which the Nigerian novelists'

fictional experience and style seem to differ from that of his counterpart in the modern European fictional oeuvre. Conscious of his responsibilities towards his society, the protagonist of the Nigerian novel is a man who is "apart," individualistic, and consequently alone psychologically because he is possessed by a desire to instill into a degenerate and disintegrating world a consciousness of human values that his world no longer seems to care for. Perplexed and disenchanted by the decadent values of the world around him, he strives to transcend the pressures towards conformity and the ideal of social unity into which he has been born. Tragically he suffers and at times perishes because he cannot transcend the constraints imposed by his society. Ezeulu's experiences as analysed and illustrated in our diagram "Ezeulu as centre of socio-cultural forces" (p.115) represents at its most complex form the relationship of Oneness and mutual interaction between the individual and society in the Nigerian novel. This form of experience is in sharp contrast to the solipsism of the typical protagonist in the major novels of western fiction of the post World War II years. This is so in the sense that unlike the central character of the major Nigerian novels, the central character in much of the major contemporary western European fiction suffers psychologically not necessarily through his moral strength and aspirations. He suffers because he cannot transcend the individualism inherent in a society that is already fragmented and individualistic through historical forces and the

For specific examples of the many novels and novelists that present characters who turn away from society and its values to face chaos and nothingness, and for the discussion of the dominance of this theme in mid-twentieth century western fiction see Colin Wilson's book The Outsider: An inquiry into the nature of the sickness of mankind in mid-twentieth century. (Victor Gollancz, London, 1956).

growth of a materialistic and technological culture. In his recent study David Cook has rightly highlighted this differential quality in the approach to characterisation in the African and the contemporary western fiction. Discussing this quality he observes:

> In the Western novel, ... it is the loneliness of the protagonists which makes them typical or representative, whereas in the African novel the aloneness of the hero makes him exceptional. The problem for the Western protagonist is how to approach more closely to other human beings the problem for the leading character in the African novel is more likely to be how to assert an individual standpoint without becoming a total outcast. The African society which rejects non-conformists is itself an amalgam of people who have come together in agreement to conform to certain norms for the sake of the general good. Western society is seen as a machine, all people as people being alien to it so that they have only their isolatedness in common. Thus a typical hero in the Western novel may well be regarded by the novelist as typical or significantly representative by virtue of his alienation, and may be regarded as exceptional only in the way that he reacts to his isolation ... while this kind of seperatenessen is part and parcel of the characters uniqueness in many an African work, or at least identifies him with an urbanised minority. 1

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1. David Cook: <u>African Literature: A Critical View</u>. (London, Longmans, 1977), pp. 15-16. Mr. Cook's views came to my attention long after I had completed the analysis and discussion presented in the foregoing. A reader of my work who noticed the similarity in our independent views drew my attention to Cook's book, which he happened to be reviewing at the time. The similarity in our independent observations indicate that the difference in the approach to character presentation in the African and western novel of the post world War II period, is one that is of literary significance, and central to an understanding of the independent spirit of the African novelists and the question of the relationship between the novel and its cultural environment.

The various relationships established between the individual and society in the Nigerian novels and the novelists' intense concern with the representation of society are in no way peculiar to the developed form and aims of the Nigerian novel. Further the projection of cultural realities which lie at the centre of the Nigerian novel is in a sense also an implicit aim in the major novels of other national literatures, especially in their nationalistic phases. What does, however, give a significant level of uniqueness and common identity to the emergent forms is the very high level of emphasis which the novelists give to two aspects of their narration, viz, the cultural background of the experiences presented and the related issues of human values, and the moral development of society.

Writing of the relationship between society and the American novel, Lionel Trilling observes:

> .....Not that we have not had very great novels, but that the novel in America diverges from its classic intention, which as I have said is the investigation of the problems of reality beginning in social field. The fact is that American writers of genius have not turned their minds to society... the reality they sought was only tangential to society.[1]

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[1]. Lionel Trilling, "Manners, morals, and the Novel" cited in A.N. Kaul: The American vision. (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1963), p. 2.

This tangential character of the interest of the classic American novel is often expressed in the respect that not only does society not feature as an ubiquitous presence or as the all important determinant of human life, and attitudes, but also the classic heroes like Ahab and Ishmael turn away in "a romantic" defiance from society in response to their purely personal impulses. Indeed, as Kaul[1] has rightly observed, the protagonists and "heroes of the classic American fiction affirm the vitality of the American myth... and the extent to which literary imagination still regarded the individual as essentially unfettered by social pressure." In terms of their characteristic orientation this type of emphasis in the most typically American novels is the diametric opposite of the thematic orientation of the Nigerian novels as these are evolving. In this respect, it may be said that the central characteristic moral vision of the classic Nigerian novels has affinity not with the typical individualism of the American novels, or with the nihilism of the post World War II European novels, but with one expression of the English novel, the nineteenth century English novel whose form and style is characterised by a marked interest in society, man's place in it, and by what Kaul has rightly described as "the reformist motive."[2]

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1. A.N. Kaul, The American vision, (Yale University Press, New Haven, June 1970), p. 56.

2. Ibid., p. 57

IV

The Novelist and Praxis

The intense desire for the reform of society which is central to the Nigerian novelists vision is a direct expression of the various novelists' awareness of the a spirituality of contemporary society and of their anxiety over the disappearance of traditional humanism upon which social life had been based. What is, however, significant is that the ideals which most of the novelists hanker after is neither a transcendent one whose focus is the christian God as such; nor is it a matter of a romantic interest in the revitalisation of traditional African society and patterns of life. Conscious of the impossibility of going back into the past, and conscious of the unsatisfactory nature of the contemporary moral ferment, the Nigerian novelist's mainspring of inspiration is the need for social change and the orderly development of society and man's moral life. It is largely this creative intention that lies behind the use of form and techniques in the novels of Isidore Okpewho, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, John Munonye and Chinua Achebe. By imaginatively drawing their inspiration from these basic normative aspirations which can provide a foundation for

social development, it may be said that the Nigerian novelist writes essentially as "a reformer" than as a visionary.[1] In this respect most of the novelists have persistently defined their roles as writers in terms of commitment to immediate social needs rather than the pursuit of art for arts sake.

Wole Soyinka's acute awareness of the lack of integrity and spirituality in Nigerian society and his own personal experience of the way in which "squalor, sordidness, and brutality exists side by side with irresponsible affluence has led him not only towards the development of style and narrative form in The Man Died, The Interpreters and Season of Anomy, but also to the conception of the role of the modern writer and the literary work of art. As he once averred, the African literary work has to serve an immediate social function:

> A book, if necessary should be a hammer, a hand grenade which you detonate under a stagnant way of looking at the world.1

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1. Wole Soyinka: In Interviews with six Nigerian writers. Ed. John Agetua, (Bendel Newspapers Corporation, Benin City, 1973), pp. 47, 49.

and the objective of such an emphasis is:

> to arrest the ears of normally complacent people, we must make sure we explode something inside them which is a parallel of the something which they ignore outside.[1]

Hence, for him the real role of the intelligensia including the writer is

> the real political education of the masses.... not education merely as to their immediate rights, social and economic and judicial rights but.....about their own potential in society.[2]

As demonstrated in the aims of Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God and his early critical writings, Achebe's initial inspiration had been cultural and nationalistic. In the composition of A man of the People we find a much more strident and single-minded critique of society in the wake of bad government and the betrayal of the promises of independence. In the denouement of the novel there is an almost explicit suggestion of the need for change in the direction of social and political development. As he observes:

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1. Ibid., p.49.
2. Ibid., p.47.

changes in the morphological structure of words as syntax.

Although the novelists who resort generally to standard English usage lack significant inventiveness or striking literary power, it is important to note too that there are within this group a few novelists in whose work there is an impressive order of linguistic competence put to a highly artistic use. Through this level of competence, these writers have written novels that achieve an air of sophistication and finesse which we associate only with the masters of English prose. Those who achieve this quality most notably are Wole Soyinka and Isidore Okpewho. For instance in his novel, Season of Anomy, Soyinka has succeeded in achieving even more than Chinua Achebe in making his English convey both its international character and native "poetry" in a manner comparable to that of any of the major English writers. The following passage which presents the burial rite of the "Custodian" in Season of Anomy, is indicative of Soyinka's skill and capacity to convey an African experience without losing the native aesthetic qualities of the English language:

> The guilds approaches, danced, retreated, leaving sinuous waves between the corpse and fourteen noble bulls penned before the alcove,

> one for each of the thirteen prior departed founding elders of the town. They were proud-hearned, rich-humped, their brilliant ivory torsos rippled in the sun. Among them leapt the acrobats, in violent cartwheels, the female stilt-dancers bestrode them writhing suggestively above the humps, stooping low till their raffia skirts just covered the humps, only to rock-rebuke at the large watery eyes. The swirl of loin-cloths daubed ochre, chalk and indigo turned the pen fluid, as if the enclosure were one vast churn of milk. Until Ahiro nodded quietly to the leaders, and the arena drained slowly of movements. The pillowed head of the Custodian had merged into shadows of the alcove, leaving the white shrouded form and the death-bed faithfully white to the eyes. The songs fell silent, the shouts retreated into subdued murmurs: a prelude of dedication before the climax of bright red sluices. [1]

A striking quality of this passage is the form and texture of its diction - its unlimited range, and the lack of any obvious emphasis upon simplicity in relation to the home audience the average Nigerian reader. Soyinka uses the English language simply as a professor of Comparative literature, and for whom the principal factor in the choice of words is neither to be readily understood by the general reader nor to reflect dogmatically, what Okara describes as "our African ways of thinking."[2]

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[1] Wole Soyinka, Season of Anomy (London 1972), p. 14.

[2] Gabriel Okara, See Interview with Bernth Lindfors, Dennis Ed. B. Lindfors, op. cit., p. 43.

But characteristically, the realities persistently evoked, and the poetry of the prose work along with a web of local symbolic references and allusions to achieve a style that marries the local experience with the foreign aspects of the English language. The use of phrases like "brilliant ivory torsos", female stilt-dancers, stooping.....raffia skirts, lein cloths daubed ochre" express this subtle mode of language use. Indeed, with Soyinka's prose style generally, the tensions between what J. P. Clark describes as "the two hands"[1] of the African writer not only finds a stable and intricate balance but also generates a form of English which is at once personal, African and international in its aesthetic pre-supposition.

The foregoing examination of the relationship established between the individual novelist's sensibilities, African culture and the English language bring into focus, a number of stylistic features which must limit the validity of any theory

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1. J. P. Clark, Preface to A Reed in the Tide (Longman, 1976), p. vii.

of the aesthetics of the modern African novel form. First, and of special significance is the fact of the language of the novels, - the English language and its international rather than uniquely African basis of communication. Second, is the creative individualism and originality which the major novelists bring into their use of the English language. These observations will be discussed briefly to bring out their significance.

In the first instance, what is noteworthy in the discussion of the aesthetics of the novels is the kind of stylistic restrictions which the use of English as the vehicle of narration necessarily imposes upon the novelists. Thus, although creative modification of the English language in relation to aspects of local experiences is one of the major ways through which the more intelligent novelists seek to achieve cultural verisimilitude, the language which they organise is still the English language with its core syntactic forms, grammar, and limiting conditions of intelligibility. Hence, whatever may be the achieved level of cultural verisimilitude, the basic aesthetic norms of their language are not uniquely those of the African vernacular languages as the opinion of some critics often seems to imply. This fact becomes even more

significant in the light of the consideration that, as we have tried to show, even the major novelists who seek to model their style on local cultural linguistic realities do not in fact proceed dogmatically at this level of language "refashioning" all the time. Rather, as artists, they do so only as certain narrative contexts demand. Indeed, for the most part, they not only conform to the basic rules of British English, but also many of them like Onuora Nzekwu, Cyprian Ekwensi, Isidore Okpewho and Wole Soyinka, including even Chinua Achebe generally use the English language with a clear consciousness of its international character and hence designed to be appreciated also by the western audience.

That a number of Nigerian novelists have not used English in strikingly original manner but with clear consciousness of its international character does not mean that generally the language of Nigerian fiction is uncreatively tied to the English language they have inherited. The lack of serious and sustained commitment to the creative adaptation of language which some of the novelists manifests is not peculiar to Nigerian fiction writers. It is a fact of fiction writing, and indeed a feature of many other national literatures that it is only a few gifted intellectual and or inspired

writers rather than the vast majority who usually demonstrate a vivid awareness of the need to revitalize the literary language being used through the innovation of new modes of expression. In fact as in the case of the novelistic form being used, it is the ordinariness of the language being used by the many that provide for the few the background and need for the revitalisation of the out-worn modes of expression.

This background of conventional English usage by some of the novelists brings into sharper focus our second observation, namely, the striking creative use of the English language by the more instinctively creative novelists like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Elechi Amadi, and Gabriel Okara. These novelists whose works are not merely classics but pace-setters in the making of the tradition of Nigerian fiction have clearly demonstrated that they are in no sense imitators, but skilful adaptors of the English language to the African socio-cultural reality. Thus, in a manner reflective of their personalities and nationalistic considerations these novelists strive to refashion the English language at the appropriate moments into stylistic forms.

capable of effectively expressing local linguistic realities and the peculiar sensibilities of their characters. In this respect, it may be noted that the kind of adaptive skill which most of the talented novelists have displayed in their use of the English language bear a favourable comparison with the techniques which other writers from similar colonial situations have adopted towards the achievement of literary independence.

Indeed, as may be readily seen from a comparison of their ideas and techniques, the stylistic methods of Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and even Gabriel Okara reveal the same kind of originality of mind and creative methods which writers like Mark Twain, Walt Whitman and Waldo Emerson and other "local colour" American writers have displayed in their efforts to fashion an American English and literature capable of adequately reflecting the American sensibility, national spirit and landscape.[1] It is also by such similar methods that such Australian writers[2] like Paterson, and Boldrewood have striven to achieve an "Australian English" by impregnating

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[1]. See W. F. Taylor The Story of American Letters (Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956) chapters 1, pp. 69ff, chapter 5, pp. 205, and 238ff.

[2]. T. Inglis Moore. Social Patterns in Australian Literature (Angus and Robertson, Melbourne), 1957, pp. 31-35.

the received English with the language and sensibility of the outbacks, and the flora and fauna of the Australian landscape. Given the fact that the novelists are involved in an adaptive process it becomes not merely unfair to them but also incorrect to describe their stylistic forms and effects as being the result of a basic lack of competence in the use of a foreign language.

Discussing an African writers best way to a new and genuine mode of expression, J. P. Clark suggests

> a reliance upon the inner resources of language. These are images figures of meaning and speech which with expert handling can achieve for his art a kind of blood transfusion reviving the English language by the living adaptable properties of the African language. 1

It is these adaptable properties of African language and experience that the more talented writers who are creating the language of Nigerian fiction are exploiting. That their style demonstrates is not a dissociation of content and expression but a sensitive fusion of the two sources of their social experience.

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1. J. P. Clark: "The Legacy of Caliban" in <u>The Example of Shakespeare</u> (Longman, London, 1970, p. 37.

Our evaluation of the quality of the Nigerian novelists' creative response to the English language has implied a number of important ideas about linguistic adaptation, and the role of this in the creation of development of national literature. These ideas serve to provide a framework for a better appreciation of what the Nigerian novelists have achieved through their style. The most important of these ideas may be stated as follows: First, that while being experimental, or "idiosyncratic" in the literary use of the English language is in itself not necessarily a virtue, it is also not necessarily an indication of the given novelists' literary or linguistic limitation. Secondly, that the adaptation of the colonial language into new stylistic forms sensitive to local experience, is, in fact, what augurs well for the growth of a national literary tradition. Thirdly, that the adequacy of a literary language in a new cultural environment is not its conformity or non-conformity to what constitutes the norms of grammatical correctness characteristic of the native speakers of the language. As Chinua Achebe has rightly observed it is the capacity of the expression to bear the weight of the new experience. That the stylistic techniques style of Okara,

Achebe, Tutuola and Amadi are intelligible and further, that they offer a lucid rather than opaque experience is an index of their adequacy as well as of the creative potentialities which they offer.

The fact of the use of the English language in the novels and the innovations which the more talented novelists try to introduce in their use of this alien language are indications of the complex relationship between the native and the foreign and between originality and convention in the language of the Nigerian novel as it has evolved so far. It is for this undoubted fusion of these two elements that there is, as Abiola Irele[1] and many other African critics have suggested, a real case for the readjustment of western critical standards and expectations before this literature can be usefully appraised. At the level of style, to understand what is meant by "readjustment" here is to grasp for instance, the need for the extension of our normal views of what constitutes) grammatical correctness in the use of English syntax and diction and by taking into account the fact that

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[1]. Abiola Irele, "The Criticism of Modern African Literature" in C. Heywood Ed. Critical Perspectives on African Literature, (Heinemann, London, 1968), pp. 17ff.

language changes and must change in response to new experiences and cultural environment. Such a perspective becomes necessary in the sense that, while the core grammar and the aesthetic basis of the English being used is inevitably the "British" English for historical reasons, the language of the new literary experience does not have to be seen entirely in terms of British English usage. Rather, it can be looked upon more realistically as a variant of the English language which is slowly evolving and growing out of the process of its readjustment to its new cultural environment. In this sense, to regard the use of pidgin English, transliterated syntactic structures, syntactic changes and such relative innovations as palpable violations of the ideal standard English grammar is at once not merely to display a basic lack of aesthetic attunement to the literature; it is a failure to recognise the most basic fact about language, namely that it is a growing, living system whose rules and referential power are derived from the community in which it functions as the medium of communication.

CHAPTER X

CULTURAL IMAGES AND NARRATIVE FORM

In chapters III - VIII, our concern has been to examine how the Nigerian novelists' creative response to African socio-historical experience, culture and the English language have determined the form and originality of the representative novels. In this chapter we examine how far a common narrative form has emerged out of the different novels so far examined. One of the reasons behind this discussion consists in the fact that the literary features which enforce/ our sense of the Africanness of the modern African novels are of a kind that require not only an analysis of the individual novelists' modes of narration, but also, of their style and vision as members of one cultural community. The area of critical analysis involved in this particular respect is effectively what the literary semiologists of Communications have described in terms of the concept of "intertextuality",[1] that is the element of commonality existing between the fictive reality of the writers such that together they constitute a single literary world view.

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[1] See J. Culler. Structuralist poetics (Cornel University press, New York, 1975), pp. 138, 139.

The critical relevance of the concepts of "intertextuality" to the issue of the right aesthetic reading of a given literary text has been pointed out by Jonathan Culler when he observed:

> 'A work can only be read with or against the background of other texts, which provide the grid through which it is read and structured, by establishing the expectations which enable one to pick out salient features, and give them a structure or meaning. And hence, intersubjectivity - the shared knowledge which is applied in reading.....is a function of these other texts'. [1]

While for Culler here, the level of "shared knowledge", is a cardinal consideration in the area of the necessary conditions for the right aesthetic comprehension of the text, for us the sense of a common denominator of shared experience and creative techniques is of central importance not only in relation to valid criticism as such, but for the possibility of a tradition. In this respect, these factors are a measure of how far out of the variety of methods, and

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[1] Ibid., p. 139.

thematic interests expressed, a common and distinctive narrative pattern has either already emerged, or is unfolding and thus indicating the line of the gradual growth of a style and form that is specifically Nigerian. In this closing chapter, we take into consideration this metaliterary problem as it relates to the achieved authenticity and relevance of the novels and, the possibility of a national literature.

The analysis we have so far undertaken presents two major points about the development of form and style in the Nigerian novels written to date. First, there is a striking element of diversity in the thematic vision and experience in terms of which plot structure, characters and story content are organised. Of equal literary interest are the different levels of originality displayed by the novelists in the handling of the aesthetic relationship between the different elements which define the novel as a genre. In respect of these considerations, we note that whereas the first crop of Nigerian novels like Arrow of God and The Concubine achieve their cultural verisimilitude and formal identity through their projection of specifically African cultural realities, others like The Interpreters, A Dancer of Fortune

and The Voice make this approach a subsidiary concern. Instead, they deal largely with the social and psychological problems of contemporary society. In the handling of the constitutive formal elements of the genre, each novel is characterized by a different level of emphasis on African realism, satire, character presentation and the organic relationship between these aspects of the novel. While in their use of the typical social realistic novel form Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi pay a great deal of attention to the relationship between culture, personality and plot in order to achieve a form appropriate to the complexities of the African experience, in the works of other novelists, like Gabriel Okara and Wole Soyinka, the aesthetic cannons of the realistic novel form are idiosyncratically modified towards the achievement of poetic-satiric forms for the reasons we have discussed. Further, in their interest in the achievement of authenticity, the stylistic forms which are fashioned and imposed upon the English language differ from one novelist to another.

However, while these differences cannot be ignored this does not mean that there are no common factors which

bind the different novelists together as a community of writers whose work is characterised by a set of common aesthetic and moral objectives. Specifically, in spite of differences in the sensibilities of the writers, their common experiences of colonialism and contemporary socio-economic and moral problems have created a common interest in the imaginative exploration of traditional African cultural realities and the projection of authentic African human values against the undermining influence of the present neo-western cultural milieu. Thus even though the idea of a socio-ethnic sensibility which determines the style and form of modern African literary modes may be hard to establish, and the specific common stylistic approach achieved not readily apparent, a number of features have non-the-less emerged and given a characteristic orientation to the evolution of form during the period under study. The first of these features derive from the structural organisation of the novels. This consists broadly in their frequent imaginative use of some aspect of Nigerian socio-cultural reality. This aspect we shall be referring to hereafter as "the dominant cultural image." The logic of this narrative form will be explicated fully in what follows. The second stylistic feature derive

from the thematic vision of the novels, especially from the creative handling of model themes and patterns of human experiences which, though by no means peculiar to the Nigerian novels, are non-the-less most persistent and recurrent. Basically, in its insistent engagement with these two aspects, the Nigerian novel as so far as it has developed can be said to be "social-cultural"in its formal orientation and humanistic in its search for human values which make life worthwhile.

In terms of this formal development, the novels which are most typically African are characterised in principle by the following narrative strqtegies, viz: the setting up of a dominant cultural image,[1] and the creative development of this as the focal centre and basis of the complexities of the narrative action.

Secondly, through the novelists' literary treatment of the logic of the cultural image, the basic movement of

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[1]. By the term "cultural image" we mean not merely the picture of, or reference to a significant aspect of socio-cultural reality, but the very nature, force and moral logic of this element of social reality.

the stories in the novels involve the representation of the social and cultural consequences of this particular aspect of the African world. In this sense "plot" often consists effectively of the major cultural situation used as the dynamic source of the narrative action, and a set of minor cultural images that are its correlates.

Thirdly, the literary use of these images function within the novels as means towards the achievement of two aesthetic effects, viz: the representation of the complexities of contemporary African human experiences, and the establishment of a relation of vraisemblance between the structure of the text, and that of the actual world outside the text.

Naturally, the use of this approach in the hands of the novelists is not uniform. Instead, this basic approach breaks out into a broad spectrum[1] in which differences occur in terms of the novelists' innate narrative craftmanship, human awareness, and interest in "Africanity". For our purpose two broad categories can be noted.

In our first category are the novels of the major

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1. This we differentiate in terms of their achieved technical excellence, intellectual depth and human interest.

The general social consciousness which has determined the allegoric form of Okara, the satiric novels of Munonye and Wole Soyinka and the novels about the civil crisis of 1966-70 is significant to the understanding of the evolving trend of the Nigerian novel. This is so in the particular respect that its historical growth in the period 1952 to the present is marked by a gradual but steady transition from the cultural nativism of the beginning to a more objective critique of African society and its modern values (see chart 0.T.1).[1] Significantly, this new humanism expressed through the modes of satire, allegory, and realism is most likely to form the trend of the future development of the novel. This is due to two major factors. First, is the ever increasing decay of social morality, and the hard social and economic conditions under which the Nigerian is being compelled to live. Second, and closely allied to this, is the Nigerian writers' keen awareness of these moral realities, and the way in which this reality seems to force him to make his art a means of regenerating the moral consciousness of the nation.

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[1]. The sign X indicates the dominant or focal cultural image and ~ denotes other related but subordinate culture oriented incidents or experiences. The large A denote areas which comprise themes or experiences that do not command the attention of the novelists at a given time of the Nigerian novel's development. Because Nigerian novelists are individuals of varying interests, and who are not constrained by being part of a conscious literary movement, they cannot be expected to fit into a very regular pattern or model. The diagram, though only a rough one, clearly shows a significant shift in the creative themes presented.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that in the relatively short period of twenty-seven years of its development the Nigerian novel has clearly established itself as a new and vital cultural form in the social and intellectual growth of the nation. Beginning with the forms of Amos Tutuola, and developing through Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Amadi, Wole Soyinka, Isidore Okpewho, the novelists have exploited a variety of novelistic forms including the social-realistic novel, the mythopoetic novel, the historical novel, the social-satiric novel, and the "popular" novel. In the representation of their experiences, the novelists have also used a variety of techniques to achieve their individual goals.

In using these pre-established forms and techniques, the Nigerian novelists have not been merely imitative. Rather, employing these as frameworks, they have gone to express their own originality and independence. They have demonstrated these qualities through the artistic exploitation of themes of African experience, African linguistic forms and world view towards the achievement of an appropriate form of realism that constitutes the basis of the social relevance and authenticity of the novels. In the early phase of the growth of the Nigerian novel, this

achieved sense of realism was realised and expressed largely in terms of an interest in the cultural realities of the African world. But in the historical development of the novel in the period, there is a significant shift away from the initial emphasis on cultural realities towards a more objective representation and critique of contemporary society and its problems. This changing vision of the novelists has resulted in the development and use of new narrative techniques fashioned in relation to the political and economic life of the nation.

The form, content, and style of the novels which we have examined serves to provide answers to the issues which we set out to illuminate. Central to these is the question of what the Nigerian novelists have done to the novelistic form and techniques which have come to them through the colonial literature. Further to this is the question of whether a distinctive form has emerged out of the variety of forms and interest displayed in a way that can be said to be distinctively African.

In answering these questions, some critics have passed

the judgement that African novelists (including the Nigerian novelists we have studied) are content to use the traditional English novel form without making any significant contribution to its evolution. In a manner that echoes the early views of W. E. Abraham[1] Shatto A. Gakwandi in his recent study maintains that:-

> ...The African novel has been shy of experiment... the leading African novelists have been satisfied with employing the techniques developed by European realism and have used them to comment upon African experience. Local colour is there, but the basic form remains the same. [2]

When judged against the specific examples of Amos Tutuola, Gabriel Okara, Chinua Achebe and even Wole Soyinka, this kind of view becomes false and unfair in many respects. In fact, given the details of the novelists' narrative procedure, to take such a view shows a lack of awareness of the different and distinctive levels of creative adaptation being displayed by many of the novelists.

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1. W. E. Abraham, The mind of Africa (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962), p. 98.
2. S. A. Gakwandi, The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa. (Heinemann, London, 1977), p. 127.

Such a stance also suggests by implication that such critics have not realistically resolved a critical issue that is central to a valid critical appraisal of new literary works. This is the question of what must be the case for us to say that a given new novel shows considerable originality. As we have demonstrated in the early stages of this study,[1] novelty of form and creative originality in the novel genre do not have to be achieved in terms of only one mode, but of several: in terms of the themes and experiences utilised in the novel, in terms of the structural format of the novel and in terms of the original use of language.

At the level of the experiences and themes presented, and in their delineation of characters, our study clearly shows that the Nigerian novelists have on the whole shown a remarkable innovative spirit and concern with authenticity. They have clearly demonstrated these qualities through the conception of characters and fictional experience in relation to the peculiarities of their national experience. They have avoided the exploration of purely personal emotions and philosophical ideas, and they have established appropriate relationships between narrative elements and culture, and between their characters and

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1. See chapter I p. 33

African socio-cultural experiences. By these means, they have succeeded in giving a meaningful expression to the literary implications which the background of African experience can have for the stylistic organisation of the novel, and the presentation of characters.

In a way, some of the patterns of experience which are persistently presented in the novels have some similarities with the thematic approaches of the classic[1] English novel, and indeed all major novels dealing with society and human experience. However, these patterns of experiences have not featured in the Nigerian novels as a result of a conscious imitation of foreign models. Rather, these have arisen out of the local environment and the novelists desire to effect a change in the moral life of the society in which he lives.

Thus while the imaginative denouements of The Voice, Season of Anomy and A Man of the people, for instance, are exploitations of the universal themes of the tragic defeat of youthful idealism by the corrupt practices of the establishment, stylistically, the handling of these formal themes echoes the aestheticism that typifies the work of major European novelists to whom the Nigerian novelist has been

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[1]. By this we mean the type of novelist described by F.R. Leavis in The Great Tradition as being characterised by an intense awareness of life-possibilities.

amply exposed.

This achieved independent spirit is further enhanced in the major novelists by the often highly original use of the English language in harmony with the peculiarities of local experience, patterns of speech, and sensibility. Thus, even though most of the major writers have enough linguistic competence, and are able to write impeccable English, they have been able to recognize the need for setting this approach aside, and to take into account the implications of local experience, and the variety of spoken English in the country in the evolution of their literary style. Through this, most have been able to set an example that is likely to be of immense practical (concomitance) in the growth of the language of Nigerian fiction.

In the area of the handling of the structural format of the novel, it can be said that the Nigerian novelists have not introduced radically new elements that are capable of significantly affecting the historical development of the novel in the way that the techniques of James Joyce, Marcel Proust or Allain Robbe Grillet have done. In order to express themselves intelligibly to their readers, the Nigerian novelists have on the whole drawn upon some of the basic formats and narrative techniques which have come to them through their western

literary education. However, to use this consideration as indication of his lack of creative originality or experimental spirit is to ignore the refreshingly new human experiences being presented as well as the controlled but significant contributions which they are making to the growth of the African novel through the exploitation of African mythical ideas, local rhetoric and linguistic habits and the forms and techniques of African oral narrative art. Indeed, in the light of these creative modes which the major novelists like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Nkem Nwankwo and Gabriel Okara have clearly demonstrated in their works, it would seem much more correct to emphasise the adaptive quality and peculiar humanistic outlook of their novels than their obvious indebtedness to some aspects of the western novel.

That the Nigerian novelists like novelists anywhere have drawn upon the basic narrative elements of the western novel does not in any way mean that the novelists cannot explore the formal possibilities implicit in the novel for their own sake as the formalist approach or Robbe-Grillet demands. The ease and competence with which Okpewho has been able to handle some aspects of the techniques of the stream of consciousness novels,

and the skill with which Achebe and Amadi have been able to handle the "social realistic" models testify to a high order of creative intelligence possessed by some of the novelists. This ability could easily have been channelled towards purely personal experimentation with idiosyncratic narrative techniques, had they thought it fit. That they choose to use more or less the traditional narrative framework is largely the result of two considerations. The first is metaliterary, and bound up with the structure of narrative itself and the limitations which it sets for the narrative artist. What we mean by this is that the persistent use of a number of narrative techniques, especially causal-chronological framework, spatial and cultural settings, and linear (and or cyclical) patterns as the basis of narration is neither necessarily imitative of foreign models nor the result of a merely conventional kind of imagination. Rather, these modes feature as structuring elements in the novels and provide a basis of narrative coherence largely because they constitute universal[1] modes of narrative art. This is so in the sense

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[1]. See for instance R. Barthes "Introduction a la analyse structurale des recits in Communication 8 (1966) pp.1-27. While one may not accept Barthes stipulation of the five rather than more codes, his basic argument that there is a system of objective codes or categories which form the narrative text rendering it intelligible is an insight which is worth noting.

that they are the necessary conditions of the intelligibility of fictive experience. Discussing the necessity of the temporal frame in narration Toliver rightly observes:

> While it is true that chronology has been complicated in fiction since Joyce and Proust, the temporal foundations of narrative remain unquestionable even in radical experiments with the calendar in Donald Barthelme and Alain Robbe-Grillet and others...verbal composition are never merely juxtaposed even in paratactic construction or tabled columns partly because words depend upon syntactical juxtapositions, order and rhythm at the basic sentence level. Verbal coherence is profoundly temporal: the psychology of reading and listening are based upon successiveness and rhythm. 1

This observation also holds true for most of the other modalities. Thus, the insistent use of cultural images, the recourse to the element of causality and irony in the analysis and presentation of the moral and social consequences of individual's actions, and the projection of suspense in the novels work not only towards the integratedness of the artistic vision and experience. They also constitute the conditions for the possibility of our aesthetically enjoying the stories, as

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1. H. Toliver. Animate Illusion: Exploration of narrative structures (Lincoln, University of Nebraska press, 1974), p. 11 (Footnote.)

well as for our intellectually making sense of these experiences. This factor provides a background to one of the basic facts of fiction-writing everywhere, namely that most novelists do not reject everything in the pre-established narrative form; they accept the basic form and only modulate it to an extent determined by their sensibilities, themes and aesthetic interests.

The second reason for the novelists' apparently conventional approach to narration is bound up with their sense of what is socially relevant. By this we mean the novelists' recognition of the necessity to write novels that minister to the immediate social problems of their society. It is in this particular respect that the emerging Nigerian novel form is characterised by the fact that it deals with the cultural experiences of the people and is humanistic in the transcendence of this cultural interest to the search for humane social values.

Given the urgent character of the socio-historical problems of modern Africa, to have indulged in an intellectualized exploration of the possibilities implicit in the genre or to engage in the narrative expression of philosophical ideas would have been pointless as Chinua Achebe has rightly pointed

out. Further, such a procedure would have been tantamount to a gratuitous exercise that has no real social relevance. By imaginatively expressing the cultural realities and human problems of their society and thus making their art serve the needs of their society in terms of the language proper to art, the Nigerian novelists have been able to assert their independence from foreign fictional models.

The implication of these observations is that the relationship between the English and the Nigerian novel is not that of a model and its reproduction or copy, but that of an example that provides a basis for further adaptation and innovations evolved in response to the peculiarities of the contemporary African, his relationship to society and the complexities of his world view. By the imaginative use of narrative modes that have a basis in their world, and by the imaginative treatment of contemporary African experiences in a manner relevant to the moral growth of the individual and society at large, the Nigerian novelists have been able to lay the foundations for a truly Nigerian national literature.

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CHART C. T. I.

CHANGING THEMES IN THE NIGERIAN NOVEL.

The development of the Nigerian novel from the period 1952 to the present (shown as a movement from The Palm Wine Drinkard and Things Fall Apart to The Last Duty, 1976) shows a shift in thematic focus from the area C. to S. This shift represents a development from the initial preoccupation with cultural issues to a new awareness, especially of contemporary social-moral problems.

		SOCIAL-CULTURAL REALITIES										ISSUES OF HUMAN VALUES							
		Local gods & Spirits	Magic power	Divination Sacrifice	Marriage	Kingship	Love of children	Missionary activities	Colonial power and Influences	Western Education	Western Culture	Political Mismanagement	Bribery	Corruption	Materialism	Civil war	Inhumanity	Social Pressures	Moral Decadence
The Palm-wine Drinkard.	1952	X	X																
My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.	1954	X																	
Things Fall Apart	1958	X																	
No Longer at Ease	1960					X					X					A			
Arrow of God	1964	X				~		~	X										
The Concubine	1966	X		~	X	X													
The Only Son	1966						X			~	~								
Efuru	1966				X	X	~												
The Voice	1964											X		X	~			~	~
The Interpreters	1965									~	~		X	X				~	~
A Man of the People	1966											X	~	~	~			~	~
A Dancer of Fortune	1974							A							X		~	~	~
A Wreath for the Maidens	1973															X			~
Season of Anomy																X	~	~	~
The Last Duty	1976													~		X		~	

X Dominant cultural image

~ Associated minor (sub) cultural image(s)

to

> I believe it is impossible to write anything in African without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, early novels that look like very gentle recreations of the past - what they were saying, in effect, was that we had a past.....
> We started off and this was necessary — showing that there was something here, a civilisation, a religion, a history. Then we had to move on to the era of independence. Having fought with the nationalists movement, and been on the side of the politician, I realised after independence that they and I were now on different sides, because they were not doing what we had agreed they would do. So I had to become a critic. I found myself on the side of the people against their leaders - leaders this time being black people. I was still doing my job as a writer, but one aspect of the job had changed. I think that what you do as a writer depends on the state of your society.1

Even though in a few of the novelists the stirring of this consciousness of social values has been subordinated to the objective representation of the African cultural identity, the literary development of some of these novelists is significantly away from objective recreation of the past towards the commitment to positive human values. Elechi Amadi is a novelist who typifies this development. This is so in the sense that his movement away from the novel genre, and his early concern with the supernatural towards the dramatic mode is but an expression of both the need to reach a wider audience, and to find a medium for dramatically stimulating the audience consciousness and sensibility towards a new moral awareness.

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1. See B. Lindfors, Palaver: Interviews with five African Writers in Texas. (1972), pp. 7 - 8.

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