

1500 - 1800 are as consistently engaging as they are informative. Recommended without reservation, this text will make a welcome addition to anyone's library.

MONIQUE Y. TSCHOFEN

WORKS CITED

Armstrong, Nancy, and Leonard Tennenhouse. *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins of Personal Life*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.

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Craig McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail, eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000. Pp. x, 291. \$59.95.

This collection of essays on Ken Saro-Wiwa is a timely one, appearing at our post-industrial, ecological *fin-de-siècle*, half a decade after Ken(ule) Saro-Wiwa was hanged, by the Nigerian government, on 10 November 1995. A volume of breadth and generally high intellectual caliber, it does justice to Saro-Wiwa's multifaceted personality as a writer-cum-environmental activist.

The book is divided into four Parts, crowned by an Epilogue of seven poems from Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues*. Part I ruthlessly examines "The Context" of Saro-Wiwa's life and work. Charles Lock incorporates into the title of his opening essay, the title that Chinua Achebe's fictitious District Commissioner, in *Things Fall Apart*, intended for his own *magnum opus*: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. Lock imagines that this title "could well serve as a summary of the fate of the Ogoni" (3). Perhaps. But whereas Okonkwo committed suicide by hanging, an aberrant act in the Igbo society at that time, Ken Saro-Wiwa was murderously hanged by Sani Abacha's régime as a result of what I might call "a conspiracy theory." Indeed, it is significant that Nigerian letters came to prominence in 1958 at approximately the same time that Shell Petroleum discovered the "black gold" which accounts for 96% of Nigeria's GNP.

Lock's otherwise vibrant and daring essay, which denounces Nelson Mandela's strategy of "quiet diplomacy" against Nigeria (5), turns nasty when it incriminates Saro-Wiwa as a tycoon who "was deeply implicated in his country's corruption" (13). We are thus introduced to both the strengths and the weaknesses of this volume. Its major strength is an unprecedented attempt at critically (de)fusing the somewhat explosive interrelation between political commitment and the literary arts. Its weakness lies in a posthumous wryness concerning Saro-Wiwa's inevitably Shell-shocked personality. Admittedly, Saro-Wiwa was a successful business man, but, as one who knew him person-

ally, I prefer Laura Neame's poised endorsement, in her essay on "Saro-Wiwa the Publisher," of Ken Wiwa's assessment of his father as a writer who "self-published at a loss" (qtd. 167). In "Pipe Dreams: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice, and Microminority Rights," Rob Nixon concedes that our writer-martyr was "never anticapitalist per se"; nonetheless, Nixon casts Saro-Wiwa as "a microminority intellectual in a poor African country" (113). This apparent paradox is beautifully captured in the following anecdote. In 1994, Saro-Wiwa was interviewed in Brussels by a Belgian non-profit governmental organization. The interviewer, himself a former hippie, was jolted in his assumptions of what an African environmentalist should look like. Ken was dressed, not in sandals, worn jeans, and a *dashiki*, but in an elegant three-piece suit and spit-shined shoes, complete with an accessory that even Magritte would have recognized as *une pipe*.

In Nigerian parlance, this account of our gentleman would be "*incomplete*" without Joseph McClaren's expert tracking, in "A Political Assessment," of Saro-Wiwa's anti-federal position as it evolved from the major 1970 blowout, through the Nigerian regimes up to Babangida's takeover in 1985, which "sealed the fate of the Ogoni," as Saro-Wiwa writes in *Genocide in Nigeria* (1992; qtd. McLuckie and McPhail 23). In an essay on the Biafra issue in *Songs in a Time of War* (1985), Tanure Ojaide comes to Saro-Wiwa's defense by presenting him as an opponent of Biafra, who was, however, resolutely opposed to "the dismemberment of the Nigerian nation" (63).

In the essay which opens "Part II: The Literary Experiments," McLuckie surveys what he calls "Literary Memoirs and Diaries," i.e., Spivakian "subaltern histories" (p. 29) such as Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972), and Saro-Wiwa's *On a Darkling Plain*. Relying on Roy Pascal's outdated definition, in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960), of the memoir as characterized by "partisanship" and "bias," McLuckie ignores recent re-evaluations that treat the genre as "an account of a *public* life," which, in contrast to autobiography, does not have as its focus "lived and felt experience." (Steedman, 43)¹ McLuckie's criticism of *On a Darkling Plain* often verges on belittlement, especially when he singles out "overwritten passages" (40) or decries "the silliness" of the embedded poetry (43). He dismisses Saro-Wiwa's account of the Civil War as "a badly rendered, biased, and in areas repugnant memoir" by an individual indifferent to "communal improvement" (44-45). Misty Bastian's witty albeit necrophilic essay takes its cue from the different versions of Ken's last words and from rumors concerning the exact whereabouts of the corpse. Short of spelling out *the shortest way to hang dissenters*, she morbidly dwells on the place, in the Igbo thanatological economy, of Saro-Wiwa's Foucauldian body as a "hanged man," and on the "disciplinary" message it was to convey to Abacha's enemies.

Saro-Wiwa's failure to include "the perspective of women" in his memoirs (50) is apparently offset by what McPhail describes, in his Bakhtinian reading of "The Short Fiction: *A Forest of Flowers* and *Adaku and Other Stories*," as Saro-Wiwa's empathy with "the hardships facing the young women of Dukana" (77). Maureen Eke contends that Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* reveals "the acute marginalization of women, especially daughters . . . [who] are offered as pawns in this game of power" (91). Unfortunately, none of the essays in this volume mounts a thorough investigation into what William Boyd has described as Saro-Wiwa's "hijacking" of English (qtd. Zabus, *The African Palimpsest* and "Mending the Schizotext").² Ojaide is sensitive to the language issue, but, like Eke, he confuses "rotten English," the fabricated language of *Sozaboy*, with pidgin English, the lingua franca of the Delta.

In a prosaic discussion of Saro-Wiwa's juvenilia entitled "The Children's Series," John Leblanc relates Basi to the Yoruba God Obasin, whose "propensity for doubleness and inclusiveness" (199) is said to point toward a future Nigerian multicultural landscape. Last but not least, Chris Dunton discusses Saro-Wiwa's unpublished plays, *The Supreme Commander*, *Eneka*, and *Dream of Sologa*, an adaptation of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, while pointing to future areas of critical inquiry. Three admirable appendices conclude the volume: a "Chronology of Ken Saro-Wiwa's Life" compiled by Laura Neame, a "Chronology of the Nigerian Civil War" compiled by Ross Tyner, and "An Annotated Bibliography" compiled by McLuckie and James Gibbs.

By doing justice to both the writer and the activist, this volume constitutes the *dangerous supplement* to Manfred Loiemer's untranslated *Zum Beispiel: Ken Saro-Wiwa* (1996). It does not, however, constitute a homage to *the man [who] died*.

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- . "Mending the Schizotext: Pidgin in the Nigerian Novel." *Kunapipi*, 14:1 (1992): 119-127.